

Guide to Universal Credit

What you need to know



How to contact us:

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Useful Contacts

Contacts of organisations
referred to in this booklet

Women's Pioneer Housing **0208 749 7112**

Universal Credit Full Service
queries or claims **0800 328 5644**

Universal Credit Live Service
queries or claims **0800 328 9344**

Social Security & Child
Support Tribunal - 8.30am -
5.30pm **0300 123 1142**

Money Advice **0800 138 7777**

Citizens Advice **0344 411 1444**

What is Universal Credit?

Universal Credit is made up from **six benefits**.

These are:

Housing Benefit

Child Tax Credit

Income Support

Employment Support Allowance

Job Seekers Allowance

Working Tax Credit

Universal Credit is to help prepare people for getting into work. Claimants are paid monthly, and will receive a sum of money to cover living costs and housing costs. The time frame for payments is 30-31 days, not 28 days.

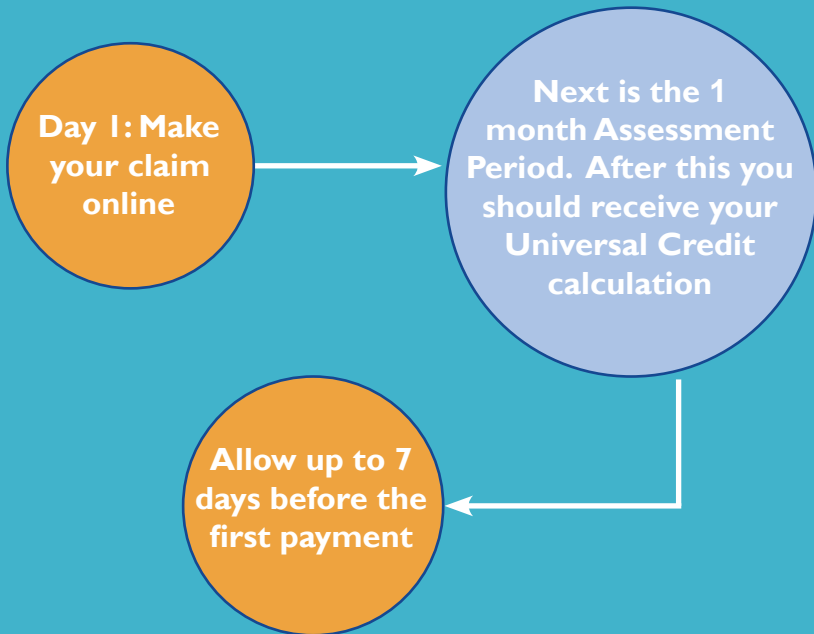
Universal Credit is not affected by the number of hours you work, only the amount of money that you earn. It calculates your earnings at 63%, so for every £1 you earn it deducts 63p.

Universal Credit is means tested, and so will be affected by other income that you receive.

The benefit cap could affect you under Universal Credit. This is where the amount of money you are entitled to is capped. If you think this could affect you, please call us for more advice.

If you live with a partner you will have a joint claim, even if one of you is working. It is recommended that the first claimant should be the tenant whose name is on the tenancy agreement.

Timeline for Universal Credit Payments



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The first payment will be sent to you **1 month** from the date of your application. It will be backdated from the date your claim starts but could take up to **7 days** for the payment to reach you.

For example, payment will be received between **16/10/18 to 22/10/18**, covering the period **16/09/18 to 15/10/18**.

When will it affect me?

The borough you live in determines when you will receive Universal Credit. If your borough is in Full Service, any new benefit claim is to Universal Credit. You might already be on Universal Credit, even if your borough is not yet Full Service. This is either because your local Jobcentre is Full Service, or you are on a Live Service form of Universal Credit. If you are on a Live Service claim you will have to move onto Full Service, but you will be notified at that time.

Westminster:

Is in Full Service, so all new claims will be Universal Credit.

Camden:

Is in Full Service, so all new claims will be Universal Credit.

