

UNIVERSAL CREDIT

AND

YOU

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For more information on all the topics covered in this guide and more, please visit www.gov.uk/universal-credit

Universal Credit Introduction

Universal Credit is an in and out of work benefit. It has been introduced to give you the support you need to find and progress in work. We want you to be able to benefit from all the positives that work brings. This guide will help you do that.

Universal Credit Service

Universal Credit has been introduced to replace the following benefits: Child Tax Credit; Housing Benefit; Income Support; income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA); income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA); Working Tax Credit.



Claiming Universal Credit

In most cases, Universal Credit claims are made online. You will then meet your work coach at an interview in your local jobcentre. The work coach will be able to guide and support you and, where appropriate, help you into work by providing personalised advice using their knowledge of local work opportunities. Alternatively, you may be given a case manager to help you. If you do not have internet access you can use the computers or Wi-Fi in your local jobcentre. If you are unable to use the online claims process, even with assistance - for example, you are unable to access the internet due to a health condition or disability that limits what you can do, you will need to call the [Universal Credit helpline \(see page 9\)](#).



What you'll need to make a Universal Credit claim

There are a number of things that are needed to make a Universal Credit claim:

- an address (this can be a 'care of' address)
- an email address
- a telephone number
- bank account details (a claim can still be made without a bank account)
- evidence of your identity



Online

Most Universal Credit claimants manage their Universal Credit claim through their online account. You can use your account to report changes, get support and use your journal to send messages to your work coach. Almost all Universal Credit claims will be managed using an online account. If you need some help to use the internet please talk to your work coach or case manager about the support available near you.



Home Visits

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Visiting Team can, in certain circumstances, visit claimants at home to help them with their Universal Credit claim. A request for a home visit can be made via your online journal or by calling the Universal Credit helpline.

Support visits can take place somewhere other than your home, for example, at a hospital.

A visit can be arranged if, for example, you:

- cannot attend a jobcentre due to a disability or health condition
 - are a vulnerable young person making a claim for the first time
- and:
- have nobody else to support you
 - cannot claim Universal Credit in any other way



What to expect

The DWP Visiting Team will call you to book a visit and tell you what to expect, including how to contact us. During this initial call the DWP Visiting Team will tell you about:

- the date and time of the visit – you can reschedule it if you need to
- where the visit will take place
- how to contact the Visiting Team
- who will visit you - you'll be given the visiting officer's name
- security and safety for the visit
- what identity documents you will need to show the visiting officer
- what you'll need to tell DWP about your income, savings and housing
- what you should tell us about your health



Following the call you will receive confirmation of the booking via a letter or text message (if you have provided a mobile telephone number).

You will be able to contact the DWP Visiting Team before the visit if you have any questions. The number for this is included in the confirmation letter and text. This number can also be used to:

- reschedule your visit
- change where you want the visit to take place
- arrange for a password to be used between you and the visiting officer to check their identity

During the visit, the visiting officer may, among other things:

- help you through a telephone claim
- check to see if you are entitled to any other benefits
- signpost you to any additional services that might be available

As each visit is different it is not possible to say how long the visit will take or exactly what steps the visiting officer may take to help you.



Check the identity of the visiting officer

You can check the identity of the visiting officer by:

- comparing the name on the visiting officer's photo identity card with the name on your confirmation letter or text message
- agreeing a password for the visiting officer to say when they arrive. You must arrange this by calling the number on the confirmation letter or text before the visit
- calling the DWP Visiting Team on the number on your confirmation letter or text and providing the visiting officer's name

Date of claim

If you require help with making your Universal Credit claim by a home visit, the date of claim will be the date of first contact. This is the case even when you are not actually able to complete the claim on that same day.



Reporting changes

It is important that you tell us about any changes to your circumstances straight away. For example, if you move address, change your phone number, find or stop work, go abroad or are planning to go abroad, pay for childcare for when you are working or your income or capital changes. This list is not exhaustive.

Use your Universal Credit online account to report changes by answering the questions on screen. The **online** service will also explain how to report changes you cannot report online at the moment. <https://www.gov.uk/sign-in-universal-credit>



Help to Claim

Citizens Advice (England and Wales) and Citizens Advice Scotland deliver a 'Help to Claim' service to anyone who requires support to make a new Universal Credit claim. This includes anyone moving from another benefit to Universal Credit following a change in their circumstances.

The Citizens Advice Help to Claim service offers you tailored, practical support to help you make a Universal Credit claim through to getting your first correct payment. Help to Claim can be accessed at any time until the first full correct payment of Universal Credit is in place. You can access the service online via webchat, through a freephone number and face to face with your local Citizens Advice service.

For more information:-

If you live in England or Wales please visit: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/helptoclaim.

If you live in Scotland please visit: www.cas.org.uk/helptoclaim.

Or you can ask about **Help to Claim** in your jobcentre.

Your Responsibilities

When you claim Universal Credit there are a number of activities you become responsible for in order to receive your payment. You can get more information about Universal Credit online at www.gov.uk/universal-credit



Complete a **Claimant Commitment** with your work coach.



Complete **work search activities** in line with what you have agreed in your Claimant Commitment.



Paying your **own rent** and other **housing costs**.



Reporting changes in circumstances, through your **online account** or by calling the Universal Credit helpline.



Manage your payments and **budget on a monthly basis**.

You may be able to get an [advance](#) to help you manage until your first payment see:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-advances>



Look for additional work and **increase your earnings** if you are working part-time.



Your Claimant Commitment

When you claim Universal Credit you will need to complete and accept a tailored Claimant Commitment.

In most cases your Claimant Commitment will be drawn up during a conversation with your work coach at your local jobcentre. It will set out what you have agreed to do to prepare for and look for work (when appropriate), or to increase your earnings if you are already working. Your Claimant commitment can be found on your online account.

It will be based on your personal circumstances and will take your health into account. It will be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis. Each time it is updated, you will need to accept the new Claimant Commitment to keep receiving Universal Credit.

