

An introduction to Universal Credit

What is Universal Credit?

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

Universal Credit will replace:

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

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

To find out 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](#).

To find out if you can make a claim, and for the latest information, visit www.gov.uk/universalcredit.

How does Universal Credit make work pay?

We have changed the rules to help make sure work pays. Universal Credit can top up your earnings so you are better off in work than on benefits.

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. The more you earn, the higher your total income from earnings and Universal Credit will be. Most Universal Credit claimants agree that it does more to

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support them financially when they start work than Jobseeker's Allowance does.

Your Universal Credit claim continues when you start work, so you don't have to go through the hassle of making a brand new claim if that work comes to an end. There won't be a gap between your last payday and your next Universal Credit payment, so you can take temporary jobs without worrying what it will mean for your benefits.

If you need to come back onto Universal Credit within six months of your previous claim ending we will make it easy for you to do so.

Claiming Universal Credit

Universal Credit is usually claimed online, which means you can make a claim at a time that is convenient for you. You can make your claim online at www.gov.uk/universalcredit.

Support is available to help you get online. Your jobcentre can provide access to the internet or tell you about local places where you can use the internet for free. If you cannot claim online, face to face and telephone support will be available until you can get access to the internet.

A new relationship with Jobcentre Plus

With Universal Credit, you will experience a different type of relationship with your work coach than you may have expected.

They will support and challenge you to fulfil your potential and help you to raise your expectations of what you can achieve. They will focus on mentoring and coaching you and will set you targets to make sure you are doing everything you can to find a job.

In return you will need to take personal responsibility for finding work. It is up to you to do everything you can to support yourself and your family. If you are working part time and able to work more, you will be required to look for additional work or work more hours.

Your Claimant Commitment

To receive Universal Credit you will need to accept a Claimant Commitment.

In most cases your Claimant Commitment will be drawn up during a conversation with your work coach at your jobcentre.

Your Claimant Commitment will set out what you have agreed to do to prepare for and look for work, or to increase your earnings if you are already working. It will be based on your personal circumstances and will be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis.

If you do what you've agreed in your Claimant Commitment, Jobcentre Plus will give

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you all the support you need to prepare for work, move into work, or to earn more.

However, if you don't do what you've agreed and can't give a good reason why, you could lose some of your benefit.

If you're unable to work, Universal Credit will continue to support you.

If you are able to work and available for work you will need to do everything you reasonably can to give yourself the best chance of finding a job. Preparing for and getting a job must be your full time focus.

You will be expected to look or prepare for work for 35 hours a week, depending on your circumstances. Job-related activities that count towards your 35 hours can include:

- searching for jobs
- visiting potential employers
- doing training courses

If you claim Universal Credit as a couple, both of you will need to accept 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.

Universal Credit payments

Universal Credit is paid monthly directly into the account you have chosen. If you are part of a couple, living in the same household, and both of you are claiming Universal Credit you will receive one monthly payment. 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. Other adults living in the same household who are claiming Universal Credit will be paid separately.

Monthly payments match the way most salaries are paid. This will help you to move into work, as you will be used to managing a monthly budget.

If you're not used to managing your money in this way, a range of support services are available to help you budget successfully. Your work coach will talk to you about the types of help you might find useful.

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.

For more information about claiming as a couple see the guide to [Universal Credit and couples](#).

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Getting ready for Universal Credit

The Universal Credit [Personal Planner](#) can help you prepare for the changes 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.

You can prepare for Universal Credit by doing things such as:

- opening a bank account if you don't already have one
- finding out where you can access the internet
- improving your internet skills

For more information see [Universal Credit frequently asked questions](#) and the short film [What is Universal Credit?](#) which explains how Universal Credit works.

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