



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Universal Credit Statistics

Background information and methodology

February 2019

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Purpose of the statistics

Context of the statistics

Universal Credit is a payment to help with living costs for those on a low income or out of work. Eligibility for Universal Credit depends on individual circumstances and location. Universal Credit was introduced in April 2013 in certain pathfinder areas of North West England. Between October 2013 and December 2018, Universal Credit was progressively rolled out and is now available in every jobcentre across the country.

Support for housing costs, children and childcare costs are integrated in the new benefit. It also provides additions for disabled people and carers.

The following benefits will be replaced as Universal Credit rolls out:

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

The main features of Universal Credit are:

- Universal Credit is available to people who are in work and on a low income, as well as to those who are out-of-work
- most people will apply online and manage their claim through an online account
- Universal Credit will be responsive – as people on low incomes move in and out of work, they will get on-going support
- most claimants on low incomes will still be paid Universal Credit when they first start a new job or increase their part-time hours
- claimants will receive a single monthly household payment, paid into a bank account in the same way as a monthly salary; support with housing costs will usually go direct to the claimant as part of their monthly payment

Purpose of the statistics

The statistics allow people to see how many people have claimed, started and are currently on Universal Credit. From March 2017, the statistics also show how many households¹ are on Universal Credit.

The statistics are used by a wide variety of people within the Department for Work and Pensions, other central government departments, Scottish and Welsh devolved administrations and local authorities across Great Britain. The statistics are used to answer Parliamentary Questions and requests under the Freedom of Information Act. They are used by journalists and commentators and the data is included in the national measurement of unemployment. More information about the Office for National Statistics' Claimant Count is below.

Limitations of the statistics

A limited test of the Full Service for Universal Credit was launched in Sutton, South London, on 26 November 2014. From May 2016 Universal Credit full service began its roll out to all other Jobcentre Plus areas and expanded across the country to include all claimant types. The latest information about the areas included in the expansion is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit>. The definitions section below contains more information about what is included in this publication.

To ensure that monthly comparisons can be made, some of the charts used in the publication have been standardised to a 4 ¹/₃ week month using a simple pro rata.

Comparisons between the statistics

Unemployment in the UK is measured using the Labour Force Survey (LFS) consistent with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition. The LFS is a sample survey of people living in private households. The survey asks a series of questions about respondents' personal circumstances and their activity in the labour market. Through these questions every respondent is classified as in employment, unemployed or economically inactive, consistent with ILO definitions.

The LFS and ILO define an individual as unemployed if they are without work, available for work and seeking work. The UK considers anybody who is not in employment by the above definition, has actively sought work in the last 4 weeks and is available to start work in the next 2 weeks, or has found a job and is waiting to start

¹ The term "households" is used throughout the publication, in place of "benefit units". Universal Credit entitlement is assessed on a benefit unit basis. The publication tries to avoid the use of technical language. The often used alternative of "family" might imply that the statistics refer only to benefit units with dependent children. Referring to "households", whilst not strictly accurate, is less technical and less likely to be misunderstood by many users of the statistics.

in the next 2 weeks, to be unemployed. The measure is not dependent on which, if any, benefit is being claimed.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) also publish monthly statistics on the Claimant Count. This is a measure of how many people are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, and since May 2013 includes some people claiming Universal Credit.

Since April 2015, the Claimant Count published by the ONS has included Universal Credit claimants who are required to seek work. Further information on the Claimant Count can be found here:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Claimant+Count>

Since January 2019, DWP has published an Alternative Claimant Count series to measure the number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits. One component of this series are Universal Credit claimants in the 'Searching for Work' conditionality group (excluding those awaiting a Work Capability Assessment). These statistics do not replace the ONS Claimant Count but, given the implementation of Universal Credit and the natural increases to the Claimant Count that this brings, the statistics do provide a:

- consistent unemployed claimant series from 2013
- better indicator of local labour market change over time than the Claimant Count

Further information can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/alternative-claimant-count-statistics>

Source of the statistics

These official statistics have been compiled using data from systems within local offices and records of Universal Credit benefit payments made by the Department.

This and other new data sources will, in time, allow a progressively wider range of breakdowns to be published as new IT systems are introduced. The methodology used and definitions of the official statistics may be updated within subsequent releases, along with information on the impact of any changes to the time series already released. A [strategy](#) for the release of official statistics on Universal Credit was first published in September 2013 and last updated in January 2018.

