

Universal Credit is a payment to help with your living costs. It's paid monthly – or twice a month for some people in Scotland. You may be able to get it if you're on a low income, out of work or you cannot work. Universal Credit is being rolled out to replace Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Employment & Support Allowance and Income Support. The full rollout of Universal Credit is scheduled for completion in 2024.

Between March 13th 2020 and January 14th 2021 there were 4.5 million Universal Credit claims. Over a third of Universal Credit claims have been made since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Find out more about Universal Credit using our Universal Credit guide. It covers who can apply, how to apply, how much money you can claim, a glossary to help with Universal Credit terminology and more.

- [What is Universal Credit?](#)
- [Universal Credit full service areas](#)
- [Who can claim Universal Credit?](#)
- [How much can I claim on Universal Credit?](#)
- [How will I get paid Universal Credit?](#)
- [How to apply for Universal Credit](#)
- [Login to your Universal Credit account](#)
- [Universal Credit with more than two children](#)
- [Universal Credit FAQs](#)
- [Universal Credit useful contacts](#)
- [Universal Credit glossary](#)
- [Universal Credit in Scotland](#)
- [Universal Credit in Northern Ireland](#)

What is Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a new benefit that will support people out of work or on a low income. It is being introduced in stages and will affect around 8 million people in the UK.

It will replace six, older benefits:

- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Income Support
- Housing Benefit
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

The government hopes that Universal Credit will make benefits easier for everyone. It comes as one payment, with everything rolled together into one. You won't need to chase lots of payments each month.

Right now if you have a question about your benefits you have to contact a few different numbers to get an answer. With Universal Credit you will do everything through one helpline and internet account.

The Department for Work and Pensions will manage Universal Credit. They say most people will be better off on Universal Credit than older benefits. They also say it will encourage people to get back to work by providing training and support to find a job.

If you do find a job while receiving Universal Credit, your payments won't stop suddenly. They will go down gradually until you get on your feet and feel comfortable by yourself.

Universal Credit will only affect new claims for now. If you currently receive benefits, nothing will change for you and you don't need to worry. The government will contact you when they are ready for you to switch over. Only contact them if your current circumstances change that might affect your benefits.

Changing to a new type of benefit can be scary, especially if you have children or rent to pay. Universal Credit should be easier for you but it might be hard to understand. A lot of the information about it is hard to understand or confusing. Below, you will find everything you need to know about Universal Credit and what will change for you. Hopefully, this will make the change less scary for you and your family.

Who can claim Universal Credit?

Universal Credit is generally available to anyone out of work or on a low income. Certain things will affect your eligibility and how much you get, like where you live or your income.

To be eligible to receive Universal Credit, you must:

- Be aged between 18 and the state pension age (exceptions apply).
- Be unemployed or on a low income.
- Have savings lower than £16,000.
- Not be studying full time, like in university or doing a training course (exceptions apply).

Live in an area where Universal Credit has started replacing the older benefits. Citizens Advice has a useful postcode checker, which will tell you if it is available in your area.

16 and 17 year olds

If you are 16 or 17, this doesn't automatically mean you can't receive Universal Credit. You may be still be able to get it if you meet one of the points below suits your circumstances:

- You don't have any support from your mum or dad, and you're not in care.
- You are unable to work because you are sick or have a disability.
- You are a carer for someone with a serious illness or disability.
- You have had a baby within the past 15 weeks or are expecting to give birth within the next 11 weeks.
- You or your partner look after a child. If this applies, both you and your partner need to be eligible for Universal Credit.

If you are 16 or 17, you won't have to look for work while getting Universal Credit. Most people over 18 have to apply for jobs and prepare for work to keep receiving Universal Credit.

Once you turn 18 and you are fit for work, you will need to prove you are looking for a job to keep getting payments.

Does your partner get a pension?

If you live with your partner who gets a pension, you have a choice to make. You can either claim Pension Credit or Universal Credit. Pension Credit is a top-up of your income and pension, and is available for everyone over 66 years old. The government use your income, savings and pension to calculate how much you'll get.

You don't actually have to be pension age to receive this, as long as your partner is eligible, you will be too. If you fit the description above, you should consider Pension Credit. In some circumstances, you'll be better off on Pension Credit than Universal Credit.

Still studying or training full time?

As a general rule, you are not eligible for Universal Credit if you are still studying full-time.

