

Assisted digital overview

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Introduction

The standard process to make and maintain a Universal Credit claim is via online self-service. Claimants should be made aware that they will increasingly need to be able to use online services to make and maintain their claim and to job search online.

The Department for Work and Pensions is bound by legislation to consider the needs of those who may not be able to access services through the standard process.

The most common reasons why people are unable to use online self-service are typically linked to skills, confidence, lack of motivation and access. This includes people who are offline with no digital skills, people who are online but have limited digital skills or those who live in rural areas where broadband is not widespread. Other barriers might include disability or homelessness. See Homelessness.

Assisted Digital – key points

Claimants should always be asked to apply and maintain claims online independently where possible, via GOV.uk.

All reasonable attempts should be made to enable, support and educate claimants to self-serve.

If an online claim cannot be independently made or maintained, assisted digital is one of a number of support options available.

If claimants state they are having difficulty using the online service, reasons for this need to be established. Based on their circumstances, claimants should be assisted in accessing the Universal Credit service through a channel that is appropriate for their needs. The following options are available:

- support from family or friends
- telephone support when using the online channel
- in-house coaching in the Jobcentre
- home visit
- Universal Support delivered locally (USdl)
- agent as proxy (only in exceptional circumstances)

USdl funds Local Authority assisted digital provision.

In some circumstances claimants are told to report information via the telephone or textphone. Each case should be considered on the individual circumstances. For example, where contact via this method is not possible, the journal should be considered as an alternative.

If an agent is satisfied that a claimant is unable to provide a care of address or an actual address the local Jobcentre address can be used. The decision whether to allow the claimant to use the local office address will be taken locally on a case by case basis.

Assisted Digital support includes:

- coaching, challenging and motivating claimants to become more digitally competent – helping them to create, maintain and fully utilise their digital account
- recognising when additional support is required and taking appropriate action to coach, sign-post to additional support or ensure claimants are referred to appropriate provision to build their digital skills
- promoting the benefits of work and supporting/coaching claimants to make the most of on-line services to help them prepare for, find, and secure work

During delivery of assisted digital, unless it is in exceptional circumstances when the agent is acting as proxy, Universal Credit members of staff must not enter information on a claimant's behalf. They are there to support the transaction and as an enabler to build a claimant's ability and confidence to make and maintain their claim online. The information entered and the accuracy of this information is the responsibility of the claimant.

If Assisted Digital support is given for transactions, the member of staff should identify if claimants have an on-going need for Digital Inclusion support. Where claimants are unable to use the service themselves, alternative channels can be offered.

Assisted Digital support must not be offered or provided to claimants who are simply unwilling or refuse to make or maintain an online claim.

Support by telephone

A claimant may have access to suitable devices and WI-FI but have insufficient IT skills to complete their claim, and no one to support them. They may initially be unwilling to use the online channel but can be encouraged to do so. In this scenario, coaching can be provided to the claimant to help and prompt them through completing their claim over the phone.

The call takes approximately 40 minutes. An appointment should be booked, and the claimant called back to complete their claim. The claimant should be made aware of this timescale to enable them to talk freely. The claimant must enter any data required.

Claimants are still required to attend their commitments meeting at the Jobcentre to complete their Claimant Commitment.

Some calls may just involve clarifying a question to complete a transaction, in which case an appointment is not necessary.

Attendance at a Jobcentre

If other means of accessing the online account are not suitable, claimants can book an appointment at the Jobcentre for support from the Assisted Service Team, or alternative job role in some offices.

Universal Credit members of staff must never enter information on a claimant's behalf. The information entered and the accuracy of this information is the responsibility of the claimant.

Agent by proxy

Agent by proxy is a last resort for Assisted Digital support, where all reasonable attempts have been made to enable, support and educate claimants to 'self-serve'.

The above process is used for claimants unable to complete the online service when classed as vulnerable or presenting with very complex needs, due to falling into all of the categories below:

- being unable to complete the registration independently
- not having anyone to support them online
- being unable to attend for in-house support
- a home visit not being appropriate

If the claimant falls into each of the categories above, and has online security concerns, this is another factor which should be taken into consideration.

Ensure claimant notes have been reviewed for previous discussions and any support provided. Assess the claimant's circumstances and the best way to manage the call.

There will also be rare occasions when a claimant has a device and the ability to use it but cannot access the service. They should be signposted to where the service is available, for example family and friends or the Jobcentre. If this type of support is not an option, the transaction will be dealt with over the phone with the agent acting as proxy. The claimant must inform Universal Credit as soon as the issue is resolved so that they can begin to self-serve.

When taking a new claim over the phone, the member of staff will use a contingency e-mail address associated with their location. This is to generate the verification code required to complete the claim. Once the contingency email address is used, the verification code will be forwarded direct to the Service Centre's own generic inbox.

Only in these rare telephony situations will data be input on the claimant's behalf. The information entered and its accuracy is the responsibility of the claimant.

The claim is completed by the Service Centre. All parts of the claim must be read out and confirmed including the declarations. Calls are recorded as a safeguarding measure.

GOV.UK Verify

If required, Assisted Digital support is available for the full end to end GOV.UK Verify transaction. This must protect the claimant's security. Claimants should not divulge any of their credential information to the supporting member of staff.

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