

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:

[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 **June** 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 benefits

Here's a roundup of the latest news and changes. Many of these were announced in our previous March Benefit Bulletin which, along with our web page [Coronavirus and benefits – what the changes mean for you](#), provides more details.

Support for employees

The **furlough scheme** was extended to the end of September 2021.

Support for the self-employed

The **Self-Employment Income Support Scheme** was extended with a fifth grant. [Find out if you're eligible for the fifth grant](#), which will cover the period from May 2021 to September 2021. Applications for fourth grants have closed, with the last date for making a claim on 1 June 2021.

The Universal Credit '**minimum income floor**' suspension will continue until the end of July 2021 and be 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).

Universal Credit

The Universal Credit extra £20 per week continues until 30 September 2021.

Tax Credits

The extra £20 per week of Working Tax Credits ended in April and was replaced by a £500 one-off payment. Guidance on how this will work from the [Government](#) and from [revenuebenefits](#)

Further extensions of coronavirus (COVID-19) measures

These measures were due to expire on 12 May 2021 but were extended as follows:

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 extended until 12 November 2021.

This extension **does not apply to Universal Credit** (the 'treated as' rule for Universal Credit 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) is extended to 12 November 2021.

The rule that allows some people affected by * coronavirus (COVID-19) to continue to get **Jobseeker's Allowance** is extended to 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

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" is extended to 31 August 2021.

The rule that allows individuals on **temporary release from prison** to access means-tested benefits during the period of that release are extended to 31 August 2021.

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

Local Housing Allowance

The Government also brought forward some improvements to Local Housing Allowance for people leaving the care of the local authority and people living in homeless hostels. This is described in new government guidance [ADM memo 10/21: Changes to the Exceptions to the Shared Accommodation Rate](#).

Restart Scheme

Part of the Government's [Plan for Jobs](#), the [Restart Scheme](#) will give residents claiming Universal Credit who have been out of work for at least 12 months enhanced support to find jobs in their local area.

Jobcentre Plus office availability

Here is a reply from a Jobcentre Plus Partnership Manager:

“COVID secure Jobcentres have remained open throughout the pandemic, providing support for those who need it. From 12 April, in line with the UK Government’s Roadmap to ease lockdown restrictions, face-to-face appointments restarted in England and Wales. Scotland will resume from 26 April. Jobcentres are open to all customers who need to see their work coach whilst priority will be given to new customers and young people (aged 18-24) who are at risk of long-term unemployment.

To keep everyone safe, customers won’t need to come into the Jobcentre unless they are asked to. Jobcentres will continue to operate in accordance with current health and safety guidelines, for example social distancing. As a result, capacity limits will be reduced and will differ within each Jobcentre.

The safety of our people and our customers remains paramount. Therefore, if you are considering using any amenities or facilitate any event in the Jobcentre you should contact your local Employer and Partnership Manager to check availability first”, and “JCPs will revert to their original opening hours, for Newcastle that should be 9 – 5”.

There is more information on the DWP’s website page [Coronavirus and claiming benefits](#).

Health and disability assessments – face-to-face, phone and video

The DWP announced a **timetable for the resumption of face-to-face assessments**, initially for those who cannot access the other methods such as telephone and video assessments. This was from **12 April** for Industrial Injuries and from **May 2021** for Personal Independence Payment and work capability assessments for Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance. See the [DWP’s press release](#) and updated [guidance](#).

See also the DWP guidance on new [legislation](#) that allows for medical assessments in person, over the phone and by video from 25 March 2021: [ADM Memo 4/21](#) and [DMG Memo 3/21](#).

The following government guidance has also been updated to include the possibility of conducting an assessment ‘in person’:

[New Style Employment and Support Allowance](#)

[New Style Employment and Support Allowance: detailed guide](#)

Commentary by Disability Right UK:

“Phone and video assessments have worked well for many during lockdown. People should be able to choose their preferred method of assessment, in line with the reasonable adjustment provisions of the Equality Act. [Read more on this story here.](#)” Also, see their other [report and stance](#).

When residents can't undertake a telephone assessment

This relates to Personal Independence Payment but may be relevant for assessments for other benefits.

Internal government guidance says: "Health professionals should adjust their approach if they become aware someone can't undertake a telephone assessment".

For those without a phone or persistent phone connection issues, "Once all other options for completing an assessment have been exhausted a best endeavours recommendation can be made for those claimants who are unable to undertake a telephone assessment".

More details: [Revised Best Endeavours Process Final: Dec 2020](#)

Also, see this guide which is 'part of a training programme for Healthcare Professionals', which includes the following subjects:

- Processes & Guidance to be followed when conducting telephone interviews for Work Capability Assessments (WCA)
- General Claimant Welfare
- Claimant expresses thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- DWP Welfare Checks

'If a claimant reveals details such as extreme financial difficulties where the DWP may be able to assist, please notify DWP through the procedures outlined in the "Protocol for Illness VCC" within "The Virtual Contact Centre Procedural Guide MED-VCCPG01" available on the knowledge library.'

