

Universal Credit frequently asked questions

Q. What is Universal Credit?

Universal Credit supports people who are on a low income or out of work, and helps ensure that you are better off in work than on benefits.

Universal Credit will give you the support you need to prepare for work, move into work, or earn more. In return for this support, it is your responsibility to do everything you can to find work or increase your earnings.

Universal Credit replaces some in work and out of work benefits, making it easier to take short-term or part-time work, which can be a crucial step on the road to long-term employment.

Q. Why is the system changing?

Despite considerable welfare spending in recent years, the current benefit system has trapped people in poverty. Universal Credit makes sure that work is the best choice for individuals or families, and provides a route out of poverty and away from benefit dependency for thousands of people.

Universal Credit aims to make the welfare system simpler by replacing six benefits and credits with a single monthly payment if you are on a low income or out of work. Changing the system will help reduce poverty by increasing the rewards that are on offer as you move into work. Universal Credit also makes it easier for you to take short-term or part-time work, which can be a crucial step on the road to long-term employment.

Q. How is Universal Credit being introduced?

Universal Credit is being introduced in stages. It is available to single people, couples and families in some areas of the country and is being rolled out to single claimants nationally from February 2015.

Whether you can claim it will depend on where you live and your personal circumstances.

See the [list of jobcentre areas where Universal Credit is available](#) and the [local authorities and jobcentre areas that will begin delivering Universal Credit over the coming months](#).

Q. Who will be able to claim Universal Credit?

Universal Credit is being introduced in stages. When it affects you will depend on your personal situation, where you live and any benefits you currently claim.

You can check if you can get Universal Credit by going to www.gov.uk/universalcredit.

To be eligible to claim Universal Credit (as opposed to existing benefits), you must:

- live at your usual address, in an area where Universal Credit is available
- not be homeless, in supported or temporary accommodation, nor a homeowner
- be a British citizen with a National Insurance number
- be aged between 18 years and 60 years and six months
- be fit for work
- not have applied for a fitness for work note
- consider yourself/yourself fit for work
- not be pregnant nor have given birth within the last 15 weeks
- not be entitled to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support (IS), Incapacity Benefit (IB), Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA), Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
- not be awaiting a decision on a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support (IS), Housing Benefit (HB), Child Tax Credit (CTC) or Working Tax Credit (WTC)
- not be appealing against a decision of non-entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Income Support (IS)
- not be awaiting the outcome of an application to revise a decision of non-entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support (IS) or Housing Benefit (HB)
- not have any caring responsibilities (such as for a disabled person)
- not be self employed, a company director or part of a limited liability partnership
- not be in education or on a training course of any kind
- not have a person acting on your behalf over your claim
- have at least one suitable account that DWP can pay your money into
- not live in the same household as a member of the regular or reserve forces who is away on duty
- have lived in the UK for the last two years, and not have been abroad for more than four weeks continuously during that time
- not be required to pay child maintenance via the Child Support Agency
- not have savings in excess of £6,000
- not be an approved foster parent (even if you currently have no foster children) not be expecting to adopt a child in the next two months or (where family claims may be made) have adopted a child within the last 12 months
- not expect to receive individual take home pay of more than £330 in the next month - from 6 April 2015 this amount will increase to £338
- not be responsible for a young person under 20 who is in non-advanced education or training

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- not expect to receive any earnings from self employment in the next month

If you and your partner are claiming as a couple you must also:

- live at the same address
- be married to each other, civil partners of each other, or living together as if you were married
- not expect to receive joint take home pay of more than £525 in the next month - from 6 April 2015 this amount will increase to £541
- not have savings in excess of £6,000 between the two of you

For more information on claiming as a couple see the [Universal Credit and couples Q&A](#).

If you have children you may be able to make a Universal Credit claim if you live in certain parts of the country for more information see the guide to [Universal Credit and your family](#).

In time Universal Credit will be extended to groups of people who cannot claim it at the moment.

For the latest information visit www.gov.uk/universalcredit.

Q. What do I need to do to get ready for Universal Credit?

There are two main things that you could do to get the most from Universal Credit:

i) Go online

Universal Credit is designed to be claimed online. Your claim starts on the day that you submit it to DWP. If you do not have access to the internet, jobcentres have computers you can use. If you are not confident using a computer, the jobcentre can tell you about local services that can help you.

Getting online and building your confidence in using digital services will also help you to access more job vacancies and get into work more quickly.

ii) Sort out the best way to manage your money

Universal Credit is paid monthly into a single account for you and your household. If you are making a joint claim, this will usually be paid into a joint account to help you and your partner manage your money together. However, you can nominate an individual account if you prefer.

