

Benefit Bulletin: Big benefit changes and news

Produced by the Active Inclusion Service, Newcastle City Council

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Universal Credit

Are you better off on Universal Credit?

Some people *may* be better off on Universal Credit than their present 'legacy' benefits, such as those who satisfy the Limited Capability for Work Related Activity (LCWRA) test. This is known as the Support Group in Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). A single person aged 25 years old or over on ESA and in the Support Group with no rent to pay would be entitled to £128.45 per week, whereas Universal Credit is £150.93 per week.

We have a factsheet on our website which explains how someone satisfies the Support Group or LCWRA test www.newcastle.gov.uk/benefitinformation.

However, **it may not be as simple as that** because at some stage, they may stop satisfying the LCWRA test. Plus, if they satisfy the rules for the 'severe disability premium' element, that would make them better off on 'legacy' benefits – as their ESA would be £194.30 per week.

So, people on 'legacy' benefits should always get a better off calculation and advice.

Universal Credit scams in person and on social media

You may have seen this story in the [press](#). Residents are being approached by individuals, through doorstep cold calling and outside of Jobcentre Plus offices, offering a "government grant" or "low cost government loans for a small fee". They get enough information from them to make an initial Universal Credit claim and request an advance payment and keep most or all of it. Residents are unaware they have placed a Universal Credit claim until their existing 'legacy' benefit stops, and they have to repay a loan that they did not receive. Those affected have reported being approached by well-dressed persons, carrying what appears to be official ID.

The scam is [also taking place on social media](#).

Does the claimant have to repay the scammed money?

Justin Tomlinson MP, the Minister of State at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), has [said in Parliament](#) that "Where it is clear that [claimants] have been a victim of fraud through no fault of their own, no, we would not expect them to pay it back". The DWP [said](#) they would have to if the money went into their account but advisers have reported people being taken to cashpoints and handing the loan over so they don't receive it.

Can the claimant return to their old 'legacy' benefit?

The Minister also said "... and yes, we would consider putting them back on to the 'legacy' benefits if they were better off under those".

What should claimants do?

The DWP advice for people who believe they have been targeted is to contact [ActionFraud](#) on 0300 123 2040

More details from the [Money Advice Service](#).

Improvements to Universal Credit online account

The DWP has added a **new payments section** on the 'home screen' of a Universal Credit claimant's online account, showing for example:

- the date the claimant should receive their first payment
- a version of the statement to show how their payment will be made up based on what they've declared

Details from [gov.uk Touchbase edition 135](#).

What to do if you are unable to use the online Universal Credit system

Most people are expected to claim and manage Universal Credit online and communicate with the Jobcentre online through their Universal Credit account.

There is some help for those who do not have access to or have difficulty using a computer. However, those who for various reasons are unable to manage their Universal Credit claim digitally may be able to make a claim using the Universal Credit helpline. This is described on our webpage [more detailed guide to Universal Credit](#) under the heading 'Extra help and support under Universal Credit - including in Newcastle' which has links to documents with more guidance.

News on the Universal Credit roll out

The government have now laid regulations, which allow for the piloting of their next stage of Universal Credit roll out. A small pilot will start in Harrogate to test out the 'managed migration' of Universal Credit. This is where people who are on the 'legacy' benefits that Universal Credit is replacing, are told at some point they have to claim Universal Credit. They will receive a top up called transitional protection if their Universal Credit is lower. Learning from the pilots will inform the further roll out.

The regulations also include the following, previously promised, measures:

- From 22 July 2020, a two-week run on of Income Support, income-based Jobseekers Allowance and income-related Employment and Support Allowance for those who have to claim Universal Credit
- Improvements for the self-employed on Universal Credit
- Protection for some who are in education when 'manage migrated' to Universal Credit
- Compensation payments for those more disabled people who have already moved to Universal Credit and not received any transitional protection. These are people who received the 'severe disability premium' element in their 'legacy' benefits but due to a change in circumstances had to claim a lower amount of Universal Credit. The compensation will be in the form of extra weekly payments and a lump sum for the arrears. The regulation lists the amounts.
- From 16 January 2019, people getting the 'severe disability premium' have not been able to claim Universal Credit – to protect them from such a drop. This 'gateway' will be removed from 27 January 2021 when transitional payments will be available.

