

Childcare costs

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Introduction

Universal Credit provides support to households to help meet their eligible childcare costs, enabling claimants to take up work or increase their working hours.

It supports the [wider government childcare offer](#), which includes free childcare hours and tax-free childcare, meaning reasonable childcare costs do not form a barrier to work.

Claimants can receive support with eligible childcare costs regardless of the number of hours they work.

Any eligible childcare costs are not subject to the benefit cap.

Eligibility for help with childcare costs

The claimant must satisfy both the childcare cost condition and the work condition to qualify for help with childcare costs.

The childcare cost condition

To meet the childcare cost condition the claimant or both claimants in a joint claim must satisfy all of the following:

- be responsible for a child or qualifying young person (up to the end of the assessment period that does not include the 1st September following their 16th birthday)
- have paid for and reported charges for relevant childcare in the assessment period in which they were paid
- the charges must be paid to allow them to take up or continue paid work or (in certain circumstances where they have recently stopped working) to enable them to keep childcare arrangements which were in place before they stopped working

The work condition

To meet the work condition the claimant or both claimants in a joint claim must satisfy one of the following:

- be in paid work (either employed or self-employed)
- have accepted an offer of paid work due to start before the end of the next assessment period
- have stopped paid work in the current or previous assessment period
- be in the first or second assessment period of a new claim, and stopped paid work no more than one calendar month before the date of their initial claim

There are exceptions to the work condition where one claimant in a household is working, and the partner is one of the following:

- has Limited Capability for Work or Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity
- has regular and substantial caring responsibilities for a severely disabled person
- is temporarily absent from the claimant's household or is expected to be absent for six months or more, for example in prison, hospital or residential care

When a claimant is getting any of the following, childcare costs can be claimed as they are treated as being in work:

- statutory sick pay
- statutory maternity pay
- ordinary statutory paternity pay
- shared parental pay
- statutory adoption pay
- maternity allowance

Verifying childcare provider details

To receive help with childcare costs, the claimant must give the following information about the childcare for each child:

- provider's full name and childcare registration number
- full contact details of the childcare provider including address, telephone number address
- where the child is being looked after
- the full cost of the childcare

Any of the documents listed below can be accepted as evidence to verify a childcare provider:

- Childcare Contract
- Letter headed invoice from the childcare provider
- Letter from the childcare provider

These documents must:

- be unaltered
- be dated
- display the relevant registration number

A childcare provider's details are verified on the initial claim to childcare costs or when there is a change of childcare provider.

If a claimant uses more than one childcare provider, they must provide details of each one.

Verifying childcare costs

Claimants can declare childcare costs when they make a new claim or at anytime during an existing claim. They will be asked to provide proof of these costs within one calendar month from the point of declaring them.

After the initial costs have been verified, the claimant will continue to report the childcare costs they pay but may not be asked to provide evidence. This is because the childcare costs have automatically been accepted.

Where a claimant is asked to verify their costs they must provide the information required.

Any of the following documents can be accepted as evidence to verify childcare costs:

- **Letter or letter headed invoice from the registered childcare provider must:**
 - be unaltered
 - be dated and annotated as being paid, and
 - show the childcare amount actually paid

If the letter headed invoice is not annotated as 'paid', the claimant must provide a bank statement or a cash receipt to confirm that the cost was actually paid and when.

- **Bank/credit card statement displaying**
 - the actual amount paid
 - date when the cost was paid
 - provider name as the recipient

Similarly detailed ATM bank receipts can be accepted.

- **Cash payment receipt**
 - Registered invoice headed receipts will be accepted
 - Hand written receipts will suffice as a last resort, although it must show the provider name

The cash receipt must show the date of payment and amount paid.

Where verification of childcare costs is required, the claimant has one month to provide this evidence from the date it is requested.

Claimants should be advised that they must keep evidence of the actual childcare costs they have paid out and claimed for, for two years. Evidence of childcare costs may be needed at a later date.

Childcare costs – reasonable usage

For Universal Credit, reasonable usage means considering whether the amount of costs a claimant pays to their childcare provider is generally reasonable, when balanced against the amount the claimant earns/works.

If the level of childcare costs seem high when compared to the earnings received, or hours worked, consideration should be given to whether all of the costs should be included. For example, if childcare costs exceed the claimant's earnings or the claimant is paying childcare for more hours than they work.

Some childcare costs which appear too high could be treated as reasonable. These include, but are not limited to:

- disabled childcare costs
- a childcare purchasing pattern
- parents that are not actually in work but treated as such for Universal Credit, for example on maternity leave

What makes childcare costs excessive is not defined and all circumstances must be taken in to account when deciding if costs are excessive or not.

