

The following information has been compiled using publicly accessible sources. Autism West Midlands cannot give individual benefit advice. For further information, please see the resources at the end of this information sheet.

Universal credit is a single working age income related payment which will replace the following benefits:

- Income support
- Income based job seeker's allowance
- Housing benefit
- Child tax credits
- Working tax credit
- Income related employment and support allowance.

From October 2013, people of working age who wish to claim a means tested benefit (a benefit which depends on how much money you have) will have to claim universal credit.

Many of the current benefit specific rules will be transferred into the universal credit. For example claimants of universal credit who claim on the basis of being too sick to work will be subject to the work capability assessment.

Universal credit will provide a basic allowance to both working and non-working households, and will include additional elements for children, disability, caring responsibilities, housing costs and childcare.

To qualify for universal credit a claimant must meet all of the following conditions:

- Be at least 18 years old (there are some exceptions for parents under 18)
- Have not reached the qualifying age for state pension credit
- Be resident in Great Britain (habitual residence and right to reside will apply)
- Not be receiving education
- Have accepted a 'claimant commitment'
- Meet the financial tests.

Claimant commitment is an overall term which captures the type and extent of the various forms of conditionality that will apply to different groups of claimant. A claimant commitment will clearly set out the responsibilities of the claimant in terms of any work related activity requirements they are expected to comply with in order to qualify for benefit.

Claimants will be placed in one of four conditionality groups:

1. Full conditionality will apply to claimants who will be expected to attend work focused interviews, undertake work preparation activities as well as be available for and actively seeking work.
2. Work preparation conditionality will apply to those with disabilities or health conditions which do not prevent some engagement in work related activities.

3. Work focused interview requirement – those with responsibility for caring for a child over one but under a prescribed age will be expected to participate in activities which will enable them to 'keep in touch with the labour market.
4. No conditionality – people with limited capability for work related activity/carers/ lone parents or lead carers of a child under one will not be subject to conditionality.

Sanctions will be applied to claimants who fail to properly meet their conditionality requirements. A new regime of 'High Level Sanctions' will be introduced for claimants who, without good cause, are deemed to have failed conditionality requirements due to the following:

- Voluntarily left paid work or reduced paid hours
- Left work due to misconduct
- Failed to take offer of paid work
- Failed to apply for a vacancy when required to do so
- Failed to participate in a Mandatory Work Related Activity or other type of placement (claimants must actively participate, attending will not be enough).

Sanctions will lead to a loss of 40-100% of a personal allowance and will usually be set at 91 days in the first instance.

Initially universal credit will only apply for new claims. Existing benefit/tax credits will be migrated to universal credit over a period of several years. All claims will be done electronically and claimants will have a universal credit online account. There will be no clerical claims. Claims can be backdated for one month but only in limited circumstances, for example, because of language or learning difficulties. Universal credit will not be payable for the first three days of a claim. Universal credit will usually be paid monthly.

No provision has been made regarding how passported benefits such as free school meals, prescriptions and health vouchers etc. will be treated under universal credit.

How do I apply for Universal Credit?

Visit www.gov.uk/universal-credit/overview for more information and to apply for Universal Credit.

Useful resources

www.dwp.gov.uk – Department for Work and Pensions website provides access to consultation documents, policy briefing and updates to legislation and decision makers' guidance

www.cpag.org.uk – access to information on welfare benefit matters including policy briefings and campaigns/consultations

Autism West Midlands Information Helpline 03 03 03 00 111

Email: info@autismwestmidlands.org.uk

Website: www.autismwestmidlands.org.uk