- Evidence Gathering and Evaluation in the WCA
- Limited Capability for Work related Activity (LCWRA) criteria (NB. see our factsheet explaining this on our benefit information web page)

Link to the guidance: [COVID Clinical Telephone Assessment & Related Filework Guidance for Work Capability Assessments](#)

Both above documents were obtained via a [Freedom of Information](#) request.

Children who remain unwell 12 weeks after coronavirus (COVID-19) may be entitled to Disability Living Allowance

Internal Government [guidance](#) has been updated to include 'Long COVID syndrome':

"We know that recovery usually takes place within three to four weeks of onset of COVID-19 and many more children recover within 12 weeks. However, for some children, the recovery will be much longer."

"It is those children who have significant functional impairment at 12 weeks and do not seem to be recovering, who may have entitlement to DLA Child."

"A child does not have to have had a positive test result to be diagnosed with the syndrome. Testing has not always been easily available."

Help for local businesses and help with work

See Newcastle City Council's website page: [Covid-19: Business grants and financial support](#) and the Government's website page [Work and financial support](#).

Child Benefit to continue

New rules allow Child Benefit to continue in payment after a young person leaves education early due to exam cancellations due to coronavirus (COVID-19). For more information, see the regulation [SI.No.630/2021](#) which came into force on 31 May 2021.

Other coronavirus (COVID-19) changes and support

Please see our March 2021 Benefit Bulletin and our website page [Coronavirus and benefits – what the changes mean for you](#) for more details of these changes and other support.

Deductions from Universal Credit to repay fines is limited to 5%

Following a [High Court](#) judgement brought by Shelter and others, the Government updated its [Benefit overpayment recovery staff guide](#) to say recovery for fines is limited to a maximum of 5% from the Universal Credit standard allowance. This is detailed in the [Benefit and pension rates 2021 to 2022](#).

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](#)

Universal Credit

The latest figures on the roll out of Universal Credit in Newcastle

Universal Credit is replacing six 'legacy benefits'. Of the total **households** on Universal Credit and 'legacy benefits' in Newcastle, Universal Credit accounts for 68% (31,942). 'Legacy benefits' account for 32% (14,890). In other words, the roll out of Universal Credit is 68% complete in Newcastle. Nationally (in Great Britain) and in the North East it is 61%. For more details, see [Constituency data: Universal Credit rollout](#).

In terms of **people** on Universal Credit, DWP statistics show that there were 36,417 *people* on Universal Credit in Newcastle, which represents a small decrease on last month of 0.3% but an increase of 465% since April 2017 (48 months) and a 58% increase since March 2020.

Employment – Of the total *people* on Universal Credit in Newcastle, 33% are in some sort of employment (12,300). Nationally (in Great Britain) it is 37%.

Children – Of the total *households* in Newcastle on Universal Credit, 38% have children (10,895).

Some Universal Credit 12 April changes explained in the following DWP guidance

[Universal Credit advances](#)

The above links to updated government guidance to explain that **repayments of an advance can be delayed for one month** if you cannot afford them and the advance was paid because of a change of circumstances.

[Universal Credit and you](#)

The above links to updated government guidance: “If you apply for a Universal Credit advance on or after 12 April 2021, the time you must usually pay back the advance has been extended from 12 to 24 months. The monthly work allowances have increased from £292 to £293 if your Universal Credit includes housing support and from £512 to £515 if you do not receive housing support”.

[Universal Credit and homeless people](#)

The above links to government information about Universal Credit for homeless people, those at risk of homelessness and the organisations supporting them.

[Find out about money taken from your Universal Credit payment](#)

The most that can normally be taken from your Universal Credit payment to repay a debt has changed from 30% to 25% of your Universal Credit Standard Allowance.

[Universal Credit advances](#)

If you apply for a Universal Credit advance on or after 12 April 2021, the time you must usually pay back the advance has been extended from 12 to 24 months.

DWP: Care Leaver Covenant offer

This ‘offer’ from the DWP has useful information about the extra help they provide to people leaving the care of the local authority. For more information see: [Department for Work and Pensions: Care Leaver Covenant offer](#).

Philippa Day suicide – DWP and Capita response

The DWP and Capita, who do the assessments for disability and sickness benefits, have both [responded](#) to the Coroner’s report and recommendations after Philippa Day’s suicide.

EU Settlement Scheme

There is still time to make an application to this scheme before the deadline of 30 June 2021, and it very important for people to do so. However, late applications to the scheme may be allowed, “The Home Secretary confirmed a few months ago that people can apply after that deadline, but they must have “reasonable grounds to apply late”.

See details from the independent Free Movement: [Late applications to the EU Settlement Scheme](#).

Further information and sources of help are available on the [Newcastle City Council website](#).

Also, see these two internal guides from the DWP: [ADM Memo 8/21](#) and [DMG Memo 7/21](#)

Poverty in the UK

This [briefing note](#) by the House of Commons Library sets out information on the levels and rates of poverty in the UK, including historical trends and forecasts for future years, as well as poverty by employment status, tenure, ethnic group, disability, region and constituency.

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.