After investigation of data on Jobcentre Plus offices, it was discovered that there are some instances of incomplete Jobcentre Plus office data from January 2018 to April 2018. This has impacted a limited number of claims in offices where Universal Credit hasn't been fully rolled out. Although this has now been resolved for April 2018, there is no reliable method for recovering the missing data therefore JCP office data between January and March 2018 should be treated with caution. The appropriate action has been taken to ensure that this does not re-occur.

Please note that whilst the latest revisions for overall caseload remain within two per cent of last month's provisional figures, for certain Jobcentre Plus Offices, revisions may be considerably higher. This is due to the migration within the source administrative systems of caseloads from closed offices to merged offices. Further information on closures and mergers can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/update-on-the-future-of-dwp-jobcentres>

In January 2018, DWP announced that there would be changes to published DWP statistical geographies. Further details of which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dwp-statistical-geographies-in-national-and-official-statistics/changes-to-dwp-statistical-geographies-in-national-and-official-statistics>. Although Universal Credit Official Statistics already used 2011 COA based geographies, a methodology change was applied in May 2018 to the full People on Universal Credit backseries. The methodology change was also applied in September 2018 to the full Households on Universal Credit backseries. Changes to both series have been made to ensure consistency with other benefits and have resulted in minor changes to historic geography data.

Definitions within the statistics

From November 2018, the statistical bulletin (in PDF format) has been published every quarter and includes the following four main measures:

- The **people** on Universal Credit includes those who have started Universal Credit (as above) and have not had a termination recorded for this spell, up to the 'count date'. A termination would be recorded either at the request of the individual or if their entitlement to Universal Credit ends (for example, if they no longer satisfy the financial conditions to receive Universal Credit as they have capital over £16,000). The count date for the people on Universal Credit figure relates to the second Thursday of the month. Please note that figures for the number of people on Universal Credit are provisional and will be finalised in the next release (the expectation is that the overall provisional figure will be within two per cent of the final figure). The number of people on Universal Credit figure includes a breakdown by whether the claimant is **in employment** or **not in employment**, which is also subject to revision. An individual on Universal Credit at the count date will be recorded as in employment if they have employment earnings recorded within their completed Universal Credit assessment period closest to the count date. They may not be in employment precisely on the count date.
- The number of **households on Universal Credit** is defined as the number of households that have an assessment period that spans the count date (the second Thursday of the month). There is a further condition that entitlement must have been calculated for the period. This will include households with

claims that are live and in payment, live and have a nil award (due to earnings or deductions) or temporarily suspended. Note that the term “households” is used in place of benefit units.

- The **claims** figure in this release is defined as the total number of claims made to Universal Credit, up to the count date. If an individual goes on to make multiple claims, each claim will be included in the headline figure. Claims that did not progress to the individual starting on Universal Credit are also included. There are a number of reasons why they may not start; for example, the individual may not be eligible to claim Universal Credit.
- A **starter** to Universal Credit is defined as an individual who has completed the Universal Credit claim process and accepted their Claimant Commitment. The headline figure for starts includes all successful claims made for Universal Credit. Therefore, if an individual has started on Universal Credit more than once during the period covered by this release, then each spell will be included in the headline figure. The reporting month in relation to **starts** to Universal Credit relates to a period from the Friday following the second Thursday in the previous month to the second Thursday in the reporting month.

Data for people on Universal Credit is published on Stat-Xplore and ODS tables on a monthly basis. Data for the other measures is updated quarterly alongside the statistical bulletin.

Universal Credit was introduced in 2013 and is now available to all types of claimants across Great Britain.

The expansion of Universal Credit to the full range of claimants was started in May 2016 and rollout was completed in December 2018. By 2023, all existing legacy claimants will have moved on to Universal Credit.

Claimants on full service manage their Universal Credit claim online to monitor payments, communicate with their work coach and record work search progress.

Further information on the roll-out of Universal Credit can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-transition-to-full-service>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-toolkit-for-partner-organisations>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-full-service-and-live-service>

Data Confidentiality

The Code of Practice for Statistics (CoP), specifically Principle T6: Data Governance and the National Statistician’s guidance: Confidentiality of Official Statistics (CoOS

guidance) set out principles for how we protect data on individuals from being disclosed.

