



Department
for Work &
Pensions



Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

Wave 33: Universal Credit Managed Migration and reduced
Housing Benefit Backdating period

March 2018

Research Report No 951

A report of research carried out by NatCen on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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Summary

This research report has been prepared by NatCen Social Research (NatCen), an independent social research organisation, commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It presents findings from Wave 33 of the Local Authority Insight Survey, which focuses on Universal Credit Managed Migration (UCMM) and the reduction in the Housing Benefit (HB) backdating period from six months to one month. This online survey of Housing Benefit (HB) managers at 380 local authorities (LAs) was conducted in spring 2017, and achieved an overall response rate of 40 per cent. A summary of key findings is presented below.

Universal Credit Managed Migration

- Most LAs had done some work to prepare for UCMM, although the extent of the preparation is not known and is anticipated to have been small given that the DWP and LAs are currently at the beginning of the UCMM process and therefore not all details are yet available.
- Nine out of ten LAs reported that claimants would need personal budgeting support and 93 per cent said they would be able to provide that support. However, seven per cent felt they would not be able to provide the support needed.
- LAs requested more information about Universal Credit (UC) from DWP, including a timetable for implementation and information for themselves and claimants.
- LAs are concerned about the impact on claimants of current problems with UC implementation.
- LAs are also concerned about the impact of redundancies within the HB teams resulting from UCMM.
- Only 44 per cent of those LAs who said support for health barriers was required could actually provide it.

Reduced Housing Benefit Backdating period

- On average, LAs reported that since April 2016, 16 per cent of new working-age HB claims were requested to be backdated.
- Almost half of new claims with a backdating request (eight per cent of total HB claims) covered a period of more than one month.
- Over half of LAs reported that the number of working-age HB backdating claims had remained at the same level.
- Over half of LAs (58 per cent) reported having not observed any direct impacts on claimants as a result of shortening the HB backdating period.

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

- There were concerns that people making a backdating claim were likely to suffer from mental or physical illness, or to have low levels of literacy or learning difficulties.
- Claimants making an HB backdating claim were considered likely to have rent arrears, which Discretionary Housing Payments were helping to mitigate.
- Some people in LAs were concerned that vulnerable people are the most affected by the reduced HB backdating period¹.

¹ Current regulations allow for HB claims to be treated as made from when entitlement to a legacy benefit (income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), income-based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and Income Support (IS)) starts, provided the actual HB claim is made within a month of the claim to the legacy benefit. This should help mitigate many of the concerns of the LAs in this regard, because if entitlement to the legacy benefit is itself backdated, the HB claim can be backdated with it.

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List of abbreviations

APA	Alternative Payment Arrangement
CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
DHP	Discretionary Housing Payment
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
HB	Housing Benefit
IS	Income Support
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LA	Local Authority
LHA	Local Housing Allowance
NatCen	NatCen Social Research
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
UCMM	Universal Credit Managed Migration
UC	Universal Credit

1 Summary background and methodology

1.1 Background to the policies and study aims

1.1.1 Universal Credit Managed Migration

Universal Credit (UC) has replaced a number of legacy benefits, including Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Income Support (IS), Tax Credits and Housing Benefit (HB). Under the legacy system, HB was managed by local authorities (LAs), but under the new system UC (which also includes a housing costs element) is managed by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Currently, all new claimants in UC areas apply to UC, and existing claimants move onto UC if they have a change of circumstances – this is known as *natural migration*. Where existing claimants have no change of circumstances, they will be moved over to UC in a phased process which is expected to run from 2019 to 2022. This is known as *managed migration*.

The change impacts on LAs as they will no longer administer HB, and will be responsible (jointly with DWP) for the smooth transition of claimants from the old scheme to the new one. In addition, LAs have relationships with landlords. Under the legacy scheme, HB was paid to landlords; under UC it is paid to claimants. LAs will therefore need to engage with landlords – including their own housing function which might be delivered directly, or via a Housing Association.

It should be noted that managed migration will not commence until 2019 and no detailed plan or timetable is yet available. It is possible that some of the responses in this report relate to LAs' work on UC in general, rather than the managed migration process.

This survey was designed to gather LA feedback on Universal Credit Managed Migration (UCMM) with explicit details of the UCMM programme provided at the beginning of the survey questionnaire (Appendix B). However, it is likely that some LAs have included responses to the broader UC transition, and therefore, these findings may represent opinions and actions as a response to both UCMM and UC in general.

1.1.2 Aims of the UCMM research

The overall aims of the research were to understand how LAs are preparing for managed migration, in order to inform DWP's stakeholder strategy and understand LAs' support needs. Specific objectives were to understand:

- what activities LAs are undertaking internally to prepare for managed migration;
- what activities LAs are doing with others, including claimants and landlords, to prepare for managed migration; and
- claimants' likely support needs with regard to UC, and to what extent those needs can be met.

1.1.3 Limiting HB backdating to one month

Under previous rules, working-age HB claimants might have had their claim backdated for up to six months, if they could show 'continuous good cause' for the delay in making the claim. Under UC, backdating is limited to one month.

HB was brought into line with the UC backdating period, while retaining the requirement to demonstrate good cause for failing to make the claim. This change introduced equality for working-age claimants by aligning HB rules with the current UC approach. The pension age HB regulations remained unchanged.

1.1.4 Aims of the HB backdating research

The aims of this part of the research were to understand:

- how the change in policy had impacted on claimants; and
- whether any particular claimant groups had been affected more than others.

1.2 Methodology

NatCen Social Research (NatCen) conducted an online survey of HB Managers and those in a similar position (who will be referred to as the Benefit Manager for the purpose of describing the methodology) at 380 LAs in England, Scotland and Wales. Email invitations containing unique links to the survey were sent to each LA. Some LAs reported operating a shared service to manage benefits – 53 authorities invited to take part in the survey were managed by 21 named individuals. This meant that 349 Benefit Managers represented the 380 LAs. A copy of the questionnaire in Word format (Appendix B) was provided to give LA respondents the opportunity to prepare answers in advance of accessing the survey online. The Benefit Manager was responsible for sharing the Word questionnaire with colleagues who might help with collating data, and submitting the questionnaire. Any person with the relevant information to answer the questions was able to complete the survey online. The questionnaire was split up into question sections which could be completed independently.

In total, NatCen received responses from 145 Benefit Managers which covered 151 LAs. This amounts to an overall response rate of 42 per cent. This is not an uncommon level of response for an online survey. Participation in this study will have been affected by the respondents' ability and willingness to complete the questionnaire, as participation was entirely voluntary. Competing demands on the LA employees' time, including their workload and statutory requests for information, will also have had an impact on the response rate to this survey. Appendix C shows there was a good spread of participants by type of authority. Nevertheless, the response rate varies somewhat between regions. The overall response rate and variance between different types of LA may affect the generalisability of the findings.

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

The survey responses in this report are drawn from the experiences of the Benefit Managers at the LAs and reflect variable data collection practices around UCMM and HB backdating.

Table 1.1 Response rates by local authorities and Benefit Managers

	LAs	Benefit Managers
Total number issued	380	349
Full survey completed	118	115
Partial survey completed	33	30
Total number of responses	151	145
Response rate	40%	42%

This survey was carried out in May and June 2017.

2 Key findings

2.1 Universal Credit Managed Migration

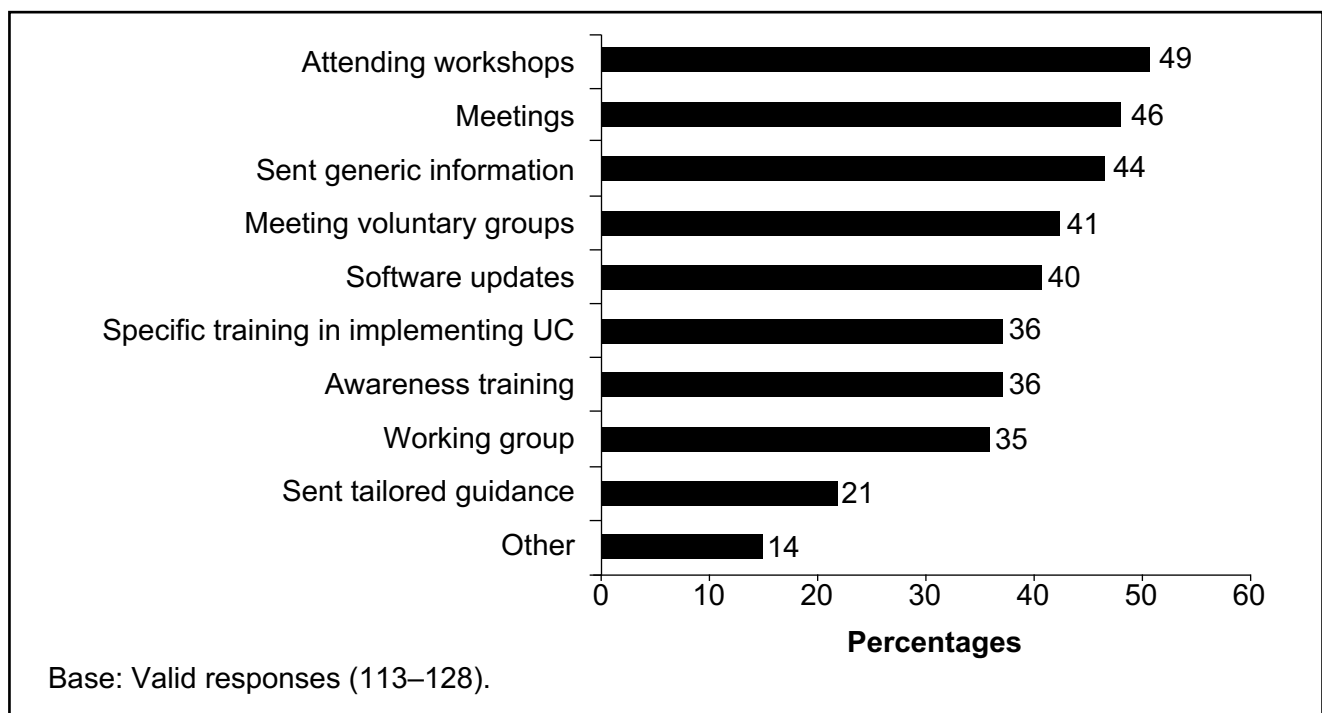
LAs were asked to consider what preparations had been made for UCMM, the types of support HB claimants will need when transitioning to UC and whether that support was available to claimants. LAs were also asked what support they require from the DWP in managing the transition to UC and their concerns about managed migration, both for the LA itself, and for claimants.

