

# Derbyshire Welfare Rights Service

## Universal Credit – Claimant Commitment

Universal Credit is a means-tested benefit which will eventually replace Income Support, Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit - DWP refers to these as 'legacy benefits'.

The UC 'full service' (see below) has now been introduced throughout Derbyshire.

The full service of UC affects all new means-tested benefit claims for people of working age (with the exception of some severely disabled people) and will apply to all sorts of claimants, even those who are working.

Existing legacy benefit claims may not change to UC until between November 2020 and September 2024, but your claim could change to UC if you have a change of circumstances which means that you need to make a new claim for means-tested benefit.

For full details, please see our website or our leaflet 'Universal Credit – what is happening now and in the future in Derbyshire'.

Call our Helpline for further advice.

### The Claimant Commitment

Most people on UC will have a Claimant Commitment: the Claimant Commitment is an important part of your Universal Credit claim. It sets out what you agree to do in return for getting benefit.

It is important to make sure that the Commitment reflects your full personal situation and contains any information about things (such as illness, disability or caring duties for children or a disabled person) that may limit your ability to get a job. **If you are unable to work or to seek work make sure that the Jobcentre is aware of this – you may need letters from your GP to make this clear.**

If your situation changes, it is important to make sure the Jobcentre knows about this - you can ask your Work Coach to change your Claimant Commitment if it no longer reflects your true situation.

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If you refuse to accept a Claimant Commitment, your Universal Credit claim will stop. It is possible for Jobcentre Plus to delay your accepting a Claimant Commitment in 'exceptional circumstances'.

**If you fail to carry out your responsibilities you can be sanctioned (lose benefit). By getting the Claimant Commitment right, you can avoid unnecessary sanctions.**

Seek advice at once if you are having difficulties.

If you are not required to seek work - for instance owing to disability – your Claimant Commitment may simply be an agreement to contact DWP to report any changes in your situation.

## **Work Search' and 'Work Availability'**

Under Universal Credit, if you are fully fit for work and you have no restrictions on your ability to look for work, you will be expected to look for full-time work – this usually means working hours of 35 hours or more per week.

You will also be expected to:

- Look for any type of work
- Be available for work and for interviews right away
- Work any hours
- Spend 35 hours a week looking for work
- Apply for vacancies that Jobcentre Plus tells you about
- Look for work that is a maximum of 90 minutes' travel (each way) away from you by public transport
- Attend interviews for work – and take part in them fully
- Take up offers of paid work

Remember that the Jobcentre can agree to reduce some of these requirements in your case – but it is essential that you explain why you can't meet the full requirements and that this is put in writing in your Claimant Commitment.

You will have a 'work search and preparation plan' – this will list the things that should give you the best chance of getting work.

You will need to make sure you can and do stick to this plan and that it contains things that it is reasonable for you to do. If in doubt, seek advice.

## **Claimant Commitment Interview**

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When you claim Universal Credit you will have an interview at Jobcentre Plus to discuss what goes in to your Claimant Commitment. The interview is meant to:

- Identify your abilities and personal circumstances
- Identify what work you will be expected to look for
- Set your arrangements for contacting Jobcentre Plus as your claim goes on
- Advise what support is available to you
- Discuss any budgeting support if you need it
- Discuss your responsibilities and the consequences of not meeting them (sanctions – see below).

## Things to think about before the interview

- What is your work-history so far?
- What experience of different types of work do you have?
- What qualifications and training do you have?
- Do you have any health problems or disabilities that may limit the type of work you can do, the hours you can do or the distance you can travel to work?
- Is there any health or other problem which will limit your ability to travel for work or for meetings at the Jobcentre?
- Do you have any caring responsibilities (for children, or someone who is disabled) that you will need to fit in with your search for work?
- What sort of support (new skills, training, work experience etc) do you think you need in order to find work?
- Is there any sort of work that you would object to doing for sincerely-held conscientious or religious reasons? *(for example you may be a committed non-smoker and you don't wish to work in the tobacco industry)*
- Are you doing any voluntary work that will help you to get paid work and that you wish to carry on doing? (you may be asked to reduce your hours of voluntary work as you can only spend half of your work-search time doing voluntary work – and you must give up or change your voluntary work if there is a job available).

If you have previously held a job with specific skills in a particular field, you may be able to restrict your job-search to this type of work for a maximum of three months.

You should also mention how best Jobcentre Plus can contact you – and if there are any limitations on this, such as you have no land-line or mobile phone, or if you have no internet access or no computer at home.

All these things should be taken in to account at your interview – it is vital that you mention them so they may be included in the written Claimant Commitment.

If you disagree with what is in your Claimant Commitment you can ask for it to be reviewed before you accept it, or at any time afterwards. Contact our Helpline for more advice.

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## **Keep a record of what you do to look for work**

You will need to show that you have taken all reasonable actions to meet the terms of your Claimant Commitment – it is very important to keep clear records what you have done to find work and why you think your activity will help you to find work, but also to keep a careful note of anything that may happen to prevent you from looking for work – such as temporary illness, a family crisis, the need to look after a child temporarily, a bereavement or making funeral arrangements - you should also tell the Jobcentre about any of these.

## **Sanctions**

Under Universal Credit, if you fail to meet your Claimant Commitment or you refuse to take part in Mandatory Work activity and other schemes, you can be sanctioned (lose benefit), depending upon what has happened, for a minimum period of a month but for a maximum period of six months.

If you are sanctioned more than once within one year you may find a longer sanction period applies to you. The maximum period will only apply after you have been sanctioned on a number of occasions for particular failures such as failing to apply for a job, or to accept a job offer.

**If you think you are going to be sanctioned, or you have been sanctioned, seek advice at once. The sanction can be overturned if you have 'good reason' for your actions.**

See our leaflet – 'Universal Credit Sanctions and Hardship' for more details.

Additional information can be found on our website, visit [www.derbyshire.gov.uk/welfarebenefits](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/welfarebenefits)

**To keep up-to-date with benefit changes in Derbyshire go to**  
[www.derbyshire.gov.uk/benefitnews](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/benefitnews)

**Benefits Helpline – 01629 531535 or email**  
[welfarebenefits@derbyshire.gov.uk](mailto:welfarebenefits@derbyshire.gov.uk)

**Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday**

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**11.00am – 4.00pm**