If the childcare costs are deemed excessive the case is referred to a Decision Maker. An

amount of reasonable expected childcare costs will be applied. The claimant will be awarded 85% support of this revised amount up to the childcare cost maximum limit of £646.35 for one child or £1108.04 for two or more children.

Calculating childcare costs

Any reasonable costs paid to a provider which enable that claimant to work, begin work or increase working hours can be allowed.

We can pay for items included in the monthly contract, but we cannot pay for optional charges or tuition fees.

Help with childcare costs is worked out as a proportion of a monthly cap (see Rates for Universal Credit).

The childcare costs are automatically calculated and attributable to an assessment period.

Claimants who pay for more than one month's childcare in one assessment period, will have any eligible support apportioned across the periods the childcare covers up to a maximum of three assessment periods.

Any help the claimant receives from another source towards childcare, for example their employer, will reduce the support available under Universal Credit.

Childcare costs for a qualifying young person will end in the assessment period that does not include the 1st September following their 16th birthday.

Reporting childcare costs

If a claimant qualifies for help with childcare costs they must report the actual costs paid in each assessment period, as soon as they pay them, even if the costs haven't changed from the previous month.

Childcare costs can be reimbursed when reported before the end of a relevant assessment period, where the charges are paid:

- in the current assessment period for childcare provided in that assessment period (monthly or more frequently)
- in the current assessment period for childcare provided in a previous assessment period or periods (arrears)
- in either of the two previous assessment periods for childcare provided in the current assessment period (advance)

Costs are reported outside the assessment period in which they were paid but within a calendar month of being paid

If the **only** reason for the delay in reporting the childcare costs was because the claimant states they were unaware of the need to declare the costs within the assessment period, then the case must be referred to a decision maker. The decision maker will determine if the costs can be allowed. In all other instances the costs are treated as being received on time.

Costs are reported over a calendar month after they were paid

If the childcare costs are reported over a calendar month after the costs were paid by the claimant the case must be referred to a decision maker. The decision maker will determine if the costs can be allowed.

Costs paid in advance or arrears

Childcare costs which cover more than one assessment period may be reported in any of those assessment periods. However, only the proportion of costs that relate to the assessment period in which they report the costs and the subsequent relevant assessment periods can be reimbursed.

Costs paid in arrears are reimbursed in the assessment period they are paid and reported.

Deposits and upfront fees

Claimants may receive help with eligible deposits and upfront fees and these are treated in the same way as childcare costs for standard fees. Budgeting advances and Flexible Support Fund can also be used but to support claimants with deposits and upfront childcare costs.

Where a claimant has already received help for deposits and upfront fees through other DWP support, for example, Flexible Support Fund, these childcare costs can't be claimed back.

Run-ins

Claimants who have accepted an offer of paid work due to start before the end of the next Assessment Period are eligible to be paid childcare costs. These costs can be paid during the assessment period in which they start work and the assessment period prior to starting work.

Run-ons

Run-on after work stops

Claimants who stop work and have paid for childcare, may be paid a proportion of these costs for the assessment period in which they stopped work and the following assessment period.

Claimants who do not restart work by the end of the following assessment period will not be eligible for help with childcare costs until they again meet the qualifying conditions.

This run-on also supports those who make their initial Universal Credit claim within a month of losing their job, and who have pre-existing childcare.

Run-on after a child dies

If a child dies and there are on-going paid childcare costs, claimants will continue to receive help with childcare costs if appropriate.

Claimants will continue to receive support with childcare costs for three months, after the death of a child. This includes the assessment period in which the child dies and the following two assessment periods.

After this run-on period, payment of childcare costs will stop in respect of the deceased child.

Wider government help with childcare costs

Help with childcare costs can be claimed over and above the free childcare hours, but not in addition to HMRC's Tax Free childcare. Claimants can compare the different offers and decide what is best for them on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

Tax Free Childcare

Claimants and their partner in a joint claim who are receiving Universal Credit or have an outstanding claim to Universal Credit will not be eligible for a Tax Free Childcare account.

Free Childcare and Education

Free childcare and education is available for 3 to 4 year olds and some 2 year olds. Claimants can find information on the support available from their local council or through [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

Childcare Vouchers

Employers may help with childcare costs using childcare vouchers. For the calculation of Universal Credit, these vouchers will be treated as 'Benefit in Kind' meaning they are not taken into account.

Help with learning costs may be available from the Childcare Grant. Claimants will not be eligible for both the Childcare Grant and childcare support from Universal Credit.

Claimants cannot get help towards any payments that were made using childcare vouchers. If childcare costs are more than the value of the vouchers, help towards that additional amount can be applied for.