

Spotlight on: Claims by phone

Introduction

The facility for claimants to make new claims by phone is available for those who are unable to complete the online service due to the following circumstances:

- being unable to make a claim online independently, perhaps due to a health condition or not having the digital skills
- not having anyone to support them to make a claim online
- being unable to claim online with in-house jobcentre support (see Assisted Digital Overview)
- being unable to claim online even with support from Citizens Advice or Citizens Advice Scotland using the Help to Claim Service - in these cases, Citizens Advice or Citizens Advice Scotland will have identified that the claimant cannot use online services and a claim by phone is appropriate (for more information, see Spotlight on: Help to Claim)
- not having access to a digital device or internet access to be able to make and maintain a claim online

The claim by phone process must only be used when other assisted digital options have been exhausted and found to be not suitable, and all reasonable attempts have been made to enable, support and educate claimants to self-serve online. See Assisted Digital Overview

If a claimant does not satisfy the above circumstances but insists on making a claim by phone, they must be allowed to do so.

Advantages of a digital claim

Claimants asking about making a claim by phone must be informed that if they are capable of claiming online this has advantages which include:

- 24-hour access to their account
- an online journal to keep track of their claim
- the ability to update circumstances immediately
- view when payments are due

If a digital claim is not suitable, claimants asking about a phone claim in the jobcentre must be advised to contact the Universal Credit Service Centre number to make a phone claim.

Appointees

The call may be from an appointee wanting to make a claim on behalf of a claimant.

If the claimant has a **personal appointee**, the criteria above should be considered.

If the claimant has a **corporate appointee**, in most cases the new claim will be taken by phone as most corporate appointees cannot provide an individual email address for each claimant they represent.

Further details on appointees can be found in Appointees, Personal Acting Bodies and Corporate Acting Bodies

Calls from organisations on behalf of multiple claims

Partner organisations (such as those working with refugees) may phone on behalf of multiple claimants asking for phone claims for each claimant.

In these circumstances, ensure a phone claim is suitable for each claimant. The benefits of a digital claim must be explained and if

appropriate for any claimant - ensure they are encouraged to make their claim via the online service.

If there are multiple claimants for whom a phone claim is suitable, claims must be started by following the Claim by Phone process and appointments arranged for them to receive calls from the Claims by Phone Team to complete them.

Applications on behalf of single claimants or couples should be treated in line with other requests to make a phone claim.

National Telephony

When a claimant asks to make their claim by phone, the process is started via the 'Telephony ID Check' option in the toolbar of the agent dashboard. Check:

- the claimant's postcode
 - If the claimant is already receiving Universal Credit
 - whether they are receiving Severe Disability Premium
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Reason for claim by phone

Ask questions to understand a claimant's circumstances - why they wish to make a claim by phone and whether they have the support available to make a digital claim possible.

Explain to the claimant the advantages of a digital claim

The 'Reason for claim by phone' box must be completed when setting up the claim.

If a claimant has multiple reasons for making a phone claim, all the reasons must be listed along with all other relevant information, for example 'The claimant needs an interpreter as X is their first language', 'The claimant has a corporate appointee' or 'the claimant is unable to attend the jobcentre because of X and requires a home visit'

Taking the claim

Advise the claimant that when they claim Universal Credit, all existing Legacy benefit claims including Tax Credits will be closed and cannot be reopened.

The claimant must tell us of any changes to their phone number as this is the primary means by which they can be contacted.

Note: The claimant will not be able to access a phone claim online as they have no username or password.

National Telephony: action to take

Click the 'Telephone ID Check' button at the top of the screen and select 'Start a claim by phone'. Then follow the actions on the screens and in the ALP.

It is important to inform the claimant they must immediately notify us of any changes to their telephone number as we can only contact them by phone.

When setting security questions, make the claimant aware they will need to answer these questions each time they contact us. It is important they chose something memorable. Confirm the spelling of the answers with the claimant before completing them.

Once the account is created, the claim should only be completed fully if:

- the call is from a DWP visiting officer who is helping the claimant make a claim by telephone
- the call is from an appointee or person acting on behalf of the claimant if they are unable to make the claim themselves (for example, claimants in Secure Hospital Units)
- the call is from a claimant in distress or with complex needs or vulnerability and they would like the claim to be completed now and confirm they have all the information required and can provide it on the call
- the claimant has no phone number - as we cannot arrange for them to receive a call from the Claims By Phone Team

If the call does not meet the criteria described above, an appointment must be booked to enable the 'Claim by phone' team to make contact. This should be done as follows:

- book the claimant an appointment
- Appointment channel – By phone
- Appointment location – Claim by phone
- Appointment category – Other
- Other type – Unlock claim

Important: agents must always choose 'By Phone' in 'Select appointment channel' and 'Claim by phone' in the 'Jobcentre Name' drop-down lists when booking the appointment. Not choosing these options fills diary time for agents in jobcentres who do not take phone claims and delays claimants completing their claims.