This survey was designed to gather LA feedback on UCMM, with explicit details of the UCMM programme provided at the beginning of the survey questionnaire (Appendix B). However, it is likely that some LAs have included responses to the broader UC transition, and therefore these findings may represent opinions and actions as a response to both UCMM and UC in general.

2.1.1 Preparations for managed migration

LAs were asked which activities they had undertaken to prepare their staff and systems, claimants, social housing providers, private landlords and third parties for UCMM. Figure 2.1 shows that just under half of LAs reported having already attended workshops (49 per cent). Forty-six per cent of LAs had attended meetings. Forty-four per cent of LAs had sent generic information, but fewer than half as many LAs had sent tailored guidance (21 per cent):

Figure 2.1 Proportion of LAs who have already undertaken at least one of the listed activities to prepare for Universal Credit Managed Migration

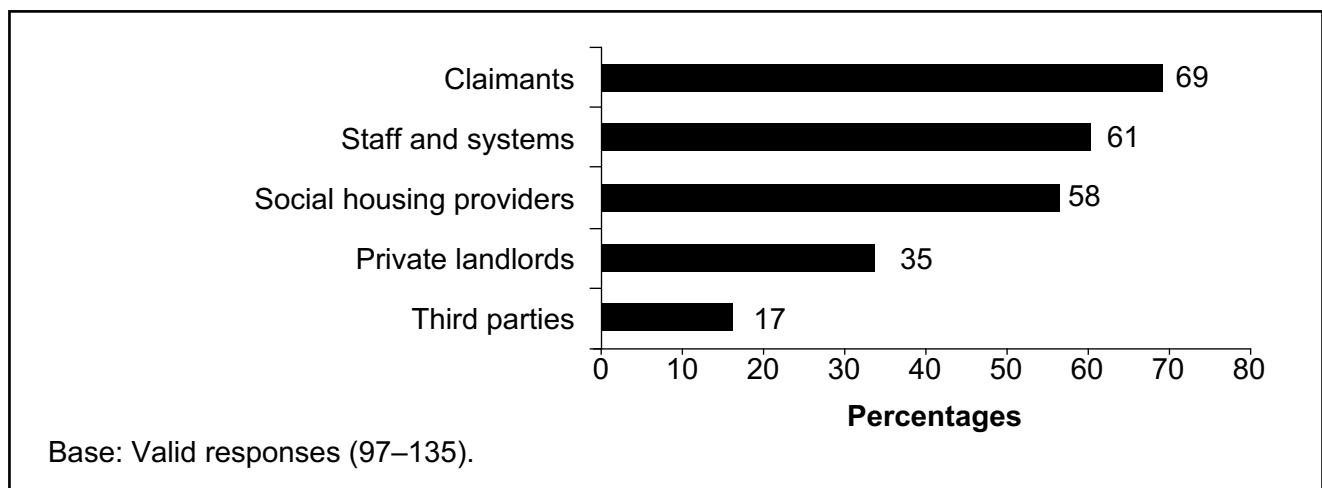


Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

The most commonly undertaken activities might be described as passive (e.g. attending a workshop or meeting). LAs commented that they would do more work on preparing staff and systems for UCMM once a more detailed plan was confirmed, as the only information provided to date on managed migration is the broad implementation timeframe of 2019-2022.

Figure 2.2 shows the proportion of LAs who had already undertaken at least one of the listed activities to prepare for UCMM. Over two-thirds of LAs (69 per cent) had already prepared claimants for UCMM. Just under two-thirds of LAs (61 per cent) had prepared their staff and systems for UCMM. Over a third of LAs (35 per cent) had prepared private landlords. Fewer LAs had prepared third parties (17 per cent). It should be noted that LAs were not asked about the extent of the preparations. Given that the information the LAs had on managed migration was minimal the extent of preparations is likely to be small.

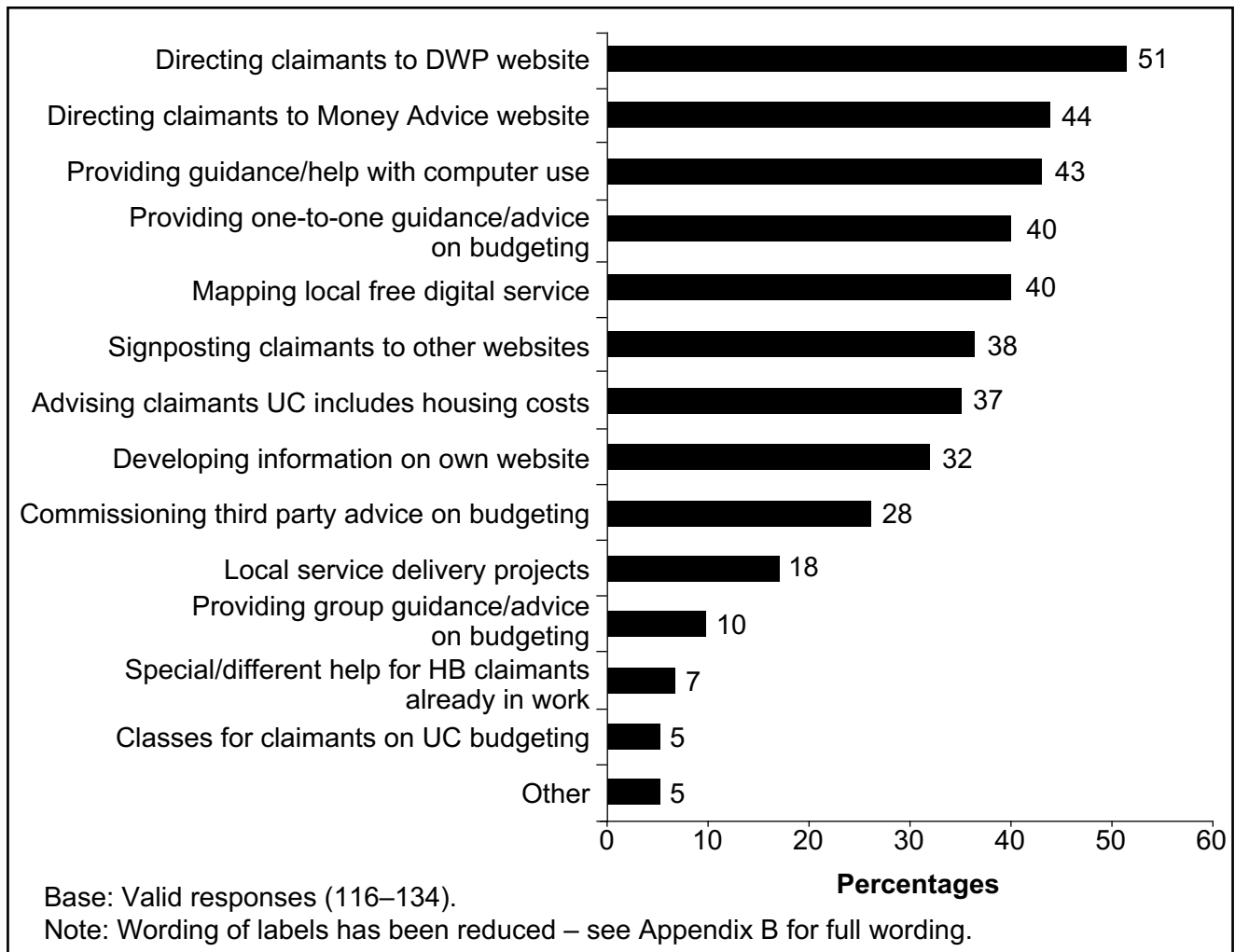
Figure 2.2 Activities LAs have already done to prepare staff and systems for Universal Credit Managed Migration



LAs have already directed claimants to websites; just over half of the LAs have referred claimants to the DWP website to prepare them for UCMM; 44 per cent directed claimants to the Money Advice website and 38 per cent to other websites. Just under a third (32 per cent) of LAs were developing information on their own website to prepare claimants for UCMM. LAs (23 per cent) also reported having already provided help with digital inclusion, by providing help/guidance with computer use (43 per cent) and mapping a local, free digital service (40 per cent). Budgeting advice is also being provided on a one-to-one basis (40 per cent) and, to a lesser extent, by providing group guidance on budgeting (ten per cent), with five per cent providing classes on budgeting. Other activities reported were working with Citizens Advice and operating triage clinics in the local Jobcentres to ensure claimants are on the right benefits.