If you claim Universal Credit as a couple, both of you will need to accept an individual Claimant Commitment. Your Claimant Commitment may be affected if your partner starts work or their circumstances change.



Being open about your situation

We understand that it is sometimes difficult for you to talk to us about issues or challenges that you are experiencing, but your work coach is there to help you. It is really important that you tell your work coach about any issues you may have, including homelessness, addictions or poor mental health. Your work coach can tailor your Claimant Commitment to take into account your circumstances.



Not meeting your responsibilities

Your Claimant Commitment will clearly state what will happen if you fail to meet one or more of your responsibilities. Your Universal Credit payments may be reduced for a set period of time if you fail to meet one or more of your responsibilities and can't give a good reason to explain why. This is known as a **sanction** (see page 13).



If you are earning as much as can be expected in your current circumstances.

You will receive financial support without any other conditions to increase your earnings.



If you are able and available to work.

You will need to do everything you reasonably can to give yourself the best chance of finding work. You will be expected to spend the number of hours agreed on your Claimant Commitment preparing for and getting a job. If you do not do this without a good reason you may receive a sanction.

If you currently have limited capability for work, related to a disability or health condition, but this is expected to change over time.

You will be supported until your circumstances improve and you can work. You will be expected to prepare for work so far as you are able.



If you have a disability or health condition that prevents you from working.

You will not be required to work or prepare for work and will be supported through Universal Credit.

For more information see the [Health and Disability](#) section on page 22

If you care for a severely disabled person for at least 35 hours per week.

You will not be required to work and will be supported through Universal Credit.



If you are the lead carer for a child.

You will be supported in your current circumstances. What is expected of you as a lead carer in return for getting Universal Credit will be based on the age of the youngest child in your household.



Easements

Easements are reducing or removing work-related requirements.

In some situations your work-related requirements can be reduced for a period of time due to your personal circumstances. DWP calls these changes easements. You must let your work coach know if any of the situations below apply to you so they can agree suitable work related requirements for your Claimant Commitment.

Situations which result in compulsory easement of work-related requirements for those required to look for work:

SITUATION	DURATION	INFORMATION
Compulsory		
Bereavement of partner or child	6 months	Easement of work-related requirements for a duration of 6 months.
Domestic violence	3 or 6 months	Easement of work-related requirements, where criteria has been met. This is for 6 months for lead carers of a child.
Drug or alcohol dependency	Up to 6 months	If receiving structured treatment, easement of work-related requirements apply. Circumstances will be reviewed regularly to confirm continued engagement in treatment.
Child distress	1 month – once every 6 months for up to 2 years	Easement of work-related requirements apply if there is a need to provide additional support to a child following the death of a parent/sibling/lead carer, or if the child witnessed or experienced domestic violence or abuse.
Carrying out a public duty	Period covered by the circumstances	Includes volunteer fire fighter, lifeboat crew member, volunteer coastguard, councillor, TA reservist, attending Jury service, core participant in a public or independent inquiry, for example, child sex abuse inquiry.
Unfit for work	Duration of Medical Evidence or up to Work Capability Assessment (WCA) date	Remains unavailable for work.
	Up to the first 14 days of sickness in any one period	Easement of work search requirements applies if it is the first or second period of sickness in a rolling 12-month period. Work coach discretion applies to set reasonable work focused, work preparation requirements.
Temporary absence abroad to receive medical treatment or accompanying child or partner.	Up to 6 months	Easement of work search and work availability applies if receiving medically approved treatment abroad or accompanying a partner or child who is receiving medically approved treatment abroad.
Treated as having limited capability for work (LCW)	Until outcome of the WCA	LCW easement of work search and work availability requirements applies, pending the outcome of a work capability assessment. Work focused interviews and work preparation activities may still be set, if reasonable, depending on the health condition and will be discussed with the work coach.
Treated as having limited capability for work and work-related requirements (including terminally ill) (LCWRA) For more information visit:		If treated as LCWRA all work-related requirements must be eased pending the outcome of the work capability assessment outcome of the work capability assessment. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-if-you-have-a-disability-or-health-condition-quick-guide/universal-credit-if-you-have-a-disability-or-health-condition#terminally-ill
Witness Protection	Up to 3 months	For those whom arrangements have been made under section 82 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005. Easement of work-related requirements will apply.



Discretionary easements of work-related requirements for those required to look for work.

Discretionary easements can be applied at the discretion of a work coach where it would be unreasonable to impose work-related requirements. These cover domestic emergencies, homelessness and temporary childcare.

Payments

How, when and where?

Universal Credit is paid monthly directly into the account you tell us about when you make your claim. The amount you get is calculated each month and depends on your circumstances and earnings during that time. This is known as an Assessment Period.

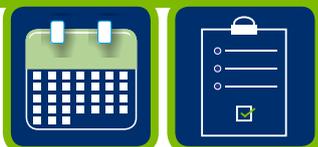
Your Universal Credit payment is made up of a basic amount called a standard allowance plus any additional amounts depending on you and your households circumstances.

You should receive **your first payment 7 days after the end of your first Assessment Period**. You will then be able to view your **payment details in your online account**. We can't confirm how much you'll get before then because the amount depends upon your circumstances, for example, if you're caring for someone else and/or if you have received any income or earnings that month.

Your payment will usually arrive on the **same date each month** (or earlier if the date falls on a weekend or bank holiday). If you are employed, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) will tell us about any money you've earned.

If you were previously in receipt of tax credits it is important to note that **your tax credits will stop as soon as you make a claim to Universal Credit**. For further information see: [Universal Credit: help with managing your money](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/help-with-managing-your-money)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/help-with-budgeting-your-universal-credit>

1 calendar month Assessment Period



Assessment Period

Universal Credit is assessed and paid in arrears, on a monthly basis, in a single payment.

Your personal circumstances will be assessed to work out the amount of Universal Credit you are entitled to.

7 Days



7 Days and Payments

Your payments will usually be calculated from the day you submit your claim and you will get your first payment 7 days after the end of your first Assessment Period.

Your payment will then be made on the same date every month while you remain entitled to Universal Credit. If your payment date is on a bank holiday or weekend you will be paid on the last working day before the bank holiday or weekend.

