

Universal Credit - Frequently Asked Questions

What is Universal Credit?

Universal Credit is a new type of Benefit administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to support people on a low income or out of work. It will replace six existing income related Benefits and is currently being rolled out across the country. This new Benefit system is based on a single monthly payment, transferred directly into a bank account.

Will I be affected?

If you are of working age, do not live in supported or temporary accommodation and do not have the Severe Disablement Premium included in any of your current benefits, this will affect you if you are currently claiming or want to claim one of the Benefits Universal Credit is replacing.

What benefits is Universal Credit replacing?

Universal Credit replaces these income related benefits:

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

Are all Benefits being replaced by Universal Credit?

No. Many Benefits will remain including:

- Contribution-based JSA
- Contributory ESA
- Attendance Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
- Disability Living Allowance (DLA for children)
- State Retirement Pension
- Pension Credit
- Carer's Allowance
- Child Benefit
- Social Fund payments
- Statutory Sick Pay
- Statutory Maternity/Adoption/Paternity pay

I get means-tested Benefits- when will I be moved onto Universal Credit?

If you are already getting one of the Benefits that Universal Credit replaces, you will stay on that Benefit for the time being. The DWP plans to change all claims for income related Benefits over to Universal Credit between 2019 and 2023. However, if you have a change of circumstances that would currently prompt a claim for a different or additional existing Benefit or Tax Credit, you may have to apply for Universal Credit at that point.

Is Council Tax Reduction included in Universal Credit?

Universal Credit as a Benefit includes a payment for housing costs (rent), so you will no longer need to claim Housing Benefit.

You will, however, need to make a separate claim for help with your Council Tax bill.

If you have made a claim for Universal Credit you will need to claim Council Tax Reduction from the Council.

How does Universal Credit affect my rent?

Your rent money will be included in your Universal Credit payment. This is the same whether you are a social or private housing tenant.

However, as with Housing Benefit, certain housing costs do not count for Universal Credit (such as water charges) and the amount of housing costs that are taken in to account may be reduced if you are deemed to be living in a property that is too large for your needs.

Your housing costs may also be reduced if there is someone else living with you (for instance a member of your family for whom you cannot claim as they are over 18) – the deduction is a fixed £68 per month.

Housing costs may be refused in certain situations – for instance if you are claiming for living with a close relative.

Rent costs will usually **not** be paid direct to your landlord; you will be expected to manage the payments yourself. Seek advice if this arrangement would cause you difficulty.

How do I pay my rent if I am a Council tenant?

As housing costs will be included in your Universal Credit payment, you should set up a Direct Debit or Standing Order to pay your rent.

Your tenancy agreement requires you to pay your rent in advance. Universal Credit is paid to you monthly in arrears. To prevent enforcement action, you should start to make extra payments immediately to bring your account into credit. It is recommended that tenants pay an extra £5-£10 per week to bring their accounts into credit.

The Council is aiming to contact all tenants affected by Universal Credit to work with them to minimise rent arrears.

How do I claim Universal credit?

Universal Credit is claimed via an online application, there is no paper application form. You can apply for Universal Credit online at:

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

You need to be ready to complete the online application in one session as you cannot save details and return to the claim at a later time to finish. Claiming this way may take 60 minutes. If you leave an online application for more than 20 minutes it will 'time out' and you will have to start again.

When you submit your claim, you will be required to telephone the Jobcentre to arrange an interview to complete the application process. Your Universal Credit application will not be processed if you fail to attend this interview.

Will I need any information ready before beginning the online claim?

Make sure you have the following information available before you start:

- Your postcode
- Your National Insurance number
- Details of the bank, building society or Post Office account you want Universal Credit paid into
- Your rent agreement (if you have one)
- Details of your savings or other capital
- Details of any income or Benefits that you get

You also need to have an email address and a contact telephone number.

Can I claim Universal Credit by telephone or face-to-face?

If you cannot claim online, you can ask to claim by telephone or face-to-face. You will need to contact your Jobcentre to discuss this and show why you cannot claim online. Jobcentre Plus will only accept such claims in 'exceptional circumstances'. Seek advice if you are having any difficulties.

What happens after I've submitted my online claim for Universal Credit?

You will be expected to attend a 'work search interview' and draw up a 'Claimant Commitment' within a few days of making the online claim.

The purpose of this interview will be to set up the terms of your claim, including what you will do to find work and what support you should be given.

If you do not accept a Claimant Commitment, your Universal Credit claim will stop. If you are having difficulties, seek advice.

When will I receive my first payment of Universal Credit?

You should receive an on-screen message telling you when your Universal Credit payment will begin. You should receive your first payment approximately five weeks after you made your initial online claim.

Is there support for Council tenants to set up a bank account?

The Council can help tenants set up a basic bank account to ensure you receive your Universal Credit payments and so you can pay your rent by Direct Debit or Standing Order. Contact your [Housing Officer](#) for further information.