

Suspending Universal Credit: Guidance

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When to suspend and not suspend payment

This guidance provides information about when to suspend and when not to suspend payments of Universal Credit for a new claim and the ongoing award.

References to suspension in this guidance applies only to payments of Universal Credit.

Suspension can lead to the end of entitlement, but it cannot be used on its own to close a Universal Credit claim. Also, Universal Credit cannot be partially suspended. Where a suspension is appropriate, this will apply to the whole award.

Before a decision to suspend is made, evidence from the claim must be considered to decide if a suspension would place the claimant in hardship.

Where the claimant is required to provide evidence to support their ongoing claim, it cannot be suspended until the time limit for supplying the evidence has ended. See the evidence verification guidance for the new claim or a change of circumstances time limits.

Once a suspension has been imposed, the claimant has 1 calendar month to provide the required information or evidence. If they fail to do so, the claim is closed 1 calendar month plus 1 day from the date of the suspension.

This allows the claimant the whole calendar month to provide the evidence. For more information see Claim closure.

Claimant with complex needs

For claimants with complex needs, agents must liaise with their Advanced Customer Support Senior Lead.

Advanced Customer Support Senior Leads can only be considered after all advanced customer support action has been taken.

Advanced customer support action must be taken to ensure any barriers claimants have with providing the requested information are addressed.

Further information can be found in the, related content and Protecting claimants at risk: Guidance.

New claims

New claims cannot be suspended because Universal Credit is not yet in payment.

If entitlement to Universal Credit has not been established due to:

- claimant identity
- capital
- other income
- Habitual Residence Test
- further education
- change to a date of birth

payments of Universal Credit will be blocked by the Service until entitlement has been decided.

Additional amounts of Universal Credit (for example, children, childcare or housing costs) are payment accuracy components and not conditions of entitlement.

If the only doubt on a new claim is payment accuracy and not related to identity or underlying entitlement to Universal Credit, the basic Standard Allowance of Universal Credit can be paid.

The additional amounts must be marked as 'not verified' to ensure payments remain accurate. Additional amounts will be paid together with arrears once they have been verified correctly.

Ongoing award where suspension is not appropriate.

Failure to attend or participate in mandatory interviews

A suspension must not be used as a lever to compel a claimant to attend or participate in mandatory work-related interviews. This is because the claimant has an obligation to attend as part of a work-related requirement.

If a claimant does not attend or participate, failure to attend action must be taken and a sanction considered where appropriate. Suspensions and sanctions are not interchangeable options.

Bank account

A suspension must not be used to compel a claimant to open a bank account (for example, instead of using a bank account belonging to a third party).

Ongoing award where suspension may be appropriate

Entitlement in doubt (indisputable)

The claim can be suspended immediately, if a claimant's entitlement is indisputably in doubt (for example, evidence definitely points to the claimant being in further education or having capital over £16.000) during an ongoing award.

The claimant must be informed using their journal:

- the reason for the suspension
- what evidence or information they need to provide for the suspension to be lifted
- they have 14 days (or longer in certain circumstances) to provide the required evidence or information
- if they do not respond, the claim may be closed from the date of the suspension after 1 calendar month

Entitlement in doubt (not indisputable)

If a claimant's entitlement is in doubt during an ongoing award and it is not indisputable (for example, the circumstances are suspicious or the evidence does not provide sufficient proof for entitlement to be determined either way), the agent must advise the claimant that:

- they have 14 days (or longer in certain circumstances) to provide the required information
- if the information is not received, Universal Credit payments will be suspended and the claim closed after 1 calendar month, if the claimant has still not complied

Address in doubt

Universal Credit can be suspended immediately if there is reliable evidence that the claimant is not at the address recorded in their Universal Credit account. This could be the result of a home visit, or information received from a third party (for example, a landlord, social worker or the manager of supported accommodation).

If this occurs, the claimant must be contacted using their journal to:

- explain the reasons for suspension
- advise them to report a change of circumstances in their Universal Credit account
- this must be done within 1 calendar month or their claim may be closed

Appointees

In cases where there are credible allegations of misuse of funds against an appointee, the claim can be suspended at once to safeguard the claimant's payment pending the allegation being investigated and resolved.

These cases must not automatically be closed after 1 calendar month as they can be complex. Agents must discuss these claims with their manager to determine if a referral to an Advanced Customer Support Senior Lead is required.

Cases must be suspended if we are informed an appointee stops being an appointee for any reason, either by notification from the appointee themselves or it is revealed to DWP from another source.

Cases must remain suspended until either:

- a new appointee is in place, and new bank account details are reported and verified, or
- in exceptional cases it is decided that an appointee is no longer required

No further payments should be made into the original appointee's bank account.

Change of circumstances that would reduce the Universal Credit award

When a change of circumstances is reported and more information or evidence is required, the claimant must be told of their responsibility to provide this within 14 days (or longer in certain circumstances) and the potential consequences of not doing so.

If the claimant does not provide the required information, the claim must be superseded to remove whichever additional amount is affected by the change of circumstances. Therefore, suspension is not appropriate and the claimant will have the right of appeal.

Change of circumstances reported verbally or using the journal

Claimants who report a change of circumstances verbally or using a journal entry, must be advised or coached to report this on their Universal Credit account.

If the functionality to report a specific change of circumstances does not exist on the Service, the agent must support the claimant to get the change onto their account.

If the functionality does exist on the Service, the claimant must be advised using their journal that:

- they have 14 days to report this, and
- if the change means that their Universal Credit payments would reduce, a suspension will be applied after the 14 days if the change hasn't been reported

If the claimant has still not reported the change of circumstance on their account while the claim is suspended, the award must be closed 1 calendar month plus 1 day after the suspension.

This does not apply to those claimants who are unable to use, or do not have access to an online account (phone claims). See Assisted Digital overview.

Follow-up action for agents

Suspensions will usually only be in place for 1 calendar month.

If the claimant has failed to provide the information or evidence within this timescale, the agent must decide if the claimant continues to be entitled to Universal Credit. This will include one final check regarding vulnerability.

If the claimant is not entitled, where possible, the claim should be closed by a different agent. If this is not possible, the agent who imposed the suspension can also close the claim.

In exceptional circumstances the claimant can be given extra time to respond or to provide what is required.

A suspension can be lifted at any point if the:

- claimant has made a declaration of the change of circumstances
- claimant has provided the information or evidence that is required
- the issue which caused the suspension has been resolved

Once the suspension is lifted, the outcome will be one of the following:

- payment is made and the claim will continue as before
- the claimant makes a declaration of the change of circumstances and the award is superseded (which may include arrears for a past period)
- claim closure action is taken

If a further doubt arises after action has been completed, a new suspension can be considered and relevant action started again.