

Spotlight on: complex needs

[Introduction](#)

[What is meant by 'complex needs?'](#)

[Developing complex needs](#)

[Examples of life events that might indicate that a claimant may have complex needs](#)

[Complex needs - modern slavery](#)

[Complex needs - care Leavers](#)

[Supporting complex needs – site level hints and tips](#)

[Recording information on the service](#)

[Complex Needs Toolkit](#)

[Supporting guidance and products](#)

Introduction

This Spotlight product has been designed to help identify and support claimants with complex needs. It lists current guidance and tools which staff should use to ensure claimants are given the required support at the earliest opportunity.

The Spotlight will remain in place for a temporary period until the Universal Credit design and supporting products are developed further.

What is meant by 'complex needs?'

Complex needs reflect personal circumstances and life events that present an individual with extra challenges in accessing Universal Credit, using the Service and moving towards work and financial independence.

A claimant with complex needs may be:

- someone who is experiencing difficult life events or personal circumstances
- someone who has difficulty in dealing with the demands of our processes at the time they need to access and use a service

They may be unable to use normal channels to access the Service and may benefit from extra or face-to-face support.

Some claimants will have obvious physical disabilities which mean they may need extra personal support or that adjustments are required to enable them to access services. Other claimants may have conditions that are less obvious.

Complex needs are not always a static state.

It is important to remember that although the circumstances described in the following sections may suggest there are complex needs, the claimant may consider themselves perfectly capable of managing without the need for support.

We must always be mindful not to consider just the claimant's circumstances alone, but how those circumstances affect their ability to access Universal Credit, continue to use the Service and move towards work.

We must avoid making assumptions about what a claimant can or cannot do to help themselves.

Developing complex needs

Below are some of the circumstances which could lead to someone developing complex needs. There is often more than one trigger and most can impact anybody at any time, for example when a claimant

- has just left prison
- is blind or deaf
- has suffered a recent bereavement
- is homeless
- is terminally ill
- has a learning disability
- has a mental health condition
- has just left care
- is a young carer
- is in a hospice
- has an addiction to drugs or alcohol
- can't read or write
- is no longer a carer
- has suffered domestic abuse
- can't speak English
- has had an accident

has restricted mobility This is not a complete list

Examples of life events that might indicate that a claimant may have complex needs

Frequent applications for Advance payments

This could be a sign that claimant is not able to manage their money. It could also indicate an underlying issue, for example, homelessness, addiction, victim of modern slavery. See Advances

Physical disabilities

The claimant may not always say their health is deteriorating. The following examples are things to look out for:

- does the claimant now use a walking aide?
- are they out of breath upon arrival?
- has their appearance or complexion changed?

Showing signs of addiction

Signs of addiction may be physical as well as non-physical, for example:

- extreme weight loss
- slurred speech
- being anxious
- paranoia
- unexplained need for money
- neglecting their responsibilities

Struggling to set up a bank account

If a claimant is struggling to set up a bank account or provide ID, it could indicate there are other underlying issues for example, homelessness or learning difficulties.

See Spotlight on: method of payment

Does the claimant have a history of imprisonment or a criminal record?

Prison leavers are often vulnerable because they have lived outside of the modern world for a period of time and are not used to managing their own affairs.

Has an Unacceptable Customer Behaviour marker

An Unacceptable Customer Behaviour marker is displayed on a claimant's record when they have displayed negative, aggressive or threatening behaviour. However, there could be an underlying reason behind the reaction.

See Unacceptable Customer Behaviour

Attending appointments with family, friends or support workers

This is usually a clear indicator that somebody is vulnerable and requires further support for example, because of learning difficulties or language barriers. Be aware also of situations where the claimant allows the other person to speak for them or seeks the other person's permission or reassurance before speaking.

See 'Complex needs – modern slavery' below, Domestic abuse and Appointee guidance.

Previous suicide or self-harm threats

Looking through 'Claimant history', 'Profile' and 'Notes' should identify if the claimant has made previous suicide or self-harm threats. This may indicate the claimant is vulnerable and requires further support. See Claimant suicide or self-harm - 6 point plan framework

Frequent sanctions or failure to attend

This could indicate there is an underlying issue for example, a change in physical or mental health, or addiction. This could also indicate a chaotic lifestyle so may require further support (reminders and help) to understand the consequences.

History of debt or money management issues.

Severe debt isn't just a financial problem; it causes relationships to breakdown, people to lose homes and families to breakdown.

Homelessness

If a claimant is homeless or at risk of homelessness, this is a clear indicator that they require additional support. See Homelessness and at risk of Homelessness and Spotlight on: homelessness 'duty to refer' to a local authority (England only).

Domestic abuse

A claimant may display signs, behaviors and language to suggest that they are experiencing domestic abuse for which additional support is required. See Domestic abuse and Spotlight on: Claimants experiencing harm and abuse.

Complex needs - modern slavery

Modern slavery encompasses:

- human trafficking
- slavery servitude
- forced or compulsory labour

Someone is in slavery if they are:

- forced to work through mental or physical threat
- owned or controlled by an 'employer', usually through mental or physical abuse, or the threat of mental or the physical abuse
- dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as 'property'
- physically constrained or has restrictions placed on his or her freedom of movement

Case study

Organised criminals in the UK trafficked people from Slovakia where they were forced to work and claim state benefits. The victims were kept prisoner in various properties and were forced to hand over all their money and benefits.

The criminals falsely procured National Insurance numbers for their victims. Thirteen potential trafficked victims were eventually rescued.

None knew that claims to benefit and Tax Credits had been made in their names. Nine criminals were arrested and 4 were subsequently convicted and imprisoned for a total of more than 9 years.