Figures in this publication are derived from [Stat-Xplore](#) and are subject to [Introduced Random Error](#) to ensure that no data is released which could risk the identification of individuals. Figures contained within the Statistical First Release (SFR) are also subject to additional rounding unless otherwise stated. The level of rounding applied, which is dependent on the magnitude of the figure being quoted, is shown in the table below.

Users should note that percentages shown within the SFR are calculated using figures prior to rounding.

Statistical First Release rounding policy

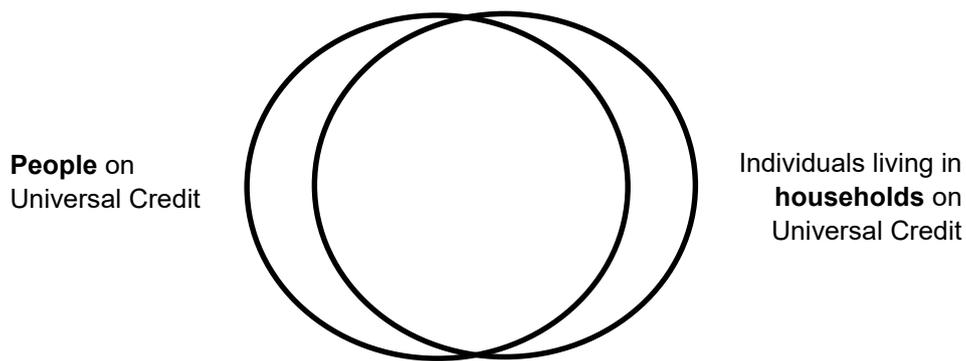
Range	Rounded to the nearest:
0 – 1,000	10
1,001 – 10,000	100
10,001 – 100,000	1,000
100,001 – 1,000,000	10,000
1,000,001 – 10,000,000	100,000
10,000,001 – 100,000,000	1,000,000

Relationship between people and households on Universal Credit

To be counted as a *person* on Universal Credit, an individual has to have completed the Universal Credit claim process and accepted their Claimant Commitment. This has to happen on or before the ‘count date’, with no record of a termination of their claim.

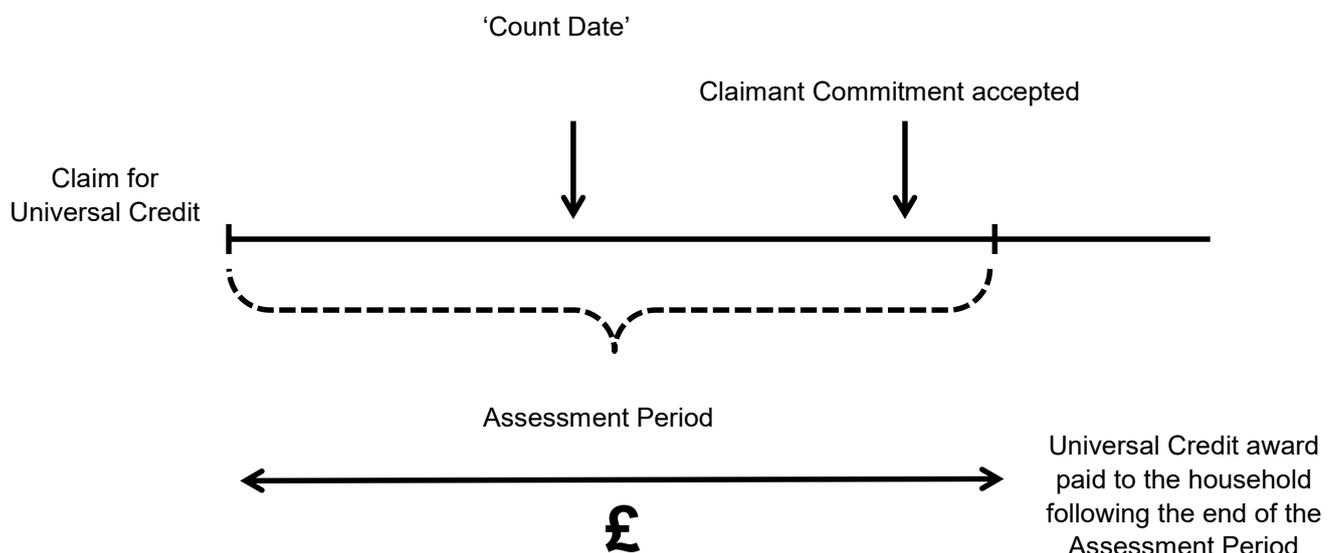
To be counted as a *household* on Universal Credit, there must be an assessment period spanning the ‘count date’. Entitlement to Universal Credit must also have been calculated.