Universal Credit will be paid directly into your chosen account.

Payment



Advances

You can get additional help during your first month of claiming Universal Credit. Universal Credit is paid monthly and you are required to budget monthly (the first Universal Credit payment will be made 7 days after the end of your first Assessment Period). If you feel you may experience financial difficulties during the time between making your claim and receiving your first payment, you can apply for a Universal Credit advance.

You can apply for up to 100% of your first Universal Credit estimated entitlement (this may include an amount for housing costs).

You will need to repay the advance from your future Universal Credit payments over a maximum of 12 months.

Deductions to repay an advance are made from your monthly Universal Credit payment. The first deduction is made on the day you get your first payment. You can ask for your repayments to be delayed for up to 3 months if you can't afford them. This is only allowed in exceptional circumstances.

Advances are usually paid into the bank account that you are using for your Universal Credit claim within three working days. If a payment is needed more quickly, DWP can make a **same day payment**. These will only be made where there are exceptional circumstances, for example, where you do not have enough money to last the 3 working days until the advance is paid.

You can apply for an advance through your online account by asking your jobcentre work coach or by calling the Universal Credit helpline.

To apply, you will need to:

- explain why you need an advance
- provide bank account details where the advance should be paid
- verify your identity (you'll need to do this in the jobcentre during your first interview)

Universal Credit helpline

Telephone: 0800 328 5644

Textphone: 0800 328 1344

NGT text - if you cannot hear or speak on the phone: 18001 then 0800 328 5644
Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.

The agent will take you through the advances application.
(For Welsh language call 0800 328 1744).

You can read more information on this and other types of advances that are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-advances>

Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs)

If you can't manage the single monthly payment an Alternative Payment Arrangement can be considered. Not all requests for Alternative Payment Arrangements will be granted as each request will be considered on its own merits and against the eligibility criteria.

If you are eligible you can get:

Money paid directly to your landlord for rent



This means the housing costs part of your Universal Credit payment will automatically be paid directly each month to your landlord.

Payments made twice a month or exceptionally four times a month instead of monthly



This can help prevent you from running out of money if you're struggling to make your payment last a whole month.

Payments split into 2 bank accounts instead of one (couples only)



This can help you manage your money yourself if you have responsibilities that are different to your partner's, or if you've been a victim of abuse and want to manage your money yourself.

Alternative Payment Arrangements can be considered at any point during your Universal Credit claim. If you are currently applying, or are about to apply for Universal Credit, you can ask for an Alternative Payment Arrangement at your interview.

You also need to be aware that should you fall into rent arrears, your landlord can apply for a **deduction directly from your Universal Credit payment**. This will only apply if you are at **least 2 months in arrears** with your rent. You may want to talk to your landlord and come to an arrangement (to avoid these deductions) if you are at least 2 months in arrears with your rent.

Speak to your **work coach** for further information if you are already receiving Universal Credit.



Conditionality

Conditionality is a term used to describe what group of conditions you will have to meet based on your capabilities and circumstances. Each **eligible adult** will fall into one of four conditionality groups.



All work-related requirements

You have to do all you can to find a job or earn more. This includes looking for jobs, applying for jobs and going to interviews.



Work-focused interview and work preparation requirements only

You have to meet your work coach regularly and also prepare for work. This includes things like writing a CV and going on training or work experience.



Work-focused interview requirements only

You have to go to regular meetings with your work coach.



No work-related activity requirements

You don't have to do anything to prepare or look for work.

Full time work search

If your Claimant Commitment includes looking for work, you will be expected to do everything you reasonably can to prepare for and find work. In most cases, you will need to complete up to **35 hours** of work search activity **per week** in order to receive Universal Credit. This could include some or all of the following:

Prepare your CV



Tailor it to each job



Prepare your CV cover note



Research employers & transport links



Job search and set up job alerts online



Apply for suitable jobs



Follow up applications



Make it easy to be found online



Network with friends, family and on social media



Prepare for your interview



Record your activities to track your progress



This list is not exhaustive. For more tips and ideas visit The Daily Jobseeker <http://dailyjobseeker.tumblr.com>

Sanctions

If you fail to meet any of the responsibilities that you agreed in your Claimant Commitment without good reason, you may receive a reduction in your benefit payment, known as a sanction.

We will inform you how long the sanction lasts when we tell you about our decision. If we ask you to complete an activity to limit the length of a sanction, how long the sanction lasts will depend on how quickly you complete that activity.

There are four sanction levels: **higher, medium, low and lowest**. The period of reduction will increase if you fail to meet requirements multiple times in each level.

You will be sanctioned for **91 days (13 weeks)** for your first higher level sanction and **182 days (26 weeks)** for your second and each subsequent higher level sanction in any **364 day period** if you:

- have to meet the 'work search requirement', and you fail to apply for a particular job when told to do so
- have to meet the 'work availability requirement', and you refuse a job offer
- leave work or reduce your hours of work, whether voluntarily or due to 'misconduct' (while claiming Universal Credit or just before your claim)

There are special rules for how long your sanction will last if it is for leaving work before you claimed Universal Credit.

You will be sanctioned for **28 days** for your first medium level sanction in any **364 day period**, or **91 days** for your second if you:

- have to meet the 'work search requirement', and you fail to take all reasonable actions to find paid work or increase your earnings from work
- have to meet the 'work availability requirement' and you are not available to start work or attend interviews.

They last until you do whatever you were sanctioned for failing to do, **plus 7 days** for your first low level sanction in any **364 day period**, **14 days** for your second, or **28 days** for your third if you:

- fail to attend or take part in a work-focused interview, and a lowest sanction level does not apply
- fail to attend or take part in a training course
- fail to take a specific action to get paid work, or to increase your earnings from work

These apply if you only have to meet the work-focused interview requirement, and you fail to attend or take part in a work-focused interview, they last until you take part in one.