But you might still be able to apply for Universal Credit if you fit one of the exceptions below:

- You have a serious illness or disability. You can also claim Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
- You're under 21 and have no support from your parents. You can claim Universal Credit while in 'further education' like A Levels or BTEC
- You or your partner are students and responsible for a child
- You live with a partner/spouse who can claim Universal Credit

Universal Credit for Couples

Universal Credit will be a big change for couples who live together. Rather than you getting individual payments, you will receive your payments together. On the same date each month, the amount you both receive will be paid into one bank account.

Once you make a joint claim, both of your other benefits will stop. If they don't, you will need to tell the government you're receiving Universal Credit. If you fail to do this, you might have to pay the money back later.

To be eligible to claim with your partner:

- You must both share the same address
- Be in a civil partnership, marriage, or serious relationship
- Not have combined savings of £16,000 (this includes any property or other things you may own)
- Both be eligible for Universal Credit

If your partner is not claim Universal Credit then their income and savings might affect you. The Department for Work and Pensions will base the amount you get off your partner's finances.

In certain situations you should apply as a single adult, even if you live with your partner. This happens when:

- You and your partner have been living apart for six months
- Your partner is currently outside of the United Kingdom for an extended period

- Your partner is in prison
- Your partner is below 18 and so not eligible for Universal Credit
- Part of the Church or other religious group which pays for their house and daily spending
- Your partner does not have a permanent residency visa

You must contact the Universal Credit helpline if anything changes in the relationship. This might be splitting up, getting married or deciding to live separately. Your payments might be affected or stop if you do not inform the helpline of a change in circumstances.

How To Apply For Universal Credit?

The government say that Universal Credit will be easier to claim than other benefits.

Everything related to your claim can be done and managed online.

You can make a new application using the Universal Credit website. If you are part of a couple, you should apply together. After you create your account online and apply, you need to contact your local Jobcentre. You have to do this within 7 days or else your application will expire. The Jobcentre will arrange an appointment with your 'work coach' who is there to help you. They will answer any questions you have and support you find a job.

Once you have submitted your application, you need to keep checking your account. If there are any questions about your application, the government will use this to get in touch. Your 'online journal' is there for you to ask questions or for an adviser to get in touch with you. If you don't answer any questions that pop up on your journal, your claim might be delayed or refused.

What do I need to apply?

To make an online application, you'll need to have a few things ready to use on the website and show in the Jobcentre:

- Your National Insurance number. If you've forgotten or lost this, or have never received one then contact HM Revenue and Customs on 0300 200 3500.
- Proof of your address (like a utility bill).
- Details of where you want your money paid (like your bank details or building society number).
- Bank statements or other documentation showing savings or capital you own.
- An email address which you have access to.
- Housing details like rent amounts, mortgage statements and your landlord's contact details.
- If you are going to apply for childcare help you will need proof of this (like bills or invoices).
- Proof of your income (if you work or are self-employed) like payslips or your P60. If you have any other forms of income (such as a pension or insurance plan) you will need to bring proof of that too.
- Valid form of ID (like a passport, EU identity card, UK driving licence or residency permit).
- Details of any other benefits you receive.

How to prepare for Universal Credit

If you live somewhere that doesn't have Universal Credit yet, you can still start preparing for it. This will make sure you're ready to make a claim when it arrives.

You could prepare by:

- Making sure you have an email address that you have access to
- Opening a bank account

- Preparing proof of income and housing payments (rent, mortgage, etc.)
- Making sure you have internet access or know somewhere you can access the internet. You could try a neighbour's house or your local library.
- Making sure you understand how to use the internet and are comfortable with it.
- Check you have valid ID.

Your responsibilities while receiving Universal Credit

You will sign a document called a 'Claimant Commitment' after applying. You will do this together with your work coach in the Jobcentre.

This document will lay out what you're expected to do to keep receiving Universal Credit. For example, if you're fit to work, this could be working on a CV or applying for jobs.

The biggest responsibility you have when receiving Universal Credit is to budget. You're expected to use the money you receive to manage your own finances correctly. You're responsible for paying your own rent or mortgage, utility bills and other living costs.

You are also expected to inform the government of any change in circumstances. If you live in a 'live area' you should call the helpline. If you live in a 'full service' area, do this online. If you don't report a change in circumstance you might have your payments stopped or reduced.

This could be anything like:

- Finding a job or leaving your current job
- Having a baby
- Changes in your illness or disability
- Changes in your rent amounts or mortgage payments
- Moving house or moving in with a partner
- Changing bank accounts

If I have children, do I have to look for work?

