

Homelessness

First Published: 13 April 2016

Last Published: 10 August 2016

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Introduction

Some Universal Credit claimant's Commitments can be tailored to meet individual circumstances. Work-related requirements can be personalised to meet the needs of a claimant.

A domestic emergency, such as when a claimant has recently become homeless, may require a claimant's Commitments to be tailored to meet their requirements at that time.

The degree to which the claimant's current circumstances and lack of permanent accommodation prevents them from having a realistic chance of finding and keeping work must be considered.

When drafting a claimant's Commitment consideration must be given to:

- how the homelessness situation affects the steps that are reasonable for the claimant to take in any week to find work, including the type of homelessness, for example rough sleeping, sofa surfing, hostel, bed and breakfast
- whether it is unreasonable to require a claimant to comply with a work search requirement or a work availability requirement where the claimant is dealing with temporary circumstances

If a period of easement is applied to a claimant's Commitment it should be temporary and intended to allow the claimant the opportunity to resolve their accommodation issues.

Determining the claimant's current situation

To determine if the work-related requirements detailed on their Commitment are still reasonable and suit their current circumstances ask the claimant questions including:

- when did you become homeless?
- what circumstances led to you becoming homeless?
- where have you been living since becoming homeless?
- do you currently have any access to washing and laundry facilities?
- do you have access to a phone? The Internet?
- what actions have you taken to find accommodation?
- have you ever been homeless before?
- how long do you see this lasting for?
- how will this impact on your normal work-searching?

Homelessness is not an automatic indication of a complex need (see complex needs overview) and the type of homelessness will have a great impact on this. However, homelessness is nearly always complex when the circumstances that are likely to have led to the loss of the home, for example debt, family breakdown, addiction, mental health, are considered.

See Health conditions and disabilities

See domestic violence

See prison leaver (in development)

See drug and alcohol dependencies (in development)

See risk of harm to self and others (in development)

See care leavers

See death and bereavement

The claimant may have other barriers together with homelessness that mean that they have complex needs, for example:

- drug and alcohol dependency
- mental health condition
- history of offending

This is not a complete list

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Considering an easement of work search and availability requirements

The easement has two purposes:

- to stop a claimant who has recently become homeless becoming set in in a homeless lifestyle
- to give the claimant time to focus on finding suitable accommodation, and recognising that they can't do all that and meet all normal conditionality requirements at the same time

To determine if it is reasonable to impose any work search, work availability or work preparation requirements on the claimant consider:

- is the claimant in a direct-access hostel or a rough sleeper
- the degree to which the claimant's current accommodation circumstances will prevent them from having a realistic chance of undertaking their current work search activity
- has the claimant recently lost their accommodation and been made homeless; if the claimant has accommodation of any kind and whether they have access to essentials such as food, clean clothing, and whether they have a reliable means of contact (to receive notification of job interviews or work offers)
- if it is reasonable to require a claimant to comply with a work search and work availability requirement while they are dealing with their temporary circumstances
- if the claimant has recently become homeless and has challenging circumstances due to other types of homelessness for example:
 - bed and breakfast accommodation
 - sleeping on friend's sofas (sofa surfing) and/or floors
 - living in squats

Easement required

If a temporary easement can be applied for work search and work preparation activities the claimant's Commitment must be updated to reflect this. See claimant's Commitment Hub.

The Commitment is amended to reflect the activities that must be undertaken to find accommodation, whilst the easement is in place.

The claimant must be told exactly why the easement has been given and what their responsibilities are whilst it is in place. This is because the claimant needs to understand if they fail to complete the actions set out in their Commitment the easement will be withdrawn and then they will be expected to have met the work search requirement instead. If these have also not been completed a sanction will be considered. See sanctions guidance.

Easement not required

If a temporary easement cannot be applied for work search and work preparation activities, the claimant's existing Commitment must be reviewed. This is to check it reflects the claimant's current circumstances and the claimant is told they must meet work search and work preparation requirements.

If a claimant stays with various friends or relatives, it is likely they will spend a certain amount of time deciding where they will stay from day to day. They may also spend time trying to secure more permanent accommodation. This may impact the number of activities on the claimant's Commitment. See claimant's Commitment Hub.

