

Spotlight on: understanding claimant history and journal

This Spotlight has been developed to explain the differences between the claimant history and journal.

Feedback from agents has shown that claimants can sometimes find it difficult to read or understand journal messages.

Consequences for claimants who are unable to engage using the journal can include being unfairly sanctioned, or receiving delayed or inaccurate payments. Underpayments for missing elements could result in rent arrears leading to possible homelessness.

This Spotlight raises awareness of how to format journal entries, and includes best practice, and hints and tips when writing journal messages for claimants.

It also raises awareness of when the delete function should be used to delete journal entries and when it shouldn't, as well as highlighting best practice if mistakes are made in a journal entry.

It will remain in place until the Universal Credit design and supporting products are developed further.

Claimant history

Claimant history must provide an overview of what actions have been taken on a case. Claimants cannot see this in their account and it is only visible to staff. However, claimants can request information that is in Claimant history so it is important not to include anything the claimant shouldn't know or see. This includes details of any fraud referrals made.

Claimant history:

- gives a quick summary of what has happened on a case so it can be dealt with efficiently and accurately

- gives a clear audit trail of the action taken - for example, information about work or appointments, evidence for decisions and appeals

prevents unnecessary referrals to other parts of the business

It is used to update when an action is taken on a case.

Claimant history entries must:

be clear, concise, free of jargon/text speak using recognised abbreviations only

not contain defamatory information

use opening words that make it easy to identify the topic it relates to - for example 'Sickness', 'Holiday' etc. (this will increase the speed in which agents can scroll through the list of conversations)

meet the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation and it is recommended that conversations are 'FRANC' - while the acronym has been borrowed from the Disability Discrimination Act, the meaning in this context relates to:

- factual (personal opinions must not be recorded)
- relevant
- accurate
- not excessive (to the point)
- current (not out of date)

give a quick summary of what's happened on the case so it can be dealt with quickly by others

Claimant journal

The journal is a tool which belongs to the claimant. Although it is used by claimants and staff to communicate, it's main function is to provide a full picture of the claimant's claim and track their activity.

The agent's full name is shown on the agent side when they make a journal entry, but only their first name is displayed on the claimant side.

The journal is used to:

encourage digital communication and prevent calls

help staff to progress a case

maintain relationships with claimants if they don't see a work coach regularly

find out what the claimant needs to do to prevent duplication or follow-up with a colleague

respond to claimant questions and give updates

get more information from the claimant - for example, further evidence

remind claimants when an action needs to be taken

Journal entries must:

be clear, concise and free of jargon/text speak

be tailored for each claimant, and in the case of a couple claim the claimant's name must be included in the entry

meet the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation and DWP data standards

not include individual telephone numbers - if the claimant needs to call give 0800 328 5644

not include agent notes

It is recommended that conversations are 'FRANC' - while the acronym has been borrowed from the Disability Discrimination Act, the meaning in this context relates to:

factual (personal opinions must not be recorded)

relevant

accurate

not excessive (to the point)

current (not out of date)

Note: Documents must not be uploaded to the Journal unless the Universal Credit Service provides specific instructions to do so.

Writing clear and simple journal messages

When writing journal messages and to make the information easier to read and understand, consider following these steps:

use plain English - it's clearer, simpler and people prefer it

write less, say more - keep content short, clear and simple

follow a logical layout - important information first

align text to the left and keep a consistent layout

use headings, sub-headings and line breaks to break-up long text

use a new line where a long word goes over line size

highlight important points in **bold type** - don't underline, use italics or write in capitals

Consideration should be given to the structure and language used when writing journal messages to instruct claimants to take action to progress their claim.

Structure:

use headings and sub-headings - especially if there is a lot of information

break the contents up logically, for example:

- greeting
- purpose of journal entry (I need xxx from you)
- action needed from claimant (you need to do xxx)
- timing
- consequences of the claimant not taking the action

Language:

Sentences must be written in the active voice as these are easier to understand than those written in the passive voice. The active voice clearly identifies the action to be taken and who is performing that action.

