

## Universal Credit – Facts & Tips Dec 2017

**Universal Credit has started to replace six benefits / tax credits – by combining them into a single monthly payment.** Universal Credit is a working age benefit - if you are Pension Credit age then you can claim Pension Credit and Housing Benefit instead.

### **It is replacing...**

- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment & Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credit / Working Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit.

Any other benefits you are entitled to will continue as normal.

### **Introduced in stages.....**

Whilst some people are already on UC, the Full / Digital UC service is currently being rolled out across the UK by postcode area. The Full / Digital service is where claims for UC are made and administered online. The aim is to have it fully rolled out by the end of 2022 - so you may not have to claim just yet.

***TIP... you can get ready for Digital UC by setting up an email address and opening a bank account - get help if you will find this difficult.***

### **When will I need to claim?**

This will depend on where you live and whether you have had a change in your circumstances that triggers the need to claim UC. If you are finishing work and you already get Housing Benefit, then, New-Style Jobseekers may be for you rather than Universal Credit - get advice.

### **Universal Credit is...**

for anyone of working age living in a Full / Digital service area\*, who would normally be making a *new claim* for one of the benefits Universal Credit is replacing. \*To find out if you are, go to: [universalcreditinfo.net/](http://universalcreditinfo.net/) and enter your postcode.

### **You may need to make a claim if you are:**

- Moving to a new LA area with the Digital service and need help with your new rent
- Living in a Digital area and finish work and have no other source of income
- Living in a Digital area and become unfit for work.

### **But you may not need to claim if you are:**

- Moving within a Local Authority area, are on Housing Benefit, and have no other change in your circumstances
- Getting some Tax Credits and have a change in your circumstances that would increase/ decrease that entitlement such as having a baby, or starting work
- With a partner who is Pension Credit age.

**NOTE:** There are special rules for families with three or more children - seek further advice.

**TIP...** *If you are told you have to claim - seek advice immediately from a benefits adviser to make sure this is your best / only option.*

### **Can I claim now?**

If you live in a Digital area then you can claim now - but seek advice before you do.

### **What if I'd be better off on Universal Credit? Can I claim it now?**

As soon as the Full / Digital service starts in an area anyone of working age can make a claim for UC. Some people will be better off on UC - or able to receive help for the first time. If you think this could be you, then get advice and check that, taking all your circumstances into account, you will be better off.

### **You'll need to think about:**

- Whether you (or your partner) would have to look for work as a condition of receiving UC
- What deductions might be taken - reducing the amount you'll receive
- Paying your rent yourself (if you are used to your Housing Benefit being paid directly to your landlord)
- Needing a bank account, email address, and mobile phone number
- Having regular access to the internet
- Whether you'll manage budgeting your money monthly.

**TIP...** *if you are thinking of making a claim for UC contact a benefits adviser first.*

### **How do I make a claim?**

Universal Credit is claimed online. You'll need an email address and a mobile phone number to claim UC on the Digital service. If you need help setting these up - talk to your area housing manager.

### **Claiming UC...**

Go to [www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit](http://www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit)

If you are claiming as a couple you will both need to claim **separately**. One of you will be given a code to give to the other to input, so that the claims can be joined.

### **What if I can't get online?**

You may be able to access a computer at a Council Office, Job Centre, Community Centre or Library. Talk to Hastoe if you are unsure.

### **What will I need to make a claim?**

- Your **postcode**
- Your **National Insurance number**
- **Details of the bank, building society or credit union account** you would like any UC award paid into
- **Tenancy agreement** and **current rent figure**
- Details of any **income, savings** or **capital**
- **Details of children** including a **child benefit number**

- **Photo ID**, such as a **passport** or **photo driving licence** – this isn't essential but speeds up the process.

### **Can I get help making my claim?**

If you need help completing your claim you can:

- Contact your local **Job Centre** or go to [universalcreditinfo.net/](http://universalcreditinfo.net/) & enter your postcode to get a list of places where you can get help, or
- Call the **Universal Credit helpline: 0800 328 5644**

### **Completing the claim process.**

There is lots to do to ensure your claim is successful and you get paid. Once you've made your claim, you'll need to:

- Book an appointment to go to the Job Centre for an **interview**
- Agree and sign your '**claimant commitment**'
- Provide certain **documents**
- Discuss whether you'll need help with budgeting
- Have an ID interview - if you haven't been able to get verified online
- Regularly check your 'to-do' list and journal to see if you have any outstanding actions or messages from your work coach
- Start looking for work - unless you are not required to do so.

If you are claiming as a couple you will both need to do the above separately.

