

Annual verification

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Introduction

From February 2016, an annual verification of Universal Credit claims is introduced. It affects claimants in both the Intensive Work Search and Light Touch regimes.

Annual verification applies to claimants who have remained in the Intensive Work Search and Light Touch Regimes continuously, for 12 assessment periods from the start of the assessment period that they were allocated to their regime. This could be from new claim or following a change in regime.

They must re-declare the circumstances of their claim, to verify that the claim details held for them are still correct.

The aim of this is to significantly reduce the amount of overpayments to claimants through fraud and error.

Eligibility

Annual verification applies to:

- claimants who have remained in the Intensive Work Search and Light Touch regimes continuously, for 12 assessment periods from the start of the

assessment period that they were allocated to their regime (this could be from new claim or following a change in regime)

- couples where one or more member of the couple has remained continuously in the Intensive Work Search and Light Touch regimes for 12 assessment periods from the start of the assessment period that they were allocated to their regime. For couples, the time served by one or other member in the Intensive Work Search and Light Touch regimes will count towards the review trigger provided the time served was without a break

For annual verification to apply, one person in the benefit unit must be in the Intensive Work Search or Light Touch regime continuously for 12 assessment periods, otherwise the clock 'restarts'. If there is a break and no person in the benefit unit is in one of these regimes, the clock will restart only when one person re-enters Intensive or Light Touch.

Example 1- Simon:

Simon is single

- His assessment period ends on the 10th of each month
- He moved into the Light Touch Regime on 5 January 2016 from No -Work Related Requirements Regime due to a change in his circumstances
- he will be due for annual verification on 10 December 2016 if he stays in the Light Touch Regime(or Intensive Work Search Regime) continuously until that time

This is because Simon will have spent 12 assessment periods in the Light Touch Regime which includes the assessment period that they moved into it. In this example this is 12 assessment periods from 10 January. If Simon moves out of the Light Touch regime (unless into the Intensive Work Search regime) during this time, the clock will re-start from the point that they re-join the Light Touch regime.

Example 2- John:

- John is part of a couple with Joy
- their assessment period ends on the 10th of the month
- John is allocated the Intensive Work Search Regime on 5 January 2016
- Joy is currently in the Work preparation Regime as they have a child under 5
- Their child reaches age 5 years in April 2016 and Joy joins the Intensive Work Search Regime at that point
- John subsequently becomes a carer in June 2016 and leaves the Intensive Work Search Regime

As there is a continuation of the time served in the Intensive Work Search Regime by one or other member of the couple which is continuous (without a break), the time already served by John counts towards the annual verification trigger.

The review date would be based on the date John was allocated to the Intensive Work Search Regime. The claim would become eligible for annual verification at the end of the 12th assessment period spent in the Intensive Work Search Regime, which is the on 10 December 2016.

Any overlapping time is not counted towards the 12 assessment periods. For example the time served by Joy from April to June overlaps and would not be counted as John has served that time already.

In this scenario, if Joy became a Carer in August 2016 and John was able to look for work and re-joined the Intensive Work Search Regime in October 2016, the time served in the Intensive Work Search Regime in that benefit unit would be broken as there would be a break in one of them being in the Intensive Work Search Regime (from August to October 2016).

Eligibility for annual verification will restart for John from October 2016, to October 2017.

If John was able to look for work or re-entered the Intensive Work Search Regime in July, and Joy left the Intensive Work Search Regime because she became a career in August (but remained in the benefit unit) the review for the benefit unit would continue to be 10 December 2016. This is because one or other member has always been in the Intensive Work Search Regime continuously since John's original entry into the Intensive Work Search Regime in January 2016.

Failure to comply

Claimants will be sent a review your details to-do when they have been in the Intensive Work Search regime or Light Touch regime for 12 assessment periods. It will ask claimants to re-declare their circumstances. If any of the claim details are no longer correct, it will ask the claimant to report a change in circumstances.

The to-do will include a deadline explaining that failure to complete the action (and any associated change of circumstances) within 14 days will result in the claim being suspended. A reminder email will also be sent to the claimant at this point.

If the claim is suspended, this will take effect from the 15th day following the notification to the claimant to complete the annual verification to-do.

An agent will be able to see if a claim has been suspended due to annual verification, by viewing the claimant's journal. If the agent feels the claimant has complex needs they would consider contacting the claimant. This is to ensure they understand their responsibility to complete annual verification and offer support if needed.

If the annual verification is still incomplete one calendar month after the claim is suspended, the claim will be closed and the claimant notified of their right of appeal.

Claimants with complex needs can access support if they have difficulties completing annual verification. In the first instance, this would be over the phone with a Service Centre agent. If the claimant can't be supported in this way, an appointment can be booked to complete it in the jobcentre.

Change in circumstances

When completing their annual verification, if a claimant reports a change in their circumstances late (after the assessment period when the change took place), their awards will be recalculated to check if there has been an underpayment or overpayment.

If an overpayment has occurred, a decision on a Civil Penalty must be considered before the overpayment can be referred to Debt Management. Agents should consider a fraud referral at this point, following the normal process. See 'refer an overpayment' ALP.

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