Most people get captured in both measures – but some can appear in one and not the other.



Some people on Universal Credit may not have provided all the information needed to work out their entitlement, or their entitlement to Universal Credit may be in the process of being calculated. These individuals may not have an assessment period spanning the count date. Despite being counted as a person on Universal Credit, they will not appear in the household measure.

Conversely, some people who are not counted as being on Universal Credit on the 'count date', may be included in the corresponding household measure. This may occur where an individual accepted their claimant commitment after the 'count date' - but once accepted, their Universal Credit award will be paid for the period of time covered by the Assessment Period in which the count date falls. This is illustrated below:



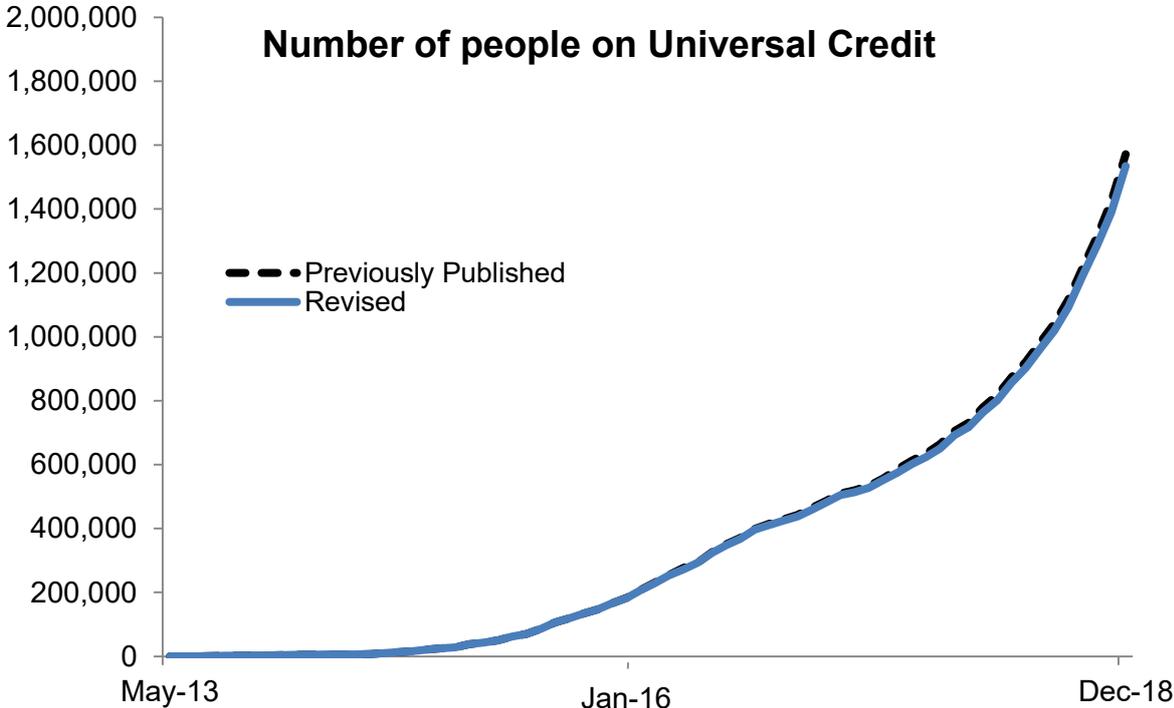
Revisions of people on Universal Credit statistics

Statistics released in October 2017 incorporated improvements to the processing of data for full service claimants which feeds into the Universal Credit official statistics.

The changes to the methodology better identify conditionality group and when claims are closed. The improvements also more accurately recognise separate spells on Universal Credit that were treated as continuous under the previous methodology. As a result of these improvements, the people on Universal Credit series was revised between December 2014 and August 2017.