Tailoring a claimant's Commitment with an easement

A new Work Preparation Commitment must be created and mandatory work preparation activities set for the claimant to take steps to find accommodation.

The actions agreed will depend on the circumstances of the claimant and can include:

- registration with the local authority as homeless
- registration with an agency supporting homeless people
- registration with services offering emergency accommodation
- visit a homeless day centre to request support
- visit a local advice centre to request support
- visit or make an appointment with the local authority housing department to request advice and assistance
- meet with the local street outreach team to request support
- request support offered from a hostel
- contact the local rent in advance scheme
- mediation through 'Troubled Families'
- making contact with local/national homeless organisations for example crisis

The claimant must be advised that if they fail to take the agreed actions (or any alternative action appropriate to their circumstances) as detailed on their Commitment their Universal credit may be affected.

It is essential that claimants are properly informed at this point that if any work-related requirement is imposed, the requirement is mandatory and may attract a sanction. See sanctions guidance.

Subject to the claimant's agreement to these conditions, the actions are recorded on the claimant's Commitment.

When gaining the claimant's acceptance of the actions placed on the their Commitment, ensure they are fully aware of what they are being asked to do during the period of the easement and how they may go about doing it.

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Homeless easement period and future review

An initial period for the easement must be agreed based upon an assessment of when the temporary homelessness could be resolved. This must be reviewed within two weeks and the total easement period should normally last no longer than a month.

There is discretion to extend further dependent upon the claimant's circumstances.

The claimant must be advised that at the review meeting they are expected to produce evidence of the actions they have taken to find living accommodation. This may include:

- registration letters/information issued by support agencies to the claimant
- confirmation of application to a scheme supporting access to private rented accommodation
- confirmation of an application to the 'Rental in Advance' scheme
- a copy of the licence or tenancy agreement if the claimant has moved into a hostel
- an appointment letter or card
- a letter describing the support that an agency will give to the claimant

Should the claimant fail to provide appropriate evidence (subject to consideration of good reason) their Universal Credit could be affected by a sanction. See sanctions guidance.

Homeless easement review

During the interview identify if the claimant's homelessness situation continues to impact their work-related requirements. Ensure the steps detailed on their Commitment are still reasonable and suit their current circumstances.

The total easement period should be as short as possible and normally last no longer than a month.

Ask the claimant:

- are you still homeless?
- what actions have you taken find accommodation?
- do you currently have any access to washing and laundry facilities?
- how much longer do you see this lasting for?

If the claimant is no longer homeless, remove the current easement and review the claimant's availability and work-related requirements. See claimant's Commitment Hub.

To note, an easement still maybe necessary due to another complex need. See complex needs overview

Using the evidence provided by the claimant, determine if they have completed the steps detailed on the Claimant Commitment or have taken other reasonable steps to secure accommodation.

If the claimant has failed to complete the steps detailed on their Claimant Commitment, consider referring their claim to a decision maker. See sanctions guidance.

If the claimant has completed all the steps detailed in their Commitment, determine if it is still unreasonable to impose any work search or work availability requirements on the claimant. Consider:

- is the claimant in a direct-access hostel or a rough sleeper
- the degree to which the claimant's current accommodation circumstances will prevent them from having a realistic chance of undertaking their current work search activity
- has the claimant taken steps to secure accommodation
- if the claimant has accommodation of any kind
- whether the claimant has access to essentials such as food, clean clothing,

- if the claimant has a reliable means of contact (to receive notification of job interviews or work offers)
- if it is reasonable to require a claimant to comply with a work search and work availability when they are dealing with their temporary circumstances
- if the claimant is recently homeless and has challenging circumstances with regard to other types of homelessness, for example:
 - staying in bed and breakfast accommodation
 - sleeping on friends' sofas (sofa surfing) and/or floors
 - living in squats

If an easement is still required, inform the claimant the easement will continue and set another review date.

If after consideration of the claimant's evidence, actions and responses an easement is not required, review their availability and work-related requirements See claimant's Commitment Hub.

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