One LA reported problems with funding and a resulting future decline in support that could be given to claimants. The concern was that there is no budget to provide additional general one-to-one budgeting, money management, or digital advice. Claimant support offered by the LA would, as a consequence, be reduced to low-cost options such as general information on the website, or referral to the DWP and other organisations.

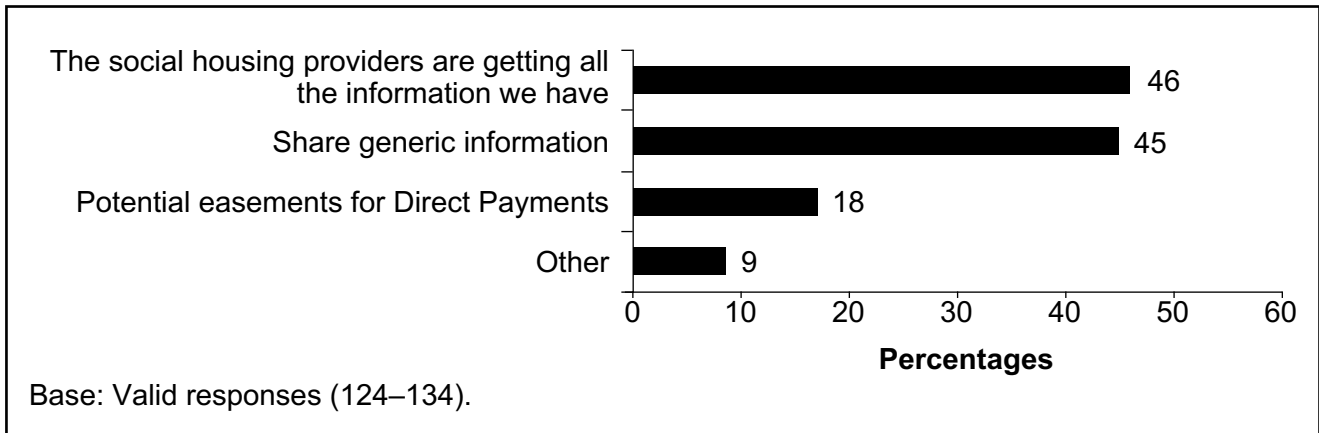
Figure 2.3 Activities LAs have already done to prepare claimants for Universal Credit Managed Migration



LAs reported having already shared generic information with social housing landlords. Forty-six per cent of the LAs said that social housing providers were getting all the information the LAs had. Other activities reported were working closely with main, or largest, registered social landlords (RSL) so that triage arrangements could be put in place in preparation for UC being rolled out for those who are unable to manage their budget, and pay their rent. Other low-cost activities involved passing information on to social housing providers by email or forums. LAs reported having advised social landlords about the process for applying for an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA) and how to contact DWP with queries about APAs, the expectation being that DWP would lead on engagement with social housing providers beyond passing on basic information.

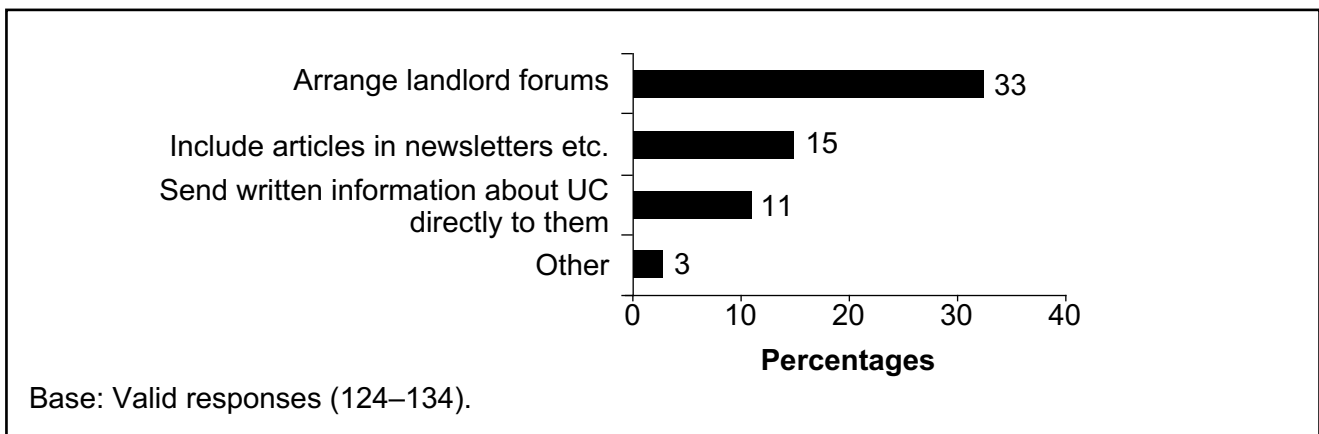
Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

Figure 2.4 Activities LAs have already done to prepare social housing landlords for Universal Credit Managed Migration



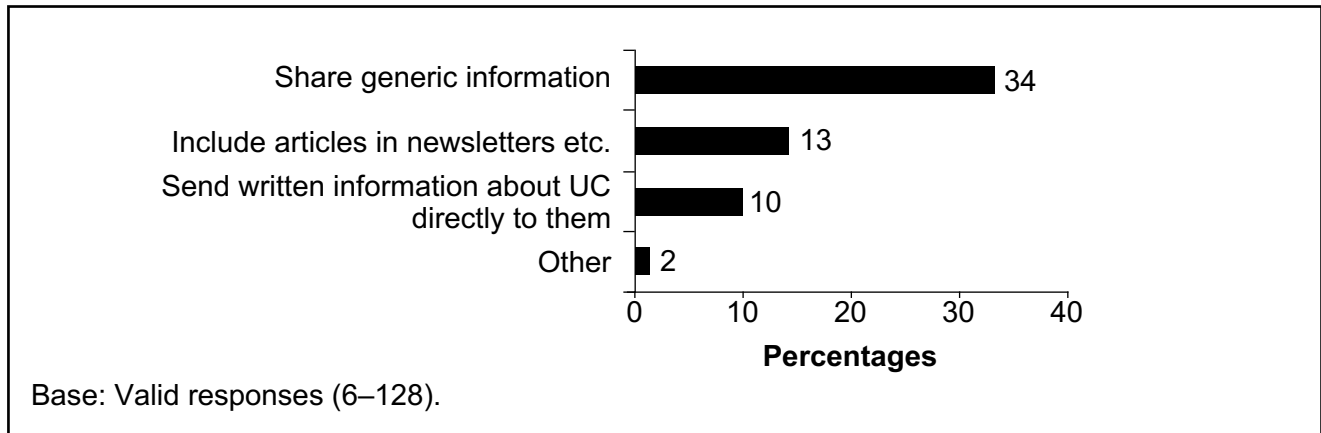
A third of LAs (33 per cent) had arranged landlord forums to prepare private landlords for UCMM.

Figure 2.5 Activities LAs have already done to prepare private landlords for Universal Credit Managed Migration



Just over a third of LAs (34 per cent) had already shared generic information with third parties to prepare them for UCMM. LAs had also sent newsletters (13 per cent) and written information about UC (ten per cent) directly to third parties.

Figure 2.6 Activities LAs have already done to prepare third parties for Universal Credit Managed Migration



2.1.2 Types of support HB claimants will need and whether these services are available within the LA

LAs were asked which types of support they think HB claimants will need to migrate to UC and which of those support services are available from their LA and/or other third parties. A high proportion of LAs who identified a type of support being needed to migrate to UC also confirmed that those support services were available. Ninety-three per cent of LAs who identified personal budgeting support as being needed also reported it as being available. Eighty-three per cent of LAs thought that claimants would need help with digital inclusion and this would be available. Eighty-seven per cent of LAs who thought that claimants will need referrals to sources of funding reported that these services were available.

Table 2.1 Proportion of LAs who identify type of support HB claimants will need and the services available from the LA and/or other third parties

	Percentages of LAs that consider support necessary (%)	Percentages of those LAs who think support is available (%)	Percentages of those LAs who do not think this support is available (%)	Base
Referrals to sources of funding	94	87	13	126
Support with health barriers	94	44	56	86
Digital access and inclusion support	93	86	14	125
Personal budgeting support	92	93	7	123
Debt advice	90	83	17	121
Information about UC	80	80	20	126
Other	15	50	50	20

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2.1.3 Support LAs need from DWP to help with UCMM

LAs were asked what, if any, support they need from DWP to help with UCMM. This open question (see Appendix B, Questionnaire) generated a variety of responses. Many responses reflect that the UCMM process is still in its formative stages, and active implementation is not planned until 2019, with the details of the process still being decided.

