

## **SUPPORT FOR BENEFIT CLAIMANTS**

### [1. NEW CLAIMS FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT](#)

### [2. CHANGES TO JOBCENTRE APPOINTMENTS](#)

### [3. PEOPLE ALREADY CLAIMING SUPPORT](#)

### [4. SUSPENSION OF BENEFIT REVIEWS AND REASSESSMENTS](#)

### [6. TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF DEBT RECOVERY FROM DWP BENEFITS](#)

### [7. SOCIAL SECURITY SCOTLAND \*\*updated\*\*](#)

### [8. INCREASED HELP WITH FUNERAL PAYMENTS](#)

### [9. NEW PROVISIONS FOR CARERS IN SCOTLAND](#)

### [10. AMENDMENTS TO STATUTORY FAMILY BENEFITS FOR FURLOUGHED WORKERS](#)

### [11. TAX CREDIT CLAIMS ENDING FOR PEOPLE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR UNIVERSAL CREDIT](#)

### [12. PENSION CREDIT CLAIMS AVAILABLE ONLINE FROM 4TH MAY 2020](#)

### [13. NO NEW BENEFIT PAYMENTS TO POST OFFICE CARD ACCOUNTS 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020](#)

## **1. PEOPLE WHO NEED TO MAKE A NEW CLAIM FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

The DWP have said they appreciate people who are required to stay at home or are infected by coronavirus may need financial support, and quickly.

Those affected by coronavirus will be able to apply for Universal Credit and can receive up to a month's advance up front without physically attending a Jobcentre.

The 7 waiting days for ESA for new claimants will not apply if they are suffering from coronavirus or are required to stay at home – so it will be payable from day one

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-support-for-employees-benefit-claimants-and-businesses>

**No-one making a new claim for Universal Credit needs to call the DWP**

The DWP has launched a new 'Don't call us - we'll call you' initiative that proactively calls claimants if they need to check any of the information provided as part of the claim, as well as messaging them on their online journal to confirm details.

This is in response to the huge volume of calls to the Universal Credit phone lines that has resulted in people being faced with an engaged tone or being left waiting for several hours.

Calls from the DWP may come through from a withheld number and claimants are encouraged to answer their phones, if it is not DWP or someone else you need to speak to, you can terminate the call.

The quickest and most direct way for Universal Credit claimant's to contact the DWP is through the online Journal.

## **2. CHANGES TO JOBCENTRE APPOINTMENTS**

Starting from Thursday 19 March 2020, people receiving benefits do not have to attend Jobcentre appointments for at least 3 months. People will continue to receive their benefits as normal, but all requirements to attend the Jobcentre in person are suspended.

People can still make applications for benefits online if they are eligible.

Jobcentres remain open to continue to support people who are not able to use phones and online, including homeless people.

People should not attend the Jobcentre unless directed to do so for an exceptional purpose, for example to collect Payment Exception Service vouchers.

The DWP announced further measures to minimise footfall in Jobcentres on 24 March 2020.

- Jobcentres will be closed to all but vulnerable cases and other related transactions which cannot be completed through any other channel in order to receive a timely payment.
- Inside Jobcentres, strict social distancing measures will be in place.
- Signs will be placed in windows asking everyone to claim online and / or over the phone.
- A number will be provided for those who want to speak to a colleague in the Jobcentre.

## **3. PEOPLE ALREADY CLAIMING SUPPORT**

The Government announced additional financial support for claimants on 20<sup>th</sup> March. The following benefits are due to increase on 6<sup>th</sup> April in addition to the planned increases on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020:

- Universal Credit standard allowances by £1000/yr for 12 months.

- Working Tax Credit by £1000/yr for the next 12 months. The new working tax credit basic allowance would be up to £2,960/year

In real terms, this means both benefits increase by £20 per week on top of planned annual uprating. This will apply to all new and existing Universal Credit claimants and existing Working Tax Credit claimants.

<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/>

To ensure people are not missing out on a Universal Credit award, claimants in work already claiming Universal Credit and staying at home on Government advice should report this in the usual way via their online journal. If working fewer hours, the amount of Universal Credit awarded will adjust as earnings change.

**There is updated guidance for those requiring further information at Gov.uk**

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): what to do if you're already getting benefits](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): what to do if you're employed and cannot work](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): what to do if you were employed and have lost your job](#)

**Only 'critical workers' able to access Childcare Element of Universal Credit while government's response to coronavirus is in place.**

In updated information added to its 'Understanding universal credit' web pages, the DWP advises that, in respect of childcare costs during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak -

'If you're already claiming universal credit, any childcare costs that you have paid for and reported, for childcare that has been provided, will be reimbursed as part of your universal credit claim as normal. Any childcare costs that you have paid for and intend to report, for childcare that has been provided, will also be reimbursed as part of your claim as normal.

Whilst the government's response to coronavirus is in place, unless you are a critical worker you will not be able to access universal credit childcare.

NB – DWP information about who qualifies as a critical worker refers to England, information for Scotland key workers can be found here:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-guide-schools-early-learning-closures/pages/key-workers/>

In respect of childcare paid for in advance during the coronavirus outbreak, the DWP advises -

'If you pay (and report) advance childcare costs for a future assessment period, but no childcare actually takes place during that time, you will not be able to reclaim those costs as part of your universal credit claim.

Your childcare provider might ask to keep an advance payment, saying that it will cover your costs whenever your childcare resumes. Please note that you will only be able to reclaim these costs if the childcare resumes during the assessment period in which you made the payment, or within the next 2 assessment periods after that.

Your childcare provider might ask for a sum of money to keep a place for your child – this is sometimes known as a retainer. This is not eligible for reimbursement unless it is actually an advance payment for childcare costs.'

For more information see [New to Universal Credit: Childcare costs and Employment and benefits support: Childcare costs during the coronavirus outbreak](#) from [understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk](http://understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk)

#### **4. SUSPENSION OF BENEFIT REVIEWS AND REASSESSMENTS**

On 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020 Work and Pensions Secretary of State Thérèse Coffey said:

*“We are automatically extending all awards and reassessments for health and disability benefits to provide reassurance to those in receipt of them.”*

- There will be no new reviews or reassessments across all benefits for 3 months – this includes Universal Credit (UC), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit.
- People who need to claim ESA or Universal Credit because of coronavirus will not be required to produce a fit note.
- Claimants who are staying at home as a result of coronavirus will have their mandatory work search and work availability requirements removed to account for a period of sickness.
- The Minimum Income Floor (an assumed level of income) will be suspended for all Self-employed claimants claiming Universal Credit.

#### **DWP has no plans to remove sanctions or deductions ‘incurred’ before the coronavirus outbreak for claimants who are self-isolating**

A written question regarding the above was raised in Parliament and answered by Employment Minister Mims Davies who said -

“We have no plans to remove sanctions or deductions incurred before the COVID-19 outbreak for those self-isolating. Deductions are already capped at 30 per cent to not overburden the claimant. Should we suspend deductions there is a risk that some claimants will be unable to pay their outstanding arrears from third parties, potentially resulting in eviction or a loss of services.’

The Minister added that hardship payments were available on request for those who are sanctioned to ensure they have the ability to pay for basic necessities but they have no plans to make these payments automatic and they must be applied for.

### **Disability Benefits due for review extended by 6 months**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> April, Justin Tomlinson – Minister for Disabled People confirmed that the DWP is automatically extending disability benefit awards by six months if they are due for reassessment in the next three months.

People whose conditions have deteriorated that feel they would be entitled to more money can still request a reassessment, but otherwise all current awards will be automatically extended.

He added “For new claimants, the terminally ill, and for those who ask for it, we are seeking to do it by telephone, by paper based reviews adopting a very sympathetic, claimant supportive view of this because we recognise that there are increasing challenges to be able to get adequate medical evidence so we are relying very much on the claimant’s case as they explain it.”

## **5. NEW SOCIAL SECURITY REGULATIONS**

In addition to those highlighted, the new regulations in force from 30 March 2020, *the Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) Regulations 2020* (SI.No.371/2020) also provide -

- that work search requirements for claimants of Universal Credit or new style JSA are not imposed for a period of 3 months, and that any existing work search requirement no longer applies so that the requirement to be 'able and willing immediately to take up paid work' no longer applies;
- for claimants who have an award of old-style JSA to be treated as available for work and actively seeking employment for at least the next 3 months;
- for any period during which a JSA claimant is infected or contaminated with coronavirus disease, is in isolation or is caring for a child or qualifying young person in their household who is infected, contaminated or in isolation, to not count towards a period of sickness that might otherwise have led to them losing entitlement to their JSA; and

SI.No.371/2020 is available from [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk)

## **6. TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF DEBT RECOVERY FROM DWP BENEFITS**

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Department for Work and Pensions has temporarily paused the recovery of benefit overpayments, for three months. This will stop recovery action associated with benefit overpayments, tax credits debt, and social fund loans.

There is a recorded message on its Debt Management telephone line (0800 916 0647, Option 3), the DWP says that due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak -

*'... We will no longer start to recover any new debts and will be suspending repayment of any debts already being recovered. This includes deductions for the repayment of benefit overpayments, tax credit debt and social fund loans from all benefits, direct debit plans, and repayments made to employers.*

*You do not need to speak to an adviser to ask us to do this, we have arranged this on your behalf.*

*If you currently make repayments through a bank standing order, please contact your bank to cancel your arrangement. If you currently make repayments by bank giro credit, please suspend these payments immediately. If you currently make repayments through online banking, please suspend these payments immediately."*

- Note recovery of Advances by deduction from Universal Credit payments will continue.
- Local Authorities will suspend referral of Housing Benefit overpayments.
- The transfer of Tax Credit debt from HMRC has already been suspended.
- Many activities will cease immediately but others may take longer to implement.
- For citizens who are not on benefits, we have directed private sector debt collection agencies to stop their activity for Debt Management customers.
- We are also suspending voluntary debt repayments and recovery by Direct Earnings Attachments.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/recovery-of-benefit-overpayment-suspended>

### **DWP third party deductions from Universal Credit recommenced 10 May 2020**

Due to the unprecedented number of new benefit claims and to ensure people were getting support they needed, the DWP paused deductions for Rent arrears, Service Charge arrears and Council Tax from UC and people may have been require to make alternative payments arrangements for April/May.

Applications for deductions have now recommenced from 10/5/20 and anyone who has had deductions approved from their benefit will be notified in their online UC journal.

## **7. SOCIAL SECURITY SCOTLAND Updated**

The Scottish Government has delayed the introduction of devolved disability benefits for an indefinite period.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Personal Independence Payments (PIP) which were to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament and replaced by Disability Assistance has now been delayed for an indefinite period.

Job Start Payment due to be introduced in March has also been delayed.

There are seven benefits currently administered by the Scottish Government. These are listed below and linked to [mygov.scot](https://mygov.scot) where there is more information about them and where people can make applications.

- [Carer's Allowance Supplement](#) – will be paid automatically in June 2020 to anyone who was getting Carer's Allowance from the Department of Work and Pensions on 15 April 2020 [More info below](#)
- [Best Start Grant - Pregnancy and Baby Payment](#)
- [Best Start Grant - Early Learning Payment](#)
- [Best Start Grant - School Age Payment](#) – [Reopened 1 June 2020 see below](#)
- [Best Start Foods](#)
- [Funeral Support Payment](#)
- [Young Carer Grant](#)

**The following statement was made on <https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/news/social-security-scotland-service-throughout-covid-19-1>**

“By following Scottish Government guidance, we are having to adapt some of our ways of working. These are unprecedented times and it is a fast changing situation.

If you have a general enquiry, please check [mygov.scot](https://mygov.scot) before calling and, if you are able to, please submit your application online. This will help to ease any additional pressure on our phone lines at this time and protect the telephone service for those who cannot access our support online.

We are now also taking general enquiries via our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts.

We are currently unable to answer incoming calls to our Freephone helpline. However, you can leave a voicemail with us between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday and we will aim to call you back within 48 hours. We will call you back between 8am and 6pm and we will try to reach you three times.

During this time we are continuing to process applications and make payments. However, this could take longer than usual. We will write to you once we have reached a decision on your application. We are grateful for your patience.”

The introduction of the Scottish Child Payment will also be delayed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The Scottish Government has stated that their aim is to now start taking applications by the end of 2020 with payments being made from 2021.

### **Extension of Social Security Timescales in Scotland**

Social Security timescales in Scotland have been extended where a delay is as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The changes are provided for by the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 which amends the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 to provide that:

- Late applications for assistance through any of the devolved benefits will be accepted where the lateness is due to coronavirus - In addition, the amendments allow for a late application to be accepted and considered where a person has passed the age limit for assistance, and would otherwise lose their entitlement to assistance, where the application could not be made earlier due to coronavirus;
- reasons relating to coronavirus will be accepted as 'good reasons' for extending the time limit for redeterminations and appeals by one year; and
- the timescale for Social Security Scotland to complete redeterminations is extended by nine weeks on top of the current 16 working days.

*(Section 11 of the Act provides for the new measures to expire on 30 September 2020 unless the Scottish Parliament extends this date, by way of regulations, to 31 March 2021 or 30 September 2021.)*

### **New Best Start School Age Payment**

From Monday 1st June 2020 applications opened for the Best Start School Age Payment from Social Security Scotland.

The £250 payment will be made for any child born between 1 March 2015 and 29 February 2016 where the parent or carer

- normally lives in Scotland.
- is responsible for a child born between 1 March 2015 and 29 February 2016 (inclusive)
- is getting a 'qualifying benefit' or is aged under 18
- claims between 1 June 2020 - 28 February 2021.

To claim you can:

- phone Social Security Scotland on 0800 182 2222
- [claim online at mygov.scot](https://mygov.scot)
- download a paper application form from [mygov.scot](https://mygov.scot).

## **8. INCREASED HELP WITH FUNERAL PAYMENTS**

The maximum additional amount within funeral expenses payment has been increased from £700 to £1,000. This payment is in addition to existing allowances that pay for funeral necessities, such as burial or cremation fees.

## **9. NEW PROVISIONS FOR CARERS IN SCOTLAND**

### **Temporary Adjustment to Carer's Allowance Rules**

Carer's Allowance claimants in Scotland will be treated as being engaged in caring duties during temporary breaks due to Coronavirus.

From 3 April 2020, the Carer's Allowance (Coronavirus) (Breaks in Care) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 (SSI.No.117/2020) make a temporary adjustment to entitlement rules to Carer's Allowance. This allows carer's to retain their entitlement if they have a temporary break in caring as a result of isolation due to, or infection or contamination with, coronavirus of either the carer or the person cared for.

The regulations also disregard the normal requirement to have provided care over a certain number of weeks in order to continue to qualify for Carer's Allowance during a break in care.

### **Extra £230.10 through a special one-off Coronavirus Carer's Allowance Supplement**

As part of the next emergency coronavirus legislation, the Scottish Government is proposing an additional £19.2 million investment in the Carers Allowance Supplement.

If approved by Scottish Parliament, around 83,000 eligible carers will get an extra £230.10 through a special one-off Coronavirus Carers Allowance Supplement which will be paid in June.

As with the current supplement, carers will not need to do anything to get this extra payment as it will be paid automatically to people in receipt of Carers Allowance.

This would mean that carers in Scotland will receive an additional £690.30 this year on top of their Carers Allowance and any other income. This supplement is not paid in the rest of the UK.

Further details are available at: <https://www.gov.scot/news/extra-payment-for-unpaid-carers/>

### **New Extra payment for Carers Confirmed**

This one-off payment is in addition to the regular six monthly Carer's Allowance Supplement. As a result, eligible carers will get a payment of at least £460.20. This will be paid from Friday 26 June.

As with the current supplement, carers will not need to do anything to get this extra payment as it will be paid automatically to people who were living in Scotland and in receipt of Carer's Allowance on 13 April 2020 eligibility date. Social Security Scotland will write to eligible carers in advance.

## **10. AMENDMENTS TO STATUTORY FAMILY BENEFITS FOR FURLOUGHED WORKERS**

From 25<sup>th</sup> April 2020, new regulations are in force for workers furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to ensure, that for the purposes of statutory family benefits and maternity allowance, workers are treated as if they had not been furloughed.

The Maternity Allowance, Statutory Maternity Pay, Statutory Paternity Pay, Statutory Adoption Pay, Statutory Shared Parental Pay and Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (Normal Weekly Earnings etc.) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI.No.450/2020) amend regulations relating to -

- statutory maternity pay
- statutory adoption pay
- statutory paternity pay
- statutory shared parental pay
- statutory parental bereavement pay
- maternity allowance

The amendments apply where a person is a furloughed employee for the purposes of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, and provide that normal weekly earnings (or average weekly earnings in the case of maternity allowance) are to be calculated to take into account the sums which a person would have earned if they had not been on furlough during the relevant period.