Your employment responsibilities are different depending on how old your children are. If your children are old enough you'll have to look for work to keep receiving payments.

If you're child is:

- **Less than one years old** – You won't have to apply to jobs while receiving Universal Credit.
- **Between one and two years old** – You won't have to apply for jobs but you can talk to your work coach about what you want to do.
- **Two years old** – You still don't have to look for a job, but you will need to have regular conversations with your work coach. They will ask you to start preparing for work with things like your CV.
- **3-4 years old** – Now your child has grown up, you need to work at most 16 hours a week. If you don't have a job you will need to spend 16 hours a week applying for jobs.
- **Between 5 and 12 years of age** – The hours you need to work or search for a job now increase to 25 a week.
- **13+** – You will now have to apply to jobs or work for 35 hours per week.

Childcare responsibilities

If you receive help with childcare costs you need to make sure you keep record of everything you pay. You should then upload this proof to your online Universal Credit account. If you don't have an account yet, you can report your payments to the helpline. They will then ask you to

take your invoices and proof to your local Jobcentre.

You can claim up to either 3 months in advance or 3 months after you've paid your child's childcare provider. You will need to keep a record of their name, address and childcare registration details.

If you're suffering from a terminal illness

You need to tell the government if you are diagnosed with a terminal illness. This may increase the amount of Universal Credit you get each month.

If your life expectancy is lower than six months and you live in a 'full service' area, report the change online. The Department of Work and Pensions will then get in touch with you to tell you what to do next. If you're not well enough to do this yourself, you can ask a family member or someone close to you to do it for you. They will need to get a doctor to fill out a DS1500 form and post it to:

Freepost

Department for Work and Pensions

Universal Credit Full Service

If you live in a 'live service' area, then you should contact the helpline and they will give you the next steps.

If your life expectancy is more than six months, you can use your account or the helpline to report it.

What happens if I don't meet these responsibilities?

If you don't meet the responsibilities above, you may get a 'sanction'. This can reduce your Universal Credit payment or stop it completely. Sanctions depend on your personal circumstances, what you did and how many times you did it.

If you applied as a couple but only one of you did something wrong, you will both get half a sanction.

If you don't agree with a sanction, you can challenge it online or through the helpline.

You can apply for a hardship payment if a sanction has left you unable to afford basics like your food or rent. This is a loan to help you until your next payment. You will have to pay this back eventually through future Universal Credit payments.

You must be over 18 years of age to apply. You'll have to prove that you tried to get money elsewhere, and this is your last resort.

You may have to repay money if you didn't provide correct information to the government. You will also have to repay money if not report a change in circumstances as soon as it happened. If you receive too much money in error, you will also have to return this.

If you provided false information on purpose, you could face appearing in court.

How much money can I claim on Universal Credit?

Universal Credit is different than older benefits as it will be just one monthly payment. Your basic allowance and any extra amounts for your rent or children will all come together. If you live in England and Wales, it will be a monthly payment. If you live in Scotland and Northern Ireland you will get paid twice a month.

Everyone who claims Universal Credit will get a basic amount and then you can claim for extra things. Rent or mortgage help, childcare costs and disability support will be added later.

The standard amounts are as follows:

- If you are single and under 25 – £342.72 per month
- If you are single and 25 or over – £409.89 per month
- If you're part of a couple, and you're both under 25 – £488.59 per month (one payment)
- You're part of a couple, and you're both over 25 – £594.04 per month (one payment)

There is also a new policy called a Benefit Cap, that is being introduced with Universal Credit. The Benefit Cap will limit the amount of benefits a person can receive in a year. Benefits will be in line with or lower than what a typical family earns in the UK. The Benefit Cap is currently set to £26,000, or £500 a week.

If you have kids, the amount you'll receive on top of the standard payment is:

- One child born before 6th April 2017 – £281.25 per month
- One child born after 6th April 2017 – £235.83 per month
- A second child – £235.83 per month
- A child with an illness or a disability – £128.25 per month
- A child with a serious illness or disability – £400.29 per month
- Childcare costs – 85% of what you pay reimbursed (capped at £646.35 for one child or £1,108.04 for two or more).

Will my wages affect this?

If you have a job you can get Universal Credit, but the amount you'll receive every month depends on how much you earn.

The Department for Work and Pensions have created a 'work allowance' for employees. If you have a job and claim Universal Credit, you can take a certain amount of 'free earnings'. This means that you can earn a certain amount of money without it affecting your claim.