Ealing:

Is in Full Service, so all new claims will be Universal Credit.

Hillingdon:

Will be Full Service from October 2018.

Hammersmith & Fulham:

Is in Full Service, so all new claims will be Universal Credit.

Wandsworth:

It will be Full Service from September 2018.

Harrow:

Is in Full Service, so all new claims will be Universal Credit.

RBKC:

Will be Full Service in December 2018. Fulham Job Centre is Full Service.

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Transitional Protection

Beginning in July 2019, anyone in receipt of the old benefits will be moved to Universal Credit. This is known as *Managed Migration*. Once your borough is Full Service, any change in your circumstances could trigger a move onto Universal Credit. The total balance you receive will be protected when you move onto Universal Credit, but any change of circumstance following this might affect it.

How to claim

Universal Credit claims can only be completed online. They take approximately 1 hour to complete and you must complete the full form in one sitting. You cannot save your application, and if the computer connection is lost you will have to start again.

In order to complete the form, you will need:

- Valid email address
- ID
- Postcode
- NI Number
- Bank account details it will be paid into
- Proof of rent
- Landlord details, including their address
- Details of your savings
- Details of your earnings
- Details of any other income
- How much you pay for childcare
- Details of any other benefits
- Child benefit reference numbers

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If you do not have access to a computer, or would like help in completing your form you can make an appointment with the Income Officer at our offices, who will be happy to support you.

As soon as you have applied for Universal Credit, please let us know so we can make a note on your account and support you.

It will be a minimum of 5 weeks before you receive your first payment. If you need money during that time, you can ask Universal Credit for an **Advance Payment**. This would need to be repaid within 6 or 12 months, and would be automatically deducted from your living allowance. As soon as you have received your first payment, set up a direct debit to WPH to pay for the housing element of your UC payment. This will ensure you do not incur further arrears.

Change of circumstances

You will need to report any change of circumstances either online through the journal, or by calling **0800 328 9344**.

Change of circumstances include:

- Finding or finishing a job
- Having a child
- Moving in with your partner
- Starting to care for a child
- Moving to a new address
- Changing your bank details
- Your rent going up or down
- Changes to your health condition
- Becoming too ill to work or to meet your work coach
- Changes to your earnings (only if you're self-employed)

If you have a change of address in the middle of your claim, during your assessment period, your rent for that month will reflect your new rent. If your rent is lower at your new address you will be paid the lower amount for the whole period and will need to make up the difference. If your rent is higher at your new accommodation you will be able to keep the difference. If you move to a different landlord, it is your responsibility to ensure your rent is paid to both of them for the periods you were living in each address.

Universal credit entitlement

Age qualifying

You can be any age to start UC. However, when you reach “Pension Credit Qualifying Age” you will stop receiving UC. You should receive a letter from them before that date.

EU Citizens

If you meet the “Right to Reside” policy, you should be entitled to UC. It is advised to get independent advice before applying.

Non – EU Citizens

If you meet the “habitual residence test” & other eligibility criteria you should be entitled to UC. However, again it is advised to get independent advice.

Asylum Seekers

If you are awaiting the outcome of your claim, then you will not be entitled to UC.

You should be eligible if your application for asylum is successful.

Sheltered schemes

If you live in one of our sheltered schemes, you will continue to apply for and receive housing benefit. Contact our Income Officer for further information.

Universal Credit & children

You can only claim UC for your first **two** children, unless special circumstances apply.

Children = any person under 16, or under 20 in eligible education

Universal Credit will not pay additional child care costs for any child who was born **after** the 6th April 2017, unless they meet any criteria from the Special Circumstances.

If you currently have three or more children, and are not on Universal Credit you will not be able to apply for it until February 2019. The only exception is if you received Universal Credit in the last 6 months (full service) or are making a single claim within **1** month of leaving a joint claim (live service).

If your first child was born **before 6th April 2018**, you will be eligible for £277.08.

