

Flexible Support Fund

Background

The Flexible Support Fund (FSF) is a locally managed budget to supplement existing services and tailor support to the needs of individuals in the local area. The local budget is the responsibility of the Service Leader.

FSF awards are discretionary, aimed at improving a claimant's job prospects and are subject to eligibility.

Eligibility

Universal Credit claimants are eligible for FSF from and including the first assessment period if they have:

- provided ID verification (including the Habitual Residence Test where relevant)
- attended their First Commitments Meeting
- accepted their Claimant Commitment.

Labour Market regimes

A claimant can be considered for a FSF payment if they are allocated to any of the following Labour Market regimes:

- Intensive Work Search
- Work Preparation
- Work Focused Interview only
- No Work Related Requirements

Claimants in the Light Touch and Working Enough regimes are not currently eligible for FSF. However, subject to eligibility, lead carers in these regimes may have access to FSF. See In work emergency payment (ignoring references to LMS).

Flexible Support Fund award types

This interim guidance for FSF in Universal Credit provides information on the most commonly used awards:

- training and education
- barriers to work
- travel expenses

A full list of circumstances relevant to the award of FSF is available in the general DWP Flexible Support Fund guidance.

When Flexible Support Fund must be awarded

There are circumstances when payment of travel, childcare or replacement care to attend training or education must be made to eligible individuals. For further information, see:

- Payment of travel expenses
- Childcare costs
- Replacement care

FSF for Childcare costs may be awarded for training and education or for the period between commencing work and the receipt of first wages (upfront childcare costs).

There are no minimum hours required for Universal Credit claimants only accessing FSF for upfront childcare costs. If wages are paid weekly, discretion should be used to consider payment of FSF beyond the first wage.

The award of FSF must be recorded on the 'Claimant history' to ensure childcare costs are not awarded from Universal Credit for the same period.

Note: ignore references to LMS in the Childcare Costs guide.

When Flexible Support Fund does not apply

FSF must not be awarded if

- the activity conflicts with DWP policy objectives
- it duplicates any provision which would normally be funded by government, partners or commercial providers
- it is to pay benefit-related travel costs
- it directly replaces any benefit lost as part of a sanction
- it is for top up wages once in work
- it is to pay fines or similar penalties
- it is to pay loans or debts
- it is to pay a subsidy to an employer to provide an incentive to employ a particular person or group of people.
- it covers the cost of living - such as paying bills, household costs or buying food

- it helps claimants who have a job or employment contract but are returning to work after a career break or maternity leave.
- it supports applications for immigration documentation - including biometric resident permits
- it is to provide any medical-related certificates or forms

As a minimum, a claimant in the Intensive Work Search regime is expected to attend fortnightly Work Search Reviews. The claimant must fund the travel costs themselves. However, to support claimants to attend additional appointments, travelling expenses can be refunded. This includes refunding travel expenses for every alternate weekly Work Search Review during the first 13 weeks of being allocated into the Intensive Work Search regime.

Recording awards from Flexible Support Fund

The award of FSF **must** be recorded on the 'Claimant history'. You must generate an ad-hoc to-do for the claimant, asking them to provide receipts or proof of purchase (if appropriate) within 14 days.

Update the 'Claimant history' with details of:

Details	Examples
The type of FSF award.	barrier travel childcare training
What the award is for.	clothing (for interview) travel to attend interview childcare (attending work trial) LVP (name of course)
The cost.	
The supplier or provider.	
What proof or receipt there is to support the award.	IPF1JP (Matalan, Arco or Alexandra) bus or rail ticket seen FSF2 or FSF3 completed LVP1 completed

What the record may look like in the 'Claimant history':

FSF travel award – additional attendance (date)
 Authorised amount: £4.40 bus fares retrospective
 Proof/receipts – bus tickets seen

FSF childcare award: provider ****nursery, ESOL training
Authorised amount: £70 (date) to (date) retrospective payment
Proof/receipt: FSF2 or FSF3 completed

Training and education

Before considering any award, check the 'Claimant history' to see if any previous FSF awards contradict or affect the reason for the current request.

Before agreeing to the referral of any claimant to education or training funded by FSF (or agreeing to purchase it), the following questions must be considered:

Question	Notes
Will the activity enable the claimant to enter employment, or give relevant skills and experience for jobs available in the local labour market?	The primary focus is to help individuals into work as quickly as possible. However, for some claimants, training or education may be necessary to move them closer to work.
Has the individual sufficient time to complete the activity they require?	Will they become eligible to attend other training or provision?
Will the activity impact on any claim to or award of benefit?	Claimants must comply with appropriate benefit conditionality to ensure their payments will continue.
Does the claimant require funding for travel, childcare or replacement care costs?	FSF can be used for travel expenses and childcare costs where it has been agreed the claimant can attend education or approved non-contracted provision.
Does the claimant have access to other funding that would cover the cost of the activity?	FSF must not be used.
DWP guidance also sets out a number of other training considerations, including:-	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• training that should not be funded• training requiring further consideration• training at NVQ, SNVQ level 3 and 4 (or equivalent)	
DWP guidance sets out the funding process to follow.	