In February 2019, further revisions were made to the people on Universal Credit figures for the period of January 2016 to December 2018, alongside the restoration of data on the durations of time spent by individuals on Universal Credit. The previously published information on durations was removed from the Universal Credit statistics in April 2018 following identification of an issue with these figures and was not published between April 2018 and January 2019.

The chart below illustrates the scale of this revision. For the latest month in the comparison – December 2018 – the overall number of people on Universal Credit has been revised downwards by 2.4%. This difference varies when looking at lower geographical areas. Users are advised to obtain the new time series from Stat-Xplore.



Further information on this revision can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-statistics-revision-to-number-of-people-on-universal-credit-and-restoration-of-data-on-durations>

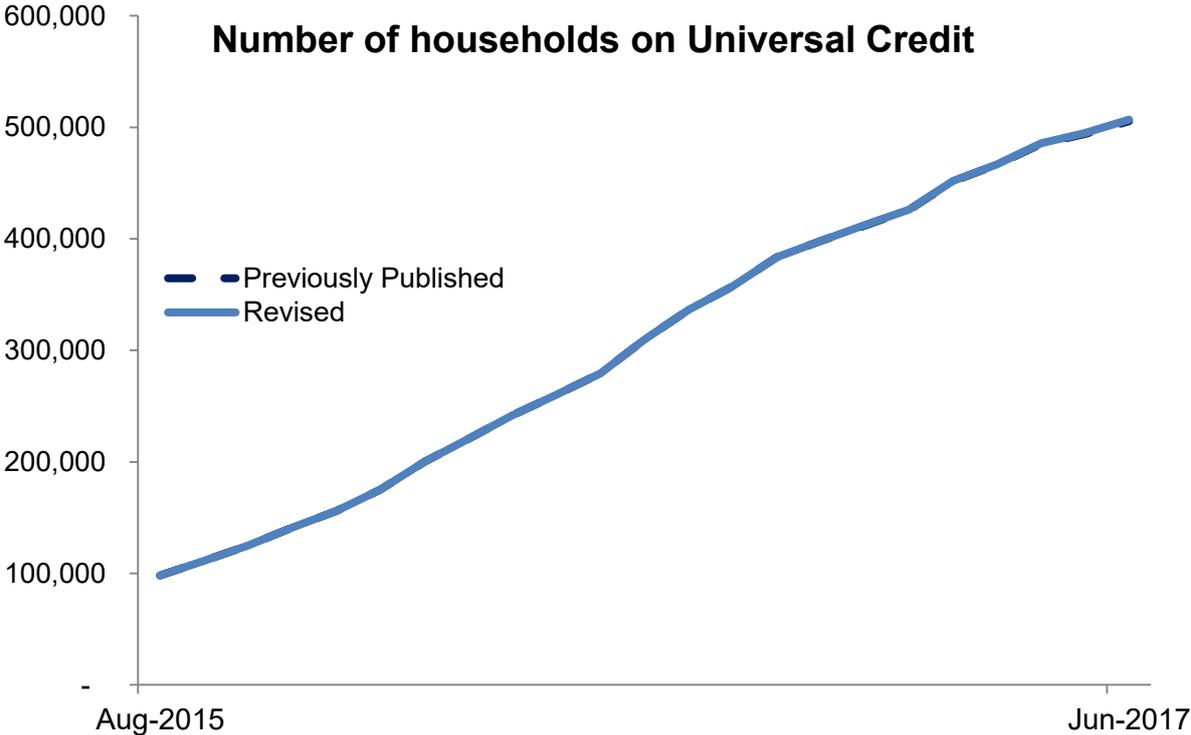
Revision of households on Universal Credit statistics