**NOTE: If you fail to do any of these, your claim will be cancelled.**

**TIP... make sure you attend all your appointments on time - if you are late you can be sanctioned. Check your 'to-do' list every day if you can and make sure you complete any actions you are given.**

### **When will I get paid?**

Universal Credit is usually paid on the same day every month. If you're going to struggle with monthly payments ask the DWP to consider paying your Universal Credit twice a month.

### **When will I be paid?**

When you make a **new claim** for Universal Credit, you will have .....

- ...'**7 waiting days**'\* before the claim starts, then...
- ...a **calendar month** before your entitlement is assessed, then...
- ...up to **7 days** for your payment to be processed.

*\* **The 7 day waiting period** will not be applied to new claims from February 2018. AND it should **not** apply if you have been the claimant of any of the benefits UC is replacing, at any point in the calendar month before making your new claim for UC. Please tell your work coach and get advice if they are applied.*

### **You'll then be paid calendar monthly**

Universal Credit is paid monthly - based on the date you claimed - and in arrears.

If you're used to working out your budget weekly or fortnightly you'll need to think about how you'll manage your money for a whole month. Make sure you prioritise your rent - otherwise you risk losing your home.

**TIP... you can ask for an Advance Payment if you're going to find it hard to manage until you receive your first payment.**

### **What is an Advance Payment?**

An Advance Payment can help if you can't manage until your first (or next) UC payment.

**TIP... if you ask for an Advance Payment on a new claim, make sure you know how much you need - as you can only get one payment at the start of a claim.**

### **You can get an Advance Payment:**

- When you make a new claim for UC and are going to find it difficult to wait for your first payment (called a New Claim Advance or Benefit Transfer Advance)
- When you are on UC and have a change in your circumstances and you are going to find it difficult to manage until you receive your next UC payment (a Change in Circumstances Advance)
- When you need help with one off expenses (called a Budgeting Advance).

### **You'll have to pay it back**

An Advance Payment is an 'advance' of your future payments and will need to be paid back. Rather than having to pay it back in one lump sum, you will pay it back over 6 or 12 months - directly out of your Universal Credit payments.\*

### **How do I request one?**

Ring the UC helpline on: 0800 328 5644 and ask for an Advance Payment.

**\*From January 2018** those who need it, and who have an underlying entitlement to Universal Credit, will be able to access up to a month's worth of Universal Credit within five days via an advance. The period of recovery will be extended from six months to twelve months for all types of advance payment. Advances will continue to be interest free. New claimants in December 2017 will be able to receive an advance of 50% of their monthly entitlement at the beginning of their claim and a second advance to take it up to 100% in the New Year, before their first payment date. It will be possible to apply for an advance online.

**TIP... think carefully about how much you need as an Advance Payment because your future UC payments will be reduced to pay it back.**

### **What about my rent?**

Universal Credit can include help to pay your rent - called a Housing Costs Element.

If you are on UC - you are responsible for paying your rent yourself. If you are finding this difficult, ask your Local Authority for a Discretionary Housing Payment and seek advice from a benefits adviser if you need help with this.

### **Will the money to cover my rent be sent straight to Hastoe?**

On Universal Credit you will have to pay your full rent to your Hastoe yourself. Your Universal Credit payment will include any help with your rent that you are entitled to (minus any bedroom tax reduction and/or non-dependant charges that apply).

If you have been getting Housing Benefit and are used to your rent being paid directly to Hastoe, this will change - **so make sure you contact us when you make a claim.**

### **What if I go into arrears?**

A system of **Alternative Payment Arrangements** means that once you are two months or more behind with your rent, Hastoe can apply for something called an **APA Managed Payment**. This means that some of your UC payment is then paid directly to Hastoe. But it may not cover your full rent - you may still have a payment to make yourself.

**TIP... if you feel you may struggle paying your rent, contact Hastoe to let us know and discuss how we can help.**

### **What is the 'Claimant Commitment'?**

Your claimant commitment will outline what you need to do in exchange for receiving Universal Credit.

### **What does a claimant commitment include?**

Depending on your circumstances it could include some work related requirements...

- Attending **work-focused interviews**
- Undertaking **work preparation**
- And if you are fit for work - **work search**.

### **Will the same conditions apply for both claimants in a couple claim?**

No, not necessarily. Each member of a couple has their own 'claimant commitment' depending on their individual circumstances.

### **What happens if I don't stick to it?**

Failing to keep to your claimant commitment will mean losing some of your Universal Credit for a period - this is called a **sanction**.

