



## **A Quick Guide to Universal Credit for Youth Justice Practitioners.**

### **Introduction.**

Universal Credit is a benefit usually paid to adults. However, depending upon their personal circumstances, some 16-17 years are also eligible. Consequently, it is important that you as youth justice practitioners understand:

1. the eligibility criteria for Universal Credit
2. the steps you should take to support children in making a claim and
3. on-going support that is likely to be needed to make sure that children continue to be able to claim Universal Credit.

### **What is Universal Credit?**

Universal credit is a payment to help with living costs. It replaces six existing benefits (Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-related Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Working Tax Credit).

It is usually paid monthly (but can be paid more frequently if needed). It is made up of a standard allowance and any extra amounts that apply, for example, if the person:

- has children
- has a disability or health condition
- has housing costs

## Who can Claim Universal Credit?

**Gov.uk states that the minimum age to claim Universal Credit is generally 18 but in some circumstances the minimum age is lowered to 16 where a child:**

- has limited capability for work or has medical evidence and are waiting for a Work Capability Assessment
- is caring for a severely disabled person
- if responsible for a child
- is in a couple with responsibility for at least one child and your partner is eligible for Universal Credit
- is pregnant and it's 11 weeks or less before the expected week of childbirth
- has had a child in the last 15 weeks
- does not have parental support\*

**\*A child is without parental support if they are not being looked after by a local authority and they:**

- have no parent; or
- can't live with their parents because they are estranged from them, there is a serious risk to their physical or mental health, or they would suffer significant harm if they lived with them; or
- are living away from their parents, and neither parent can support them financially because the parent has a physical or mental impairment, is detained in custody pending trial or sentence upon conviction or under a sentence imposed by a court, or is prohibited from entering or re-entering Great Britain.

### **If a child is in training or studying full-time**

They can make a new Universal Credit claim if any of the following apply:

- they live with their partner and they're eligible for Universal Credit
- they're responsible for a child, either as a single person or as a couple
- they're disabled and entitled to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and have limited capability for work
- they're in 'non-advanced education' (for example studying for A levels or a BTEC National Diploma), are 21 or under and do not have parental support

## How to claim Universal Credit

A claim for Universal Credit must be made online and the account must be managed online. After making a claim the child will need to attend an interview. If the child cannot claim online:

- they can get help making a claim online at local Jobcentre Plus offices, councils or by calling the helpline on 0800 328 5644.
- If the child is unable to claim Universal Credit online, they must contact the Universal Credit helpline. They can claim over the phone if they have good reasons for not being able to claim online.

**You should check if the child needs support in making a claim. Support might be needed to prepare for the claim, making the claim online or attending the interview with the child at the Job Centre.**

**Some Youth Offending Teams have local partnerships with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to ensure that children have access to trained DWP work coaches or to support DWP staff in understanding the needs of children.**

### Practice Example:

Having identified a need, Sheffield YOT helped negotiate and establish the part allocation of the work coach HMP Wealstun to HMYOI Wetherby to provide benefits advice and support to children placed there.

### Practice Example:

The South and West Yorkshire Resettlement Consortium have established a Resettlement clinic where eligible children placed at HMYOI Wetherby can spend time at Leeds YOT on temporary release to engage in resettlement activities such as benefits preparation.

### **Practice Example:**

Hartlepool YJS have a Service Level Agreement with DWP to support a seconded Think Families Employment Advisor. The Think Families Advisor has worked closely with the local job centre to support staff understanding of the needs of children in contact with the youth justice system and the needs of their families.

This has resulted in staff at the job centre having a better understanding of children's needs, how best to communicate effectively with children and to flex their approach. This can include, seeing them when late or rescheduling appointments as well as positive communication.

The Advisor has also worked with Credit Union, to increase their knowledge and understanding of children's needs and again to demonstrate flexibility where needed.

### **What is needed to make a claim**

To make a claim for Universal Credit the following are required:

- email address (this cannot be set up whilst in custody. However, the YOT or DWP work coach should be able to support the child in setting one up. address (a care of address can be used or, in exceptional circumstances, the Job Centre)
- phone number
- bank account details (not essential for making the claim but is needed before a payment can be made)
- evidence of identity (see appendix 1), and
- where the claimant has a tenancy, we will also need to see a recent tenancy agreement and proof of housing costs

**Children are unlikely to have many of the sources of accepted proofs of identity due to their age and stage in life. As such an application for Universal Credit can be**

challenging and you are likely to need to offer support to ensure the child has the necessary documentation in preparation to make a claim.

“We help children apply for their National Insurance (NI) number if lost. NI numbers are frequently needed ETE purposes and ensuring children have them to hand makes life easier for them.” **Sheffield YJS.**

You can find out more on how to do apply for a lost NI number via the following link <https://www.gov.uk/lost-national-insurance-number>

## **Making a claim for children resettling from custody.**

A claim to Universal Credit currently **cannot** be made in advance of a child's release from custody.