See our [January, March and earlier Benefit Bulletins](#) and [Universal Credit webpage](#) for more details.

When you have to claim Universal Credit and when you do not

Please see our updated table on our [more detailed guide to Universal Credit](#) webpage, which explains when people have to claim Universal Credit and when they do not and can remain on their 'legacy' benefits.

Work conditionality and sanctions

Benefits like Universal Credit have certain levels of work-related requirements or 'conditionality' ranging from full conditionality to none. Usually, these requirements are included in the Claimant Commitment, which is agreed with the Jobcentre Work Coach at the start of the claim. If people fail to meet those requirements, they may suffer a 'sanction' which is a reduction of benefit for a certain length of time.

The government has [recently said](#) it will reduce the maximum length of a sanction from October this year from its present three years down to six months.

GP fit notes if a patient is refused Employment and Support Allowance

If a person is refused Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), the DWP were writing to GPs saying that they should no longer supply fit notes. Some GPs were taking this to mean that they shouldn't supply fit notes in any circumstances. This has now been clarified: fit notes can still be supplied if patients ask for evidence for a reconsideration or appeal against our decision or their condition has got worse or develop a new condition. [See the gov.uk guidance to GPs](#) page 21.

'New style ESA' – new guidance

The government have [updated their guidance](#) on 'new style ESA'. This is the new name for 'contribution-based ESA', which is payable if you have paid enough National Insurance contributions. You can claim it alongside Universal Credit. It is not to be confused with 'income-related ESA', which is a means tested benefit and **has** been replaced by Universal Credit.

See the [March Benefit Bulletin](#) for improved ways of phoning the DWP about 'new style ESA'.

Send in your fit note online

You can now send an ESA fit note to the DWP via a laptop, PC or smartphone via www.gov.uk/send-fit-note

'Mixed age' couples – it's not too late to claim

'Mixed age' couples have until 13 August 2019 to make a claim for Housing Benefit and / or Pension Credit – which can be more generous than Universal Credit. More details on our [Mixed age couples webpage](#).

Professionals can get advice from the council's Welfare Rights consultancy line (phone 0191 277 2633, Monday to Friday from 10 am to 12 noon).

The EU Settlement Scheme

Citizens and their families from EU and some other countries can apply to the EU Settlement Scheme to continue living in the UK after it leaves the EU, which can allow them to claim benefits, work in the UK, use the NHS and so on.

In Newcastle, information and support to claim is provided by:

- Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) tenants (or members of the household of a YHN tenant) - Julie Robertson, email julie.robertson@yhn.org.uk
- Other residents- Riverside Community Health Project, phone 0191 226 0754 or email eussadvice@riversidechp.org.uk

Also see [government guidance](#), [factsheet](#), [HB circular A7/2019](#), [DMG Memo 06/19](#) and [ADM Memo 09/19](#).

The local impact of changes to free TV licences for over-75s

The BBC plan to restrict the licence fee to those aged over 75 getting Pension Credit from 1 June 2020. Parliament has produced a [report](#) which "...explores the relationship between Pension Credit and free TV licences, provides local data on those affected and looks at who is and isn't claiming [Pension Credit]".

Terminal illness and benefits review

The government have [announced a review](#) of the benefits rules relating to terminal illness.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Fewer PIP reviews for some older people

The [March Benefit Bulletin](#) reported that new PIP claimants aged over pension age will only get a 'light touch' review every ten years. This is [extended to existing PIP claimants](#).

£1,000 for those who lose Motability due to move from DLA to PIP

Most adults receiving DLA have to claim PIP at some stage. Those who lose Motability in the process may get £1,000 and other support [said a government minister](#).

Protection for older claimants on DLA

[New rules](#) from 4 July 2019 mean that older claimants aged over pension age on DLA will be able to claim PIP rather than AA, and can remain on PIP rather than claim AA after a change in circumstances. This helps to retain their mobility component which does not exist in Attendance Allowance.