While the focus of this question was on UCMM, the open nature of the question may have allowed LAs to provide feedback on the UC programme in general, which should be considered in the interpretation of these findings.

Timetable and planning

A timetabled plan for implementation of UCMM was seen as crucial to allow the LAs to plan. It was noted that the information provided by DWP needs to be the final considered plan of action that will not change. This would not only assist LAs in the planning of their own resources but was seen to be critical to maintaining public trust in the process and helping vulnerable claimants understand how the process will operate. LAs requested detailed guidance that specifies task lists and planning outlines, such as were available when Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was introduced. One LA commented that the nature of the UC roll-out and system makes it difficult for LAs to keep up with changes to guidance.

Funding

Funding was highlighted as an issue by LAs to ensure that the mechanisms were in place to support claimants in the UCMM process. Additional, and long-term, funding was requested due to the demands placed on LAs as a result of managed migration. LAs identified that, under current budget arrangements, only a minimum amount of support could be offered.

Communication with DWP

A knowledgeable contact point with whom questions could be raised and from whom clear and correct information would be provided is required. Better information sharing so that LAs can offer claimants the help and advice they will inevitably seek was identified as being needed. LAs were concerned that they were unable to help the claimants who came to them for advice as DWP will not discuss individual UC claims with LAs. An agreement to share information or provide LAs with access to DWP UC data systems would benefit LAs in assisting claimants who come to them as their first point of contact.

Data management

In addition to a timetable for managed migration, details of how data will be transferred and whether the data will need preparation or cleaning before it is transferred were highlighted as being required. It was noted that the LAs need to know who is impacted, and when, to ensure a smooth transition.

Data sharing was also very important for LA finances to ensure the claims for Local Council Tax Support are processed quickly and efficiently to reduce financial concerns for the customer and unnecessary recovery steps by the LA.

LAs requested that DWP improve UC processing times and the accuracy of assessing housing costs.

Training and liaison with landlords and third parties

LAs consider training and liaison with landlords and third parties as very important for UCMM. It was considered to be key that help for private landlords was given more consideration. It was noted that most LAs are very reliant on private landlords to help with the housing crisis, so their engagement was critical. Clear and concise free training, where the trainers are people who are used to working in local offices and are very familiar with the benefits and the changes to the systems, was requested by LAs. Training and/or information sessions delivered by DWP would be welcomed and beneficial to LAs and partners affected directly by UCMM.

2.1.4 LA concerns about preparing for UCMM

LAs reported their biggest concerns about preparing for UCMM. As with Section 2.1.3, this open question (see Appendix B) generated a variety of responses, including those that reflect how the UCMM process is still in its formative stages, with implementation not planned until 2019, and LA experiences of the UC programme in general.

Lack of information about UCMM

One of the most common responses was that there had not been enough information, as yet, from DWP about UCMM, which has caused issues for planning. Lack of clarity on timings of the migration has impacts on planning and LAs are not sure whether the switch will be a gradual process or a complete roll-out, which could have serious implications for coping with the expected enormous demand for services when LA involvement is expected to have reduced. LAs reported being concerned that they would not be given adequate advance notice of when local cases are migrating and how this will happen.

Increased workload for LAs

Increased LA workload was created by lack of awareness of UC and its implications from claimants, their landlords and other organisations. LAs noted that they were beginning to be, or expect to be in the future, the first point of contact for claimants who have queries about their housing payments. This situation was expected to worsen as the migration progressed. LAs were concerned by the lack of support claimants received by the jobcentres and via UC contacts. It was reported that claimants are not getting prompt payments and so are getting into arrears with their rent. Landlords are making contact with the LAs directly to seek information about the non-payment of rent, unaware that their tenants are in receipt of UC. LAs were very concerned about the impact on claimants of rent arrears and being in financial crisis while awaiting UC assessment and payments. They felt that delays and errors in UC assessments could result in non-payment of rent and the tenant's eviction. LAs identified that this will have the consequence of increasing pressure on homeless accommodation and the LA housing teams.

IT systems and data management problems were raised as a concern. The type and frequency of data sent by UC Service Centres to LAs contributed to increasing staff workloads. LAs also had concerns over benefits being miscalculated, including concerns about the double-counting of UC and HB and the absence of fraud checks for UC.

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Although concerned about an increase in claimant queries, LAs identified that this had not been recognised in the funding plans where the fact that UC would be managed by DWP would reduce the workload. LAs expressed concern about the intended reduction in the administration grant and the redundancies which would result from changes in HB management and UCMM.

Supporting landlords

It was suggested that DWP provide more support to landlords, with social landlords being identified as needing more help in relation to the APAs. Improving the timeliness of UC payments to claimants would assist landlords and ensure they would not have to chase rent or instigate eviction proceedings against their tenants.

LAs had concerns about private landlords refusing to rent to benefit claimants. The bureaucracy of the system and the slow payments mean that landlords are disincentivised to stay in this market. One LA commented that a large private landlord supplying accommodation in the area had withdrawn from providing temporary housing, which had largely reduced the LA's ability to house those in need of emergency housing. There were concerns that evictions, resulting from late or non-payment of HB, would increase, and the removal of accommodation from the housing market would only make the situation worse.

Communication with DWP

LAs complained of a lack of communication with DWP in relation to supporting claimants with their queries. There was confusion about how to use the information provided by UC to assess claims. The information provided may be out of date or incorrect regarding when claimants would migrate to UC. There were concerns that DWP/UC Service Centres were giving claimants incorrect information, in that they were advising claimants that they were in receipt of HB when they were on UC. LAs found that they were then unable to discuss cases with DWP and had no main knowledgeable contact with whom to discuss difficult cases. A dedicated permanent liaison contact and a telephone number to call were identified as being helpful to the LAs in supporting claimants.

LAs stressed the importance of local knowledge in being able to support those who need it. The fact that there is no intent to involve LAs in assisting local claimants with UCMM is a large concern. This is especially concerning to LAs who are aware that claimants will need help with personal budgeting and online support.

Difficulties for claimants understanding how UC works

In addition to concerns about managed migration, LAs reported that claimants found UC systems and payments difficult to understand. LAs reported that claimants struggled to access their online account to supply the evidence needed of their UC award breakdowns.

Claimants were reported to not understand the amount of rent due if they had been in receipt of HB for many years and payments had been made to landlords on their behalf by the LA. One LA reported that on completing the HB form claimants often state that their rent is '£0.00'.

Impact of UCMM on vulnerable people

LAs shared their concerns about the impact on vulnerable claimants in particular, who need more individual support with UC and are more likely to struggle with the digital service. The difficulties claimants experience were identified as being compounded by the confused presentation of UC updates communicated by DWP/UC Service Centres.

2.2 Housing Benefit Backdating

LAs were asked whether they had accepted new claims for HB since April 2016, what proportion of backdating claims they had received, the time period for the backdating requests and whether the number of backdating requests had changed over time. LAs were also asked to consider which groups of people were most likely to make requests and the most common reasons for backdating requests being made, and whether those making claims had significant rent arrears. LAs also recorded their observations of the impacts on claimants directly as a result of shortening the Housing Benefit backdating period from six months to one month.

2.2.1 Proportion of new HB claims requested to be backdated and time period of backdating requests

All of the LAs had accepted new claims for HB since April 2016. On average, LAs reported that since April 2016, 16 per cent of new working-age HB claims included a backdating request. Half of these requests covered a period of one month or less. The remaining 47 per cent covered a period of more than one month – which represents eight per cent of all new working-age HB claims. One LA commented that many claimants will have gone over a month before they realise that they are having problems and need to claim.

Table 2.2 Since April 2016, roughly what proportion of new working-age HB claims were requested to be backdated?

