

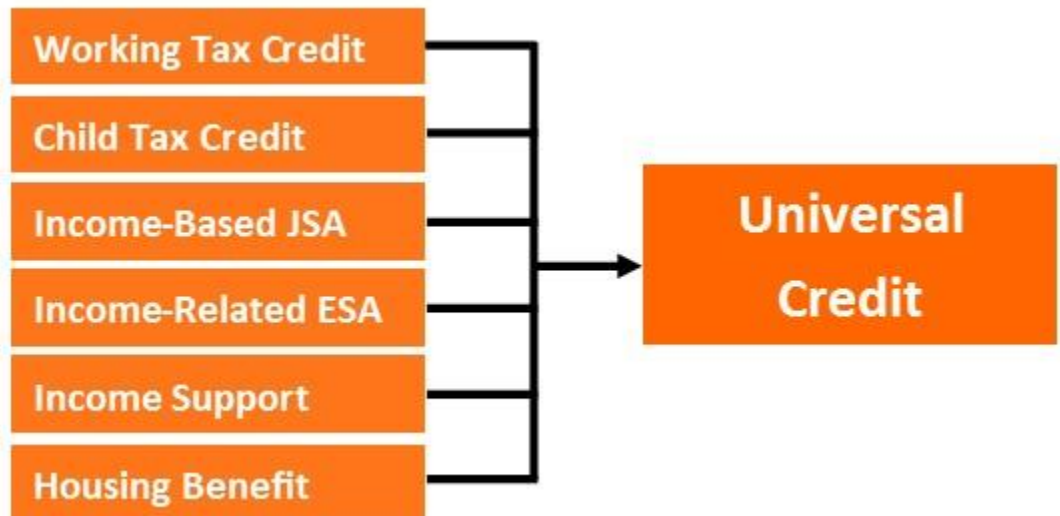
Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a new benefit which is replacing means-tested social security benefits and tax credits for **Working Age** individuals and families.

If you are single and have reached Pension age you will not be affected. If you are a couple and both of you have reached Pension age, again you will not be affected.

Although Universal Credit has been introduced in Glasgow, if you are currently receiving any of these benefits, you do not need to do anything until you hear from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) about moving to Universal Credit, unless you have a change in circumstances.

Universal Credit is gradually replacing six means-tested benefits which will now be referred to as "Legacy Benefits":



Most people cannot make a **new claim** to any of the legacy benefits, If you have a change in circumstances that requires making a new claim e.g. a new baby, or a partner joins or leaves the household you will be directed to claim Universal Credit and your entitlement to all 6 legacy benefits will end.

Note: a change of address within the same local authority area will not require a move to Universal Credit

If you are receiving a Severe Disability Premium on your Legacy benefits, even if you require to make a new claim to any of the benefits being replaced, you DO NOT need to claim Universal Credit.

Housing Costs Element

The Housing Costs element of Universal Credit replaces Housing Benefit to help pay your rent and will normally be paid monthly with your personal allowance; **it is your responsibility to pay your rent to the Housing Association.** The easiest way to do this is setting up a direct debit with your bank. If you do not have a bank account, please contact us if you require assistance to open a bank account, or to make alternative payment arrangements.

Under the Scottish flexibilities you can ask the DWP to pay your Housing Costs directly to the Housing Association or to receive your Universal Credit twice per month (the latter will mean you will also have to pay the Housing Costs element to the Housing Association twice per month).

The Bedroom Tax and Benefit Cap- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

The Bedroom Tax is still alive and well but is currently being mitigated by the Scottish Government through Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). And/or if you are affected by the Benefit cap you may be receiving a top up payment to help pay your rent. DHP is administered by the Local Authority, therefore if you are claiming Universal Credit and affected by the Bedroom Tax or Benefit Cap, you will have to make a separate claim to Glasgow City Council DHP to top up your rent.

Council Tax Reduction

Similarly, Council Tax Reduction is also administered by the Local Authority and a separate claim will have to be made to Glasgow City Council for help with Council Tax payments.

