

Spotlight on mandatory appointments

Introduction

Mandatory appointments are interviews that a claimant is required to attend and these include Commitment Reviews, Work Search Reviews and Work Focused Interviews. They are all booked or re-booked in advance and recorded in diaries.

Claimants are expected to:

- meet all the work-related requirements listed in their Claimant Commitment and update the work coach on their progress (see Intensive Work Search regime)
- take all reasonable steps to ensure that they are available for their mandatory appointments and attend on time
- notify the work coach in good time before their mandatory appointment if they cannot attend

Failure to attend a mandatory appointment can lead to a referral being made to a decision maker and a sanction being applied.

The work coach must not cancel any appointments that have been booked by specialist teams. For further information, see Specialist teams.

Jobcentre Core Offer

The Jobcentre Core Offer describes the method and frequency of contact that must be applied to claimants. When booking mandatory appointments, agents must follow the Jobcentre Core Offer guidance.

Booking mandatory interviews

Before booking a mandatory appointment, consideration must be given to the claimant's individual circumstances to make sure the most appropriate appointment channel is chosen. This could be:

- face-to-face
- by telephone
- by video call

Mandatory appointments must be booked one at a time. This means that whilst a claimant can have several appointments booked, they must only have one for each appointment type (for example, Work Search Review, Youth Employment Programme).

Once the claimant has attended their mandatory appointment, only then can a further appointment of the same type be arranged if and when required.

The claimant must be given at least 48 hours' notice of an appointment.

However, if the claimant agrees that they are able to attend with less notice, that is acceptable. A journal message must be sent to the claimant confirming that they have agreed to attend at short notice.

The claimant must always be told the purpose of the appointment and of the consequences of failing to attend without a good reason.

Re-booking mandatory appointments

If a claimant asks for their mandatory appointment to be rearranged in advance, they must have an acceptable reason for doing so. The reason must be considered by the work coach before re-booking the appointment. The work coach must not cancel or re-book appointments unless there is an acceptable reason for doing so.

Claimant request re-booking before the day of the appointment

Some claimants may contact Universal Credit more than 24 hours before their appointment with the request for it to be re-booked.

The work coach must consider if the reason provided by the claimant is acceptable. If not, the claimant must be asked to provide more information as they cannot re-book without an acceptable reason.

The work coach must also consider if an alternative appointment channel, such as by phone or by video, can be used instead of re-booking.

Claimant requests re-booking on the same day before the appoint time has started

Some claimants may contact Universal Credit on the same day of their appointment but before it has taken place, with the request for it to be re-booked.

The re-booking of a mandatory appointment must only be considered in certain unforeseen circumstances.

The work coach must consider if an alternative appointment channel, such as by phone or by video, can be used instead of re-booking.

Examples of acceptable reasons for all appointment types

- undergoing emergency or scheduled medical or dental treatment
- attending a funeral of a close friend or relative (the claimant must only have been notified on the day of the appointment at the earliest)

- an emergency affecting a relative or close friend
- detained in police custody for 96 hours or less and has been released on the same day or the day before the appointment
- attending a job interview and can provide sufficient evidence including full details of the interview
- they are a crew member on a lifeboat, part-time fire fighter or working for the benefit of others in an emergency
- claimant was at work or travelling to work (check if the claimant is in the correct regime)
- looking after a child full time because the normal carer is ill, or absent from home and alternative care could not be arranged
- looking after a family member who is ill and alternative care could not be arranged

Additional acceptable reasons for face-to-face appointments

- they or a member of their household, have any symptoms of COVID-19 or if they are following guidance to self-isolate, including after entering the UK from abroad
- they have recorded mobility issue and there was an unforeseen issue with transportation either due to a failure in means of transport or a disruption caused as a result of their mobility aid
- at the time of the appointment there is national or local transport industrial action and it was unreasonable for the claimant to make alternative travel arrangements
- at the time of the appointment, adverse weather conditions impacting on them getting to the local office

Consider if an alternative contact channel is appropriate in the above cases.

Reason provided is acceptable

The work coach must consider if:

- switching-off requirements (easement) should apply
- the appointment can be re-booked
- the contact channel can be changed

For more information, see Switching-off requirements (easement) for Labour Market regime interventions.

If the appointment can be re-booked, the claimant must be given at least 48 hours' notice in advance of the re-booked appointment. However, if the claimant agrees that they are able to attend with less notice, that is acceptable.

The claimant must be told the purpose of the appointment and of the consequences should they fail to attend without a good reason. In these circumstances, a journal message must be sent to the claimant confirming that have agreed to attend at short notice.

The work coach must also record a note in 'Claimant History' including the accepted reasons for re-booking.

Reason provided is not acceptable

The work coach must inform the claimant that their request to re-book their appointment is not acceptable and that they must attend the original appointment.

It must also be explained that if they do not attend without providing a good reason, their benefit may be affected. This information must be recorded in the claimant's journal and in 'Claimant History'.

Claimant requests re-booking after the appointment time has already passed

When a claimant contacts Universal Credit to re-book after the appointment window has already passed, see Fail to Attend. If the claimant does not attend by the scheduled appointment time, this must be treated as failure to attend. Even if the claimant tries to re-book the appointment, a referral to a decision maker must still be considered.

Action to take if the claimant does not arrive at the start of the mandatory appointment

The work coach must view the journal and 'Claimant History' to check if:

- the claimant has asked to re-book the appointment and has provided an acceptable reason
- an easement has been applied which means that the claimant is not required to attend appointments
- there has been a change of circumstances which means that the claimant is not required to attend appointments

Appointments by phone

The work coach must:

- make one additional attempt to contact the claimant as they may have missed the initial call
- make a record in 'Claimant History'

Appointments at the jobcentre

The work coach must:

- make an attempt to contact the claimant by phone
- make a record in 'Claimant history'

Claimant answers the call

If contact is made with the claimant, the work coach must:

- gather their reasons for not attending (claimants have 7 days to provide good reasons)
- mark the appointment as not attended

- create the 'Fail to attend mandatory appointment' to-do
- re-book the appointment (where appropriate)

Claimant does not answer the call

If no contact is made with the claimant, the work coach must continue to undertake additional supportive steps - especially if **complex needs** have been identified.

The work coach must:

- make **one further telephone call** after the appointment to attempt to gather good reason and re-book if appropriate (this call can be made anytime from the following day up to 7 days, but it is recommended that this is done as soon as possible)
 - send a journal message at least 1 hour before the call to notify the claimant (include the telephone number that will display or advise that the call may be from a withheld number and tick the box to notify the claimant we have sent them a message)
 - commence the 'Fail to attend a mandatory appointment' to-do
 - make a record in 'Claimant History'
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Action to take if the claimant does not respond within 7 days or provides an unacceptable reason

Case managers must not take any fail to attend action and these cases must be handed over to the work coach to take appropriate action. This also includes if the claimant makes contact and requests to re-book an appointment after failing to attend.

The work coach must follow the 'Fail to attend mandatory appointment' to-do and consider if good reason applies.

Sanction decisions can only be made by a decision maker. A 'Sanction pre-referral quality check' must take place before a referral is made to a Labour Market decision maker. This check can be conducted by a team leader, their deputy or a colleague with relevant experience.

For more information, see Spotlight on: Sanction Assurance Framework and Spotlight on: sanction pre-referral quality checks.