Spotlight on: National Services handling telephony enquiries

Introduction

This spotlight has been designed to support National Services case managers in handling telephone enquiries. National Services were previously called National Hubs. National Services consists of:

- National telephony enquiries
- National inbox
- Child Benefit Online (CBOL)

For further information on the job role see National Services case managers job role.
Case managers in every contact with a claimant should:

- adhere to a 'Once and Done' approach to clearing any to-do's relating to the query but **not** fully case cleanse
- include notes in the journal and claimant history of any actions taken, this provides a history of contact with the claimant
- encourage claimants to self-serve
- handoff if necessary, if the query is complex and cannot be answered within reasonable timescales
- always check Universal Learning or seek support if you do not have the skills to answer the query

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National Services case manager actions

Case managers should identify if the claimant is calling from a different number to that registered on their Universal Credit account, if they are see Claimant calls from a different contact number to that registered on their account.
Case managers should establish if the claimant's query can be answered by self-service, or do they need help. If the claimant can self-serve, the case manager should advise where to find the information to help the claimant answer their query. If the claimant needs help the case manager must:

- make sure the claimant fully understands the answer
- clear any journal entries relating to the query
- update notes

If the case manager needs to handover the query, before the handover takes place, they must ensure the claimant fully understands what is happening and what will happen next.

The case manager must:

- select the appropriate handover category within the handover tool and timescales for handover
- update all notes with the actions taken and the reason for the handover
- include any contact details for the claimant if the number is different from their registered number or for example it's a third party, corporate appointee or landlord

If the claimant is not assigned a case manager, then create a handover using the "Unassigned Case Manager" option on the drop down within the handover tool.

If the query relates to an outstanding Tier 1 decision and escalation is appropriate complete template and email to DWP UCFS Decision Makers (link sends e-mail) for decision maker escalation and send to a team leader. For outstanding Tier 2 decisions, escalation is via the drop down on the handover tool.

Query examples

Payments

There could be a wide variety of enquiries around payments, including:

- there is no payment?
- the amount of the payment

Basic payment queries

Some basic payment queries could be answered by the claimant accessing the information on their online account. If the claimant is able to self-serve, then advise the claimant on where to find this information.

Payment not issued

A claimant may contact Universal Credit to ask where their payment is? Initially you will need to identify what date the payment is due to be paid.

Enquiry before date of payment

If the enquiry is before the date of payment, where appropriate clear any to-do's that may block payment whilst on the phone with the claimant, and advise when the payment is due.

Enquiry after end of assessment period

If the enquiry is after the date of payment, within the 'Overdue to-dos to calculate payment' to-do, identify any outstanding action required for payment to be calculated and complete any to-dos you are able to, inform the claimant of any actions they need to take and handover to the appropriate agent for them to complete.

Also check for any 'Check automated calculation' to-dos and then handover to the owning case manager to consider making a payment.

Also check the sanctions tab and take any appropriate actions.

Querying the amount of the payment

A claimant may query the amount of their payment. To help explain how the payment has been calculated, you should work through the claimant's statement with them. Consider if any of the following have affected the amount paid:

- sanctions – check the Sanctions tab and if the claimant does not agree with the sanction then create a Mandatory Reconsideration to-do
- deductions – explain what deductions have been taken see Spotlight on: Signposting claimants with debt and deductions_
- earnings – explain how earnings affect Universal Credit payments see Spotlight on: Disputed earnings

Re-issuing payments

If a claimant advises that they have not received their payment, and you establish via Central Payment System (CPS) that the payment has been returned, then you can re-issue the payment. This is issued by creating and completing the 'Make a Payment' to-do.

Recoverable Hardship Payments

When a claimant asks for a Recoverable Hardship Payment (RHP) open the ‘Apply for Recoverable Hardship Payment’ to-do. You must confirm whether the claimant meets the eligibility criteria, for more information see Recoverable Hardship Payments. Complete the ‘Apply for a recoverable hardship payment’ ALP, and upload the appropriate letter to the journal advising if the payment has been approved or rejected.

If the payment is approved launch the ‘Extra frequency payment’ to-do and complete CPS with the payment details.

Deferral of Advance recovery

During the recovery of the Advance, exceptional circumstances may occur that were not foreseen when the Advance was taken out (for example, a child going into hospital which results in unexpected and regular bus/taxi fares for the parents to visit).

If there is a risk that these circumstances will push the claimant into genuine hardship and cause difficulty repaying the Advance over the agreed recovery time, a deferral of the recovery can be considered.