	Mean HB claims requested to be backdated (%)	Median HB claims requested to be backdated (%)	Median all HB claims (%)
One month or less	53	50	3
More than one month, but less than three months	26	25	2
Three months or more, but less than six months	15	10	1
Six months or more, but less than a year	6	2	0
A year or more	1	0	0
Don't know	6	0	0

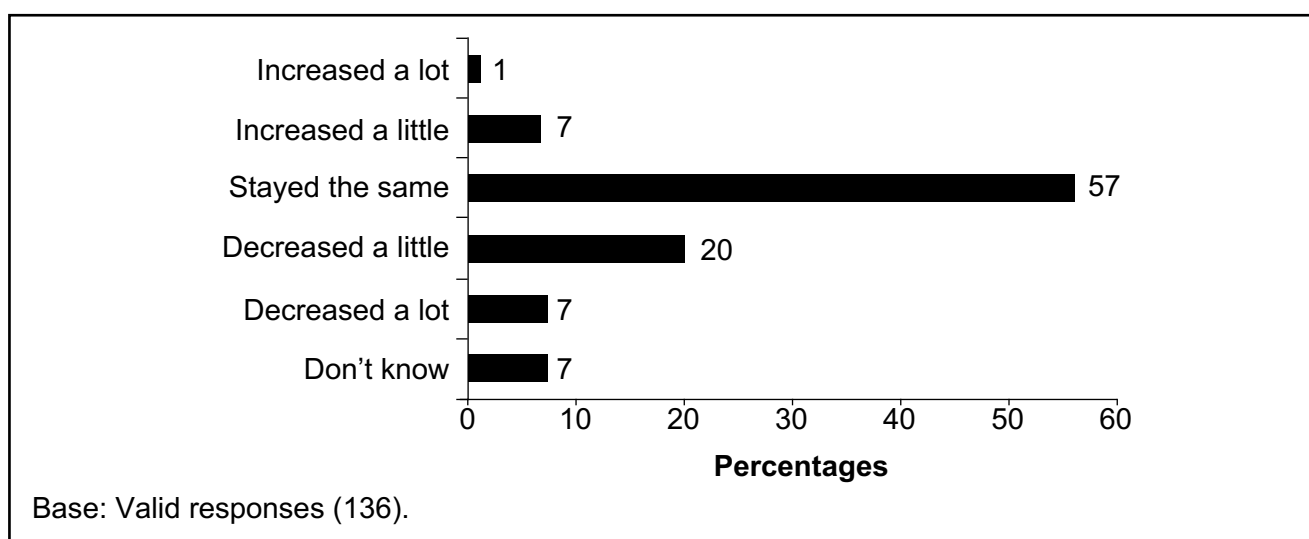
Base: Valid responses (81 – 86).

Note: Because these are averages of each LA who gave their proportions, it does not add to 100 per cent.

2.2.2 Change in number of requests since April 2016

The majority of LAs reported that since April 2016, the number of requests to backdate HB claims had stayed the same, compared with previous years when the backdating period was six months. Twenty-seven per cent of LAs thought the number of requests had decreased, either a little (20 per cent) or a lot (seven per cent). Just eight per cent of LAs thought the number of requests to backdate HB claims had increased either a little (seven per cent) or a lot (one per cent).

Figure 2.7 Since April 2016, have the number of requests to backdate HB claims increased, decreased or stayed the same compared with previous years when the backdating period was six months?



2.2.3 Groups most likely to make a backdating request

Respondents were asked to identify the groups who were most likely to make a backdating request. As there is limited information to be collected at the start of a HB claim, these responses are based on variable data collection and, in some cases, they rely on the respondent's opinion.

Eighty-nine per cent of respondents reported that HB claimants with mental and/or physical disabilities or health conditions were one of three groups who most commonly apply for backdating. These claimants were reported at later questions to be less able to navigate the benefits system and did not have representation to help with their claims.

An example was given of a claimant whose social worker had changed, and did not identify that HB had not been claimed. When the fact that the claimant had not been claiming HB was realised, their HB could only be backdated for one month. This situation, and similar ones, was commented to result in vulnerable people having increased debt that they would be unable to clear.

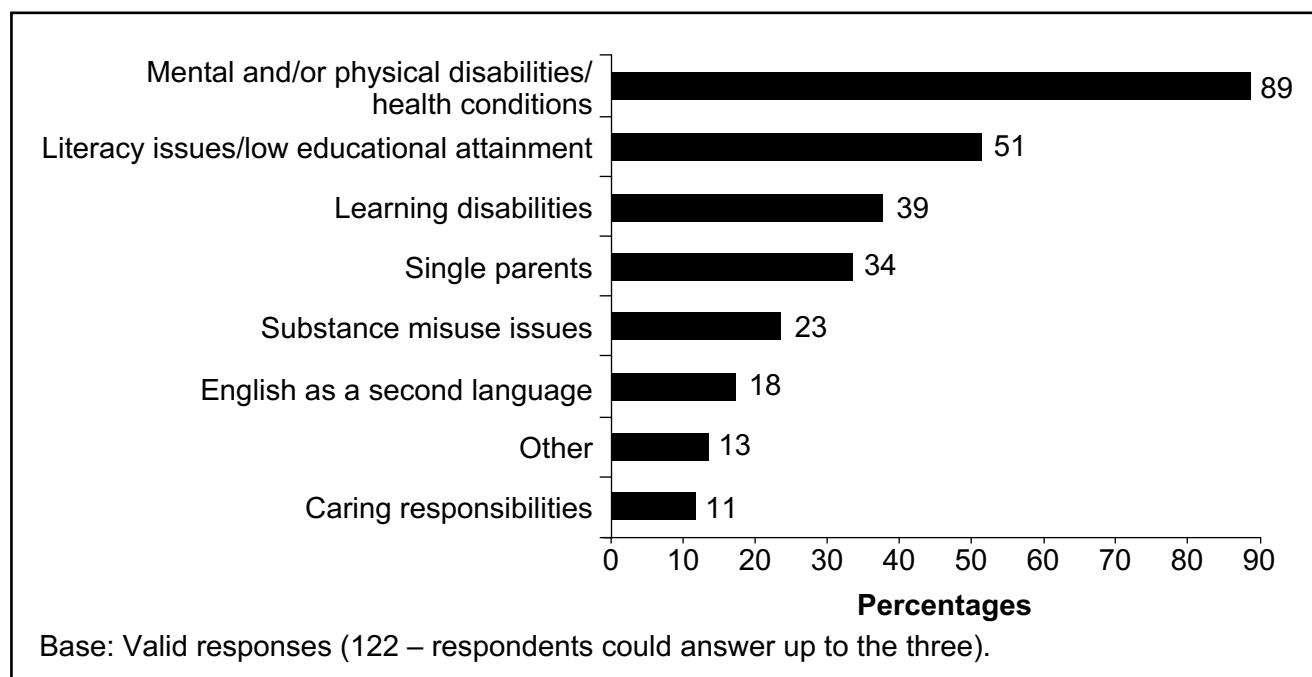
Fifty-one per cent of respondents identified people with literacy issues or low educational attainment as most likely to make a backdating request, and thirty-nine per cent of respondents identified those with learning disabilities as most likely to make a backdating request.

Thirty-four per cent of respondents felt that single parents were one of the most likely groups to make a backdating request. This is slightly higher than the proportion of HB claims made by single parents (23 per cent as of May 2017).

Of the other reasons given, those who had never claimed before, lacked information about the benefit system or were unaware that there was a time limit to claims were mentioned. People who were working or had recently lost their job and were looking for work were also identified as a group of people who made a backdating request. This often resulted from poor knowledge of their benefit entitlements, or hope that they would quickly find alternative employment.

Currently, the DWP does not collect demographic information on all HB claimants concerning their medical conditions, and therefore it is unknown whether the LAs' opinions are broadly reflective of the overall makeup of the HB claimant population.

Figure 2.8 Still thinking of all the backdating requests for working-age HB claims received since April 2016, which of the following groups are most likely to make a backdating request? Please select the three groups who most commonly apply for backdating



2.2.4 Reasons for backdating claims

As reasons for backdating claims are not collected and analysed by LAs, these responses are based upon personal experience of the Benefit Managers in dealing with reviewing backdating requests for good cause. Consequently, this section is based upon the Benefit Managers' perceptions of the most common reasons for backdating claims.

Seventy-one per cent of LAs reported that medical reasons were among the three most common reasons for HB backdating requests. Those with health problems were also identified as being negatively affected by the restriction of backdating to claims:

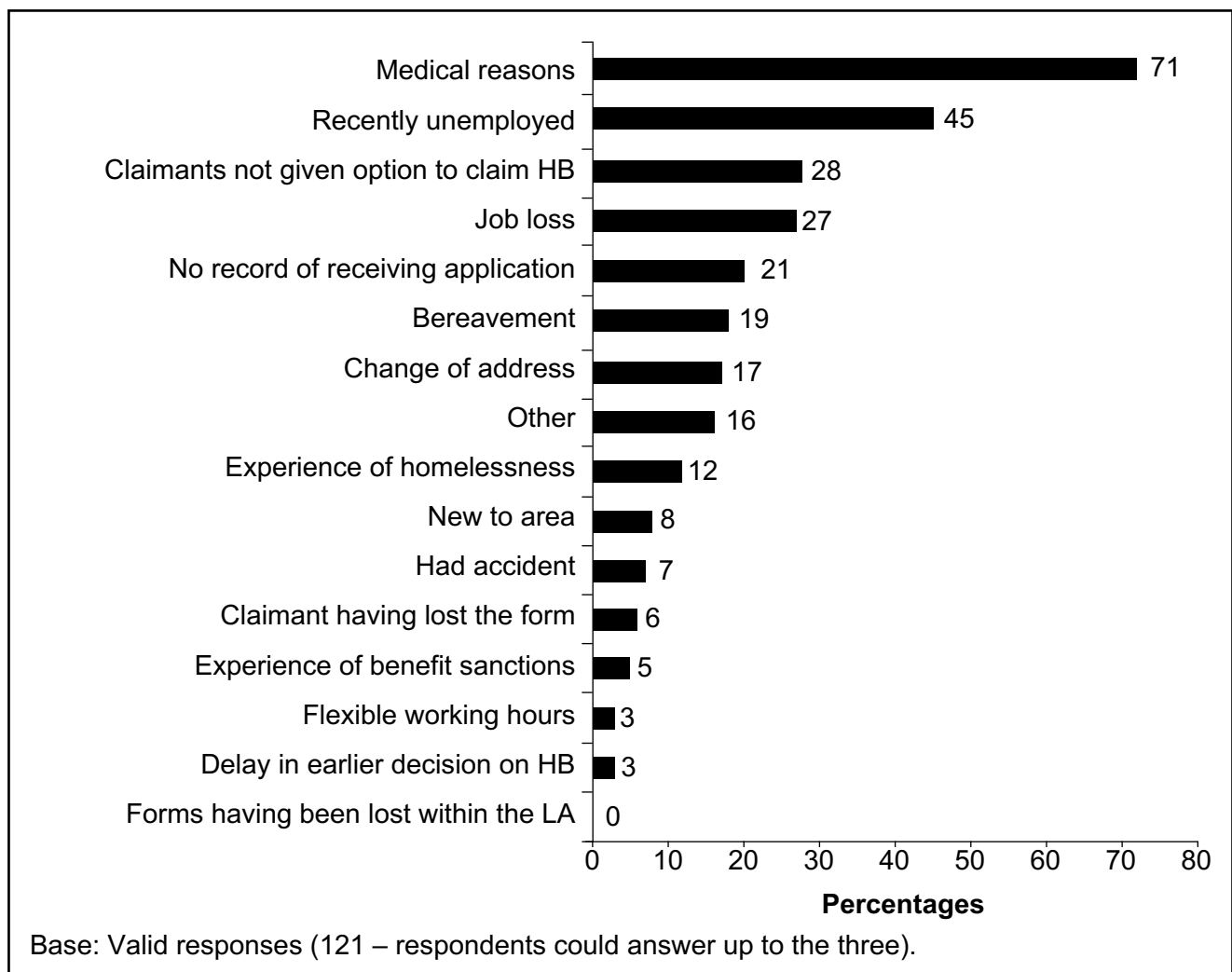
Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

