

Pre-Work Capability Assessment outcome

Work availability requirements should not be applied all the time the claimant has a valid fit note, while they are awaiting their Work Capability Assessment (WCA).

However, ongoing contact should be maintained tailored to the claimant's circumstances, for example by phone and the frequency of the contact.

The claimant remains in their allocated Labour Market regime while they await the outcome of their WCA, unless they have a change of circumstances that would mean moving to a different regime.

Any requirements placed on claimants with a health condition, including the means of ongoing contact must be reasonable in light of their health condition and other circumstances.

There is discretion to tailor what requirements are set, as well as the frequency and method of engagement. The focus should be on the claimant undertaking voluntary activities, wherever possible, but mandatory requirements can be set, where appropriate. If mandatory work search requirements are set, claimants should be asked to attend regular Work Search Review meetings, to check compliance.

Home visits

Home visits are a service provided to claimants, however, they are only offered in exceptional circumstances.

When a home visit is appropriate

A home visit should be considered:

- when a claimant has been identified as being vulnerable or having complex needs due to health issues or unable to access normal channels of communication as an individual or through a friend, family member or Third party stakeholder partner
- to safeguard claimants against sanctions where it is deemed they have a health condition which restricts them from leaving their home, this will help determine whether the claimant has fully understood their commitments and good reason can be gathered if appropriate

A sanction referral is not considered until at least 2 attempts have been made to complete a home visit and all other attempts to contact the claimant have failed. This is only the case for customer's who have complex needs and helps identify reasons for them failing to attend.

Assisted Digital Overview

Introduction

The standard process to make and maintain a Universal Credit claim is via online self-service. Claimants should be made aware that they will increasingly need to be able to use online services to make and maintain their claim and to job search online.

The Department for Work and Pensions is bound by legislation to consider the needs of those who may not be able to access services through the standard process.

The most common reasons why people are unable to use online self-service are typically linked to skills, confidence, lack of motivation and access. This includes people who are offline with no digital skills, people who are online but have limited digital skills or those who live in rural areas where broadband is not widespread. Other barriers might include disability or homelessness. See Homelessness.

Assisted Digital – key points

Claimants should always be asked to apply and maintain claims online independently where possible, via GOV.uk.

All reasonable attempts should be made to enable, support and educate claimants to self-serve.

If an online claim cannot be independently made or maintained, assisted digital is one of a number of support options available.

If claimants state they are having difficulty using the online service, reasons for this need to be established. Based on their circumstances, claimants should be assisted in accessing the Universal Credit service through a channel that is appropriate for their needs. The following options are available:

- support from family or friends
 - telephone support when using the online channel
 - in-house coaching in the Jobcentre
 - home visit
 - Universal Support delivered locally (USdl)
 - agent as proxy (only in exceptional circumstances)
- USdl funds Local Authority assisted digital provision.

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If an agent is satisfied that a claimant is unable to provide a care of address or an actual address the local Jobcentre address can be used. The decision whether to allow the claimant to use the local office address will be taken locally on a case by case basis.

Assisted Digital support includes:

- coaching, challenging and motivating claimants to become more digitally competent – helping them to create, maintain and fully utilise their digital account
- recognising when additional support is required and taking appropriate action to coach, sign-post to additional support or ensure claimants are referred to appropriate provision to build their digital skills
- promoting the benefits of work and supporting/coaching claimants to make the most of on-line services to help them prepare for, find, and secure work

During delivery of assisted digital, unless it is in exceptional circumstances when the agent is acting as proxy, Universal Credit members of staff must not enter information on a claimant's behalf. They are there to support the transaction and as an enabler to build a claimant's ability and confidence to make and maintain their claim online. The information entered and the accuracy of this information is the responsibility of the claimant.

If Assisted Digital support is given for transactions, the member of staff should identify if claimants have an on-going need for Digital Inclusion support. Where claimants are unable to use the service themselves, alternative channels can be offered.

Assisted Digital support must not be offered or provided to claimants who are simply unwilling or refuse to make or maintain an online claim.

Support by telephone

A claimant may have access to suitable devices and WI-FI but have insufficient IT skills to complete their claim, and no one to support them. They may initially be unwilling to use the online channel but can be encouraged to do so. In this scenario, coaching can be provided to the claimant to help and prompt them through completing their claim over the phone.

The call takes approximately 40 minutes. An appointment should be booked, and the claimant called back to complete their claim. The claimant should be made aware of this timescale to enable them to talk freely. The claimant must enter any data required.

Claimants are still required to attend their commitments meeting at the Jobcentre to complete their Claimant Commitment.

Some calls may just involve clarifying a question to complete a transaction, in which case an appointment is not necessary.

Attendance at a Jobcentre

If other means of accessing the online account are not suitable, claimants can book an appointment at the Jobcentre for support from the Assisted Service Team, or alternative job role in some offices.

Universal Credit members of staff must never enter information on a claimant's behalf. The information entered and the accuracy of this information is the responsibility of the claimant.

Agent by proxy

Agent by proxy is a last resort for Assisted Digital support, where all reasonable attempts have been made to enable, support and educate claimants to 'self-serve'.

The above process is used for claimants unable to complete the online service when classed as vulnerable or presenting with very complex needs, due to falling into all of the categories below:

- being unable to complete the registration independently
- not having anyone to support them online
- being unable to attend for in-house support
- a home visit not being appropriate

If the claimant falls into each of the categories above, and has online security concerns, this is another factor which should be taken into consideration.

Ensure claimant notes have been reviewed for previous discussions and any support provided. Assess the claimant's circumstances and the best way to manage the call.

There will also be rare occasions when a claimant has a device and the ability to use it but cannot access the service. They should be signposted to where the service is available, for example family and friends or the Jobcentre. If this type of support is not an option, the transaction will be dealt with over the phone with the agent acting as proxy. The claimant must inform Universal Credit as soon as the issue is resolved so that they can begin to self-serve.

When taking a new claim over the phone, the member of staff will use a contingency e-mail address associated with their location. This is to generate the verification code required to complete the claim. Once the contingency email address is used, the verification code will be forwarded direct to the Service Centre's own generic inbox.

Only in these rare telephony situations will data be input on the claimant's behalf. The information entered and its accuracy is the responsibility of the claimant.

The claim is completed by the Service Centre. All parts of the claim must be read out and confirmed including the declarations. Calls are recorded as a safeguarding measure.

GOV.UK Verify

If required, Assisted Digital support is available for the full end to end GOV.UK Verify transaction. This must protect the claimant's security. Claimants should not divulge any of their credential information to the supporting member of staff.

At a glance - Complex needs overview

Introduction

When a claimant with complex needs contacts DWP, their customer journey must be comparable in quality and outcome to those whose needs are non-complex.

While working with the claimant, it may become clear that they need additional support. It is important to ask them and record what additional requirements they need to make sure they are available to the claimant every time they need them.

This will provide them with access to products and services equal to other claimants and enable them to follow the standard claimant journey, if appropriate.

Some claimants may be unwilling to reveal that they are experiencing difficult life events or personal circumstances. There may be signs, behaviours and language they use that suggest they may have complex needs.

Support may be put in place on a one off basis, for a short, medium or long period of time, or for recurring periods, depending upon the claimant's needs.

What are complex needs in Universal Credit?

Universal Credit claimants may need additional or different support if it is likely they will have difficulty:

- accessing Universal Credit
 - proving eligibility for Universal Credit
 - fulfilling Labour Market requirements
 - maintaining their Universal Credit account
 - managing their money
- The claimant may experience difficulties with:

- understanding information
- interpreting situations
- making decisions
- giving consent
- communicating information or their views
- requesting specialist or additional help and support

These are examples, this list is not exhaustive.