Inform the claimant of the appointment details, the evidence they will need to have to support their claim and that the appointment may last up to an hour.

The 'Claim By Phone' ALP must be used by agents whenever a phone claim is undertaken.

Maintaining the claim

Claimants must be supported to move their claim online if appropriate because of the advantages this provides.

The reason for the claim being made by phone will be recorded by the agent who takes the initial call from the claimant and will be shown in the claimant history to assist with tailoring claimant support appropriately.

Any notifications or notes must still be placed in the journal as normal - but in addition, the agent must consider what other methods of contact to use. This also applies to claimant to-dos.

All notifications added to the claimant's journal must be posted to the claimant. This is so that they can take any required action and are made aware of when they have appeal rights against a decision.

The monthly award statement must be posted to the claimant. To prompt this action, a 'Print and post statement' to-do will be generated when the statement is produced. This will be located in the 'Payments due' section of the agent dashboard.

Accepting the Claimant Commitment

As a consequence of not being able to access their claim online, claimants will not be able to accept their Claimant Commitment in the Service.

Where there is a basic commitment in place, the agent must discuss the requirements with the claimant and obtain verbal consent. This call does not need to be recorded. The agent must add a Commitment note detailing the verbal consent and the reason why the claimant commitment was accepted on behalf of the claimant.

Where there is a tailored commitment this should be completed together with the claimant and be specific to the individual. The conversation does not need to be recorded. The Work Coach must get verbal acceptance of the claimant commitment from the claimant and record it in Commitment notes with the reason why the claimant could not accept the commitment themselves. The Work Coach must accept the commitment on behalf of the claimant.

Agents must note the claimant's history with the outcome of any discussion for example:

- Claimant Commitment discussed and accepted

- Claimant Commitment discussed and refused to accept
If a claimant attends a jobcentre to accept their Claimant Commitment, a work coach will assist them in accepting it. Work coaches must complete the clerical claimant commitment and print this for the claimant to agree and sign. The signed copy should be scanned and uploaded to the History in the claimant's account.
If a claimant has had the requirements to accept a commitment waived because of their circumstances, an agent should accept it on their behalf and add a History note and 'Pin' it to the overview to ensure it is seen. Claims must not be closed because the commitment has not been accepted until we have made all efforts to contact the claimant and explain the importance of it being accepted - and consequences of not accepting it.
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Changing from phone to online claim

Phone claims must be regularly reviewed with the claimant by both work coaches and case managers. They must establish whether this is still the most appropriate channel for them to manage their claim and that their commitments are up to date.

If a claimant is able to develop the digital skills they need to manage an online claim, agents must refer to the District Provision Tool and signpost them to external provision for support in becoming digitally capable.

When a claimant attains the skills and/or support to manage a claim online, take the following action:

- access the 'Change from phone claim to online' ALP which is held in the Resources area of Universal Learning - complete the first two sections of this ALP
- generate a 'Change from phone claim to online' to-do - this is only available to cases flagged as phone claims and only when the claimant's identity has been verified
- this sends a link to the claimant's email address for them to set a password - the Service sets a user name once a password has been set. The claimant will then be able to manage their claim online and see any journal entries previously made.

This process must be completed face to face and only exceptionally over the phone.

Claimants who do not own a phone

If a claimant makes a phone claim but does not have a phone, the agent must establish if they have regular access to a phone we can reach them on. If they do, this number should be entered as the Mobile Phone Number.

If the claimant does not have regular access to a phone, the number 00000000000 is entered as the Mobile Phone Number. The claimant must be informed this will mean we cannot contact them and may affect their claim. They should contact us and give us a phone number we can call them on, as soon as they get one.

Claimants who are no longer able to maintain their claim online

There may be reasons why a claimant with a digital claim is no longer able to manage their claim online. This could be short term (for example, a brief admittance to hospital) or longer term (for example, a new health condition).

If a claimant has an online claim but now needs support similar to a claimant with a phone claim, the following actions must be taken:

- a profile note explaining the claimant's circumstances is added to the claimant history and 'pinned' to the claimant's dashboard so agents are aware of their needs and any additional support required
- communication with the claimant must be through alternative methods, such as phone or post: rather than the journal
- any requirements placed on the claimant must consider their new circumstances

These arrangements must be regularly reviewed with the claimant by both work coaches and case managers to ensure they remain appropriate.