The work allowance changes depending on your circumstances:

Circumstance	Work Allowance
You are single with no children in your care	£0.00
You are single with children in your care	£198/month
You are single with an illness/disability	£198/month
You are part of a couple with no children in your care	£0.00
You are part of a couple with children in your care	£198/month
You are part of a couple where at least one person has an illness or disability	£198/month

So, if you are a single person with no kids, your work allowance is £0. This means that even if you earn £1, it will affect your Universal Credit payment that month. Of course it won't disappear, but it will reduce a little.

If you have a disability, you can earn £198 a month without it reducing your Universal Credit payments.

After you pass your work allowance, each £1 you earn will reduce your Universal Credit payment by 63p.

Here is an example if you are single and have no children. If you earn £100 a month, your payments for Universal Credit will go down by £63 a month.

If you earn so much that your Universal Credit payment stops, the government will contact you. If in future your income drops again, you can make a new claim. You will need to submit fresh evidence to prove you are eligible.

Universal Credit Surplus

If you are receiving Universal Credit but also have a job, the 'Surplus Earnings' rule might affect you.

Each month, you can have a job and claim Universal Credit as long as you don't earn too much. If you earn enough, you may not receive Universal Credit that month at all. But, if you earn a lot one month, it may affect next month as well. This is what the 'Surplus Earnings' rule is about.

If you earn enough one month, your Universal Credit payments will reduce to £0. If you earn £2,500 more from where your Universal Credit payments stop, you will have a 'surplus'. This 'surplus' will not just affect this month, but next month too.

Every pound you earn over that £2,500 limit will carry through to next month and affect your earnings limit. This means that next month your income limit is lower and you might find your payments reduce to £0 easier.

For example, if one month you earn £400 over this £2,500 limit then next month you must earn £400 under it. This will clear your surplus and bring your limit back to normal.

If two months in a row, you go over this £2,500 limit, your claim will stop. You will only be able to claim Universal Credit again once your surplus is zero (i.e. your earnings are small enough).

If you are self-employed, you have different rules. You are allowed to both surpluses and losses through to the next month, instead of just surpluses. For example, one month you earned £2,000 after your Universal Credit payment stopped. This means next month, you have an extra £500 to add to your limit. Now, your surplus limit is £3,000.

If you and your partner have a high surplus but you separate, you will both split between yourselves. It will go on your personal account and you'll be responsible for it as an individual.

How will I get paid Universal Credit payments?

You will get Universal Credit the same way as other benefits, with only some small changes.

Universal Credit now allows you to receive your payments into a Credit Union account. You can also use a basic bank account, current account, building society or a Post Office card.

The Post Office card account does not let you set up automatic payments, like a direct debit to a landlord. If you choose the Post Office card, make sure you are comfortable organising the payments.

The Department for Work and Pensions say your complete claim will take one whole month to assess. Once it approves your claim, it will take 7 days to get your payment. This means in total you might wait 5 weeks to get your first payment.

This can be a long time to wait if you have no savings to help with living costs. Different types of help are available to help while you wait. See our 'Other types of financial support' section for more help.

Your payment will usually come on the same day of each month. The payment date might change if it falls on a weekend or bank holiday. If this is the case, you will be paid on the working day before it. On your Universal Credit account you can see the amounts and dates of your upcoming payment.

Is it the same if I'm employed?

Having a job might affect your Universal Credit payment dates if you're paid more than once a month.

If you receive wages every week, every fortnight or every 4 weeks this will affect your claim. Some months of the year, your income might count twice. This is because of how the assessment periods work but you will end up with the same amount of money. It is not something you need to worry about or do anything about, as by the end of the year it will be correct.

If you're paid:

- Every week – your payments will change four months in the year
- Every 2 weeks – your payments will change twice a year
- Every 4 weeks – your payments will only change once in the year

On the months where this happens, you will receive less Universal Credit. This is because you have received earnings twice in the same Universal Credit month. But the month after that, your income will drop and so your Universal Credit payment will be higher. At the end of the year, your Universal Credit amounts won't be different.

The government will calculate this all for you, so you don't need to do anything. If you want, you can use your account to see which months are affected and what you will receive.

Universal Credit Helpline

Universal Credit helpline phone number and availability times. View the [Universal Credit Helpline call costs](#).

Universal Credit Appointments	Phone Numbers
Telephone	0800 328 9344
Textphone	0800 328 1344
Welsh language	0800 012 1888

The Universal Credit helpline is available from Monday to Friday, 8:00 am to 6:00 pm.