

Universal Credit Implementation Briefings – Questions and Answers

Purpose

The summary below is intended to capture the main questions and answers from the sessions held by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Sunderland City Council (SCC) in October 2015 for staff and representatives from various organisations. The organisation that provided the responses are also indicated

QUESTIONS	ANSWERS
<p>Will the support mentioned in the presentation from the DWP to help people improve circumstances / find work really be provided –or is it just rhetoric?</p>	<p>DWP Support will be there for people and it is recognised that this is a big cultural shift for DWP staff.</p> <p>DWP are now being measured against getting people into sustained jobs and then better paid jobs rather than just getting people off benefits.</p> <p>The Work Coach role and the time they spend with each customer is key to this</p>
<p>Will it be the same sanctions rules under UC as JSA/ESA?</p>	<p>DWP-Yes – The rules are very similar.</p> <p>The sanctions regime will eventually apply to everyone claiming UC, but people will have different levels of conditionality linked to their own circumstances.</p> <p>There is much more responsibilities being placed on DWP staff and Work Coaches in particular to make sure that customer’s claimant commitments are correct for their circumstance and they can actually undertake the actions required.</p> <p>UC is one payment made up of a number of individual elements.</p> <p>In most cases a sanction will only reduce a percentage of the persons ‘ Standard Allowance’ leaving any payment they receive towards their housing costs unaffected</p> <p>In some cases however where the housing costs may be the only UC payment the person is entitled to – the housing costs payment can also be sanctioned and payment reduced</p> <p>NB Sanctions under UC can run consecutively instead of concurrently.</p>
<p>How are current partners working arrangements / protocols with the DWP affected by UC – especially around Personal Budgeting Support –other support?</p>	<p>DWP- Current arrangements with organisations are unchanged</p>

<p>What arrangement will be in place for people with Zero Hour contracts – how will payments be affected</p>	<p>DWP-Are not encouraging people to take up Zero Hours contracts that have any sort of exclusivity clause.</p> <p>Where people are on such contracts though, their UC payments will be automatically adjusted as employers have to provide details of earning to the HMRC (which in turn feeds into the UC payment system).</p> <p>In practice there may be an issue adjusting payments if this is within 3 days of the person's next UC payment being made – but customers that are in financial hardship as a result can apply for an Advance Payment if the change increases their UC payment</p>
<p>Do customers get access to a computer (to make the on line claim</p>	<p>Access is being provided for people that need this both by DWP and the council – and is covered later in the presentation.</p> <p>If there are any practical issues with these arrangements these will be looked at by the UC Operational Group which has been set up to try to resolve day to day problems once UC goes live.</p>
<p>Will Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA) or something similar apply to people in Hostels – to ensure people don't spend their 'rent money ' and so the housing providers don't lose out</p>	<p>DWP- APA can be applied for by Housing Providers but if the hostel falls under the rules for 'Specified Accommodation rent' (by way of Housing Benefit) will still be paid directly to the Landlord</p> <p>In this 1st phase of Universal Credit, Hostel residents are likely to be exempt from having to apply for UC – due to being more likely to claim other benefits instead of Job Seekers Allowance. ATTACHED ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</p>
<p>Is there any information on how to calculate UC / courses being arranged?</p>	<p>SCC- A numbers of online calculators such as Turn2us or Entitledto are available on the .Gov site or SCC website already.</p> <p>Courses for those that need to know this level of detail (within the council and for advice agencies) are being considered /looked at</p>
<p>Can APA be in place indefinitely – as we've heard that they are short term?</p>	<p>DWP- The intention is that APA are short term and they will be reviewed but if the situation / person still requires one they can be continued.</p> <p>DWP acknowledge that everyone is different and so may need support for different periods.</p>
<p>Can people with Mental Health issues ask for – be covered by an APA?</p>	<p>DWP- Yes- Evidence would be requested to confirm the risk if payments were made as normal</p>

