

Benefit Bulletin: Big benefit changes and news

Produced by the Active Inclusion Service, Newcastle City Council

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Newcastle City Council website pages on coronavirus (COVID-19) and benefits

We continue to update these three website pages – with more details below:

[Coronavirus and benefits – what the changes mean for you](#) describes the main measures, explains what they mean for you and provides more detail including any potential issues

[Coronavirus and benefits – news](#) includes the latest announcements and changes, so you can see them as they happen rather than being hidden in the detail

[Coronavirus and benefits – guidance and legislation](#) provides background resources, with guidance from the government and independent sources and the legislation that has brought in some of the measures

Where to get advice in Newcastle – updated again

Like other services, most of Newcastle’s advice services changed from face-to-face to mainly phone advice with some exceptions.

The latest details are in our **August** version of **Where to get advice in Newcastle**, which can be found on the Newcastle City Council website page: [Benefit advice services in Newcastle and benefit offices](#).

Professionals can get phone advice from [the Council’s Welfare Rights’ consultancy line](#).

Coronavirus and benefit support changes

Furlough scheme coming to an end

The **furlough scheme** was extended to the end of September 2021 **with some changes**. For example, employers are being asked to contribute 10% in July and 20% in August and September as the scheme is gradually phased out. See this [Government guidance](#) on the extension.

Other support for people into work such as Kickstart can be found on the Council webpages [Coronavirus and benefits – what the changes mean for you](#) and [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Support for the self-employed coming to an end

The **Self-Employment Income Support Scheme** was extended with a fifth grant. [Find out if you’re eligible for the fifth grant](#), which covers the period from May 2021 to September 2021.

The Universal Credit ‘minimum income floor’ (MIF) reintroduced

For the first 12 months of self-employment, the Universal Credit calculation takes **actual** income into account. After 12 months a rule called the ‘minimum income floor’ (MIF) is usually applied, where you are assumed to be earning at least the national minimum wage for the number of hours you are expected to work for, usually 35 hours a week. For some this means they are assumed to be earning more than they actually are and therefore get less Universal Credit. This rule was suspended from March 2020 but has been gradually phased in from August with jobcentre Work

Coaches having the discretion not to apply it if the earnings of the resident claiming Universal Credit continue to be affected by coronavirus (COVID-19).

Those who've already done their 12 months start-up before the start of Covid will be reassessed and contacted in August and will face reductions from their next assessment period. See Rightsnet's [open access](#) item for more details.

This is a link to the [legislation](#) making this change and the [Explanatory Memorandum](#) which explains it and see the DWP's explanation to the [SSAC's July 21 meeting](#).

Universal Credit uplift to end, or...

The Universal Credit extra £20 per week continues until the end of September 2021. Specifically, [Regulation 2021/313](#) said it will 'apply in (Universal Credit) assessment periods that end before 6 October 2021'. The DWP are informing people on their online Universal Credit journals.

Meanwhile many organisations are [campaigning](#) to keep the £20 in payment such as Child Poverty Action Group, Save the Children and The Trussell Trust. See also the [Cross-committee letter to UK Secretaries of State](#) from parliament.scot.

Prisoners

The rule that allows individuals on **temporary release from prison** to access means-tested benefits during the period of that release was extended to 31 August 2021. We have no further information if it has been further extended.

Carers

The rule that allows **Carer's Allowance** to continue during a temporary break in entitlement 'as a result of isolation due to, or infection or contamination with, coronavirus disease of either the carer or the person cared for' was extended to 31 August 2021. We have no further information if it has been further extended.

Other coronavirus (Covid-19) support measures end dates

The rule that **treats** residents claiming **Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)** who are **affected by** * coronavirus (COVID-19) **as sick** without having to provide medical evidence or undergo a work capability assessment is to end 12 November 2021.