Your Universal Credit payment provides a month's support for your household and may include an amount for your housing costs which you will be responsible for paying to your landlord yourself.

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If you have been used to managing your money fortnightly or having your rent paid directly to your landlord, you may need to find new ways to manage your money.

This could include:

- talking to your landlord to agree the best way to pay your rent
- setting up a bank account if you don't already have one, or
- getting advice on budgeting

The Universal Credit [Personal Planner](#) can help you prepare for the changes that the new service brings, such as paying rent to your landlord yourself. You provide the answers to some basic questions and it will tell you how ready you are for Universal Credit. It provides advice on what you need to do and the best sources of help. It will not tell you how much Universal Credit you will get as this will depend on your circumstances when you claim.

See the guide to [Universal Credit and budgeting](#) for tips on how to prepare for the way Universal Credit is paid.

Q. How do I make a claim?

You can make a claim for Universal Credit online at www.gov.uk/universalcredit. If you get stuck while you're making your Universal Credit claim a helpline is available Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm. Call 0345 600 0723.*

If you need further help and cannot make your claim online, you can use local, face to face services. These may be offered through your local jobcentre or your local council.

If you are part of a couple and able to claim Universal Credit you will make a joint claim, but only one member of the couple will complete the online claim form. That person will need to enter details for both of you.

Q. How much will I get?

Your Universal Credit payment will be made up of different amounts depending on your circumstances.

You can earn a certain amount before your Universal Credit payments are reduced. This is known as your work allowance. If you earn less than this, anything you earn is additional income which you get to keep.

If you earn more than your work allowance your Universal Credit payments will be reduced. The amount of Universal Credit you get will gradually reduce as you earn more, but unlike Jobseeker's Allowance your payment won't stop when you work more than 16 hours a week. This will help ensure that you are better off in work.

If you are moved on to Universal Credit but your circumstances have not changed, your

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benefit payments will be protected at their current level. This is called transitional protection and it will stay in place until either:

- you would receive more money if you were paid your Universal Credit according to the normal rules for Universal Credit, or
- your circumstances change, for example you move home or start working more hours

Q. How will I be paid?

Universal Credit will be paid monthly. 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 first assessment period usually starts 7 days after you submit your claim. However, depending on your circumstances, it may start immediately from the date you submit your claim.

You will receive your first payment no more than seven days after your first assessment period has finished. For example, for an assessment period of 16 July to 15 August, the first payday will be 22 August. You will then receive future payments on the 22nd day of each month.

If your payday falls on a weekend or a bank holiday, you will be paid on the last working day before that date.

You will receive one monthly Universal Credit payment. If you are claiming with a partner this will cover both of you. This will be paid into a suitable account of your choice, which could be a joint account or a single account in either your name or your partner's name.

In exceptional circumstances different arrangements can be made such as twice monthly payments or splitting payments between two people. Wherever possible, these alternative arrangements will be time-limited and support will be offered to help you move successfully to normal payment arrangements.

Q. What are 'waiting days' at the start of a claim?

There is a waiting period of 7 days from submitting your claim before your Universal Credit will start.

This may apply if you are out of work and claim Universal Credit, except if you:

- were claiming Universal Credit as a couple and are now claiming by yourself
- were claiming Universal Credit by yourself and are now claiming as a couple
- claimed Universal Credit but left because of earnings within the last 6 months
- are terminally ill
- have been the victim of domestic violence within the last 6 months
- are a carer
- are 16 or 17 years old and have no parental support
- have left prison in the last month

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- were entitled to contribution based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) within the last 3 months
- were entitled to income related JSA, ESA or Income Support within the last 3 months and stopped claiming to start working
- were entitled to income related JSA, ESA or Income Support within the last month
- were entitled to Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit or Housing Benefit within the last month.

Q. What will I have to do in return for my Universal Credit payment?

When you claim Universal Credit you will accept a Claimant Commitment which sets out your responsibilities. Your Claimant Commitment will depend on your personal circumstances.

For example, if you are able and available for work, you will need to do everything you reasonably can to find work. With Universal Credit you'll get help identifying your skills and a clear job search plan to help you get back to work more quickly. Preparing for and getting a job must be your full time focus.

You may get a cut in your Universal Credit payment, known as a sanction, if you don't meet your responsibilities and can't give a good reason to explain why.

If you claim Universal Credit as a couple both of you will need to accept and sign a Claimant Commitment. You will each have your own Claimant Commitment, and yours may be affected if your partner starts work or their circumstances change.