Paying childcare costs for attending training or education

FSF **must** be awarded:

- when a parent is attending mandatory provision where such costs are not met by the provider

- where it has been agreed that a parent can attend approved non-contracted provision - for example, there is a formal agreement in place
 - where it has been agreed that a parent can participate in a Work Trial, work experience or sector-based work academy programme.
- FSF must not be awarded in the following circumstances:
- for attending training courses, provision or an activity where no formal agreement is in place
 - for attending provision where the provider is contracted to, or has agreed to pay the participant's childcare costs

Mandatory considerations – Flexible Support Fund childcare costs for attending training or education

Some considerations must always apply when a FSF award is made for childcare costs. Local flexibilities do not apply. These are:

- the parent must identify the childcare provider - any contract for childcare is between the parent and the childcare provider and must not involve Jobcentre Plus
- the childcare must be registered - Tax Credits description of registered childcare should be applied (please see the HMRC site Registered or approved childcare for tax credits (link is external))
- ensure any agreement to meet childcare costs on behalf of the parent **does not** exceed the maximum permitted amounts
- ensure the amount being charged for childcare is reasonable - taking into account average charges in the local area
- ensure the parent is made aware of the maximum childcare payments available where relevant
- ensure the parent is eligible to receive FSF childcare costs throughout the relevant period
- all payments must be made directly to the childcare provider into their nominated bank or building society account via SOP
- all payments must be paid in arrears unless costs are required in advance

The award of FSF must be recorded on the 'Claimant history' to ensure childcare costs are not awarded from Universal Credit for the same period.

Forms and letters

The generic DWP guidance outlines the relevant forms and letters for FSF awards

Barriers to work

Before considering any award, check the 'Claimant history' to see if any previous FSF awards contradict or affect the reason for the current request.

FSF should be considered to remove barriers that are:

- preventing claimants from moving closer to the job market
- hindering a claimant's search for work

- preventing a claimant from accepting a firm job offer or moving into self-employment

Examples are:

- smart clothing for interviews or to start work
- essential work wear (but not safety wear as the employer has a duty to provide this)
- essential tools and equipment - for example, chef's knives
- travel costs

A barrier award must not be made where it is the employer's responsibility (under Health & Safety legislation) to provide the item.

Flexible Support Fund barrier awards

DWP guidance sets out the funding processes to support payment of a barriers award from FSF. The relevant processes for Universal

Credit are:

- sourcing the goods
- forms and letters
- payment methods
- follow up action

For barrier payments, it is strongly recommended that the most appropriate payment method is used. The order of preference is:

- Retail Trade Framework or local supplier arrangement invoice payments
- retrospective payment
- advance payment

Forms and letters

The generic DWP guidance outlines the relevant forms and letters for FSF awards

Travel expenses

Before considering any award, check the claimant history to see if any previous FSF awards contradict or impact the reason for the current request.

Please refer to the following DWP guidance for more detailed information:

- Travel to interview for disabled people
- Travel expenses for job interviews
- Travel expenses for Work Trials

Mandatory awards for travel

An award for travel expenses must be made when a claimant:

- attends additional appointments other than the fortnightly Work Search Reviews when they are allocated to the Intensive Work Search regime, this includes:
 - alternate weekly Work Search Review during the first 13 weeks of being allocated into the Intensive Work Search regime
 - attends mandatory provision where such costs are not met by the provider
 - attends approved non-contracted provision where this is previously agreed with DWP staff
 - participates in:
 - Work Trial

- work experience
- sector-based work academy programme

When an award must not be made

FSF awards for travel expenses must not be made in the following circumstances:

- claimants attending their Initial Evidence Interview or First Commitments Meeting
- claimants attending training courses, provision or an activity where no formal agreement is in place
- claimants attending provision where the provider is contracted to pay (or has agreed to pay) the participant's travel costs
- claimants attending overseas training courses.

Other circumstances

Aside from the circumstances when an award must be made, the FSF award for travel payments is discretionary and subject to local guidelines and budgets.

FSF travel payments can be made in advance if it removes the barrier of getting to and sustaining employment.

The funding of overseas travel (other than for job interviews or to attend training courses, which are **not** permitted) is only allowed with Service Leader agreement.

How much to award

If it is not possible for claimants to use local or other concessionary public transport passes, the award must be based on the cost of public transport by the most reasonable and economical route. If using private transport, the award is 25 pence per mile by the most direct route.

Paying travel expenses

DWP guidance sets out the processes to follow when making a payment of FSF for an award of travel expenses.

Forms and letters

The generic DWP guidance outlines the relevant Forms and letters for FSF awards.