If your first child was born **after the the 6th April 2018**, you will be eligible for £231.67.

On Universal Credit, Job Seekers can get help with childcare irrelevant of the amount of hours that they work.

Working parents can also claim back up to **85%** of paid out registered childcare costs.

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Special Circumstances

- Multiple births
- Adopted children
- Children living with family and friend or non-parental caring arrangements
- Friends or family carers: formal caring
- Friend or family carers: under 16s who have a child
- Children conceived as a result of a non-consensual relationship or abusive relationship

You can let Universal Credit know this either on your online journal, or by calling the helpline.

Universal Credit and self-employed

If you are in a Full Service area, you can be self-employed and be in receipt of Universal Credit. Your payments will be different during your first year.

After you have applied for Universal Credit you will go for an interview known as a 'gateway interview'. You will need to ensure you have these documents with you at that time: **your business plan, invoices, receipts, accounts, tax returns and proof you are registered as self-employed with HMRC.**

Universal Credit will work out what you should be earning which they call the Minimum Income Floor. This is based on the national minimum wage and the amount of hours you work. The amount of hours worked are agreed in your Claimant Commitment.

If you earn more than what the Minimum Income Floor is, then Universal Credit will be based on your earnings. During your first year of business you will need to submit payments monthly and Universal Credit will calculate how much you are owed.

Universal Credit assumes that everyone who is self employed earns the Minimum Income Floor. If you earn more than your Minimum Income Floor Universal Credit will deduct 63p for every £1 earned from your monthly payment. Your payment from Universal Credit will be paid based on this.

You will need to submit monthly earnings and ensure these are given in on time. If they are not, your Universal Credit will not be paid.

Money and Universal Credit

UC is paid **monthly**, which means you need to calculate and budget your monthly allowance. You will be paid an amount which includes the living element of your benefits, and the housing part of your benefit. The breakdown for this will be shown on your monthly Universal Credit statement.

Applying for an Alternative Payment Agreement (APA):

An APA is an agreement between the landlord and the tenant, where the housing element is paid directly to the landlord.

If you feel you need support with paying your rent you can speak to WPH about applying for an APA.

If you are two months in arrears WPH can also apply for an APA. This can also include paying back for past arrears. The arrears are deducted at either £31.78 or £63.56 PCM and the amount is decided by Universal Credit depending on your circumstances.

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Two weekly payments:

If you are struggling with budgeting you can speak to your Universal Credit work coach about getting fortnightly payments. You will need to meet certain criteria in order to receive these.

You can also speak to WPH about a referral to **Staying First**. **Staying First** is an independent Debt & Welfare benefit advice service.

Even if UC pay us directly, you are still responsible for these payments, and we will still follow our arrears process if you fall behind.

Claimant Commitment & Sanctions

After you have claimed Universal Credit you will need to sign a Claimant Commitment. Before signing you must read through it carefully, as any breaches in compliance will result in sanctions. You will be placed in a different group depending on your circumstance.

Group 1: No work related requirements	Group 2: Work-focused interview requirement
Group 3: Work Preparation	Group 4: All work-related requirements

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Sanctions:

If you are in Group 2, you could face a sanction if you do not attend the periodic interviews to discuss getting back into work. This could last until you meet the compliance condition or up to 26 weeks. The compliance condition will be an agreement made between you and your work coach e.g. going for an interview.

If you are in Group 3 you could face a sanction if you fail to undertake

work-related activity. This could last until you meet the compliance condition or up to 26 weeks.

If you are in Group 4 you could face higher sanctions if you fail to prepare or apply for work, take up a job offer or stop working voluntarily or through misconduct. Different circumstances will affect the time period but the maximum is 3 years.

If you feel your sanction is unjustified you can make an appeal against it. Instructions on how to do so will be on your letter from Universal Credit.

If you would like to discuss Universal Credit in more detail, or need some advice, please contact Megan Redhouse on **0208 749 7112**, or email **info@womenspioneer.co.uk**.

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