A Sanction reduces the amount of your **Universal Credit standard allowance** (the amount of Universal Credit that does not include extra money for things like children and housing costs) being paid by **up to 100%** for a single claimant or **up to 50%** for each member of a couple (a **lesser % is applied** to those not in the all work related requirements conditionality group).

Reduction of sanctions from Universal Credit:

You cannot have two sanctions at once, however sanctions can run back-to-back.

When you are sanctioned, it is usually your next payment, or series of future payments of Universal Credit, that are affected.

Sanction reductions are applied after taking earnings and unearned income into account. If there is insufficient Universal Credit remaining after this to take the full sanction amount, the sanction reduces the award to nil and is treated as having been made in full. You will remain entitled to Universal Credit and will therefore maintain access to 'passport' benefits such as free prescriptions.

16/17 year olds:

You can fall into any one of the four conditionality groups:

- All work-related requirements
- Work-focused-interview and work-preparation requirements only
- Work-focused interview requirements only and
- No work-related activity requirements

The sanctions regime for 16 and 17 year olds mirrors the adult regime, but has lower sanction amounts, **40% of the Standard Allowance**, and shorter durations.

If you do not agree with a Universal Credit sanction:

You can ask for a review within a month of the date of a decision, we call this a mandatory reconsideration. You must write to the department that gave you the decision (the address to write to will be on the decision letter) and say why you think the decision is wrong, providing any evidence.

For more information please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/mandatory-reconsideration>

Recoverable Hardship Payments

You may be able to get a hardship payment if you get a **sanction**. You will repay it through your Universal Credit payments, which will be lower until you pay it back.

Eligibility - You can get a hardship payment if you can show that you can't pay for:-



rent



heating



food or hygiene needs
for you or your household.

You must be **18 years old or over** and your payment of Universal Credit must have been stopped or reduced because of a sanction. You cannot claim a hardship payment unless this has happened.

If you have been sanctioned for not doing something like attending a meeting and there is no end date to that sanction, you cannot get a hardship payment until you have done what you were asked to do.

You must show that you have done everything reasonable to look for work in the **7 days** before claiming a hardship payment. If you haven't you will not get a hardship payment. Every case is **assessed individually**. You will have to show that you have tried to find the money from somewhere else and only spent money on essentials.

How to claim

Call the Universal Credit Helpline 0800 328 5644

Textphone 0800 328 1344

NGT text - if you cannot hear or speak on the phone: 18001 then 0800 328 5644

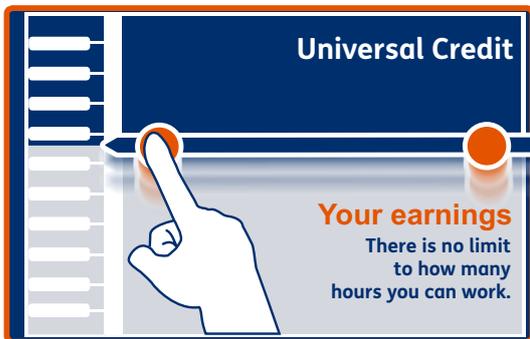
Welsh Language 0800 328 1744

Monday – Friday 8am–6pm.



Taper

Universal Credit is designed to make sure that you're **better off in work** by topping up your wages each month while you need it.



Your Universal Credit payment **reduces gradually as you earn more** (this is known as the taper), and will increase again if your job ends or your earnings go down.

You can earn a certain amount, which is based on your individual circumstances, before your Universal Credit payment is reduced. The more you earn, the higher your total income will be, which helps ensure that you will be better off in work.



Use a **benefits calculator** to see how starting a job or increasing your working hours affects your benefits. <https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators>.

Work Allowances

When you start work, the amount of Universal Credit you get will gradually reduce as you earn more. But unlike Jobseeker's Allowance, **your payment won't stop, if you work more than 16 hours a week.**

Your total income will be your earnings, plus your Universal Credit payment. The more you earn, the higher your total income will be.

Your claim continues when you start work, so you can take temporary or seasonal jobs without worrying about making a brand new claim or any gaps between paydays as you move in and out of work.

In some cases, you may be eligible for a **work allowance**. A work allowance is the amount that you can earn before your Universal Credit payment is affected.

You will be eligible for a work allowance if you (and/or your partner) either have:

- responsibility for a child**
- limited capability for work**

The monthly work allowances are set at:



£287

If your Universal Credit includes housing support



£503

If you do not receive housing support

If you have earnings but you (or your partner) are not responsible for a child or do not have limited capability for work you will **not be eligible** for a work allowance.



Non-calendar monthly earnings payments

When you are working, if you are not paid by your employer per calendar month, you may be paid **four-weekly**, **fortnightly**, **weekly** or on a **fixed day every month**, which may mean that for some months you receive two or more wages during one Universal Credit assessment period (AP). This may reduce your Universal Credit payment or in some cases mean you will not receive any Universal Credit for that month.



Fixed pay days

This is where you are paid by your employer on a **fixed date every month**. In some months you may receive your wages before your usual payday, to avoid paying on a weekend or bank holiday (weekends and bank holidays are known as non-banking days).

If employers do not follow HMRC guidance correctly and report the wrong pay date to HMRC this can impact your Universal Credit payment. If this happens, you must raise this with **your employer**.



More guidance on how often you get paid and how that may affect Universal Credit payments can be found on the internet at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-different-earning-patterns-and-your-payments/universal-credit-different-earning-patterns-and-your-payments-payment-cycles>



Surplus Earnings

If your monthly earnings are more than £2,500 over the amount where your Universal Credit payment stopped, this becomes 'surplus earnings'.

Your surplus earnings will be carried forward to the following month, where they count towards your earnings. If your earnings (including your surplus earnings) are then still over the amount where your payment stops, you will not get a Universal Credit payment.

If your earnings fall below the amount where your payment stopped, your surplus will decrease. Once your surplus has gone, you'll be able to get a Universal Credit payment again.

You'll need to reclaim Universal Credit every month until your earnings have reduced enough to get another payment.

You can talk to your work coach for more information about surplus earnings.

The statement in your online journal will show your work allowance and when the surplus reduces.