Forty-five per cent of LAs reported that being recently unemployed was one of the three most common reasons for backdating requests. The cause of backdating claims made by the recently unemployed were described by one LA as the result of people waiting to see if they can get a new job or waiting to see what their average pay will be while working on a zero hours contract. It was felt that such claimants were being penalised by the reduced backdating period who will also incur debts resulting from the delay in their application for HB.

Twenty-eight per cent of LAs identified that claimants who had not been given the option of claiming HB when applying for other benefits was another common reason for claims for HB backdating. When reporting the impacts of this situation, LAs reported that claimants felt that they had been misinformed about the benefits they could claim, leading to bad feeling and an increase in appeals on the decision taken about the period of their claim.

Perceived most common reasons for backdating claims

Figure 2.9 Again, thinking of all the backdating requests for working-age HB claims received since April 2016, which are the three most common reasons? Please select the three most common reasons

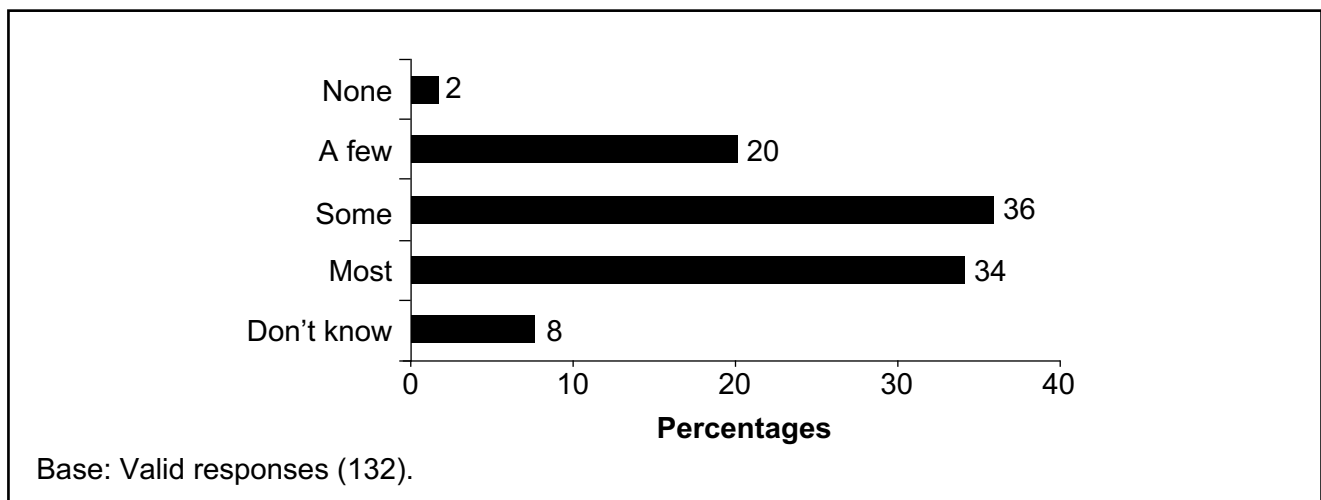


Proportion of HB claimants with significant rent arrears

In this survey, the term ‘significant rent arrears’ was left for Benefit Managers to self-define, to reflect the regional variances in rental costs and therefore rent arrears.

A third of LAs (34 per cent) reported that most of the HB claimants they saw requesting backdating had significant rent arrears. Over a third of LAs (36 per cent) identified that some of the HB backdating claimants had significant rent arrears. Therefore, 70 per cent of LAs reported that at least some of the HB backdating claimants had significant arrears. A fifth of LAs reported that a few of the HB claimants requesting backdating had significant rent arrears. When reporting the impacts of the reduction in the HB backdating requests, LAs reported that the reduction in the backdating period was increasing the proportion of claimants with rent arrears. Claimants were found to be in rent arrears as a result of not having made an HB claim before rent arrears had become an issue. Those who had become unemployed for the first time and were unfamiliar with benefit claim procedures, and those with mental health issues and learning disabilities, were found to have not made a HB claim until some months after they or their landlord realised that they could not pay their rent. LAs reported that claims for HB backdating for these claimant groups therefore often exceeded the one-month backdating period.

Figure 2.10 What proportion of HB claimants requesting backdating have significant rent arrears?

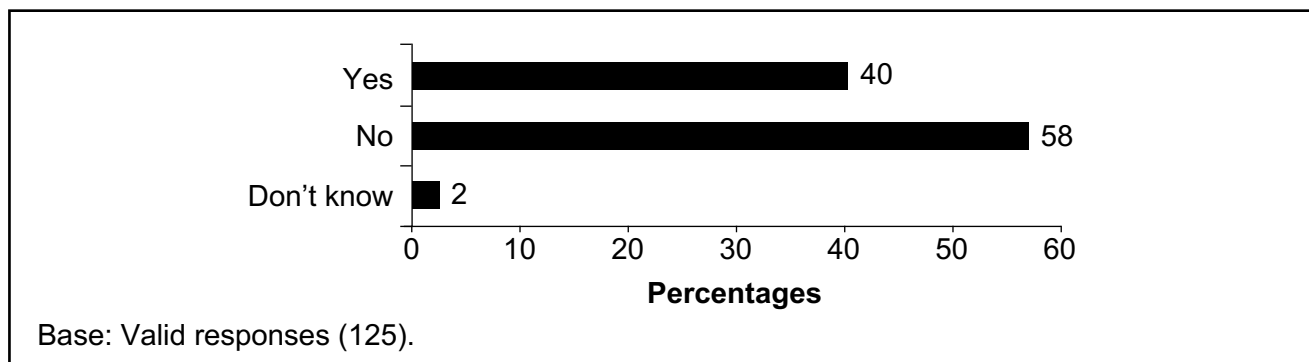


2.2.5 Impacts observed on claimants of HB backdating

Over half of responding LAs (58 per cent) reported having not observed any positive or negative impacts on claimants directly as a result of shortening the HB backdating period from six months to one month.

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

Figure 2.11 Have you observed any positive or negative impacts on claimants directly as a result of shortening the HB backdating period from six months to one month?



Of the LAs who identified an impact on claimants as a result of the shortening of the HB backdating period, the vast majority felt that the effects on claimants were negative (39 per cent).

Of the 39 per cent who felt there had been negative impacts of the reduced HB backdating period, potential increases to rent arrears and ongoing financial hardship were identified as concerns. One LA also noted that landlords were increasing their efforts in reclaiming rent that was due.

Some LAs felt that the reduction in the HB backdating period was having a negative effect on vulnerable claimants, for example, those with mental health issues, physical health problems and learning disabilities. From their experience, one Benefit Manager said:

'One month is a very tight time limit. We have an online intention to claim form. We have a box which asks people to provide any further information, including backdating requests. However, if they don't enter at the time they want a backdate and only mention it at the time of the office appointment which, at busiest times can be a month down the line, it causes an issue as we can only go back a month from when they mention it. The date of claim will be the date that the intention to claim was made, so we are not able to backdate. It would be fairer if the backdate could be a month back from the date of claim rather than date of request. Very vulnerable customers, e.g. severe mental health issues, it can take several months before landlord/support workers identify there is an issue and, as we can only go back one month, this leaves people with large rent arrears at a period they are not able to cope with such issues.'

Another LA gave the example of a claimant who had been sectioned under the Mental Health Act and was in hospital for three months but, on their return, their HB could only be backdated for one of the three months the claimant had been in hospital.

The additional pressure being in rent arrears would have on someone already suffering from mental health difficulties is a matter of great concern to LAs. Vulnerable claimants were identified as previously having received the greater backdating awards and now were considered to be missing out on payments they once would have received. LAs were concerned that their ability to help people in genuine need had been severely restricted.

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

However, it should be noted that current regulations allow for three-month backdating if requested within one month of an award for a legacy benefit (Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Income-based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and Income Support (IS)), and this will help mitigate many of the concerns of the LAs in this section.

Operationally, LAs commented that the backdating period was too short in relation to how claims are submitted and processed. This was reported to be adding to the pressure on LAs to process claims. Mention was made of the fact that if HB is not mentioned at point of contact with the LA about benefits, then they are unable to backdate further, even if there is good cause for the backdating request.

LAs reported an increase in appeals in respect of the backdating of HB claims. However, one LA felt that since the reduction of the HB backdating period, claims were submitted more quickly, indicative of a potential behavioural change in claimants as a response to the policy.

Some of the LAs mentioned that they had submitted a Discretionary Housing Payment award claim in respect of the increase in arrears, which is a mitigation implemented by the DWP to specifically address issues such as rent arrears of HB. LAs noted that discretion in the backdating period is needed: one LA noted that there had been some cases where they would have liked to have employed discretion to backdate further, due to the reasons given by the claimant. As this was not possible, the LAs felt that claimants have been left with substantial rent arrears and they do not know what to do as they do not have the means to pay them back.

LAs also reported that where HB could not be backdated beyond a month, it was resulting in bad feeling and complaints from claimants. Some claimants either had been, or felt that they had been, ill-advised in relation to their benefits. One LA noted that there was confusion about UC which was impacting on claims for HB. LAs were especially concerned for people who are unable to navigate the system and, if support relating to benefits is not provided, or those providing support do not advise effectively, then the most vulnerable lose out.

Appendix A

Preparations for managed migration

This question is about preparations for managed migration. For each activity shown below, please indicate whether your local authority (LA) has already done it, is planning to do or is considering doing, to prepare **staff and systems** for Universal Credit Managed Migration (UCMM)?

Table A.1 Preparations for staff and systems for Universal Credit Managed Migration

	Already done	Planning to do	Considering doing	Considered doing but didn't do	Have not considered doing	Nothing done	Total
Awareness training	36	34	21	0	2	7	100
Specific training in implementing UC	36	32	21	1	3	7	100
Sent generic information	44	16	20	1	7	11	100
Sent tailored guidance	21	27	22	1	9	19	100
Software updates	40	19	16	1	4	21	100
Meeting voluntary groups	41	24	16	2	7	10	100
Attending workshops	49	19	13	3	4	13	100
Working group	35	21	19	3	8	13	100
Meetings	46	23	14	2	4	11	100
Other	14	6	4	2	5	68	100

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

For each activity shown below, please indicate whether your LA has already done, is planning to do, or is considering doing to prepare **claimants** for UCMM?

Table A.2 Preparations for claimants for Universal Credit Managed Migration

	Already done	Planning to do	Considering doing	Considered doing but didn't do	Have not considered doing	Nothing done	Total
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Providing one-to-one guidance/advice on budgeting	40	19	18	4	6	13	100
Providing group guidance/advice on budgeting	10	11	23	11	25	19	100
Commissioning third party providers to provide guidance/advice on budgeting	28	8	20	14	14	17	100
Providing guidance/help with computer use	43	18	24	1	1	12	100
Developing information on own website	32	38	17	1	3	9	100
Directing claimants to Money Advice website	44	23	18	1	3	11	100
Directing claimants to DWP website	51	25	11	0	3	10	100
Signposting claimants to other websites for information	38	25	18	1	4	14	100
Mapping local free digital service	40	21	16	1	7	16	100
Classes for claimants on UC budgeting	5	7	19	6	38	25	100
Special/different help for HB claimants already in work	7	4	22	3	38	26	100
Advising claimants specifically that UC payments will include housing costs and will be paid directly to them to pay their own rent	37	25	16	1	9	13	100
Local service delivery projects	18	22	26	4	8	22	100
Other	5	1	5	3	12	74	100

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

For each activity, please indicate whether your LA has already done, is planning to do, or is considering doing to prepare **social housing provider landlords** for UCMM?

Table A.3 Preparations for social housing provider landlords for UC Managed Migration

	Already done	Planning to do	Considering doing	Considered doing but didn't do	Have not considered doing	Nothing done	Total
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Share generic information	45	27	15	1	2	10	100
Potential easements for Direct Payments	18	12	24	1	19	26	100
The social housing providers are getting all the information we have	46	18	19	1	4	13	100
Other	9	2	6	0	2	81	100

And for each activity, please indicate whether your LA already done, is planning to do, or is considering doing to prepare **private landlords** for UCMM?

Table A.4 Preparations for private landlords for Universal Credit Managed Migration

	Already done	Planning to do	Considering doing	Considered doing but didn't do	Have not considered doing	Nothing done	Total
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Arrange landlord forums	33	18	25	2	6	16	100
Send written information about UC directly to them	11	22	29	3	16	19	100
Include articles in newsletters etc.	15	27	29	1	10	19	100
Other	3	2	7	1	3	83	100

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

And for each activity, please indicate whether your LA has already done, is planning to do, or is considering doing to prepare **third parties** for UCMM?

Table A.5 Preparations for third parties for Universal Credit Managed Migration

	Already done	Planning to do	Considering doing	Considered doing but didn't do	Have not considered doing	Nothing done	Total
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Share generic information	34	21	19	1	7	19	100
Send written information about UC directly to them	10	17	29	4	12	27	100
Include articles in newsletters etc.	13	23	25	1	10	28	100
Other	2	3	6	1	5	82	100

Table A.6 Number of activities LAs have already done to prepare for Universal Managed Migration

	Staff and systems	Claimants	Social Housing Providers	Private landlords	Third parties
0	39%	31%	42%	65%	83%
1	9%	11%	20%	21%	11%
2	7%	8%	22%	6%	5%
3	6%	10%	14%	6%	1%
4	8%	12%	3%	1%	–
5	6%	10%	–	–	–
6	4%	7%	–	–	–
7	8%	10%	–	–	–
8	6%	2%	–	–	–
9	3%	0%	–	–	–
10	4%	1%	–	–	–
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Appendix B

Questionnaire

Local Authority Insight Survey

Wave 33 Questionnaire

Thank you for taking part in this survey. This wave of the survey includes questions about the managed migration of claimants on to Universal Credit and the effects of the reduction in the backdating period for Housing Benefit (HB) claims on claimants. The information you provide will help the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) understand how current and future housing policy decisions affect local authorities and claimants. It will help DWP understand the support that local authorities need from DWP and will inform the future policy strategy.

Please can you consult other colleagues who can help you in providing relevant information, when completing these questions.

A. Universal Credit Managed Migration

Universal Credit has been rolled out across the country to new single jobseekers and is now available in all jobcentres. Universal Credit is currently being expanded across the country to include other claimant groups (i.e. families) and also a roll out of the full digital service.

Claimants will be moved onto Universal Credit either when there has been a change in circumstances which would trigger a new claim to Universal Credit (referred to as natural migration) or where there has been no change of circumstances when migration to Universal Credit is then initiated to transfer an entire household from existing benefits or tax credits to one Universal Credit service (referred to as managed migration). The managed migration of existing benefit claims will start in July 2019 and complete in March 2022.

The following questions are about Universal Credit Managed Migration.

A.1 Please state your job title to help us understand who has answered questions on Universal Credit Managed Migration.

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A.2 In which team do you work and what is this team responsible for?

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A.3 Has your local authority (LA) transitioned to Universal Credit Full service?

Yes

No

A.4 This question is about preparations for managed migration. For each activity shown below, please indicate whether your LA has already done it, is planning to do or is considering doing, to prepare staff and systems for Universal Credit Managed Migration?

	Already done	Planning to do	Considering doing	Considered doing but didn't do	Have not considered doing	Nothing done
Training courses aimed at improving general awareness						
Specific training in implementing UC						
Sent generic information						
Sent tailored guidance						
Sent software updates from software supplier						
Meeting/updating voluntary groups						
Attending workshops						
Formed a working group						
Holding meetings						
Other (please tick box and specify under the relevant column)						
Don't know						

If A4 = all Don't know

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

A.5 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question? This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

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Ask all

A.6 For each activity shown below, please indicate whether your LA has already done, is planning to do, or is considering doing to prepare claimants for Universal Credit Managed Migration?

	Already done	Planning to do	Considering doing	Considered doing but didn't do	Have not considered doing	Nothing Done
Providing one-to-one guidance/advice on budgeting						
Providing group guidance/ advice on budgeting						
Providing guidance/help with computer use						
Directing claimants to Money Advice website						
Directing claimants to DWP website						
Mapping local free digital service						
Classes for claimants on Universal Credit budgeting						
Special/different help for Housing Benefit claimants already in work						
Advising claimants specifically that Universal Credit payments will include housing costs and will be paid directly to them to pay their own rent						
Local service delivery projects						
Other (please tick box and specify under the relevant column)						
Don't know						

If A6 = all 'Don't know'

A.7 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question? This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

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Ask all

A.8 For each activity, please indicate whether your LA has already done, is planning to do, or is considering doing to prepare social housing provider landlords for Universal Credit Managed Migration?