This 'treated as' rule **does not apply to Universal Credit**. It ended on 30 March 2021 by virtue of regulation 10(3) of the [Social Security \(Coronavirus\) \(Further Measures\) Regulations 2020. No. 371](#).

The rule that temporarily **disapplied the seven waiting days** for residents claiming ESA who are affected by * coronavirus (COVID-19) ends 12 November 2021.

The rule that allows some people **affected by** * coronavirus (COVID-19) to continue to get **Jobseeker's Allowance** ended 31 August 2021.

* **'affected by'** means where a resident, or child they are caring for, has coronavirus (COVID-19) or is self-isolating because of symptoms

For more information, see the [Social Security \(Coronavirus\) \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2021. No. 476](#).

Claimant Commitments and Action Plans reintroduced for ESA Claimants

The DWP announced in June this would take place in a phased approach.

‘We are reintroducing Claimant Commitments (CCs) and Action Plans (APs) for all Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants in a phased approach. Work coaches continue to work with claimants to ensure that CCs and APs are reasonable and tailored for their circumstances...’

‘For all new claims to New Style ESA, processed from 26 April 2021, claimants will be required to have an appointment with a work coach and agree a CC before they can receive New Style ESA.’

‘For New Style ESA claims processed prior to 26 April 2021, the requirement for an agreed CC and for ESA legacy claimants an AP, will be introduced gradually from 28 June 2021. We will contact claimants to arrange an appointment with a work coach and agree a Claimant Commitment or Action Plan.’

More details in the DWP’s [Touchbase 18 June 2021](#)

Accessing health and disability benefits assessments and the Jobcentre

Face-to-face assessments have resumed - with safety measures in place - as well as some assessments continuing by telephone and video. See for example, the websites of the service that carries out assessments for [most benefits such as Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance](#) and for [PIP assessments](#).

Jobcentres are open but are requesting people only turn up with an appointment or in exceptional circumstances. See the DWP’s website page [Coronavirus and claiming benefits](#).

See the last [Benefit Bulletin](#) on guidance about ‘When residents can’t undertake a telephone assessment.’

Kickstart Jobs for 16-24 years old on Universal Credit

Do you work with young people or have a child who’s out of work and claiming Universal Credit? The Kickstart scheme provides six months paid employment along with support to develop employability and work-related skills. To find out more about Kickstart, email the Skills Hub skillshub@newcastle.gov.uk. Young people can also speak to their Work Coach at the Jobcentre or view a selection of the vacancies on our [Jobs@SkillsHub](#) portal by registering at www.skillshubnewcastle.co.uk

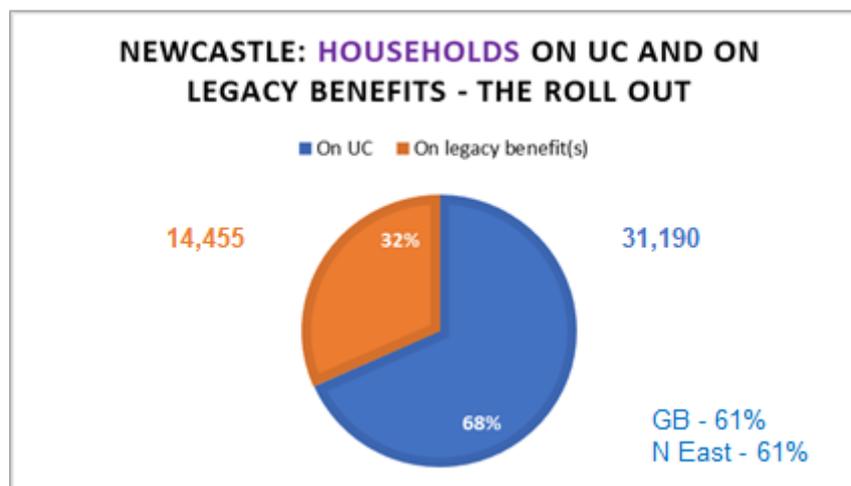
Other help in Newcastle

See the Newcastle City Council pages [Coronavirus information and advice](#) and [Support for people](#)

Facts and figures – Universal Credit, the benefit cap, foodbanks etc

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is replacing six 'legacy benefits' of working age such as Housing Benefit and Tax Credits. In July 2021 there were 35,952 people on Universal Credit in Newcastle. An increase of 458% since April 2017. The roll out of Universal Credit households is 68% complete across the city. It is 61% for Great Britain. See chart below. Statistics are from the [DWP](#) and [Parliament](#).