For more information please see <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/how-your-earnings-affect-your-payments>





If you are self-employed and make a new claim to Universal Credit or you have an existing claim and you decide to become self-employed, Universal Credit will provide support to help you grow your business. Thousands of people take the decision to start their own business each year.

If you are thinking about becoming self-employed to improve your future, GOV.UK provides a wealth of information on working for yourself. <https://www.gov.uk/working-for-yourself>



Self-employment guide

A self-employment guide will be issued to you when you tell us you are self-employed. It tells you what to expect from your work coach, what to bring with you to your first interview and how to report self-employed earnings.

What does it mean to be gainfully self-employed?

When you tell us you are self-employed we need to decide whether self-employment is the most appropriate way for you to become financially independent. The first step towards making this decision is to assess whether you are 'gainfully self-employed'.

This means that self-employment in a trade, profession or vocation should be your main occupation. Your business must be developed in expectation to make a profit.

Proving that you are gainfully self-employed

Your work coach will ask you about your business and earnings and you'll have to provide evidence to support this; things like tax returns, your Unique Tax Reference number from HMRC, your business plan, customer lists or marketing materials are all acceptable.

In order to make a decision about whether self-employment is your main occupation, we will look at how many hours you spend undertaking self-employed activity and how much you are earning from it.

If we decide you are gainfully self-employed, you are exempt from all Universal Credit work-related requirements, meaning you can focus totally on your business.

Minimum Income Floor

Universal Credit includes a 'Minimum Income Floor' (MIF) if you are gainfully self-employed, and your business has been running for more than 12 months. The MIF is an assumed level of earnings. We base this on what we would expect an employed person to receive in similar circumstances to you.

The MIF is calculated using the National Minimum Wage for your age group, multiplied by the number of hours you are expected to look for and be available for work. It also includes a notional (estimated) deduction for tax and National Insurance.

If your self-employed earnings are below the MIF we have calculated for you, we will use the MIF to work out your Universal Credit award instead of your actual earnings.

Start-up period

If we decide you are gainfully self-employed, are within one year of starting self-employment, and you are taking active steps to increase your earnings, you may be eligible for a start-up period. This is a period of up to twelve months where the Minimum Income Floor will not be applied and you won't be required to look for or take up alternative employment.

Your actual earnings will be taken into account to work out your Universal Credit award. You will be expected to take steps to build your business and increase your earnings, and we will ask you to provide evidence of this during quarterly interviews.





Work coach support

If you are in the start-up period, you will receive regular one-to-one support from your work coach to help you grow your business and increase your earnings.

If you have a partner who is working

Your partner's earnings may affect the level of MIF applied to your claim in certain circumstances.

Household income is used to calculate the amount of Universal Credit you receive, so your partner's earnings may affect your Universal Credit payment.

If you have a partner who is also self-employed

You would each have your own MIF, calculated depending on your circumstances, and these are combined to calculate your household award.

Changes to your self-employment

You'll need to report any change in circumstances as soon as possible. You can do this via your online account or by calling the Universal Credit helpline.

Depending on the change, for example if you have ceased trading or are unable to work in your business anymore, we may need to carry out a new gainful self-employment test to decide whether your start-up period needs to be ended.

You may change the type of self-employment you take part in, for example, if you decide to start a different kind of business. This does not mean you will automatically get another start-up period. You are only entitled to a new start-up period if **both** of the following apply:

- you have changed the type self-employment you do
- it has been five years since your last start-up period



Universal Credit and self-employment

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-self-employment-quick-guide>)

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Support for all 18 to 21 year olds

A programme of intensive support is provided for all 18 to 21 year olds making a new claim to Universal Credit. This is known as the **Youth Obligation Support Programme**.

It aims to encourage and support all young people into employment, work-related training or an apprenticeship.

If you are 18 to 21 years old and are making a new claim to Universal Credit, you will receive a programme of intensive support, based on evidence of what works, tailored to your needs and job goals.

Throughout this, you will continue to receive Universal Credit in line with the agreements made in your Claimant Commitment. If you are attending training or work experience you may be reimbursed for travel or childcare costs.

Your work coach will discuss the best support for you at your first meeting.

For more information please see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/support-for-18-to-21-year-olds-claiming-universal-credit>



Children

You'll be entitled to an additional amount of Universal Credit for any child born **before 6 April 2017**.



Universal Credit will no longer pay you an **additional amount for a third or subsequent** child born on or after **6 April 2017**, unless special circumstances apply (see below).

For example, if you're already claiming Universal Credit, have responsibility for 2 children and you then give birth to a new child, you won't get an additional amount of Universal Credit for that new child, unless **special circumstances** apply.

You'll **still be entitled to additional support** in respect of any disabled children, even if you aren't getting an additional child amount of Universal Credit for the disabled child.

If you're responsible for a child or children through **adoption** or as part of a **non-parental caring arrangement** then you'll be able to receive an additional amount for these children. This will not affect any amounts you may get for any other children in your household. You'll need to provide documents to support this.



Special circumstances

We call these special circumstances "**exceptions**".

There are some exceptions if you're responsible for a third or subsequent child and they meet the criteria for multiple births or non-consensual conception, these are listed below.

Multiple births

You can get extra Universal Credit for your third and subsequent children if they are born as part of a multiple birth, apart from one child in that birth. This means the exception applies to the additional children in that birth.

For example, if you're already getting additional amounts of Universal Credit for 2 existing children, then you have twins, we'll pay an extra additional child amount of Universal Credit for one of those twins (meaning that in total you'll be entitled to an amount for 3 out of your 4 children).

Where the first child of the multiple birth is either the first or second child in the household, we'll pay a child amount for all the children born as part of the multiple birth.

Children likely to have been conceived as a result of a non-consensual sexual act (including rape), or at a time when you were subject to ongoing control or coercion by the other biological parent of your child

You can get additional Universal Credit for the third or subsequent children in your household who are likely to have been conceived as a result of a sexual act to which you didn't or couldn't consent.

This includes rape or where you were in a controlling or coercive relationship with the child's other biological parent at the time of conception.

