

Benefit sanctions and how to avoid them

Advice for people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, Universal Credit and other benefits

Newcastle City Council and Newcastle Jobcentre Plus have produced this information sheet to explain briefly what sanctions are, how they can be avoided, what to do if you are sanctioned and who can help.

There are various levels of work related activities that you may be expected to do, depending on the benefit you are claiming and your situation. For example:

- If you are unemployed, capable of work and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) you are expected to be available for and actively seeking full time work.
- If you are claiming Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), or are a single parent claiming Income Support with a youngest child aged one years old or over, you may be expected to take part in work related activity and work focused interviews.
- If Universal Credit applies to you, similar requirements may apply, but under Universal Credit more people are expected to take part in work related activities, such as those earning below a certain level and partners of Universal Credit claimants.

Sometimes, these requirements can be 'switched off' or reduced in various circumstances. Also, you may have no work related activities if for example, you have a child under one, are a carer or in the ESA support group - or the equivalent in Universal Credit.

If you do not comply with these rules, your benefit may be stopped or reduced - called a 'sanction'.

Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Universal Credit claimants - what you should do

If you claim JSA or Universal Credit you have to sign a Claimant Commitment with your Jobcentre Plus work coach, which includes activities you are expected to do, such as:

- signing on at the Jobcentre Plus office on time,
- attending interviews and training courses, and attending them on time,
- taking up work and work activity,
- looking for work for a certain number of hours and applying for certain jobs, and
- maintaining a personal work plan to show the work coach a record of all of your job seeking activity.

If you do not do these activities your JSA or Universal Credit may be sanctioned, unless you can provide a good reason for not doing them. You can agree reasonable restrictions, for example, due to your physical or mental health or other reasons. You should discuss these with your Jobcentre Plus work coach. And the Claimant Commitment can be reviewed if necessary.

Also, if you leave a job without good reason you will be sanctioned.

If you think you're unable to do an activity or if you're going to be late for your appointment, you must contact Jobcentre Plus straightaway by phoning 0800 169 0310 or for Universal Credit 0800 328 5644 or your online account journal

jobcentreplus

Department for
Work and Pensions

Newcastle
City Council 

Avoid problems with your Housing Benefit

If you are sanctioned, Newcastle City Council's Housing Benefit section should continue paying your Housing Benefit. However, if your benefit is stopped for a connected reason your Housing Benefit may also be stopped. If you are concerned, phone them on 0191 278 7878 or visit their website www.newcastle.gov.uk/benefits-and-council-tax

What can you do if you are sanctioned?

- Contact Jobcentre Plus **straight away** to resolve the problem
- Ask Jobcentre Plus for a **hardship payment** - see their phone number below
- Ask Jobcentre Plus to **reconsider** their decision. You can do this over the phone but it is best in writing. Do it straightaway and explain why you disagree.
- If you are still unhappy with their decision, you can **appeal** using an appeal form from Jobcentre Plus or www.gov.uk/appeal-benefit. **Do not delay** as there are time limits.

The rules for you and Jobcentre Plus office staff

Both you and the staff at Jobcentre Plus have to be reasonable and polite.

- If you are not, then you may be asked to leave the jobcentre. It does not mean you will be sanctioned but it may cause a problem with your benefit.
- If the staff are not, you can complain. See www.gov.uk/complain-jobcentre-plus

Are you entitled to claim another benefit?

If you have care or mobility needs you may be entitled to claim Personal Independence Payment (PIP). If you think you are incapable of work you may be entitled to claim ESA instead of JSA. If you have a partner, they may be able to claim a benefit instead. See more information below.

Knowing who to contact

Jobcentre Plus deals with benefits like ESA and JSA - phone 0800 169 0310. For **Universal Credit** phone 0800 328 5644.

To claim PIP – phone the Department for Work and Pensions on 0800 917 2222. If you have a **support or care worker**, they may be able to help you.

Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) tenants can contact a Support and Progression worker at your nearest Community Housing Office, by phone 0191 278 8600 or visit www.yhn.org.uk/extra-support/advice-support/

You can get advice on the phone from: Newcastle City Council's Welfare Rights Service on 0191 277 2627 (Monday to Friday 9.30am to 12 noon) and Citizens Advice on 0300 330 9055.

More information about benefits and advice services in Newcastle:

Newcastle City Council website - www.newcastle.gov.uk/welfarerights

More information on benefits in work:

See the fact sheet on this page - www.newcastle.gov.uk/benefitinformation

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