

Universal Credit Sanctions

If you do not comply with the conditions attached to your claim, you may be sanctioned. A sanction means that your benefit is paid at a reduced or nil rate. This factsheet outlines the circumstances in which you might receive a sanction, how long they last, how much the reduction is and how to challenge the decision.

Work-related requirements

You may receive a sanction if you do not comply with the work-related requirements that are outlined in your **claimant commitment**. The work-related requirements that you might have depend on which benefit you are claiming and your individual circumstances.

Claimant commitment

You must normally accept a claimant commitment to be entitled to Universal Credit. Your claimant commitment will outline your work-related requirements and what the consequences of not fulfilling them are, as well as other responsibilities that you have (such as reporting a change in your circumstances). You cannot challenge your work-related requirements by revision, supersession or appeal, but you can negotiate with your work coach.

Work-related requirements include:

Work-focused interviews

The purpose of a work-focused interview is to increase your chances of finding work, increase your hours if you are already working, or assess your future prospects of work if you are not currently required to work. They may identify activities that you can undertake, such as education or training.

Work preparation

Work preparation means fulfilling any particular action that the DWP decide makes it more likely that you will find work or increase your hours or pay eg. skills assessment, work experience, training.

Work-search

You are normally expected to spend 35 hours a week searching for work. The number of hours may be lower if you have caring responsibilities, you have a child under 13, you are a foster parent or it is reasonable due to a health condition or disability. The DWP may also agree to lower your expected hours if you have a part-time job, do voluntary work (this can only account for up to 50% of your expected hours regardless of how much volunteering you do), or you are dealing with a domestic emergency or other temporary emergency.

Work availability

You are expected to be willing and immediately able to take up work, more work or better paid work, and be available for job interviews. You may be allowed longer in certain circumstances, eg. up to one month if you are a carer or until after your notice period if you are working.

In some circumstances, the DWP may agree that you can limit the type, location and pay of the work you are looking for.

Universal Credit work-related requirements

Your (and your partner's if you have one) work-related requirements will depend on which of the following groups you are in:

- no work-related requirements
- work-focused interview only
- work-focused interviews and work preparation
- all work-related requirements.

No work-related requirements

You are exempt from any work-related requirements if you:

- are responsible for a child under 1 year (this responsibility applies to only one member of a couple)
- have limited capability for work-related activity
- have reached State Pension age
- care for a severely disabled person for at least 35 hours a week (you do not have to be receiving Carer's Allowance or Carer Support Payment (Scotland)). Seek advice if you care for more than one severely disabled person for at least 35 hours but do not qualify for Carer's Allowance or Carer Support Payment (Scotland)
- are pregnant and due to have your baby within the next 11 weeks or have had a baby in the last 15 weeks
- have adopted a child in the last 12 months
- are the responsible foster parent for a child under 1 year
- are under age 21, in full-time, non-advanced education and have no parental support
- are a student and have student income taken into account in your award. This exemption does not apply if you have a postgraduate loan for a part-time course
- have experienced domestic violence in the past 6 months and you do not live with the person who was violent or who threatened violence. This exemption lasts for 13 weeks, or for 26 weeks if you are responsible for a child under age 16
- are in work and your earnings exempt you. If you work but your earnings are less than the National Minimum Wage for your expected hours of work, you may have work-related requirements (but see also 'In-work conditionality' below).

Work-focused interview only

You are expected to attend work-focused interviews if you:

- are responsible for a child aged 1 year (this responsibility applies to only one member of a couple)
- are the foster carer of a child (this responsibility applies to only one member of a couple)
- are the foster carer of a child or qualifying young person with significant care needs and it is accepted as reasonable
- have become a 'friend or family carer' to a child in the last 12 months and are also the responsible person for that child.

Work-focused interviews and work preparation

You are in this group if you:

- have limited capability for work
- are responsible for a child aged 2 years (this responsibility applies to only one member of a couple).

All work-related requirements

If you are not in any of the above groups, you are expected to take part in all work-related activities.

In-work conditionality

Work-related requirements may apply if you work but your earnings are less than the National Minimum Wage for your expected hours of work and the administrative earnings threshold (AET).

You may be subject to work-focused interviews and work preparation if your earnings are less than the National Minimum Wage for your expected hours of work but more than the AET.

The **administrative earnings threshold** is currently £892 per month for single claimants and £1,437 for couples. Check the latest information at www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-and-earnings

Temporary or emergency circumstances

If you do not fall into one of the above groups, your work-related requirements may be changed for a limited period in certain temporary or emergency circumstances, including if you have been bereaved within the last 6 months.

Sanction duration

There are different types of sanction, which last for different lengths of time. The type of sanction you receive depends on which conditionality group you are in and what your sanctionable failure is.