**However, it is vital that if a child is likely to be eligible to claim Universal Credit upon release that preparations to support the claim begin at the initial planning meeting. For instance, it will be important to make sure that the child has the necessary identification to enable the claim upon day of release (see appendix 1). This may not be straight forward and ample time should be allowed to gather this into one place to have to hand when making the claim on the day of release.**

The Universal Credit claim does not start until the claim has been submitted. The child should make the online claim immediately or as soon as possible after their release as claims will not be back dated.

### **Support for making a claim**

It will benefit the child if preparations to have all the information in good time prior to release. You should allow time to check the whereabouts of necessary proof of identity required to make a claim and to obtain new documents if needed. YOT and secure staff should agree who will lead on these tasks. Considerations that you will want to make are as follows:

- Checking that the child has the necessary ID and bank account and evidence like tenancy agreement and proof of housing costs to support their claim (see Appendix 1).
- It is possible to apply for and be issued with a passport whilst in custody. In this circumstance the passport will be sent to the Governor for safe keeping until the child is released. For further information visit:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/118559/prisoners.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118559/prisoners.pdf)
- If the child is a 'child in need' and requires a passport as proof of identify the practitioner could consider asking the Social Worker to make a claim for section 17 financial assistance. For further information visit:  
[https://www.proceduresonline.com/westberks/cs/p\\_fin\\_assist\\_cin.html#prov\\_fa](https://www.proceduresonline.com/westberks/cs/p_fin_assist_cin.html#prov_fa)
- Referring the child to partner prison organisations for help if necessary.

- Booking an initial appointment at the nearest jobcentre to where they will be living and explaining what to expect at the interview (that will take place on the day of release or the earliest available date). You can accompany the child to this appointment. It is likely to be a challenging time for the child and supporting them will provide both practical and emotional aid. It will also help build your relationship with the child and send a clear message that you are there for them.
- Ensuring the child understands the importance of attending their interview at the jobcentre including the availability of advance payments to support them on their release.

“I met with Jake to support his application for Universal Credit over a couple of days. The web form is long and required lots of information Jake did not have readily to hand.”

“Jake had lost his bank card, so I supported him suspend the card and arrange a new card in its place. I meanwhile arranged with a family member for Jake to use his bank details, to allow his UC claim to be completed and a verification interview to be booked at the Job Centre.”

“We were able to buy a replacement birth certificate for him to support his application using Section 17 Children Act 1989 money. We also bought Jake food whilst awaiting a decision on his claim and advance payment.” **Hartlepool YJS**

## Where Universal Credit will be Paid

Universal Credit should ideally be paid into a bank, building society, or credit union account that is in the child's or their partner's own name. The resettlement worker can help with opening a bank account.

In exceptional circumstances Universal Credit can be paid into someone else's bank account or building society account. If the child has previously tried but not managed to open or access a traditional bank account, a payment can be made using a different method:

- Post Office Card accounts (only in exceptional circumstances, these are being phased out from 2020)
- payments into third party accounts
- Her Majesty's Government Payment Exception Service (used to be Simple Payments)

**See how you can support a child open a bank account via the following link:**

<https://yjresourcehub.uk/yjb-effective-practice/youth-justice-kits/item/627-banking-for-children-in-or-leaving-custody.html>

### Case Study:

The Think Families Advisor speaks openly with families to encourage parents to open a bank account for their child. This is a positive step and supports a child's maturation and growth. Having a bank account also eases applying for Universal Credit or providing a means into which the child can get paid when entering employment.

**Hartlepool YJS.**

### On-going Support.

Children are likely to require on-going support to enable them to meet the conditions of continued receipt of Universal Credit and meanwhile to budget effectively and manage financially within their means.

## Claimant Commitment.

There are a range of **claimant commitments** that claimants will need to meet in exchange for Universal Credit.

Universal Credit claimant commitment level will be decided at the first interview with the work coach. The claimant commitment is important because it details what action the child has to take in return for getting Universal Credit. These actions will be to do with preparing for work or looking for work. If the child does not meet these commitments then their benefit can be sanctioned (cut). The child should be moved between different claimant commitment levels if circumstances change.

There are four work-related activity groups:

Group	What child will need to do
<b>No work-related requirements group</b>	Nothing required to prepare or look for work.
<b>Work- focused interview group</b>	Meet regularly with work coach.
<b>Work preparation group</b>	Meet regularly with work coach and prepare for work. This includes things like writing a CV and on-going training or work experience.
<b>All work-related activity group</b>	Make every effort to find a job or earn more. This includes looking for jobs, applying for jobs and going to interviews

**Most claimants will sit in the All Work-related activity group.** However, the group a child has been allocated to can be found either via their on-line account or their paper 'claimant commitment'. Further information can be found via the Citizens Advice website [here](#) including a useful guide to checking which group the child should sit within.