On the better off slide in the presentation is rent included in the like for like calculations?	DWP- Yes
UC is described as one single household payment – does it take account of other peoples incomes / circumstances	DWP- No – UC only covers the person, their partner and any dependent children. Other people / non dependents are not included in UC payment
Do UC payments vary depending on whether it is a 4 week or 5 week month?	DWP -No – Entitlement is averaged out over the 12 month period (though payment may change if circumstances change).
Who needs to report changes of circumstances?	DWP- Claimants need to report changes of circumstances that could affect their claim. Earnings details should be recalculated by the HMRC PAYE system and lead to any adjustments in UC needed.
Is the 16 rule (to prevent payment of certain benefits) gone?	DWP- Yes – for UC. It still exists for JSA
If people are working part time how / will their work search requirements are adapted?	DWP- The person's claimant commitment may be adapted and a 'light touch' approach adopted. The intention though is that DWP will support people to find more sustainable work
What will Prisoners need to claim when they are released?	DWP- Prisoners that have been claiming UC before entering prison will need to reclaim UC and claim UC also if they are single job seekers.
How secure are the council offices – where people can get assistance to claim on line	SCC- Council customer service staffs, working in these offices have been assisting people to apply for Housing Benefit online so already know how to manage security issues and confidentiality. When people are using library IT resources they will need to take care – as they do now
Do Landlords have to wait for the person to have 8 weeks' worth of arrears before they can apply for an APA?	DWP- No, they can apply if person is building up arrears / is in a risk group – but 8 weeks is a trigger level. The deductions from benefit rules still apply to UC but landlords do not have any additional ways of recovering rent owed under UC, compared to existing benefits
Are there any maximum time limits for making UC payments – or how long delays can be	DWP- No – but currently 97% of UC payments are being made within the time periods covered in the presentation. The 3% tend to be for complex housing queries or where customer have not supplied information that's been requested

<p>Are the Advance payments mentioned one off payments – can they only be claimed once</p>	<p>DWP- The advance payment is worth 50% of the indicative UC payment and will be recovered within 6 months</p> <p>Customers can reapply for further Advance Payments –if they are in serious financial hardship and have not yet received their first payment</p>
<p>Can you provide an update on Trusted Partner Status and developments?</p>	<p>DWP- Further roll out is intended. Expressions of interest have recently been requested to see who else wants to be involved</p>
<p>Will claimants be given information about the advice available to them if they can't agree their Claimant Commitment – or are sanctioned?</p>	<p>DWP- Yes</p> <p>SCC - Council already offers advice through its 1st Tier Advice Providers and Welfare Rights Service , and these details are being included in the public information being developed to support UC implementation</p>
<p>How are DWP addressing concerns about UC being one payment especially in cases where there is a risk of domestic violence and / or that the payment may not reach the partner / children</p>	<p>DWP- This is one of the reasons why split payments have been created as part of the APA.</p> <p>DWP and council recognise the practical issues involved and actually getting people to speak up about concerns (claimants / organisations) so do want feedback / input from partners (though recognising confidentiality issues)</p> <p>(SCC) Public information mentioning APA arrangements and we are asking the councils 1st tier advice providers to push for these where required</p>
<p>DWP mentioned that things have improved with UC since it first started in the north west. What has improved?</p>	<p>DWP- The DWP have listened a lot more to what people have been telling them regarding issues , safeguards and the support that people need.</p> <p>That's why the requirements for things such as the APA have been relaxed e.g. allowing the landlords to apply directly to Universal Credit Service Centre</p>
<p>There are real concerns about potential for rent arrears increasing because people will say that they don't need help budgeting and just want the total payment for themselves</p>	<p>DWP- The work coaches have all been trained on how to pick up on these sorts of issues, and DWP are also learning from other sites that have gone live</p> <p>They can arrange APA because of these sorts of risks , and can also refer people for Personal Budgeting support through the council</p> <p>It is planned that the councils Personal Budget Support Advisor and the work coaches will have regular meetings and case conferences to ensure that these issues are picked up on and improve.</p>

<p>Is there any plan to provide awareness training to more places – surgeries in community venues for example?</p>	<p>SCC- The need for further training is being kept under review.</p> <p>The communications though are being carefully managed to try and target these to those customers and organisations that are likely to be affected by this 1st phase rather than to alarm people that won't be affected for quite a while.</p> <p>SCC and DWP will also look at arranging update sessions post implementation to share experiences to see what needs improving (locally and nationally)</p>
<p>Will conditionality and eligibility be different under UC compared to current benefits?</p> <p>Applications forms and bids for funding currently have boxes to tick as UC Only but not any differences within this category</p>	<p>DWP - UC has a conditionality framework which means different groups of customers have to do different things as part of their Claimant Commitments</p> <p>Other areas of UC including applications and eligibility for other services are being looked at – linked to its roll out to more customer groups</p>
<p>Will the DWP still have social justice coaches?</p>	<p>DWP - Currently Yes- but the training that the social justice coaches have had is being delivered to all work coaches as well</p>
<p>If someone claims UC but then becomes really sick will they claim ESA instead?</p>	<p>DWP – No – they will stay on UC but will have to undergo the Work Capability Assessment within UC instead</p>
<p>How will Advance Payments be recovered?</p>	<p>DWP- They will be recovered from UC within 6 months. If people still at risk of hardship, recovery can be delayed for up to 3 months?</p>
<p>Can people / organisations have a look at the UC forms?</p>	<p>DWP- Unfortunately there isn't a paper form but DWP can provide a presentation detailing the process and some of the questions if this would help. ATTACHED PRESENTATION</p>