Type of sanction	Conditionality group	Length of sanction	Examples of failures
High level	All work-related requirements	91 or 182 days	Failing to apply for or to accept paid work Ceasing or losing paid work
Medium level	All work-related requirements	28 or 91 days	Failing to be available for or seek work
Low level	All work-related requirements Work-focused interview and work preparation	Until you comply, plus a fixed period of 7, 14 or 28 days	Failing to meet a work-focused interview requirement/work preparation requirement
Lowest level	Work-focused interview requirement only	Until you comply	Failing to meet a work-related interview requirement

You cannot be sanctioned if you are in the no work-related requirements group.

The sanction period which applies depends on whether any other sanctions have occurred within the last 12 months (but not within 14 days of the previous sanction). If a subsequent failure occurs within 14 days of a previous failure, the resulting sanction will be at the same level as the previous sanction.

Claimants with complex needs

If you have complex needs, you should be contacted by telephone (or home visit in some circumstances) before the sanction decision is made, to establish what caused the sanction and whether you have a good reason. This may apply if you have a serious mental health condition, you are homeless, or English is not your first language (not an exhaustive list).

Sanction amount

If you are sanctioned, your benefit is paid at a reduced or nil rate for the duration of the sanction period.

The sanction reduction for Universal Credit is calculated by multiplying the number of days in the sanction period that apply during that monthly assessment period (MAP) by the daily reduction rate. The daily reduction rate is normally the amount of the standard allowance included your claim, multiplied by 12 and divided by 365. If necessary, the sanction reduction is adjusted so that it is not more than your standard allowance.

The daily reduction rate is lower in some circumstances, including if you are the parent of a child under 1, can only be required to meet a work-focused interview requirement, or are 16 or 17 years old.

If you are a joint claimant, the daily reduction rate is reduced by 50% (unless you have both been sanctioned). If necessary, the sanction reduction is adjusted so that it is not more than 50% of your standard allowance.

Tala received a 91-day high-level sanction for leaving her job without good cause. There are 20 days remaining in the sanction period. She is 27 and lives alone.

Number of days remaining within current MAP 20 x daily reduction rate £12.90 = £258

Tala's standard allowance in her next UC award will be reduced by £258, leaving her with £135.45, plus any other elements that she is also entitled to.

Challenging a decision

You can challenge a sanction decision at any time – there is no time limit. It is important to challenge previous sanction decisions even if they have passed, to avoid the sanction period increasing in length.

You can challenge a sanction decision on various grounds, including if:

- you were properly notified about what was required of you and the consequences of not complying;
- you actually failed to do what was asked;
- you had a good reason for not complying (see below).

Good reason

A sanction should not be imposed if you had a good reason for your actions. It is up to you to demonstrate that you had good reason.

Good reason is not defined, but the guidance indicates that Decision Makers should take into account all relevant information about the claimant's individual circumstances and their reasons for any failures, including looking back over journal entries.

The Advice for Decision Maker's guidance on good reason can be found here: [ADM Chapter K2: Good reason](#)

If a sanction is imposed, you can challenge it on the basis of good reason.

When a sanction terminates

A sanction period will be terminated and benefit no longer reduced if, since the date of the sanction decision, you have been in paid work for at least 6 months. Specific conditions apply, which include the amount of earnings considered to be paid work.

Hardship payments

If you are sanctioned, you may be able to claim a hardship payment. A Universal Credit hardship payment is a loan. They are usually recovered from future payments, although the DWP has discretion to not recover hardship payments in exceptional circumstances.

To be considered for a hardship payment you must:

- be able to show that you do not have any resources to meet essential items (eg. food, heating)
- have tried to access alternative sources of support such as asking family or friends
- have complied with all work-related requirements for the last 7 days

Hardship payments are paid at a reduced rate – approximately 60% of the amount you have been sanctioned.

Hardship payments are awarded on a monthly basis – you will need to reapply and meet the criteria for each monthly assessment period. Apply through your Universal Credit journal or by contacting the Universal Credit helpline on 0800 328 5644 by textphone on 0800 328 1344, or by Relay UK (if you cannot hear or speak on the phone) on 18001 0800 328 5644. A video relay service is available for British Sign Language users.

Future changes

The previous government announced several ways in which they were considering changing the sanction system in the future. One suggestion is to close Universal Credit claims after six months of non-engagement on an open-ended sanction. This would apply where only the standard allowance is payable and it has been reduced to nil.

Another suggestion is to remove benefits entirely for people who have been unemployed for 12 months and are failing to engage.

No date for these changes are known, and they are now subject to being agreed by the new government, check the latest information at www.gov.uk