The benefit cap

Latest [DWP figures](#) reported that in Newcastle, benefits of 805 households had been capped. 39 had a benefit cut of between £150 and £250 a week. See our page on the [benefit cap](#) and the reasons why it might not apply.

Food Banks in the UK

The pandemic has led to an increase in food bank usage, particularly amongst families with children. This briefing examines the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks over time and across the nations and regions of the UK From [House of Commons library](#)

People in poorest areas 'nearly four times more likely' to die from COVID

Inquiry by [Local Gov](#)

Constituency-level data on child poverty

Also by the [House of Commons library](#)

New Tribunal Service in Newcastle

For most benefits, if you are unhappy with a benefit decision, you can ask the DWP reconsider their decision (called a Mandatory Reconsideration). If you do not like that decision, you can appeal to an independent tribunal. Some appeals hearings are still over the phone or by video link but face to face hearings will be at the new Tribunal Service in the Newcastle Civic Centre. More from [gov.uk](#) and also [Safely increasing capacity in our buildings from 19 July](#)

Also see [How to join Cloud Video Platform \(CVP\) for a video hearing](#) from the Tribunal Service

Fast-tracked access to benefits for people with terminal illness expanded

The current Special Rules for Terminal Illness which fast-track benefit applications for those with a terminal diagnosis of six months is to be replaced with a new 12-month, end of life definition.

The change will ensure that people in the final year of their life will receive financial support quicker than they can do at present, at a higher rate through revised Special Rules. The move ensures that clinicians still have discretion and are supported by a realistic and straightforward definition, consistent with current NHS practice.

More information can be found in the press release on [GOV.UK](#).

Also see a briefing paper by the House of Commons called [Accessing benefits with terminal illness](#) explores the history of the Special Rules for Terminal Illness, how they work in practice, the debate that surrounds them, and recent developments.

The Post office Card Account is ending

The Government plan to end the Post Office Card Accounts for accessing benefits and are pushing people to use a bank, building society or credit union account instead.

In their [Touchbase](#) the DWP says: 'Customers can phone the DWP Customer Service centre on 0800 085 7133 to provide new account details for their benefit or State Pension payments.'

However, those **'who are unable to provide a bank, building society or credit union account'** will be moved to the DWP voucher-based scheme called the Payment Exception service which provides access to payments via the PayPoint network.

The Payment Exception service payments can also be accessed via the Post Office network from the end of August 2021.

Customers will start to be moved to the Payment Exception service from the end of August 2021 if they haven't yet contacted DWP with new account details.'

[Find out how and when your benefits are paid](#)

Bereavement benefit improvements for cohabiting couples – at some stage

Following challenges in the court, the government have announced it plans to 'extend bereavement support to cohabiting couples with children'.

'Previously, a surviving parent could only claim the financial support if they had been married or in a civil partnership at the time of their spouse or civil partner's death. Under these plans, Widowed Parent's Allowance and Bereavement Support Payments will be extended to surviving cohabiting partners with children who were living with their partner at the time of death.

Once approved by Parliament, the changes will apply retrospectively from 30 August 2018, with any backdated payments being made as lump sums.'