Claimants with complex needs must be able to access recoverable hardship payments, if required. This provides financial protection for claimants whose benefit is reduced by a sanction or a Fraud Loss of Benefit penalty.

People from abroad may also have complex needs. Guidance for this is currently in development

The following are examples of life events, personal circumstances, health issues or disabilities that could affect the claimant's ability to access and use Universal Credit services.

Some claimants may not need additional support even though they are experiencing some or all of the examples given below:

- adoption - children
- age - older person
- age - older person - financial abuse (pensions)
- age – young person aged 16 or 17
- bereavement, death - recently bereaved
- blind or partially sighted
- caring responsibilities
- children - childcare
- child/children in distress
- children who leave care/over 18 care leavers
- crime – victim of crime
- cultural barriers, language barriers – English not their first language
- deaf or hearing loss
- debt or indebted
- divorce or termination of a civil partnership
- domestic violence and abuse
- drug and alcohol dependency

- gender recognition/transgender
 - homeless (person without accommodation, in temporary accommodation, frequent change of address)
 - Internet use is restricted (for example, due to criminal conviction)
 - just left hospital
 - leaving the Armed Forces, Ex-armed forces personnel and their spouses/partners
 - learning disabilities
 - MAPPA individuals (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements)
 - mental health conditions
 - memory loss caused by medication
 - offender/ex offender/ prisoners/detainees
 - physical disabilities
 - race - immigration status/refugee/asylum seeker/people arriving from abroad
 - reading and writing difficulties
 - redundancy
 - retirement
 - rural isolation
 - suicide and/or Self Harm Declaration or if there is a risk to themselves or others
 - supported by Troubled Families Programme
- These are examples, this list is not exhaustive

Young people aged 16 and 17 will not usually be able to get Universal Credit in their own right but there are some exceptions, see Care Leavers .

Young people are also expected to be in education or training, with the exception of those in Scotland, where there is no requirement to stay in education/training until aged 18. See Under 18s guidance for details about young people who are not in employment, education or training.

Claimants housed in temporary accommodation are treated as if they are in the private rented sector.

For disabled claimants DWP is legally required under the Equality Act 2010 to provide reasonable adjustments. It is vital interaction with the claimant is carried out to determine what tailored support or reasonable adjustments they require to have equal access to products and services.

Signs, behaviours and language

Claimants may talk about a life event (for example, “my mum has just died”) or give out information in a conversation that suggests they may have complex personal circumstances – for example, they have no ID which may indicate they are homeless, have left prison or may have fled domestic violence. There may be a combination of factors which mean claimants need additional support to be able to access benefits and use Universal Credit services.

The following could indicate that an individual requires additional support. When communicating with the claimant, assess whether they are:

- in distress
- not understanding what is being said
- giving brief or one word responses
- upset
- frustrated
- giving inappropriate responses which do not answer the question asked
- continuously avoiding eye contact
- having difficulty processing or remembering what has been said
- holding a parallel conversation with someone else who may be their advocate or appointee which suggests face to face contact might be preferable
- demonstrating unacceptable customer behaviour

Difficulties or concerns dealing with written communications, numbers or language

A claimant may display behaviour that indicates they have reading and/or writing difficulties or difficulties dealing with numbers or language. This could include:

- being reluctant to complete or read paperwork
- being unable to navigate telephony or online services
- being unable to manage money or budget as they do not have sufficient numerical skills (or state they are in debt)
- failing to understand verbal communications well enough to engage with DWP staff

Also, Universal Credit staff may notice:

- errors on completed online application forms or paper forms
- that the individual is unable to spell out words if requested during telephone calls
- that English is not the claimant's first language

Not all claimants who have difficulties or concerns dealing with written communications, numbers or language will need support to access Universal Credit services. It is therefore vital that staff interact with the individual claimant to determine if they need support and what their additional requirements are.