

Housing Benefit Urgent Bulletin

Department for Work and Pensions, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London, SW1H 9NA

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions>

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Contact	Queries about the <ul style="list-style-type: none">• distribution and content of this bulletin, contact housing.correspondenceandPQs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk•
Who should read	All Housing Benefit (HB) staff
Action	For information

Closure of the gateway to new Universal Credit live service claims

1. The 2017 Autumn Statement announced that Universal Credit live service will cease to take new claims from 1 January 2018. This change supports the smooth transition to a full digital service and continues the focus on work, independence and reducing reliance on welfare. It is not value for taxpayers' money to continue to invest in a system that is due to be closed and replaced by the Universal Credit full service.
2. Existing Universal Credit live service claimants will continue unaffected and we will maintain the existing caseload. This includes:
 - transition to Full Service, where a site is transitioning from live service to full service
 - changes of address. This will be classed as a change in circumstances within Universal Credit
 - partner joining an existing Universal Credit claim. This will be classed as a change in circumstances
 - partnership separation. This will be classed as a change in circumstances and both claimants will remain on Universal Credit (if still appropriate)

- where a claimant has been working and their earnings have exceeded the maximum amount, their entitlement will be reduced to nil due to their earnings. Their claim will stay open for up to 6 months within the six month re-award period.
3. Someone making a claim in a Universal Credit live service area after the 31 December 2017 will be directed to claim one of the following benefits:
 - Employment and Support Allowance
 - Jobseeker's Allowance
 - Income Support; and/or
 - Housing Benefit (HB) as appropriate to their circumstances. HB can be taken as part of the data gather for the above benefits through the benefit systems. Where this is not appropriate the claimant needs to be signposted to their local authority (LA) to make a claim.
 - Child Tax Credits and/or Working Tax Credits with HM Revenue & Customs.
 4. LAs will need to ask the claimants about any previous Universal Credit claims and see if the claimants are within the 6 month re-award period. There are a number of ways that the LA can find this information:
 - speaking to the claimant
 - checking the Customer Information System to see if the Universal Credit claim is still in payment
 - Universal Credit termination notification for Local Council Tax Reduction
 - a copy of the termination notification that the claimant receives.
 5. Where a claimant terminates their Universal Credit live service claim by choice they will be able to make a new claim to HB straight away. Claimants in full service areas will not be allowed to terminate their claim and make a claim for HB.
 6. There will be no backdating of the UC claim. If the claimant makes a claim from 1 January 2018 but needs to have their claim looked at from an earlier date then this will have to be requested from the LA as part of the HB claim.
 7. LAs will be able to recover any HB overpayments from the new HB claim. These will not be referred through the Payment Deduction Project system and will revert to business as usual processes.
 8. Universal Credit full service will continue to accept new claims and is not impacted by the change.

9. The Universal Credit Live Service L&D pack is being updated and will be available via Glasscubes and DWP Partnership Managers from 15 December 2017.

What LAs need to do before 31 December 2017

10. All LAs within Universal Credit live service areas will need to open their gateway to HB claims and ensure that their websites and leaflets, etc., are up to date and available as from 1 January 2018 to allow HB claims to be made. All staff will need to be aware of the change to avoid signposting the claimant back to Universal Credit.
11. We will be communicating information regarding new burdens funding to LAs once the live service closure changes have been finalised and we have made the necessary evaluation.
12. Provided below is some questions and answers (Q&A) to support all staff to respond to queries from claimants regarding the closure of Universal Credit live service claimant new claims gateway from 1 January 2018.

Q&A

Q1. Why is Universal Credit closing the live service gateway for new claims?

A1. By the time Universal Credit is fully rolled out, Universal Credit full service will have replaced Universal Credit live service in every Jobcentre/local authority area. It would not represent value for money for taxpayers to continue to invest in a system that is due to be closed and replaced by Universal Credit full service.

This will not affect anyone already in receipt of Universal Credit in a live service postcode area.

Q2. Does this change apply to all Universal Credit claims?

A2. No, if you live in a Universal Credit full service postcode area you will still be able to make a new claim to Universal Credit full service unless you are a family with 3 or more children. Then you may make a claim to one of the following:

- Employment and Support Allowance
- Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income Support; and/or
- Housing Benefit (HB)
- Child Tax Credits and/or Working Tax Credits with HM Revenue & Customs.

Q3. I have been onto the GOV.UK website and it says I cannot claim Universal Credit in my area, why is this?

A3. Universal Credit live service in your postcode area is no longer taking new claims until the full service is rolled out. Details of when the Universal Credit full service will be rolled out in your area can be found on www.gov.uk

If you have not made a Universal Credit live service claim with us before then you may make a claim to one of the following:

- Employment and Support Allowance
- Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income Support; and/or
- Housing Benefit
- Child Tax Credits and/or Working Tax Credits with HM Revenue & Customs.

Claimants already in receipt of Universal Credit will remain on Universal Credit providing other circumstances relating to their claim are unchanged.

Claimants will remain on Universal Credit live service if they are within the 6 month re-award period on Universal Credit live service. In these circumstances claimants will be able to report a change of circumstances which may result in entitlement to a revised Universal Credit live service award.

Q4. I have just separated from my partner can I continue to claim Universal Credit?

A4. When you report your separation from your partner your joint claim will end. However, you will both remain on Universal Credit (if still appropriate).

Q5. I think I should be entitled to Universal Credit from a date prior to 1 January 2018 and want to ask for my claim to be backdated.

A5. If you have not claimed Universal Credit in a live service area prior to 1 January 2018 you will need to claim one of the following and request backdating:

- Employment and Support Allowance
- Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income Support; and/or

- Housing Benefit.

Q6. If I want to claim Universal Credit how can I appeal your decision?

A6. You cannot appeal against the decision not to accept a new Universal Credit claim in a live service area as from 1 January 2018. This is because of changes in the law for Universal Credit as a result of government policy.

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