Welfare reform impact on disabled people

A report by the [Disability Benefits Consortium](#), Has welfare become unfair – the impact of changes on disabled people, looks at the financial impact and lived experiences of the welfare reforms on disabled people. "While many people who receive welfare support have experienced cuts of an average of £300 as a result of changes to the welfare system, disabled people have typically lost around £1,200 per year."

Blue Badge for people with ‘hidden disabilities’

People with conditions like autism and dementia will be more able to get a Blue Badge parking permit - to help them park nearer their destination - from 30 August 2019. More details and the criteria from [DisabilityRightsUK](#) and the [government](#).

State Pensions – frequently asked questions

The House of Commons has produced a very useful [FAQ about the state pensions](#), such as who is entitled to the new one from 6 April 2016 and the old one, voluntary contributions, spouses / partners, Pension Credit, the WASPI campaign and so on.

Children’s Funeral Fund announced

The government has [announced](#) this [fund](#) to help with funeral costs for a child from 23 July 2019. It will pay the fees charged by burial and cremation authorities and some associated expenses related to the funerals of children below the age of 18 and still-born children born after 24 weeks’ gestation, when the funeral takes place in England. DWP guidance [ADM Memo 13/19](#) and [DMG Memo 10/19](#).

In addition, claims for [Funeral Expenses Payment](#) have been speeded up because only an estimated, rather than a confirmed, funeral date is required.

Jobcentres to have a trained domestic abuse worker by the end of summer

This follows an earlier report on the Domestic Abuse Bill in [March’s Benefit Bulletin](#). See the [DWP press release](#) for information on this and other related support, for example Universal Credit being paid to the main carer.

Appeal online

The ability to appeal against a benefit decision, submit supporting documents, track progress and get notifications online will be extended to Universal Credit “this summer” – see page 19 of the [Courts & Tribunal Service reform summer update](#).

DWP help for prisoners, homeless people and other DWP news

DWP support for prisoners has been set out in an [agreement between the DWP and Ministry of Justice](#) following an [announcement in Parliament](#). For example, prison Work Coaches, housing element retained for short-term prisoners, Work Coaches engage two to three weeks before release and so on.

By August 2019, [all Jobcentre Customer Service Managers will have received homelessness training](#), in addition to the other help already available.

News from the DWP’s [‘Touchbase’](#) includes:

- Being able to claim State Pension online
- Videos explaining the loans that replaced Support with Mortgage Interest
- 30 hour free childcare awareness raising videos

Is the two-child limit unlawful?

In April, the Court of Appeal refused the appeals by two single parents by a narrow margin. Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), who is representing the parents, are [requesting the case be heard by the Supreme Court](#). In the meantime, see the survey [All Kids Count: The impact of the two-child limit after two years](#) by CPAG and the Church of England.

Further support, information and training

The DWP produce useful items for professionals in [Touchbase: DWP news about work, working-age benefits, pensions and services](#)

Find our **earlier Benefit Bulletins** on our [web page for professionals and volunteers](#) and for **more information on benefit changes**, see our web page [Changes to the benefits system](#) which includes a **timeline of the main benefit changes**

More details about benefits, including those mentioned above, can be found on [our welfare rights and money advice web pages](#), including benefit self-help factsheets and 'Where to get advice in Newcastle' on the [benefit advice services web page](#)

This Benefit Bulletin was written by the Active Inclusion Service at Newcastle City Council. It is provided bi-monthly and at times of important benefit changes and news. It is as accurate as possible at the time of writing. The bulletin is part of the Active Inclusion Newcastle support to professionals, which includes face to face and e-learning modules such as 'Introduction to benefits' and 'Universal Credit'. You may also be interested in the Debt Bulletin which is produced quarterly. For more details see our [web page for professionals and volunteers](#)

We also produce a weekly **Active Inclusion Newcastle e-bulletin** which provides a brief update on financial inclusion and homelessness prevention issues. If you want to receive this, or for more details, email activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk