

Stuff the DWP

don't want us to know – Universal Credit

We can demand...

These aren't rights, but at DWP discretion we can get:

- fortnightly payments
- the "rent element" paid direct to a landlord
- split payments for a couple

Advocacy

We have the **RIGHT** to take someone with us to **EVERY** appointment. That can be a friend, union rep, carer - anyone. At important meetings, this shows we are not alone and will not accept being messed around. They can remind us what to ask for and give us confidence to demand our rights.



“New style” JSA and ESA

If you've paid enough national insurance then you can get 6 months on “new style JSA” or “new style ESA” instead of Universal Credit - this is kept quiet. If this applies to you, ask about it!

Check your money! Keep ALL your documents

Check your first payment as soon as it comes in. You can use a benefits calculator website, or even better talk to Citizens' Advice. Your housing allowance can change when you move house so double check your payments after a move.

The DWP makes mistakes and loses documents. If they close your claim you lose access to your journal. It's important to keep a **COPY** of **EVERYTHING**, in case you're short changed or need to make an appeal.

The Claimant Commitment

Everyone on Universal Credit has to sign a “claimant commitment”. If you don’t keep to the commitment then you are **SANCTIONED** so it’s vital to get it changed if there’s anything you can’t do. You can ask for a change any time, at the jobcentre or on your journal.

You (usually) have to sign it or you won’t get any benefits. You can’t appeal the commitments, but you can **ASK** to get them “reconsidered”. If you refuse to sign, then unless the DWP believes you have a “good reason”, you won’t get any money until the reconsideration is done. It’s usually best to sign and follow the old commitment as best you can while you wait. They call it an agreement, but clearly it’s just another restraint.

Some reasons the DWP **MAY** accept to reduce your hours looking for work:

- you are sick or have a disability
- you have caring responsibilities
- you are pregnant and expect to give birth within 11 weeks
- you have recently experienced domestic violence
- you’re volunteering (can count up to 50% of your worksearch)

For the first **THREE MONTHS** you can limit your search to jobs with similar skills and pay to what you had before.

The commitment can make you sign up to the Universal Credit website, but you don’t have to **USE** it to search for work. You can document your search in other ways - on paper instead of your journal. You shouldn’t have to document what you’ve done hour-by-hour, less detail is fine. You have to take “all reasonable steps” you can to find work.

Direct Action

Sometimes our legal rights aren’t enough. Sometimes we don’t get our rights anyway, even after jumping through all the DWP’s hoops. This is where **DIRECT ACTION** comes in. We have seen bad decisions reversed just because people went to the jobcentre as a group and refused to leave until their problem was sorted. If forms and tribunals aren’t working for you, we can help you organise an action to set things right.

Making an Appeal

If you are sanctioned, refused a benefit, refused a “hardship loan”, paid the wrong amount, or found fit for work – you can appeal the decision. It’s a long process but a **HUGE** number are successful, when people see them through to the end. If you can, **GET SUPPORT** from an organisation like Citizens Advice, a welfare rights service, housing association, or your trade union.

If you miss the deadlines you can still start an appeal within **13 months**, if you show the DWP there’s a “good reason” you missed it. Before you send any form make a copy, and get proof of postage from the post office.

The first step is to ask for a “**mandatory reconsideration**”. The deadline is only **ONE MONTH** so get on this fast! This process is a sham **BUT** you have to jump through the hoops before you can make a proper independent appeal. Don’t worry if your reconsideration is rejected at first – the DWP has been caught using secret targets and rejecting tons of applications at random. They do this to everyone.

You start a “mandatory reconsideration” just by asking for it – over the phone, on your journal, in person, or in writing. In writing is best, using a form so you don’t miss any details. Search www.gov.uk for “form CRMR1”. The address should be on top of the decision letter you’re appealing. If not, phone up the DWP and ask where to send it. Make sure your application includes:

- The date of the decision you are appealing
- The reasons you disagree with the decision
- Your name, address, and National Insurance number

Next, the DWP will send you a “mandatory reconsideration notice” telling you if you were successful. If you aren’t, don’t panic – the next step is fairer and done by an independent tribunal. From the date you get your notice, you now have **ONE MONTH** to start your appeal.

To start the proper appeal, get “form SSCS1” from www.gov.uk. Fill it out explaining your reasons as clearly as you can, and get together any evidence that will help your case. Include evidence and your mandatory reconsideration notice, and send it to *HMCTS Appeals Centre, PO box 1203, Bradford, BD1 9WP*. It may take some time, but eventually you will be sent details of what happens next and when your hearing will be.

You have the best chance if you go to the hearing in person, even better **bring someone with you**. You can claim back travel expenses so keep receipts. They will question you about what happened – just stay calm and answer simply. **DO get help** from Citizens Advice, welfare rights service, your union or housing association to prepare. Good luck!

We deserve better...

Our rights are just the beginning. Benefits have been frozen since 2015 while the cost of living has gone up and up. Even after the freeze is ended our money will **NOT** be **ENOUGH** – benefits will be the lowest compared to wages since 1948. There is not enough work to go around. Most of us want jobs, but searching an unreasonable 35 hours a week for jobs that don't exist is impossible!

Life on benefits is hard for a reason: to punish unemployment. This affects **EVERYONE**, not just claimants. The worse life is on benefits the more people will accept bad jobs, the more people will be scared to fight bad conditions at work. Everyone is just one p45 away from the jobcentre. We need to:

SCRAP all sanctions, benefit caps, forced “workfare” programmes, the bedroom tax, and the two-child policy

REDUCE the 35-hour worksearch, waiting times on the DWP phone system, and the wait time for payments

REVERSE the benefits freeze: increase all benefits

We can do this. The four worst unpaid workfare programmes were scrapped in 2015 because people took direct action to stop them. We can repeat this and scrap all the worst parts of universal credit – so long as we are prepared to fight for it.

*This leaflet was produced by the **Liverpool Solidarity Federation**. It was written by claimants, for claimants, to share knowledge about our rights and to let people know that they are not alone. The Solidarity Federation is part of the International Workers' Association, a global anarcho-syndicalist movement.*

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