How Universal Credit Works

A monthly benefit designed to be like a salary

The government's intention has always been for Universal Credit to be paid like a monthly wage. Claimants are paid monthly in arrears, in one payment to a bank account (or similar) and take personal responsibility for managing their budget.

Each monthly payment is determined by a monthly calculation of entitlement, with the situation at the end of the "**Monthly Assessment Period**" determining the award for the whole of that month.

Claiming Universal Credit

Claims for Universal Credit are made on-line. www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit

Claimants who do not have access to the internet may be able to use the computers in the Jobcentre or Local Libraries, and Southside Housing Association will be providing access to laptops in local outlets for drop in sessions (details to be published shortly).

Claimants who cannot make a claim online or at the Jobcentre etc. can make a claim over the phone tel: 0800 328 5644, Mon- Fri, 8am—6pm.

Claimants need an email address to start the claim and will be expected to have a phone number and bank account.

A claim is not made until all the questions have been completed and the 'submit' button pressed. Claimants should therefore have the following information with them.

- Their (and their partners') NI number
- Their postcode
- Their landlord's name and address
- Their rent details
- Details of any children / relatives / friends that live with them including their name, date of birth and income.
- Account number and sort code of the account in which they would like their UC paid
- Details of any savings
- If working, their estimated net wage and details of any childcare
- Details of any income they receive
- Email address, landline/mobile phone number.

After you apply, you must contact your local Jobcentre Plus within 7 days to make an appointment with a work coach. (The number will be displayed when you submit your online claim) You will not get Universal Credit if you do not attend the appointment.

Once you have made your Universal Credit Claim, you can apply for an Advance Payment If you need help to pay your bills or cover other costs while you wait for your first Universal Credit payment, this will be paid back over a 12 month period. The Advance Payment may include Housing Costs which should be paid to the Housing Association.

Universal Credit is both an in work and out of work benefit.

Apart from a **few limited situations** every Universal Credit claimant is expected to work or prepare for work.

Entitlement to Universal Credit is dependent on agreeing to and signing a "**Claimant Commitment**" which sets out what the claimant will do in order to look for / prepare for work. In a couple **both** have their own Claimant commitment and **both** have to sign for them to receive the (joint claim) award.

Conditionality

Every Universal Credit claimant (for couples there are two claimants) is placed into one of four Conditionality Groups.

The **work-related activities** they have to undertake to receive/continue to receive Universal Credit will depend on which group they are placed in.

There are four groups - these are:

- **No work-related requirements,**
- **Work-focused interview requirement only,**
- **Work preparation requirement and work-focused interview,**
- **All work-related requirements.**

Some claimants are placed in the 'No work related requirements' group.

The claimants who fall into this group are those whom the DWP cannot reasonably expect to work or prepare for work, or who are already earning what is expected of them.

What is the Claimant Commitment?

Every claimant (and their partner) will need to sign a claimant commitment to be entitled to Universal Credit.

The claimant commitment outlines what they need to do in order to be paid, and continue to receive, their full UC award.

Claimants who are fit for work will normally be expected to work 35 hours a week. If they are not working they will be expected to spend 35 hours a week looking for a job. If they are working but not earning what they could be, then they may be asked to take part in a pilot looking at how the DWP can help part time and low paid workers into full time / better paid work.

Some people e.g. those with caring responsibilities, will be able to limit the number of hours they are expected to work. For example a parent whose youngest child is aged between 3 and 13 will be able to limit their expected hours of work to take account of nursery or school.

Some people will not be expected to work, but if not working will be expected to attend interviews at the Jobcentre. For example a parent whose youngest child is aged between one and three.

And some people will not be expected to work or prepare for work. For example parents with a child under one, some carers, some severely disabled.

Failing to keep to their claimant commitment will mean losing some of their Universal Credit – this is called a sanction. Some sanctions can last for up to 3 years.

Hardship payments are available to those people affected by a sanction who can demonstrate that they are suffering hardship. But these hardship payments will need to be repaid and need to be claimed on a monthly basis.

If you would like further information, or assistance to apply, please contact Craigdale Housing Association's Advice Team.