Deferral means a claimant has up to 3 months where no advance recovery action is taken. However, if the claimant has other deductions on their account that may not currently being deducted as they are lower down the priority order, these may be deducted. See Deductions Priority Order.
A request for a deferral can be handled by a National Services case manager.

For more information on the recovery and deferral of the different types of Advances see Financial Hardship.
Self-reported earnings

If the ‘Self-reported earnings’ to-do is outstanding, then complete it and take action as per the to-do if the claim is suspended for this reason, and lift the suspension if there is one.

If a claim has been suspended as the claimant has not self-reported their earnings, then take the earnings details over the phone and lift the suspension.

Habitual Residency Test
Where a claimant enquires about their Habitual Residency Test (HRT) decision they may want:

- an explanation of the decision
- to know how the decision was made?
- to know what evidence was used to make the decision?

The case manager should not try to explain the HRT decision to the claimant. If the claimant wants more information about the decision, then create and complete a ‘Refer to Decision Maker: written explanation’ to-do for a decision maker.

If the claimant asks for a reconsideration or to appeal against the decision, then create and complete a ‘Refer to Decision Maker (mandatory reconsideration)’ to-do for a decision maker.

Childcare
A claimant may enquire why they have not been paid their childcare costs. This could be where a claimant:

- has not provided the necessary evidence, or
- has provided evidence but this has not been accepted

Check if the ‘Verify childcare costs’ to-do is outstanding in the claim Overview. This indicates that the evidence has not been provided.

If the ‘Verify childcare costs’ to-do is not outstanding, then check the claimant history to check for the type of evidence provided or whether the evidence provided was received on time.

If there are no notes on the journal or claimant history to explain why childcare costs have not been paid, then hand-off to the owning case manager.

For more information on the types of acceptable childcare evidence and timescales to report the costs see and Spotlight on: Childcare Declaration and evidence and Childcare costs.

Claim closures
Claims can be closed for a number of reasons, and occasionally can be closed in error.

Claim closed in error - if the ‘Additional actions (close claim)’ to–do is still outstanding then hand-off to the owning case manager to consider re-opening.
If the ‘Additional actions (close claim)’ to-do is not outstanding, then raise a CIL with your Service Innovation Lead (SIL).

Claim closed by claimant – where a claimant has closed their previous claim and they want to re-claim, advise them of the process to do this. For more information see Re-claims.
Claim made by phone - Where a claimant has made their claim by phone, they are not able to accept their claimant commitment in the Service. For more information see Spotlight on: Claims by phone. If their claim is closed, as they have not accepted their claimant commitment, then you should apologise to the claimant and handover to the owning case manager to raise a CIL.

Landlords
You may receive enquiries from landlords asking for details about their tenant’s claim to Universal Credit. For more information see Consent and disclosure.
If an Alternative Payment Arrangement, which is a Managed Payment to a Landlord is in place, the following information can be disclosed to the landlord if requested without explicit consent:

- the start date of the Managed Payment and/or a third party deduction
- when they can expect to receive the first Managed Payment and/or the third party deduction from DWP
- the amount of the next Managed Payment to Landlord
- the maximum additional amount of housing costs payable in the next payment of Universal Credit (the circumstances that led to the change will not be discussed)

If an APA has been stopped then you must not provide the landlord with any details about the claimant’s Universal Credit, apart from confirming that the APA has stopped.

You can signpost the landlord to GOV.UK (link is external) for more information.
Reporting a change of circumstance

Where a Managed Payment to Landlord is in place, a landlord may contact Universal Credit to report a change in circumstance. The change must be accepted and actioned accordingly.

Claimant requires a home visit

Some claimants may not be able to attend their appointment for example due to health conditions, caring responsibilities or accessibility needs. For further information see Home Visits.

Claimant calls from a different contact number to that registered on their account

If you identify that a claimant is calling from a contact number which is different to that registered on their Universal account, confirm if they have changed their contact number. If they have, ask the claimant if they are able to update their Universal Credit account. Explain to the claimant the benefits of keeping their contact number up to date, that is:

- if they contact again it will try and match their number and put them through to their own case manager.
- they will also miss out on important updates that are sent by SMS text.

If the claimant is locked out of their account advise them to attempt to use the 'Problems signing in' link on the 'Sign in to your Universal Credit account'. The claimant should then raise a change of circumstances and update the registered contact number.

If the claimant is unable to access their account after following this process, then try to help the claimant by re-issuing the PSN or raising a JIRA ticket if there appears to be a technical problem.