In order to qualify for this, you must not be living with the child's other biological parent. For more information about how to apply for this, please see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-a-child-conceived-without-your-consent>.

We recognise that the handling of this exception is extremely sensitive. However, it is very important to have this exception in place to support you if you're in this position.

DWP staff will not question you about the incident other than to receive the claim and the supporting information. Any information received will be handled in accordance with the rules that DWP already use for holding and using extremely sensitive information.



For further detailed information on claiming Universal Credit for more than 2 children please visit <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-and-families-with-more-than-2-children-information-for-claimants>



Childcare

Help with eligible childcare costs

Universal Credit helps working parents by providing financial help with **eligible childcare costs**, no matter how many hours you work. If you are claiming with a partner, **both of you normally need to be in work to receive this help**. It is also available if you are claiming Universal Credit and are in receipt of Statutory Sick Pay, Statutory Maternity Pay, Ordinary Statutory Paternity Pay, Additional Statutory Paternity Pay, Shared Paternity Pay, Statutory Adoption Pay or Maternity Allowance.



You will be able to claim back up to 85% of your actual paid out childcare costs if you meet the qualifying conditions and your childcare costs are eligible. You can tell us about your childcare costs on your online account.



Claimants with a firm and accepted job offer can claim for eligible childcare costs a month prior to starting work. Talking to your work coach as soon as possible about your job offer and the support options available to you will help with getting a routine in place for when you start work. Universal Credit eligible childcare costs are paid in arrears, so if you think you need help with up-front costs, you should discuss this with your work coach. Additional help to meet an initial payment for eligible childcare costs may be available, subject to certain conditions.

Universal Credit eligible childcare costs can also be claimed for **at least a month after your employment ends**, which can help you to maintain childcare as you move between jobs.



Help paying for eligible childcare costs in Universal Credit is in respect of payments to **registered** or **approved childcare providers**. This generally means the childcare provider is registered with OFSTED in England, the Care Inspectorate in Scotland or Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW).

Approved childcare can include care provided in school or in another place by a child minder, play-scheme, nursery or club. Your approved childcare provider should be able to provide you with a registration number.

You cannot claim Universal Credit for eligible childcare costs to cover any free provision. However, you can claim Universal Credit for eligible childcare costs to cover the cost of the hours over and above the free provision. If your child starts getting free childcare, you should tell us about the change straight away.

If you are working and responsible for a child, your employer may be able to help you with childcare costs through Employer Supported Childcare in the form of childcare vouchers. Employer Supported Childcare closed to new entrants in April 2018.

To make a claim you will need to provide evidence of your childcare placement(s) and the actual cost of childcare with receipts.



Other help with childcare costs

15 hours each week



All **three and four year olds** in England can get **570 hours** of free early education or childcare per year. This is usually taken as **15 hours each week for 38 weeks** of the year. Some two year olds are also eligible.

30 hours each week



Since September 2017, the free childcare entitlement in England doubled to **30 hours per week for working parents of three and four year olds (some conditions may apply)**.

Different schemes are available in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland visit:

Scotland - <https://www.mygov.scot/childcare-costs-help/childcare-you-can-get-help-with/>

Wales - <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/in-your-area/family-information-services/>

Northern Ireland - <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/parenting-and-childcare/childcare>



The Tax-Free Childcare scheme supports parents with their childcare costs. If you are in receipt of Universal Credit, you will not be eligible for Tax-Free Childcare at the same time, so you will need to choose between getting Universal Credit childcare costs and Tax Free Childcare. If you need help with this you should speak to your work coach.

For further information on a range of different childcare schemes including, free childcare and other childcare support visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-childcare/universal-credit-childcare-guide>

Help with Child Maintenance Arrangements

You can get help with organising Child Maintenance from 'Child Maintenance Options'. This is a free and impartial service for parents who live separately. For more information, call 0800 953 0191.

Housing

If you and/or your partner are responsible for paying rent (including any eligible service charges) for the home you live in, or if you have a mortgage, Universal Credit may provide help towards the cost. We call this Universal Credit Housing Costs.



If you claim Universal Credit, it is your **responsibility to budget** correctly and make sure you pay your rent and other housing costs **direct to your landlord or mortgage lender or other lender in full**. Being responsible for paying rent means you have an agreement to make rent payments and have a contract or written rent agreement with a landlord, organisation or agency.

If you are applying for housing costs under Universal Credit, and manage your claim through your online account and live in the **social housing sector**, the service centre will email a **Housing Costs Verification form to your landlord**. Once this has been returned, the information will be checked against your claimant declaration.

We will check and **validate your evidence** before paying Universal Credit Housing Costs. We will also check the local rent levels in your area. **If you do not provide this evidence there may be a delay in paying you Universal Credit Housing Costs.**

If you're getting Housing Benefit before you claim Universal Credit.



To help you financially, your Housing Benefit will continue to be paid for 2 weeks after you claim Universal Credit. This payment will be made by your **Local Authority**.

This extra two week Housing Benefit payment is to support you when you first move from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit. You do not need to pay back this extra money and it will not be taken into account as income by Universal Credit. You do not need to claim this extra 2 weeks of Housing Benefit, it will be paid automatically when you first claim Universal Credit.

If your Housing Benefit is paid directly to your landlord, the extra money will also be paid directly to your landlord, unless you are making a new claim to Universal Credit because of a change of address. For more information go to: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/moving-from-housing-benefit-to-universal-credit>

If your Housing Benefit is paid directly to you, the extra money will also be paid directly to you when you claim Universal Credit. For more information go to: <https://www.gov.uk/housing-and-universal-credit/how-to-claim>

If you are in temporary, emergency, supported or sheltered housing.

You cannot get Universal Credit to pay for temporary, emergency, supported or sheltered housing. You will need to apply for Housing Benefit through your local council for help towards your housing costs.

Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI).

If you and/or your partner **own the home you live in** and have a mortgage or other loan secured on the property, you may be eligible for Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI).