Example of active voice:

you must provide your evidence by Friday

Example of passive voice:

by Friday your evidence should be provided

Tips for writing clear and simple journal messages

Use asterisks to emphasise words, for example ****XXX****

For points and lists, use a dash followed by a space:

- this is a point
- this is another point

Be helpful and conversational in your message. Use shorter words if possible to keep it clear and simple.

Long or complex words can often be replaced by a single sometimes shorter word which means exactly the same thing, and is easier for the claimant to read and understand. The table below gives some examples.

Long and complex	Short and clear
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sufficient	enough
numerous	many
component	part
assistance	help or support
remuneration	pay
the majority	most
that is included in	in
at the present time	now or currently

in the event of	if
in order to	to

Standard journal messages

There are 3 standard journal messages which must be used when communicating with claimants about action they need to take to progress their claim.

Agents are able to send Group Journal messages to all their caseload.

The table below shows the 3 messages.

Template title	Subject	Standard journal messaging to use when informing claimants of any activity they need to take to progress their claim
Council Tax reduction	Council Tax reduction	<p>You'll need to contact your local council to claim a Council Tax Reduction.</p> <p>Visit your local council's website or call them for further advice and support.</p>

Childcare costs general information	Help with childcare costs	<p>You may be able to claim up to 85% of your childcare costs through Universal Credit.</p> <p>Visit GOV.UK for more information on childcare costs.</p>
Starting work	Confirm the date you started work	<p>We've been told that you've started work.</p> <p>You need to update your online account using 'Report a Change'.</p> <p>You must do this by (insert date) so that your payment is not delayed.</p>

Receiving abusive journal messages

The correct process is to report the incident through existing Unacceptable Customer Behaviour (UCB) procedures.

The nominated UCB manager will determine a suitable response/warning - writing to the claimant if necessary.

If there are questions posed by claimants in abusive journal messages, these must be answered by the work coach or the case manager. The UCB manager does not action these in their response to the claimant.

Staff must not respond to the abusive comments in these journal messages. Agents need to be aware of the type of message that is appropriate especially from a security perspective.

Deleting journal entries

There is a risk that deleting journal messages which contain attachments could destroy necessary audit trails in the event that the Department is ever legally challenged.

Messages can only be deleted by staff within 30 days of them being created. It is therefore essential to check that messages, especially those with attachments, are correct at the time they are created. If errors are noticed, the message must be deleted straightaway.

Claimants are often confused when messages they have previously seen suddenly disappear without any explanation. Therefore, if messages are deleted remember to add a brief explanation so the claimant is aware of what has happened.

The information below, and in the next section, gives circumstances when journal entries can and cannot be deleted.

Best practice when deleting journal entries

The following is good practice to avoid causing the claimant confusion:

if journal entries are deleted and replaced with a corrected version, the box to notify the claimant of the new journal entry by text or e-mail must be unchecked - the claimant then receives just one text or email informing them of a journal entry (provided the mistake is rectified quickly, this reduces the risk of the claimant noticing a change in their journal entries)

where journal entries are deleted and not replaced, a note for the claimant explaining the deletion could avoid confusion

When to use the 'delete' function and when not to

When to use the 'delete' function

The following message and uploaded SSP1 form were deleted from the claimant's journal 64 days after they were originally posted.

'Message - SSP1 received states - Employer can no longer pay her. SSP1 attached'

The form was incorrectly uploaded to the journal. This was subsequently corrected and uploaded to the claimant history for a Real Time Information dispute.

Other circumstances when journal entries can be deleted:

addressed to wrong claimant

personal information has been added

spelling mistakes

incorrect dates

due to quality check

incorrect letter uploaded (Work Capability Assessment and claim closure)

When not to delete journal entries

A claim had the following message and attachment in the journal to advise the claimant about Work Choice programme.

'Message *** WORK CHOICE *** (Transitional Employer Support Grant) Please read the enclosed information about Work Choice (Transitional Employer Support Grant) which aims to help people who have a Fit Note take your next steps towards training and work. We will discuss this at our next conversation. Attachment – Work Choice info.' (Transitional Employer Support Grant)

At the claimant's next appointment 26 days later, due to a change in the claimant's circumstances, the message was deleted as the information was no longer relevant.

This should not have been deleted as it was relevant to the claimant's circumstances at the time it was entered in the journal.