See the [government press release](#) and [CPAG advice](#)

EU citizens news

Free Movement welcomed the Home Office promise ‘that people who apply late to the EU Settlement Scheme will, after all, [have their rights protected](#) while their application is being considered.’ See also [Temporary protection for more applicants to the Settlement Scheme](#) from gov.uk

See also [Information and resources to support EU/EEA nationals](#) from homeless link

Take part in the big Health and Disability consultation

‘The health and disability green paper explores how the welfare system can better meet the needs of disabled people and people with health conditions now and in the future, enabling people to live independently and move into work where possible.’

See [Shaping future support: the health and disability green paper](#) from gov.uk

Z2K have launched a new [campaign action](#) which allows people to quickly respond to the Health and Disability Green Paper – with an [Easy Read](#) guide for doing so also provided - and to then write to their MP flagging the inadequacy of this Green Paper. ‘We would be grateful if you could you share this action with your networks, and use the suggested posts below and attached canvas to share on your socials.’

Two payments in one Universal Credit assessment period

‘DWP has changed its processes so that the Universal Credit system now automatically identifies claimants who receive a second monthly salary payment in one benefit assessment period.

Staff will be able to move the second payment forward to the next assessment period in the system, ensuring the claimant’s benefits don’t fluctuate from one month to the next due to the system thinking a claimant has received increased wages in one month.’

From [DWP Touchbase](#)

This follows a [Court of Appeal](#) judgement in June 2020 that the government were wrong to take into account two payments of wages in the same Universal Credit assessment period and none in the next period. The government introduced [legislation](#) to rectify this but the DWP initially had to do manual adjustments when the claimant requested it.

DWP full compensation for couple who lost almost £10,000 by claiming Universal credit

“They should have been protected against being transferred to Universal Credit, on account of being entitled to a severe disability premium (SDP)*. But the DWP excluded them from that protection, because they were not receiving the SDP at the date they made their UC claim, even though it was later reinstated to cover that date.”

“This case may be important for anyone who lost money on transferring to Universal Credit between January 2019 and January 2021 and who was entitled to an SDP at the date of transfer, even if that entitlement was only decided afterwards.”

From the article by [Disability Rights UK](#)

* The SDP is an extra amount in many of the benefits that Universal Credit is replacing for people getting a disability benefit and other rules.

Tell Us Once: easy read guide

Tell Us Once helps you let most government departments and local councils know when someone dies. This [government guide](#) tells you how to use it.

Useful Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) internal guidance

When you are supporting someone with a benefit issue, it may be useful to see what guidance is being given to staff on that issue. Here are some examples:

[Advice for decision makers: staff guide](#) (memos and guides on Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment etc)

[Decision Makers Guide](#) (memos and guides on legacy and other benefits)

[Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Guidance Manual](#)

[Housing Benefit for local authorities: adjudication circulars](#)

[DWP factual medical reports: guidance for healthcare professionals](#)

Guidance for healthcare professionals who complete medical reports for DWP or one of its assessment providers.

Further support, information and training

Find our **earlier Benefit Bulletins** on our [website page for professionals and volunteers](#) and for **more information on benefit changes**, see our website page [Changes to the benefits system](#) which includes a **timeline of the main benefit changes** and of course the [Coronavirus and benefits](#) pages.

More details about benefits, including those mentioned above, can be found on [our welfare rights and money advice website pages](#), including benefit self-help factsheets.

Find **Where to get advice in Newcastle** on the [benefit advice services website page](#).

For details of our **e-learning modules** for professionals such as 'Introduction to Benefits' and 'Universal Credit', see our [website page for professionals and volunteers](#).

Professionals can get phone advice from [the Council's Welfare Rights' consultancy line](#).

You can subscribe to the DWP information for professionals in [Touchbase](#).

This Benefit Bulletin was written by the Active Inclusion Service at Newcastle City Council. It is provided bi-monthly and at times of important benefit changes and news. It is as accurate as possible at the time of writing.

We also produce a weekly **Active Inclusion Newcastle e-bulletin** which provides a brief update on financial inclusion and homelessness prevention issues. If you want to receive this, or for more details, email activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk.