

## **Universal Credit full service roll out in Gateshead**

Universal Credit is a national benefit which will replace Income Support, Income related Jobseekers Allowance, Income related Employment and Support Allowance, Housing benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. People in Gateshead may currently claim Universal Credit, but generally only if they are a single person.

From 11 October 2017, the roll out of Universal Credit in Gateshead will be expanded to include **anyone** making a new claim to any of the benefits referred to above. This includes families with children and lone parents.

Universal Credit is worked out by awarding a personal amount based on age and household make up, and then adding tops ups for disability, housing costs and children. It reduces in line with the amount of money earned when someone starts work.

Anyone applying will need to sign a claimant commitment. For those not working, or only working part time, they may be expected to spend up to 35 hours a week doing “work requirements” i.e. looking for work/training. If a person does not fulfil these commitments they will be subject to a sanction.

Universal Credit is paid monthly in arrears and directly to the majority of claimants. In certain circumstances, housing costs may be paid to landlords or Universal Credit may be paid more frequently. In general, there is a delay of between 6 and 8 weeks before someone will receive a payment, although there is the ability to apply for an advance payment (a partial payment).

In areas where everyone is already claiming Universal Credit, they are generally reporting overall increases in rent arrears and issues with budgeting.

Claims are made online. From the date a claim is made, an assessment period commences of one month. The claim is reviewed at the end of each assessment period and payment is made based on the circumstances during the period.

*Claims are made online at [www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit](http://www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit)  
More information is available at [www.gov.uk/universal-credit](http://www.gov.uk/universal-credit)*

## **Universal Credit and Free School Meals**

At present, anyone in receipt of Universal Credit is entitled to Free School Meals. This includes people who would formally have only applied for Working Tax Credit, or both Child and Working Tax Credit and who are not presently eligible for Free School Meals. Please be aware, therefore, that there is likely to be an increase in the number of pupils who may be eligible for Free School Meals

### **Administration of Free School Meals where someone has applied for but not yet been awarded, Universal Credit or another qualifying benefit**

Department for Education have advised that anyone who has applied for a benefit but not yet been awarded it, is NOT eligible for Free School Meals. This applies to Universal Credit

claimants even where they may be waiting for 6 to 8 weeks for their entitlement to be confirmed.

We will advise schools where we have received an application for Free School Meals and the parent has applied for a qualifying benefit, but entitlement has not been confirmed. In these cases, we cannot confirm entitlement to Free School Meals. Also the Council may not always be aware of all UC claimants.

It would be for the school to decide whether they allow the child to have a free meal, or they decide to waive payment for the time being. If the school decides to do this, then for this period they **cannot** treat the child as having been awarded Free School Meals and they could not be recorded on the census as having had Free School Meals for this period, and thereby gain entitlement to the pupil premium.

### **Effect on schools funding**

As things stand presently, because anyone in receipt of Universal Credit is eligible for Free School Meals, we anticipate that this would increase the amount of pupils eligible for a free meal, as long as parents are aware of this, and therefore increase the pupil premium schools would receive. As schools continue to retain that pupil premium for 6 years, the ultimate effect could be an increase in the level of pupil premium funding received.

Full service Universal Credit is presently live in Newcastle, but the Free School Meals team there have not seen a significant increase in take up of free meals. They are not sure if this is because parents are not aware of their eligibility or for other reasons. The mailshots we do to benefit claimants would hopefully help to identify anyone who is eligible to some degree.

### **Will this remain the position going forward?**

The Department for Education have committed to looking at how eligibility for Free School Meals will be assessed going forward with the further roll out of Universal Credit nationally. This will involve a consultation, but it is yet unclear when this will happen. It seems likely that they will look to reduce numbers eligible for Free School Meals from some point in the future.

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