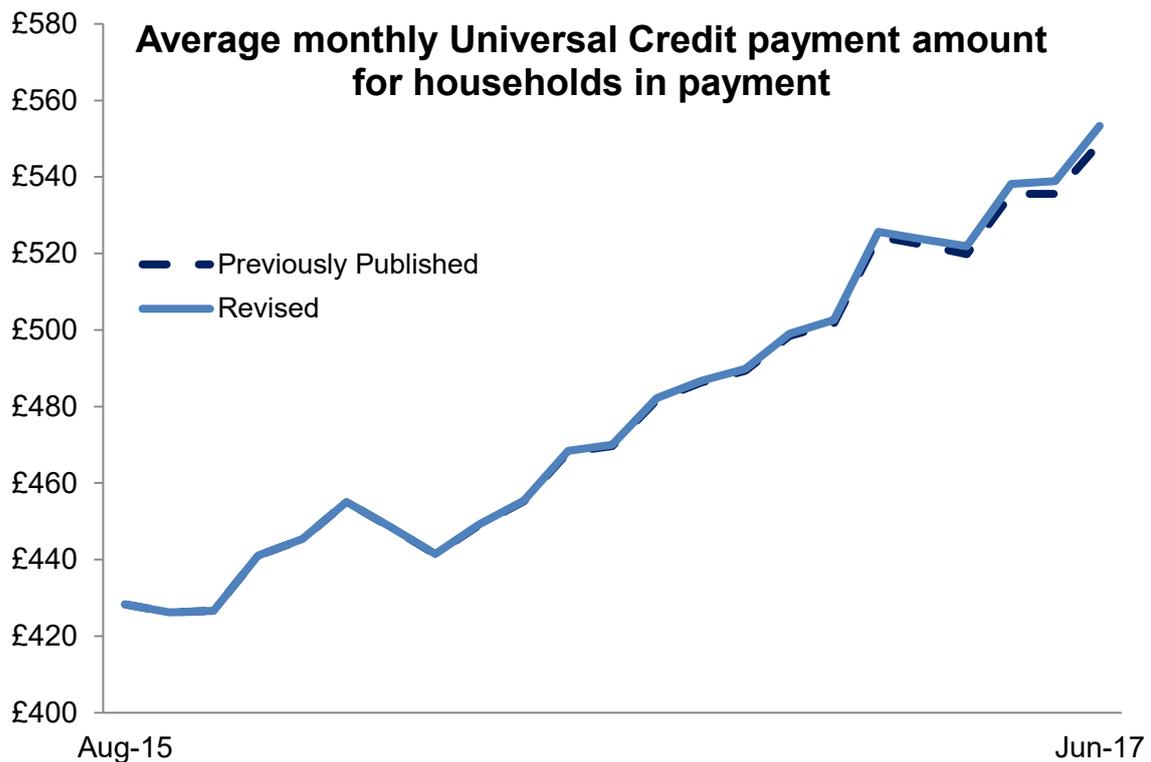
Revised figures for households on Universal Credit were published on 21 March 2017. These revisions relate to the period August 2015 to June 2017 for which household statistics were previously published.

These figures have been revised because awards may be subject to retrospective revision. For example, the amount of Universal Credit due to be paid for a past period may go up where it's identified that a household should have been entitled to an Universal Credit element (such as housing costs), that wasn't included in an earlier calculation of Universal Credit.

The level of revision between previously published figures and the revised series varies across time periods, by geographical area and by other available breakdowns. However, more recent periods tend to be subject to a greater degree of revision than more distant ones.

The charts below illustrate the scale of the revision for the number of households on Universal Credit; and the average payment amount, for households in payment.





Inclusion of full service claimants

Figures released in the publication on 16th November 2016 incorporated data on full service claimants into the three main measures, people on Universal Credit, starts and claims. Figures in the publication were therefore subject to revision and were not comparable to previous publications. Users are advised to obtain an up-to-date time series from Stat-Xplore.

Where a claimant has transferred between live and full service whilst on Universal Credit, this has been treated as a continuous claim for the purpose of measuring the duration of time that the claimant has spent on Universal Credit and not as two individual claim periods.

Breakdown by conditionality regime

Since August 2016 the Universal Credit Official Statistic has included a breakdown showing the number of people on Universal Credit by conditionality regime, as at the count date. These figures are not the same as the employment breakdown, which shows whether an individual has had earnings during their assessment period. The two breakdowns should only be used together with caution.

Conditionality means work-related things an eligible adult will have to do in order to get full entitlement to Universal Credit. Each eligible adult will fall into one of six conditionality regimes based on their capability and circumstances. Different members of a household can be subject to the same or different requirements. As circumstances change claimants will also transition between different levels of conditionality.