You should ensure that the child has understood the commitment they are making. It is likely that they will need support in working out how they can keep this commitment and in evidencing that this is the case.

#### **Case Study:**

Alex had made a successful claim for Universal Credit. However, he was subsequently failed to provide the necessary evidence that he had met his claimant commitment and was sanctioned.

The YOT realised that Alex would need support when making a further claim and obtained written consent from Alex to allow the YOT Officer to advocate upon his behalf. The Officer explained that Alex had had multiple statutory appointments plus appointments to resolve accommodation difficulties and had consequently had reduced time to seek work. The work coach consequently reinstated the full amount of money paid to Alex and reduced the expectations of Alex's claimant commitment.

Sheffield YJS

#### **Budgeting.**

Children are likely to need help with budgeting from practitioners and YOTs will need to ensure that there is adequate support available to help children manage their income.

**A range of budget planning templates are available online. For example:**

[https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/money-matters\\_budget-planner.pdf](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/money-matters_budget-planner.pdf)

However, these tools alone are unlikely to be sufficient and children will require personal support from practitioners.

Where necessary budget planning support should begin whilst the child is in custody/before a claim is made so that they can develop an understanding of how to manage their money.

In the community budget planning support might be offered by the YOT case manager, designated seconded staff, a third sector organisation the YOT has a partnership with or a volunteer. This is part of supporting any child in their maturation towards adulthood.

**For further information please contact:**

Universal Credit helpline

Telephone: 0800 328 5644

Welsh language: 0800 328 1744

Text phone: 0800 328 1344

Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm

Alternatively visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/eligibility>

<https://www.entitledto.co.uk/help/claims-by-16-and-17-year-olds>

## Acceptable ID checklist - Appendix 1

### **Primary ID—one item of evidence is needed from this list**

- A current passport showing that the holder, or a person named in the passport as the child of the holder, is a British citizen or a citizen of the United Kingdom
- A current passport or national identity card showing that the holder, or a person named in the passport as the child of the holder, is a national of the European
- Full photo card driving licence – we do not accept the paper counterpart document that came with the photo card driving licence, as these were abolished in 2015.
- Provisional photo card driving licence – we do not accept the paper counterpart document that came with the photo card driving licence, as these were
- A residence permit, registration certificate or document certifying or indicating permanent residence issued by the Home Office or the United Kingdom Border
- A permanent residence card issued by the Home Office or the Border and Immigration Agency to the family member of a national of a European Economic
- A Biometric Residence Permit issued by the United Kingdom Border Agency to the holder which indicates that the person named in it is allowed to stay indefinitely in the United Kingdom, or has no time limit on their stay in the United
- A passport or other travel document endorsed to show that the holder is exempt from immigration control, is allowed to stay indefinitely in the United Kingdom, has the right of abode in the United Kingdom, or has no time limit on their stay in
- An Immigration Status Document issued by the Home Office or the United Kingdom Border Agency to the holder with an endorsement indicating that the person named in it is allowed to stay indefinitely in the United Kingdom or has no
- A certificate of registration or naturalisation as a British citizen, which indicates the holder is entitled to take up employment in the United Kingdom.
- Non-EEA Passport.
- Citizen's Card.
- Young Scot Card with PASS hologram.
- Bank Card supported by bank statement showing full account information. This account MUST be in the claimant's name and MUST be the account their Universal Credit is being paid into.

## Secondary ID – two items of evidence are needed from this list

- Old paper type driving licence (The paper form of driving licence is still valid and will be held by people who have not changed their address since the introduction of the photo licence).
- Certificate of registration or naturalisation as a British citizen
- Original birth certificate issued in the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or Ireland (or certified copy from Registrar)
- Foreign birth certificate.
- Original (or certified copy from Registrar) birth/adoption certificates.
- Local authority rent card.
- Council tax documents.
- Life assurance/insurance policies.
- Recently paid fuel/telephone bills in the customer's name.
- Original marriage certificate.
- Original civil partnership certificate
- Divorce or annulment papers
- Dissolution of civil partnership papers
- Certificate/contract of employment in Her Majesty's Forces.
- Certificate/contract of employment under the Crown.
- Certificate/contract of employment in the Merchant's Navy
- Current Police registration certificate.
- Current firearms certificate.
- Current/recent wage/pension slip that includes payee name and National Insurance number.
- Letter from employer/contract of employment.
- Deed poll certificate.
- Current bank account/building society/Post Office card account statements.
- Current/open savings account book.
- Personal cheque book.
- Current debit/switch card.
- Current charge card.
- Trade Union membership card.
- Travel pass with photograph affixed.

- Apprenticeship indentures.
- Vehicle Registration/motor insurance documents.
- Expired passport.