SMI is paid as a loan, which **you'll need to pay back** when the property is sold or ownership is transferred. The amount you receive will be based on a set rate of interest applied to your outstanding mortgage. It will be paid direct to your mortgage lender.

Once you or your partner are receiving earned income, you will no longer be eligible to receive SMI loan payments. You'll need to repay the money you get when you sell or transfer ownership of your home.

If your house is leasehold you may also receive help with some service charges as part of your Universal Credit. Please see: <https://www.gov.uk/support-for-mortgage-interest>

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

Depending on where you live, the money you are paid in your Universal Credit payment **may not cover** all of your housing costs. Where this happens you should consider claiming **Discretionary Housing Payments**. These payments are made by your local authority and can cover the following:

- reductions in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit where the benefit cap has been applied
- reductions in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit due to the removal of the spare room subsidy
- reductions in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit as a result of Local Housing Allowance restrictions
- rent officer restrictions such as local reference rent or shared accommodation rate
- non-dependant deductions in Housing Benefit, or housing cost contributions in Universal Credit
- rent shortfalls to prevent a household becoming homeless whilst the housing authority explores alternative options
- income taper reduction
- policy to limit benefit to two children
- any other policy change that limits the amount of Housing Benefit payable, for example the removal of the family premium

A DHP can also be awarded for a **rent deposit or rent in advance** for a property that you are yet to move into if you are already entitled to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit at your present home.

For further information please see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/claiming-discretionary-housing-payments>

Local Council Tax Reduction

You may be able to get help from your local authority with your **Council Tax** if you are on a low income or claim benefits, **including Universal Credit**. The help you will get depends on where you live, your circumstances, your household income - including savings and pensions, if any children or adults live with you and your local council's own **Council Tax reduction scheme**.

If you are claiming Universal Credit for the first time we would advise you to apply for **Local Council Tax Reduction (LCTR)** straight away, as many local authorities will not backdate it for you.

You do not need to wait until your claim for Universal Credit has been assessed and/or paid. You can start the process to apply for LCTR on GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/apply-council-tax-reduction>. It will take you directly to the relevant page on your local council's website, which will tell you what you need to do next.

Health and Disability

When you make a claim for Universal Credit you will be asked if you have either a health condition or a disability **which prevents, or limits your ability to work**. If you answer 'yes' you may be asked to attend a **Work Capability Assessment (WCA)**.



In most circumstances, if you remain unable to work due to your health condition **for 4 weeks**, you will be referred for a WCA on the **29th day** of your claim.



You may be referred for a WCA on the **first day of your claim** when one of the following applies:

- you are ***terminally ill***
<https://www.gov.uk/benefits-if-youre-terminally-ill>
- you are pregnant and there is a serious risk of damage to your health, or to the health of your unborn child if you do not refrain from work or work-related activity
- you are receiving or are about to receive treatment for cancer by way of chemotherapy or radiotherapy – or you are recovering from such treatment
- you are in hospital or a similar institution for 24 hours or longer
- you are prevented from working by law
- you are receiving treatment such as dialysis, plasmapheresis or total parenteral nutrition for gross impairment of enteric function or are recovering after receiving one of these types of treatment

If you have already made a claim for Universal Credit, a new health condition or disability will need to be reported as a **change of circumstances**.

You can report periods of sickness of up to **14 days** as a **temporary period of sickness**.

For further detailed information on claiming Universal Credit with a health condition or disability please visit www.gov.uk and search for - ***Universal Credit: Health conditions and disability guide***.

You can also speak to staff in your **local jobcentre** or your **work coach**.



Support available



Managing your money

If you want some help with managing your money, you can access the online Money Manager here <http://obs.moneyadviceservice.org.uk>

Money Manager is an **interactive digital tool**, owned by the Money Advice Service, that offers personalised money management advice.

The advice includes how to open a bank account, dealing with rent arrears and regular bills and debt advice services. There's a quick and easy way to use a budget planner and money management hints and tips, including how to reduce your household bills. It also has information about claiming Universal Credit as a couple, claiming with children, information for carers, links to local authorities and other information centres.

If you are unable to use the online Money Manager tool and require help managing your money please talk to your work coach or case manager about local money advice available near you.



Money advice can be offered **online, by phone, or face to face** and is delivered by external organisations with the relevant expertise to do this.

Please speak to your **work coach** for more information.

Budgeting advance

You might be able to get a Budgeting Advance to help with:

Emergency household costs such as replacing a broken cooker, getting a job or staying in work or funeral costs.

You'll repay it through your regular Universal Credit payments - these will be lower until you pay it back. If you stop getting Universal Credit, you'll have to repay the money in another way.

The smallest amount you can borrow is £100. You can get up to:

- £348 if you're single
- £464 if you're part of a couple
- £812 if you have children

What you get depends on whether you have savings of over £1,000 and can pay the loan back.

To get a **Budgeting Advance**, all of the following must apply:

- you've been getting Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance or State Pension Credit for 6 months or more, unless you need the money to help you start a new job or stay in work
- you've earned less than £2,600 (£3,600 together for couples) in the past 6 months
- you've paid off any previous Budgeting Advance loans

Contact your local **jobcentre work coach** to apply.

Help to Save

Help to Save is a government saving scheme to support working people on low incomes to build their savings. To find out more visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/help-to-save-what-it-is-and-who-its-for/the-help-to-save-scheme>





Claiming in Scotland (Scottish Choices)

If you make a new claim in Scotland, you will be asked if you want to get paid once or twice a month.

When you move into accommodation you will be asked if you want the housing amount to be paid directly to your landlord. Your landlord will be notified if you choose this.

These options will only be offered after your first assessment period.



Claiming in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland Universal Credit is normally paid twice a month to a household, however, you may request a monthly payment.

You may also get money to help pay your housing costs. Your eligibility and how much you will get depends on your age and circumstances. The payment can cover:

- rent
- mortgage interest (Support for Mortgage Interest)
- some service charges
- interest on a loan secured against their home

In Northern Ireland these payments will be paid directly to your landlord or mortgage lender. You can request for it to be paid to your household, allowing you to pay your own rent.