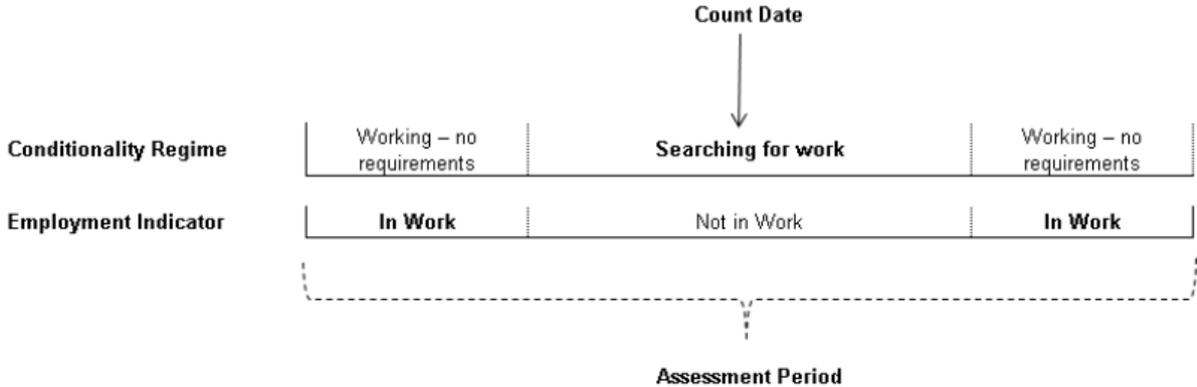
Conditionality regime for claimants can take the following values:

Conditionality Regime	Description
Searching for work	Not working, or with very low earnings. Claimant is required to take action to secure work - or more / better paid work. The Work Coach supports them to plan their work search and preparation activity.
Working - with requirements	In work but could earn more, or not working but has a partner with low earnings.
No work requirements	Not expected to work at present. Health or caring responsibility prevents claimant from working or preparing for work.
Working - no requirements	Individual or household earnings over the level at which conditionality applies. Required to inform DWP of changes of circumstances, particularly if at risk of decreasing earnings or losing job.
Planning for work	Expected to work in the future. Lone parent / lead carer of child aged 1 ^(a) . Claimant required to attend periodic interviews to plan for their return to work.
Preparing for work	Expected to start preparing for future even with limited capability for work at the present time or a child aged 2 ^(b) , the claimant is expected to take reasonable steps to prepare for working including Work Focused Interview.

(a) Aged 1 - 2, prior to April 2017. (b) Aged 3 - 4, prior to April 2017.

Conditionality regime is based on an individual's circumstances on the count date. The employment indicator shows whether earnings were recorded within an individual's completed Universal Credit assessment period closest to the count date.

It is therefore possible for an individual to be 'In Work' using one measure and 'Not in Work' using the other as shown in the example below. Care should be taken when interpreting any tables created by cross-tabulating these two variables.



Split Payments and More Frequent Payments

From September 2018 the statistics on Households on Universal Credit were expanded to include information on households that receive two types of Alternative Payment Arrangements, Split Payments and More Frequent Payments. The statistics also show which households in Scotland are receiving more than one monthly payment as a result of opting to do so via Universal Credit Scottish Choices.

Couples that claim Universal Credit together usually receive one monthly payment paid into an account of their choice, which can be a joint account or a single account in either name. In exceptional circumstances, payment of Universal Credit can be divided between two members of the household. This is known as a split payment. In the statistics, a household is counted as receiving a split payment in a given month if a split payment has been put in place *and* if payment data show that both members of the household received separate payments on the same day, for the relevant assessment period.

In instances where it is identified that one monthly payment is not suitable for a claimant, it may be possible to have their Universal Credit divided over the month to be paid more frequently i.e. twice monthly or, exceptionally, four times a month. In the statistics, a household is counted as receiving a more frequent payment in a given month if a more frequent payment has been put in place *and* if payment data show that the household received more than one Universal Credit payment for the relevant assessment period *and* those payments are not split payments (as defined above).