The traffickers were falsely in receipt of benefits exceeding £98,000 and had stolen at least £50,000 in wages.

How can modern slavery be identified?

Victims often do not recognise or realise that they are victims, which can make it difficult to identify them. Indicators for victims of human trafficking or slavery include:

- employed for no or minimal wages
- residing in communal accommodation
- identity documents held by a landlord or employer

Steps to report modern slavery

If it is suspected a claimant may be a victim of modern slavery, any relevant evidence must be gathered. Concerns must be discussed with a line manager without delay.

All referrals, including full details of any evidence gathered, should be sent to Central Criminal Intelligence Service (CCIS):

I-HUB.INTELLIGENCEINBOX@DWP.GOV.UK

DWP guidance - Modern Slavery

Complex needs - care leavers

More detail about care leavers can be found in the Care Leavers guidance.

Given their particular challenges, which is generally the case for other claimants with complex needs, care leavers must have their individual circumstances taken into account with conditionality requirements tailored to their specific needs. As this will often be the first time that a care leaver has claimed benefit, their knowledge of 'the system' will probably be limited or non-existent.

Whilst not universal, common issues faced by care leavers can include:

- coping with the demands of living on their own at a young age
- maintaining a home and managing their lives independently - often without the support from families
- having to manage finances
- lack of knowledge of the benefits system - what to claim, how to claim it and what they need to do to maintain payment
- lack of support to help them to find and sustain education, training or employment

Case study - how DWP and its external partners can work together to support a claimant with complex needs.

Bobby had been in and out of prison for most of his adult life. He needed to break the cycle and knew that finding work would be the best way to do that.

Bobby was keen to do some voluntary work and an interview was arranged with a local shop manager but unfortunately it was felt that his criminal record would be a problem so the placement could not be offered.

Bobby was then signposted by his work coach to a local job club. They worked with him to restore his confidence and helped him produce a good CV.

Following a local launch of the Hospitality Works Campaign, the local Employment Adviser Team worked with hospitality employers in the area. Bobby secured interviews with a cinema, a fast food outlet and a restaurant. Bobby attended an interview at the restaurant, armed with his new CV and with his employment adviser's support.

Bobby had learnt how to explain his past to the managers interviewing him, and show that he just needed a chance and offered himself on a Work Trial.

The employment advisor was able to explain to the employer how reliable Bobby was as he always attended his appointments on time, was well prepared for them and really wanted to move forward with his life.

As a result, Bobby started a Work Trial in a catering position. He worked really hard and picked up the job with ease. The Work Trial was supposed to last two weeks but Bobby was offered a full time job after only a few days.

Supporting complex needs – site level hints and tips

- develop and maintain a site level action plan to manage the activity relevant to the site in supporting claimants with complex needs
- be aware of the list of current guidance and useful links
- regularly review commitments to ensure they are tailored to suit the claimant's individual needs
- consider if the claimant's circumstances require work search and availability requirements to be 'switched-off' for a period of time - see Switching-off requirements guidance
- use the 'Claimant history' to manage and review content and record the support claimants might need – but not the details of any health condition
- ensure complex needs are identified at every opportunity - for example, front of house, assisted digital, interviews, the journal and telephony
- resolve queries on a once and done basis wherever possible
- develop and maintain the right partnerships and provisions to support claimants with complex needs and ensure close links with your linked Partnership Manager (PM)
- ensure the District Provision Tool (DPT) is up to date with the appropriate provision
- consider signposting or referral to Help to Claim
- ensure referrals to money guidance or debt advice deliver quality support
- support and encourage claimants to secure bank accounts and manage their money effectively
- ensure Leaving Care Teams notify the site of care leavers when appropriate
- ensure claimants transferring into or out of the office are supported
- understand claimant groups requiring specific focus and support

- arrange case conferencing with colleagues (SIL, DEA, DMA, PM) and ensure there are clear escalation routes

Recording information on the Service

Some claimants may worry about what information is being recorded about them.

Whether the claimant is at a face to face appointment or on the phone, it is important to explain what is being done with the information you are recording about them, including:

- what you will do with the information
- that the information is kept secure

When the claimant is in the jobcentre, to put them at ease the you should turn the screen around to show them what they are recording. While on the phone, you should explain any moments of silence on the call, for example while they are typing.

Put yourself in their place. How would you feel about what information is being held about your and what is being done with it? Always read the information back to the claimant to reassure them that you have recorded it correctly.

Complex Needs Toolkit

The Complex Needs Toolkit supports colleagues to identify, own and take appropriate action to support claimants with complex needs.

Each district has their own version of the Complex Needs Toolkit, which is located in the District Provision Tool (DPT)

Operational Excellence Directorate Universal Credit Service Design and Transformation own the toolkit and its overall design. However, each district is responsible for their own toolkit.

Complex Needs Toolkits are not stored in shared folders, and can only be found on the DPT.

Supporting guidance and products

Assisted Digital overview

Complex needs overview

Claimant self-harm or suicide - 6 point plan

Consent and disclosure

Home visits

Care leavers

Housing

Money guidance and Alternative Payment Arrangements

Domestic abuse

Recoverable Hardship Payments

Health

Claimant Commitment

Method of payment

Spotlight on: Recording claimant's complex needs

Spotlight on: Help to Claim

The DPT provides access to the full range of provision and support delivered by Jobcentre Plus, Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Skills Development Scotland, Careers Wales other providers, local authorities, independent and volunteer charity organisations, health services and addiction treatment. It hosts all the available provision and support within a district and nationally. To locate the relevant DPT, type the claimant's local Jobcentre into the building directory on the intranet. This will identify which part of the country the claimant lives in so they can be signposted appropriately.