Other benefits



Listed below are a number of other benefits you may have an entitlement to depending on your individual circumstances. This list is not exhaustive so please use a benefit calculator to ensure you claim the right benefits for you. <https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators>

New Style Jobseeker's Allowance (New Style JSA)

You may be able to get New Style JSA if you have worked and paid **National Insurance contributions**.

You will need to have paid or been credited with enough National Insurance contributions.

You can get New Style JSA for up to **182 days**. After this you can talk to your work coach about your options.

You can get New Style JSA **on its own** or at the **same time as Universal Credit**. If you claim both benefits any New Style JSA you are entitled to will be **deducted from your Universal Credit payment**. When your New Style JSA ceases you will move on to receive the full entitlement to Universal Credit.

New Style JSA:

- is paid fortnightly in arrears
- attracts a class 1 National Insurance contribution for each week claimed
- is not affected by a partner's earnings or any savings you may have

For more information please see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-style-jobseekers-allowance>

New Style Employment and Support Allowance (New Style ESA)

You may be able to get New Style ESA if you're **ill and unable to work** and have previously worked and paid **National Insurance contributions**.

You will need to have a fit note and have paid or been credited with enough National Insurance contributions.

You can get New Style ESA **on its own** or at the **same time as Universal Credit**.

If you claim both benefits any New Style ESA you are entitled to will be **deducted from your Universal Credit payment**.

New Style ESA:

- is paid fortnightly in arrears
- attracts a class 1 National Insurance contribution for each week claimed
- is not affected by a partner's earnings or any savings you may have

For more information please see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-style-employment-and-support-allowance>





Other benefits that you may be entitled to include:

- Attendance Allowance
- Basic State Pension
- Carer's Allowance
- Child Benefit
- Disability Living Allowance
- Industrial Injuries Benefits
- Local Council Tax support schemes
- Local Welfare Provision
- New State Pension
- Pension Credit
- Personal Independence Payment
- Bereavement benefits
- Maternity Allowance

Find out about any of these benefits by searching on www.gov.uk, or ask your work coach.

Passported Benefits

Passported benefits are additional benefits or schemes which some groups of people are entitled to because they are getting Universal Credit. Extra support that claimants may be entitled to includes:

- help with health costs, including prescriptions and dental treatment
- free school meals and other educational benefits
- Healthy Start vouchers
- legal aid
- help with the costs of using courts or tribunals
- help with prison visiting costs
- help from energy and water suppliers
- warm home discount
- cold weather payments
- sure start maternity grants

This list is not exhaustive, but these are the main benefits. For more information visit <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/other-financial-support>

If you live in England please follow this link for more information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-other-benefits-quick-guide/extra-support-for-universal-credit-claimants>

If you live in Scotland please follow this link <https://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/fairerscotland/Latestinfo-publications/mitigating/Passportedbenefits>

If you live in Wales please follow this link: <https://gov.wales/eligibility-criteria-passported-benefits-and-schemes>





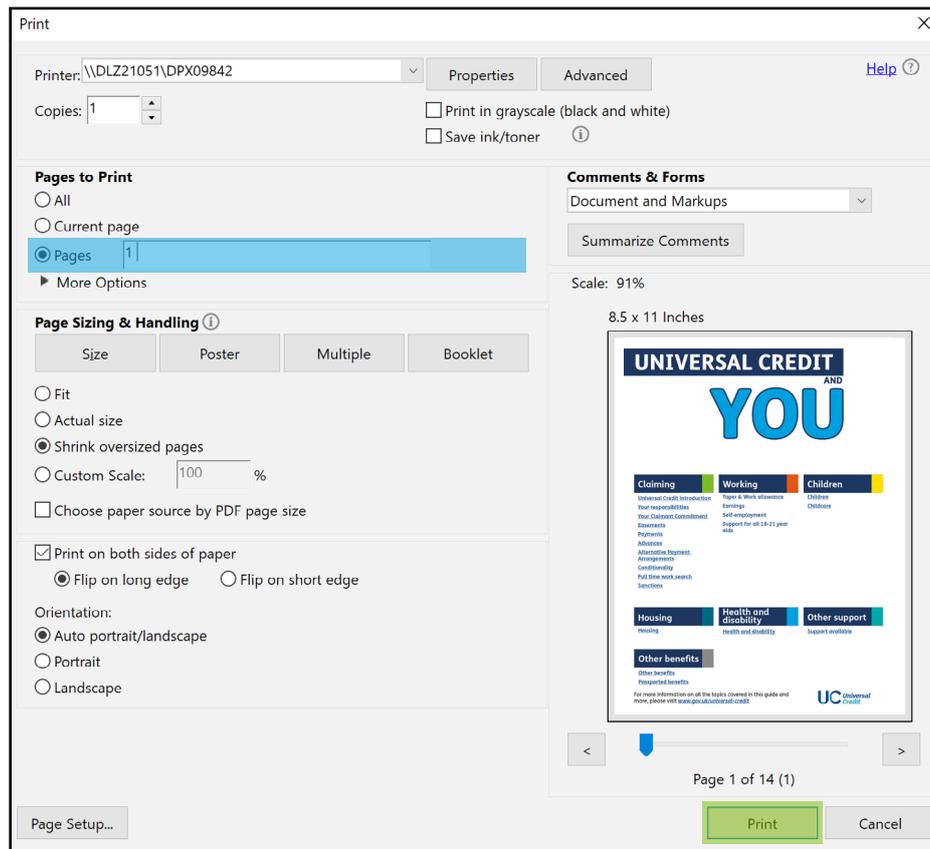
Follow these instructions if you want to print specific pages of this guide.

Click the printer icon. 

You'll see a window like the one below.

Click the circle next to 'Pages'. **The blue box** shows where this is.

You'll type the page numbers you want to print in the text box



If you want to print a single page. Type the page number into the box.

For example: 1

If you want to print more than one page (i.e. different pages from different sections of the guide). Type each of the page numbers with a comma in-between.

For example: 1,5,7,9,11

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For example: 14 – 18

Press print. **The green box** shows where this is.

