



Universal Credit Easements

Briefing for Homelessness Services

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Introduction

Individuals who make a claim for Universal Credit must complete and accept a tailored 'Claimant Commitment'. In most cases, this commitment outlines what the individual must do to prepare and look for work, or to increase earnings should they already be in work.

However, this Claimant Commitment should take into account personal circumstances, including health, homelessness, drug and alcohol use, and domestic violence.

This briefing outlines the Universal Credit Easement Policy, with information on how to request an easement, along with a template letter for homelessness services to use when advocating for a client to obtain an easement on their claim.

Universal Credit Easement Policy

Easements are reducing or removing work-related requirements¹ from an individual's Universal Credit Claimant Commitment.

In some situations, work-related requirements can be reduced for a period of time due to an individual's personal circumstances. The table below details the main situations which result in compulsory easement of work-related requirements for those required to look for work:

Situation	Duration	Information
Bereavement of partner or child	6 months	Easement of work-related requirements for a duration of 6 months
Caring for a total of 35 hours a week or more for one or more people getting: – Attendance Allowance – Constant Attendance Allowance – Disability Living Allowance (middle or higher rate) – Personal Independence Payment daily living component	While you are caring for that person or those people (as long as it is for a total of 35 hours a week or more).	No requirement to do any work-related activity.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-you/draft-uc-and-you>

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- the Armed Forces Independence Payment		
Carrying out a public duty	Period covered by the circumstances	Includes volunteer fire fighter, lifeboat crew member, volunteer coastguard, councillor, TA reservist, attending Jury service, core participant in a public or independent inquiry, for example, child sex abuse inquiry.
Child distress	1 month – once every 6 months for up to 2 years	Easement of work-related requirements apply if there is a need to provide additional support to a child following the death of a parent/sibling/lead carer, or if the child witnessed or experienced domestic violence or abuse.
Domestic violence	3 or 6 months	Easement of work-related requirements, where criteria has been met. 6 months for lead carers of a child.
Drug or alcohol dependency	Up to 6 months	If receiving structured treatment, easement of work-related requirements applies. Circumstances will be reviewed regularly to confirm continued engagement in treatment.
Temporary absence abroad to receive medical treatment or accompanying child or partner.	Up to 6 months	Easement of work search and work availability applies if receiving medically approved treatment abroad or accompanying a partner or child who is receiving medically approved treatment abroad.

Treated as having limited capability for work (LCW)	Until outcome of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA)	LCW easement of work search and work availability requirements apply, pending the outcome of a WCA. Work focused interviews and work preparation activities may still be set, if reasonable, depending on the health condition and will be discussed with the Work Coach.
Treated as having limited capability for work and work-related requirements (including if a medical professional has said you might have 12 months or less to live) (LCWRA). More information about limited capability for work	Until outcome of the WCA	If treated as LCWRA all work-related requirements must be eased pending the outcome of the work capability assessment.
Unfit for work	Duration of Medical Evidence or up to Work Capability Assessment (WCA) date	Remains unavailable for work.
Unfit for work	Up to the first 14 days of sickness in any one period	Easement of work search requirements apply if it is the first or second period of sickness in a rolling 12-month period. Work Coach discretion applies to set reasonable work focused, work preparation requirements.
Witness Protection	Up to 3 months	For those whom arrangements have been made under section 82 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005. Easement of work-related requirements will apply.

Easements for Homelessness

In addition to the above, according to DWP guidance, discretionary easement can be applied at the discretion of a Work Coach where it would be 'unreasonable to impose work-related requirements. This includes domestic emergencies, homelessness, and temporary childcare.

If an individual is homeless or at risk of homelessness, the Work Coach will decide if they are able to apply a temporary easement to allow the person time to secure stable accommodation. This easement is usually provided for up to a month but can be extended depending on the individual's circumstances. Their Claimant Commitment will be altered to have actions on relating to actively looking for stable accommodation and progress will be checked to see if they are attempting to resolve their homelessness.

There is no current guidance or eligibility criteria for what the DWP deems as being 'homeless'. If an individual is in temporary accommodation or a hostel, and this is affecting their ability to meet their work-related requirements, they should be open with their Work Coach about their situation so they can decide if an easement is appropriate.

How to Request an Easement

Being open about the situation

It is important for the individual to be open with their Work Coach about any issues they have, like being homeless, at risk of homelessness, drug/alcohol addiction or poor mental health.² It may be difficult for someone to open up about their current situation, so homelessness services should aim to support clients by attending a job centre appointment to advocate for them or completing the letter template (below). This can be given to the person to take to their next appointment. The sooner an individual is open about their personal circumstances, the sooner the Claimant Commitment can be changed, and an easement can be considered.

If someone is homeless or at risk of homelessness, their personal circumstances can change repeatedly. The Claimant Commitment should be reviewed regularly so the individual can speak to their Work Coach at any point if they are struggling with meeting their work-related requirements or if their situation changes.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-homeless-people/universal-credit-and-homeless-people-guide-for-supporting-organisations>

Reporting a Change

Reporting a change in circumstances, for example, being homeless or at risk of homelessness can be done in person with the Work Coach, or via the individual's Universal Credit journal. If the individual is unable to log into their journal online, they can call the [Universal Credit Helpline](#).

When an individual is requesting an easement due to their personal circumstances, it can be more beneficial for this to be done in person with their Work Coach, and staff from homelessness services should attempt to attend this appointment with the client if they have the capacity to do so.

Template Letter

The template letter on the following page is an example of what could be taken to a Universal Credit appointment to support the request for an easement on an individual's Claimant Commitment. Staff from homelessness services should complete this letter with as much information as possible and should check with the individual about the information they are happy to disclose to the Work Coach.

[Insert Date]

To whom it may concern,

I work for **[Organisation Name]** and am currently supporting **[Client Name, DOB, National Insurance Number]**.

[Client Name] is currently **[rough sleeping/in insecure housing/brief explanation of client's situation]**. As a result, I feel their Claimant Commitment should be tailored to take into consideration their current situation.

As you are aware, as per DWP guidance, Work Coaches are responsible for reviewing an individual's Claimant Commitment and adjusting this to reflect the claimant's personal circumstances.

Due to the nature of **[Client's Name]** situation, I would urge you to apply for an easement so they do not have to seek work during this time, allowing them to focus on **[finding accommodation/connecting with support services – amend according to client need]**. It would be preferable if all requirements could be temporarily switched off whilst they look at stabilising their situation.

If you require any further information about how I am supporting **[Client Name]**, please get in touch via the contact details below.

Yours faithfully,

[Name of Lead Worker]
[Contact Details]

Consent to Share Information

I **[Client Name, DOB]** give permission for **[Name of Lead Worker]** to share information about my personal circumstances with my Work Coach.

PRINT NAME:

Signature:

What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

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