If you are sanctioned - you can challenge this decision - contact a benefits adviser for help. They can also advise you about hardship payments - note these are given as a loan and have to be paid back.

**TIP... if you have any problems with looking for work, let your work coach know - they should take these into consideration.**

### **What if I'm working?**

Universal Credit can continue to be paid - how much you get each month will depend on your income and circumstances. If you finish work, **Notify the DWP straightaway - your UC award will be adjusted to take account of your new circumstances**

### **How does UC work for workers?**

Each month the DWP will work out your award based on your circumstances at the end of your 'Monthly Assessment Period' (MAP) and the wages you (and any partner) received in that period. So if your earnings change, so will your UC award.

### **My earnings never change but my UC award does - why is this?**

You may have more earnings taken into account in a particular MAP than you were expecting, because:

- **Paid weekly?** You can receive 5 wages in a MAP
- **Paid fortnightly?** You can receive 3 wages in a MAP
- **Paid every 4 weeks or monthly?** There will be the odd MAP when you are paid twice
- **Tax refunds / holiday pay** - count as wages.

If your UC stops and you think that you will become entitled again, you must make either a rapid reclaim (if it stopped less than 6 months ago) or a new claim.

**TIP ...look on your journal to find out what your Monthly Assessment Period is - it's the period for which each payment is made**

### **What if I become unwell?**

Universal Credit can continue to be paid - but you must notify your work coach immediately.

### **If you are too ill to work search...**

You must let your work coach know otherwise you can be sanctioned for failing to do the work search / preparation required in your claimant commitment. They can suspend all or some of these requirements for short spells of illness.

### **What if my illness is long term?**

If you have a 'limited capability for work', your claimant commitment can be altered to reflect this and you may also be entitled to more UC. You must provide the DWP with a 'fit' (sick) note from your GP and ask for a Work Capability Assessment. While the DWP are considering this make sure you:

- **Continue to meet your claimant commitment** - but ask your work coach to have it altered
- **Complete a medical questionnaire** - get help from a benefits adviser
- **Attend a work capability assessment** - get advice from a benefits adviser before attending.

### **What if I'm found fit for work?**

If you are not happy with that decision you can challenge it - by asking for a Mandatory Reconsideration and then you can Appeal."

**NOTE...** on ESA with a Work Related Activity Component or Support Component immediately before moving onto UC? If you've not been found fit, your UC should include the equivalent LCW or LCWRA Element from the start.

### **Do I need to be online?**

Yes - you will have an online Universal Credit account to manage your claim, so you will need to be able to go online on a regular basis. If you have never been online there is lots of help available – talk to Hastoe, your local library or JobCentre.

### **You'll need to regularly log in to your account...**

When you login you will be able to:

- Check for 'to do's' that you are required to action
- Contact your work coach via an online journal
- Check details of payments
- Notify changes of circumstances
- Search for a job
- Record your work search / preparation activities
- Ask questions about your claim
- Challenge decisions.

You will be expected to report all changes online and check regularly for messages from your work coach.

### **Make sure you take any action you are asked to do - otherwise you could be sanctioned.**

If you are sanctioned, seek advice immediately.

**TIP... if you are going to struggle getting online - let your work coach know. And explain what the difficulties are - they can help.**

### **Choosing the right account for your payments.**

You'll need to have a bank / Credit Union account set up to receive your UC payments. Universal Credit can be paid into a...

- Current Account
- Basic Bank Account
- Credit Union Account
- **'Jam Jar' Account**
- Prepaid Card Account.

### **How do I decide?**

There's lots of information online. Which account is best for you will depend on your circumstances but whatever account you choose it would be good if it ...

- Allows you to set up Direct Debits
- Has a 'buffer' zone.

If you are claiming Universal Credit as a couple consider setting up a joint account because a joint claim for UC can normally only be paid into one account and you may both need access to the UC award. If having UC paid into one account is inappropriate talk to your work coach about splitting the payments.

**I'd like to have a bank account, but what if I don't pass the credit check?**  
Most accounts without an overdraft facility don't require you to pass a credit check.

**TIP...** for more information have a look at [choosing a bank account](#) on the [Money Advice Service website](#)

**Useful information & contacts:**

**Department for Work and Pensions** [universal-credit](#)

[Citizens Advice](#) (CAB)

[National Debt Line](#) tel: 0808 808 4000

[Money Advice Service](#) tel: 0800 138 7777

[Step Change](#) tel: 0800 138 1111

**Please note contents are subject to change, and are not a statement of law.  
Please consult an appropriate professional for specific advice tailored to your situation.**