

Universal Support (US) overview

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Introduction

Universal Support (US) is a way that Universal Credit claimants can get advice, assistance and support from Universal Credit staff or locally agreed Universal Support partners.

US provides help with:

- Assisted Digital support (ADS) – to help claimants make and maintain their Universal Credit claim, including accessing and using online services
- Personal Budgeting Support (PBS) to help claimants manage their monthly payment, support in opening a bank account and speak about paying priority bills
 - Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs) - for claimants who can't manage the monthly payment and there is a risk of financial harm to the claimant and/or their family

Grant funding is paid by DWP to Local Authorities (LAs) to provide ADS and PBS, tailored to the individual needs of Universal Credit claimants.

LAs may choose to deliver US themselves or commission agreed third party partners to provide the services that meet the needs of Universal Credit claimants in their locality.

Locally agreed US partners include:

- LAs
- Citizen's Advice
- Credit Unions
- registered Social landlords
- registered charities

Identifying a need for Universal Support

There are a number of circumstances that might indicate US is appropriate.

The claimant may:

- have difficulty in making or maintaining their claim online for example unable to clear to-dos or use journal entries
- lack digital skills
- request information that is available on the service such as their appointment time
- miss an appointment
- have complex needs
- have difficulty managing money or budgeting
- not have a bank account – PBS partners can help claimants to access basic bank accounts or Credit Union accounts
- state they have run out of food or are using food banks
- not be able to pay their rent
- be in crisis or hardship

This list is not exhaustive.

ADS can be offered at any time in a Universal Credit claim, but PBS is usually only offered within the first 3 months, the exception is if an APA is set up, which can be at any point during a claim.

If a claimant is unable to make or maintain their Universal Credit claim via online self-service, DWP is bound by legislation to consider their needs. For further information on the help available from Universal Credit staff, see Assisted Digital guidance.

Personal Budgeting Support and Alternative Payment Arrangements guidance provides further information to help identify when PBS or APA may be appropriate and the key factors considered. This will help to ensure claimants who need help to manage their money on a monthly basis or require additional support or are at a risk of financial harm are offered the support they need.

Depending on what the claimant's individual needs are, consideration should also be given to any other support they may benefit from. See Complex Needs.

LA staff or partners may also identify a claimant need, for example when a claimant is struggling to pay rent or bills or is struggling to understand the Universal Credit award or service. They can refer claimants directly to US providers and US providers can accept self-referrals from claimants.

Referring to Universal Support

Although US is voluntary, claimants with identified needs should be encouraged to take up the offer, with the benefits of the support fully explained to them.

Where a referral is appropriate, the District Provision Tool (DPT) should host quality information about the provision and support available nationally and within each district. Staff can access the DPT via the intranet, via FIND, their desktop or i-board, depending on local practices.

Referral processes are locally tailored on the DPT.