[SI.No.450/2020](#) is available from [legislation.gov.uk](http://legislation.gov.uk)

## **Normal Working Hours used to Calculate Tax Credits**

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) have confirmed that people who are not working their normal hours because of coronavirus will retain entitlement to their usual tax credits.

Claimants do not need to contact HMRC as they will be treated as working their normal hours until the Job Retention Scheme and Self-Employment Income Support Scheme close

Claimants can still report any other changes in income, childcare and hours in the normal way. However, they must report if they or their partner lose their job, are made redundant or cease trading.'

For more information, see [Tax credits customers will continue to receive payments even if working fewer hours due to COVID-19](#) from gov.uk

## **11. TAX CREDIT CLAIMS ENDING FOR PEOPLE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

The DWP have warned people that applying for universal credit will automatically bring any tax credit claim to an end, even if they are not eligible for universal credit. Neither the DWP nor HMRC can advise people whether claiming universal credit or tax credits will be better for them.

The DWP advises that people who are in receipt of tax credits and considering applying for Universal Credit should read the Department's 'simple guide' before they apply. The 'guide' warns -

*'If you currently receive tax credits, applying for universal credit will end your tax credit claim. Once closed it is not possible to re-open a tax credit claim or to claim tax credits again in the future.*

*Not all tax credit recipients will be eligible to receive universal credit. If you claim universal credit, your tax credit claim will be closed, even if you aren't eligible to receive universal credit.*

*It should be noted that it is not only Tax Credits that will end if UC is claimed. Other legacy benefits including Housing Benefit will also cease.*

*It is very important that claimants seek advice before they make a claim for Universal Credit particularly in the situation above or if they are due any earnings, or holiday pay etc. as they will be taken into account in the first or subsequent UC Assessment periods."*

**Ayr Housing Aid Centre can provide benefit checks and information for people prior to making their claims for Universal Credit so you can make an informed decision if, or when to claim.**

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Dr Thérèse Coffey has said she is 'actively looking' at what can be done for tax credit claimants who have lost their entitlement due to applying for universal credit. Dr Coffey adds that she has 'already asked for the website to be updated', so that people are 'crystal clear' when they apply.

## **12. PENSION CREDIT CLAIMS AVAILABLE ONLINE FROM 4<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2020**

New regulations in force from 4<sup>th</sup> May will allow Pension Credit claims to be made online at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk). This is intended to both assist people making claims during Lockdown and also to relieve pressure on DWP's telephony systems.

More information available on The State Pension Credit (Coronavirus) (Electronic Claims) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 is available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/456/made>

### **13. NO NEW BENEFIT PAYMENTS TO POST OFFICE ACCOUNTS from 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020**

The DWP announced they will no longer allow new benefits or pension recipients from collecting their payments via Post Office card accounts as of 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020, as the department prepares to phase out its use of this payment system entirely next year.

Post Office Card Accounts have been used by the DWP to pay state pensions and benefits to people since 2003, but its contract with the Post Office will end in November 2021 and as it has been determined by Government to be "poor value for taxpayers" money as it is cheaper to pay money directly into bank accounts.

The DWP has been trying to encourage around 900,000 people who currently use POCA to have benefits paid directly into their bank accounts instead and has been writing to pensioners over the last three years saying they are now expected to use bank accounts.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Dr Thérèse Coffey said "Current customers who currently receive payment through a Post Office card account will see no change and will continue to receive payment into their accounts for the remainder of the contract period."

She added that an exception service would remain in place to make payments to people who cannot access any bank account.

Local Government and the National Shielding Service have been contacting vulnerable customers who receive benefits or pensions solely through The Post Office to ensure they can access their money, and among other things, the Post Office is providing contact-free cash payments by Royal Mail special delivery for users of these accounts during the coronavirus outbreak.

**If you have any further questions about any of the above topics,  
or if you require Housing Advice or Information**

**Email [advice@ayrhousingaidcentre.com](mailto:advice@ayrhousingaidcentre.com) or call, text or whatsapp us on 07549 603895 /  
07760750256 or contact us via facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ayrhac>**