New Jobseeker's Allowance claimants and those who complete the Work Programme will also have to agree a Claimant Commitment.

Q. Will I have to go into the jobcentre to sign on?

When you claim Universal Credit you will need to accept your Claimant Commitment. In most cases, your Claimant Commitment will be drawn up during an interview with your work coach at your local jobcentre. If you are able to find or prepare for work you may also be expected to attend regular interviews to discuss your progress.

Q. How do I find work?

There are many different things that you can do to find work and to improve your chances of getting a job. Your work coach will help you to identify some clear steps that you can take and these may form part of your Claimant Commitment. These steps may include:

- registering with a recruitment agency
- attending training courses
- preparing a CV, or
- taking part in the Work Programme

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You can also start searching for work online now, through Universal Jobmatch. Universal Jobmatch (www.gov.uk/jobsearch) makes it possible for you to take control of your job search.

You can upload or build a new CV online, apply for jobs at a time that suits you (24 hours a day, seven days a week), tailor your job preferences and receive messages when suitable new jobs are available.

Q. What happens when I start work?

You will need to tell DWP if you start working and will be able to call a helpline to report this change. The helpline is available Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm. Call 0345 600 0723.*

DWP will check whether your new employer is registered on the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) in real time system through Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). This system shares earnings information with the Universal Credit system. If your employer doesn't use PAYE in real time you will need to self-report your earnings through the Universal Credit helpline.

This will make sure that you get the right amount of Universal Credit. You can apply for a wider range of jobs and get back to work sooner because Universal Credit tops up your earnings if you're on a low income. As your take home pay goes up your Universal Credit will go down gradually so you won't lose all your benefits at once.

Even working just a few hours a week will make a difference.

When you start work you may also need to review your Claimant Commitment with your work coach, to make sure that it reflects the changes in your situation. You will need to accept any changes to your Claimant Commitment. Depending on your circumstances, you could still get support and advice on increasing your earnings when you're in work.

Q. How many hours can I work before my Universal Credit changes?

Universal Credit aims to make sure you will be better off in work: there is no limit to the number of hours that you can work and still claim Universal Credit. Instead, the amount of Universal Credit you receive will go down as your take home pay goes up, so you won't lose all your benefits at once if you're on a low income.

Q. Will I get less than I do now?

Most households will either receive more under Universal Credit, or the same amount as they receive now, but it depends on your personal circumstances.

If you are moved to Universal Credit but your circumstances have not changed, you will be entitled to transitional protection. This means that you will not receive less than you did under your old benefit or credits. This amount will be paid until either:

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- your circumstances change, or
- the amount of Universal Credit you have a right to receive matches, or is more than, the amount you were receiving under the old benefit or credits system

Q. I'm already receiving benefit. Will I have to make a new claim to Universal Credit?

Universal Credit is being introduced in stages. When it will affect you will depend on where you live and what benefits you currently claim.

For more information see the [list of jobcentre areas where Universal Credit is available](#) and the [local authorities and jobcentre areas that will begin delivering Universal Credit over the coming months](#).

You must tell DWP when your circumstances change as it may mean you now need to claim Universal Credit instead of your existing benefit.

If your circumstances don't change, you'll be told well in advance about when Universal Credit will become available to you.

All the information that you need to decide if you can claim Universal Credit is available at www.gov.uk/universalcredit.

Q. I am already working, so can I make a claim?

Your personal situation will affect when and if you can make a claim for Universal Credit.

If you are working and meet all the other eligibility rules you will be able to claim Universal Credit if your take home pay is no higher than £330 per month – from 6 April 2015 this amount will increase to £338.

Universal Credit can be claimed by some couples in certain parts of the country. If you are part of a couple and you or your partner are in employed work and do not have take home pay over £525 a month between you, you may be able to claim Universal Credit - from 6 April 2015 this amount will increase to £541.

All the information that you need to decide if you can claim Universal Credit is available at www.gov.uk/universalcredit.

Q. I am already working, will paying into a pension have an impact on what I receive?

When you start work, your employer may enrol you into a workplace pension. If you stay enrolled, you will begin to save for your future as you earn. This means extra money, because your employer pays in each month too.

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Your Universal Credit payment won't be affected by your workplace pension.

For more information see [Universal Credit: an introduction](#) and the short film [What is Universal Credit?](#) that explains how Universal Credit works.

For more general information visit www.gov.uk/universalcredit or the [Universal Credit toolkit](#).

*You can use the 0845 code to call any of our 0345 numbers. Check with your phone company which code is cheaper for you.