	Already done	Planning to do	Considering doing	Considered doing but didn't do	Have not considered doing	Nothing Done
Share generic information						
Potential easements for Direct Payments						
The social housing providers are getting all the information we have						
Other (please tick box and specify under the relevant column)						
Don't know						

If A8 = all 'Don't know'

A.9 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question. This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

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Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

Ask all

A.10 And for each activity, please indicate whether your LA has already done, is planning to do, or is considering doing to prepare private landlords for Universal Credit Managed Migration?

	Already done	Planning to do	Considering doing	Considered doing but didn't do	Have not considered doing	Nothing Done
Arrange landlord forums						
Send written information about Universal Credit directly to them						
Include articles in newsletters etc.						
Other (please specify)						
Don't know						

If A10 = all 'Don't know'

A.11 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question. This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

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Ask all

A.12 And for each activity, please indicate whether your LA has already done, is planning to do, or is considering doing to prepare third parties for Universal Credit Managed Migration?

	Already done	Planning to do	Considering doing	Considered doing but didn't do	Have not considered doing	Nothing Done
Share generic information						
Send written information about Universal Credit directly to them						
Include articles in newsletters etc.						
Other (please specify)						
Don't know						

If A12 = all 'Don't know'

A.13 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question? This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

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Ask all

A.14 Which of the following types of support do you think Housing Benefit claimants will need to migrate to Universal Credit?

Please select all that apply

- Personal Budgeting Support
- Digital access and inclusion support
- Debt advice
- Information about Universal Credit
- Support with health barriers
- Referrals to sources of funding
- (e.g. Discretionary Housing Payments, LA welfare/crisis funds, Universal Credit advance payments)
- Other (please specify)
- None
- Don't know

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

If A14 = 'Don't know'

A.15 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question? This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

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Ask all

A.16 Which of the following support services are available from your LA and/or other third parties?

Please select all that apply

- Personal Budgeting Support
- Digital access and inclusion support
- Debt advice
- Information about Universal Credit
- Support with health barriers
- Referrals to sources of funding
- (e.g. Discretionary Housing Payments, LA welfare/crisis funds, Universal Credit advance payments)
- Other (please specify)
- None
- Don't know

If A16 = Don't know

A.17 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question? This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

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Ask all

A.18 What, if any, support does your LA need from DWP to help with Universal Credit Managed Migration?

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Ask all

A.19 What are your LA's biggest concerns about preparing for Universal Credit Managed Migration?

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B. Reduction in Housing Benefit backdating period

Previously, working-age HB claimants could have their HB claim treated as if it were made from a date up to six months before they actually made it, providing they could show 'continuous good cause' for the delay in making the claim. Under Universal Credit the backdating process is limited to one month.

To bring working-age HB in line with Universal Credit, from April 2016, the backdating period for HB claims was reduced to one month while retaining the requirement to demonstrate good cause for failing to make the claim.

The following questions are about the effect of this change to the HB backdating period on local authorities and claimants.

B.1 Please state your job title to help us understand who has answered questions on Housing Benefit backdating requests.

.....
.....

B.2 In which team do you work and what is this team responsible for?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Ask all

B.3 Has your local authority (LA) accepted any new claims for Housing Benefit since April 2016?

- Yes Go to B4
- No Go to next section

If B3 = Yes

B.4 Since April 2016, roughly what proportion of new working-age HB claims were requested to be backdated?

Please write in a percentage that applies. If no backdating requests received write in 0.

----- per cent *If more than 0, go to B5.*

If 0 go to B9.

If B4 = more than 0 per cent

B.5 How was this figure arrived at?

Please select all that apply

Based on my own perception/an educated guess

Consulted colleagues for their perception/educated guess

Referred to information collected by LA. Please state source:

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.....
.....

Other (specify)

.....
.....
.....

If B4 = more than 0-

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

B.6 Since April 2016, of all these working-age HB claim backdating requests, what proportion have been made for the different time periods listed below?

Please write in a percentage for each that applies and make sure that your answers add to 100 – .

	Percentage
One month or less	
More than one month, but less than three months	
Three months or more, but less than six months	
Six months or more but less than a year	
A year or more	
Other (please specify)	
	100%
Don't know (tick)	

If B6 = more than 0 per cent

B.7 How was this figure arrived at?

Please select all that apply

Based on my own perception/an educated guess

Consulted colleagues for their perception/educated guess

Referred to information collected by LA. Please state source:

.....

.....

.....

Other (specify)

.....
.....

If B6 = Don't know

**B.8 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer question B6?
This will help us understand why the question could not be
answered so we can improve these questions in the future.**

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If B3 = Yes

**B.9 Since April 2016, have the number of requests to backdate HB
claims increased, decreased or stayed the same compared with
previous years when backdating period was six months?**

Please select one only

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Increased a little | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Increased a lot | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Decreased a little | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Decreased a lot | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Stayed the same | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If B9 = Don't know

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

B.10 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question? This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

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If B3 = Yes

B.11 Still thinking of all the backdating requests for working-age HB claims received since April 2016, which of the following groups are most likely to make a backdating request?

Please select the three groups who most commonly apply for backdating.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Mental and/or physical disabilities or health conditions | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Substance misuse issues | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| English as a second language | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Learning disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Literacy issues/Low educational attainment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Single parents | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Caring responsibilities | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) | |
| | |
| | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If B11 = don't know

B.12 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question. This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

.....
.....
.....

If B3 = Yes

B.13 Again, thinking of all the backdating requests for working-age HB claims received since April 2016, which are the three most common reasons?

Please select the three most common reasons.

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Experience of benefit sanctions | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Recently unemployed | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Flexible working hours | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| New to area | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Had accident | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Job loss | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Bereavement | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Experience of Homelessness | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delay in earlier decision on HB | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Change of address (Go to B15) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Claimants not given option to claim HB when claiming for other benefits | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Claimant having lost the form | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Forms having been lost within the LA | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The LA having no record of receiving an initial application for HB | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Medical reasons | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

Other (please specify)

.....
.....
.....

Don't know

If B13 = Don't know

B.14 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question. This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

.....
.....
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.....

If B13 = change of address

B.15 Thinking of all the backdating requests for HB received since April 2016, due to a change of address, which are the three most common reasons for making a backdating request?

To find work

To escape the threat of domestic violence

Flexible working hours

Previously homeless

Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy

Other (please specify)

.....
.....

Don't know

If B15 = Don't know

B.16 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question. This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

.....
.....
.....
.....

If B3 = Yes

B.17 What proportion of HB claimants requesting backdating have significant rent arrears?

Please select one only

- None
- A few
- Some
- Most
- All
- Don't know

If B17 = Don't know

B.18 Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question? This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

.....
.....
.....
.....

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

If B3 = Yes

B.19 Have you observed any positive or negative impacts on claimants directly as a result of shortening the HB backdating period from six months to one month?

Yes

No

If B19 = Yes

B.20 Please describe the impacts on claimants directly as a result of shortening the HB backdating period from six months to one month you have observed.

.....
.....
.....
.....

C. Contact with DWP and LA Contact Details

C.1 DWP runs workshops with LA benefits staff to share best practice. DWP would like the workshops to cover the issues that are most relevant to LA benefits teams. We therefore welcome your views on the topics you would like to discuss. What topics would you like to feature in future workshops?’

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

C.2 NatCen Social Research will pass responses from the survey back to DWP on an anonymised basis. However, to help improve the advice and support it offers to LAs, DWP would like to be able to see the responses you have given linked to you and your LA.

Would you be willing for us to pass your responses back to DWP in this way?

Yes
No

C.3 DWP may want to contact you again in relation to this survey to pick up on some of the issues you have raised and/or to offer advice or support where appropriate. Would you be willing for the DWP to contact you about this survey in the future?

Yes
No

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

C.4 Finally, we would be grateful if you could confirm or amend the contact details we have for you.

First name

.....

Last name

.....

Job title

.....

LA Team

In which team do you work and what is this team responsible for?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Phone number

.....

E-mail

.....

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

Postal address

Adr1C.....

Adr2C.....

Adr3C.....

Adr4C.....

PCodeC.....

Thank you for taking part in this survey! Please click the 'Next' button to confirm that you have completed the questionnaire and to send us your reply.

Please note that you will not be able to go back to the questionnaire once you have clicked the 'Next' button here.

Appendix C

Responses by LA Type

Table C.1 Type of authority

Type of authority	Total	Percentages of all LAs (%)	Percentages completed survey (%)	Number of LAs that completed the survey	Response rate
English District	201	53	52	79	39
London	33	9	7	11	33
Metropolitan	36	9	10	15	42
Scottish	32	8	8	12	38
Unitary	56	15	17	26	46
Welsh	22	6	5	8	36
Total	380	100	100	151	40