Since 4 October 2017 new claimants to UC full service in Scotland have been offered the choice to be paid twice monthly from their second assessment period as part of the Universal Credit Scottish Choices, which also give them the option of having their relevant housing costs in the Universal Credit award paid to themselves or to their landlord. From 31 January 2018 the Choices have been made available to all Full Service claimants living in Scotland. In the statistics, a household is counted as receiving a Scottish Choice more frequent payment in a given month if a Scottish Choice has been made for a more frequent payment *and* if payment data show that the household received more than one Universal Credit payment for the relevant assessment period *and* those payments are not split payments (as defined above).

As the statistics are based on whether a household has received payment in a particular month, they are different to the management information on the Universal Credit Scottish Choices that is published by the Scottish Government (available here: <https://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/SocialSecurityforScotland/ScottishUCchoices>), which shows the number of claimants that are offered the choices, and how many who chose to implement a choice.

Payment Timeliness

From November 2018, the statistics on Households on Universal Credit were expanded to include information on payment timeliness for households on Universal Credit full service.

Universal Credit entitlement is calculated over monthly Assessment Periods. Claims which are paid on time will receive payment by the payment due date, which is 7 days after an Assessment Period ends. Payments can be made late for a number of reasons, including:

- verification processes not being completed on-time (either by DWP or the claimant), or
- claims being amended at a late stage.

The proportion of claims which were paid on time is calculated as:

$$\textit{Proportion of claims paid on time} = \frac{\textit{Claims paid on time}}{\textit{Claims paid on time} + \textit{Claims paid late}}$$

Universal Credit Household statistics are subject to revision in future publications. These statistics are based on the status of each claim as the latest count date. Information which is provided or verified after this date can result in further late payments being made to these households. Therefore payment timeliness figures are likely to be revised downwards as more payment data become available.

It is assumed that all claims that are due a payment will be paid: either on time or late. Some claims will not receive a payment, because the claimant is not eligible for support, or because their earnings during the monthly Assessment Period are sufficiently high. These claims are excluded from the calculation, as they are neither paid on time nor late. There are a numerous reasons why a claim might not be in payment.

The statistics show, for households that have an assessment period that spans the count date (the second Thursday of the month) and that have been paid, the proportion which received either full or partial payment on time. The statistics for 'all claims' give a full picture of payment timeliness for UC full service. The figures for 'new claims' reflect the timeliness of the first payment to claimants (i.e. relating to the first Assessment Period of the claim). There are a number of one-off verification processes that must be completed by the claimant and by DWP at the start of the claim – to confirm the current circumstances of the claimant (or both claimants in a joint claim) and their entitlement to UC. Payment timeliness is therefore liable to be lower for new claims.

Claims are recorded as receiving 'some payment on time' if at least some of the UC award has been paid by the date it was due. In some cases the claimant may receive an additional payment after the payment due date, but this does not affect the results.

Claims are recorded as receiving 'full payment on time' where the full UC award has been paid by the date it was due (i.e. the claimant does not receive any additional payments, for the same period of the claim, after the payment due date).

One circumstance where a payment could be made in multiple instalments is where verification processes have not been completed for a particular element of a claim. For example, if verification has not been completed for the housing element, the basic payment may be paid first, followed by a payment in respect of housing once the claimant's entitlement to this element is confirmed. If the basic payment was made by the due date but the housing element was paid later then we would determine that 'some payment' was made on time, but that the 'full payment' was not.

Status of the statistics

Experimental statistics

These statistics are badged as “Experimental” because they are not yet fully developed. As Universal Credit rolls out across the country, the IT systems are introduced and become more established, this will enable the statistics to have better coverage and a more stable methodology.

Quality Statement

These statistics have been developed using guidelines set out by the UK Statistics Authority, and are new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They have, therefore, been designated as Experimental Statistics. Users are invited to comment on the development and relevance of these statistics at this stage.

Feedback

We welcome feedback

Tell us your views on the Universal Credit statistics by emailing peter.gomersall@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Or you can visit the [Welfare and Benefit Statistics community](#) on the Royal Statistical Society StatsUserNet.

Useful links

This document, the statistics release and supporting tables can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/universal-credit-statistics>

View statistics on people starting and receiving Universal Credit at Jobcentre Plus offices in our interactive map: <http://dwp-stats.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f90fb305d8da4eb3970812b3199cf489>

Use Stat-Xplore to create your own tables and charts and further breakdowns of these statistics: <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>