

DWP Staff as Claimants

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Introduction

Universal Credit is a single monthly payment that replaces existing benefits including Working Tax Credits. With the introduction and national rollout of Universal Credit, a number of DWP staff could become Universal Credit claimants. Also, as new staff are recruited into DWP, some may already be claiming Universal Credit.

DWP already has staff who are claiming benefits and defined procedures are in place for this. The procedures apply equally to staff who are claiming or have been claiming Universal Credit, but there are areas, such as in-work conditionality that are new to the department.

This guidance provides information about the general principles regarding DWP staff claiming Universal Credit (also see DWP employees who are Universal Credit claimants FAQs)

Principles

DWP staff, who are claimants or members of a household claiming Universal Credit, are treated the same as other Universal Credit claimants by the department. Equally the department treats staff claiming Universal Credit exactly the same as any other staff.

The individual member of staff decides if they wish to identify that they are a Universal Credit claimant. Line managers do not need to know which of their staff claim Universal Credit and there is no marker or other indication on the Universal Credit record that identifies them as a DWP staff.

A member of staff has the flexibility to choose which office they attend for a face to face interview as do all claimants, within reason. The appointment booking system allocates the jobcentre based on a claimant's postcode but this can be changed to an alternative jobcentre. At any time DWP staff can request an

alternative agent to administer their claim and ask to be seen in a discrete area of the office. Requesting any changes remains the responsibility of the claimant.

DWP staff are subject to the same travel expenses rules as other claimants. A claimant who requests to attend a different office to the one allocated to them for Universal Credit will not be eligible to make a claim for expenses.

If DWP staff claiming Universal Credit ask for an increase or decrease in working hours, this is considered in the same way as requests from any other member of staff. Universal Credit claimants will not be treated more or less favourably than other staff.

Policies for staff to take up additional or secondary employment are in place and are sufficiently flexible to support arrangements for staff who claim Universal Credit.

DWP staff claiming Universal Credit are subject to the same sanctions as any other claimant. Any issues resulting from non-compliance are dealt with through the reconsideration, appeal and complaints process.

A DWP member of staff not complying with the Universal Credit regime is dealt with in the same way as any other claimant would be. Disciplinary and grievance procedures cannot be considered.

Any DWP member of staff found guilty of committing Universal Credit benefit fraud will be handled under current standards of behaviour guidance.

Accessing DWP records

The following applies to all DWP staff and is taken from the existing DWP Standards of Behaviour Procedures:

- You must not under any circumstances access, or attempt to access, your own DWP records or the records of friends, family members or ex-partners on any departmental computer, paper file or benefit system, irrespective of your motivation.
- You must not access the records of other customers including celebrities, even to find an address or birthday without authorisation and a legitimate reason.
- Access without authorisation or legitimate reason is a disciplinary offence. Failure to comply is extremely serious. It will result in disciplinary action and can lead to dismissal. Staff can access their own record on the department's Single Operating Platform (SOP) as part of the self-service function.

DWP staff using departmental IT systems to access their online Universal Credit claim

The standard process to make and maintain a Universal Credit claim is via by online self-service. If DWP staff wish to access their online accounts using the department's IT systems, they must log out of their agent account and log in to their claimant account via GOV.UK. Under no circumstances should a member of staff access their own account whilst logged in as an agent. For more information, see the DWP acceptable use policy which sets out the conditions for official and Personal use of DWP information technology.

Service Centre staff

DWP staff who claim Universal Credit must never work on any aspect of their own case even if the case has been allocated to them under case management principles. This also applies if the case belongs to a relative, friend, current team member or a colleague/previous team member/colleague you have worked closely with in the last 12 months.

In any of these circumstances the line manager must be informed immediately and the case reallocated to a different member of staff within the same site. Cases should only be reallocated to a different site in extremely rare circumstances.

Staff are not obliged to inform their line manager they are claiming Universal Credit but must still request the case be reallocated.

If a member of staff is a Universal Credit claimant and does not want their line manager to know this, they can say that they have received information about someone they know.

If they accidentally access their own record or the record of someone they know, they must inform their line manager immediately.

Existing Universal Credit claimants who start working for the DWP

All the principles, guidance and procedures above apply to new and existing DWP staff and it remains up to the individual to decide whether or not to inform their line manager that they are a Universal Credit claimant.

If a member of staff is in a labour market regime that requires them to work with a work coach, this will continue.

For more information about DWP staff as claimants see FAQs