



Analysis of Citizens Advice client data on Universal Credit (April 2020)

About Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice provides free, confidential and independent advice to help people overcome their problems. In 2018-19, we helped 2.7 million people face to face, over the phone, by email and web chat. We provide support from over 2,550 locations across England and Wales.

Since the rollout of Universal Credit began, Citizens Advice has helped over 590,000 people with Universal Credit, including through its Help to Claim service. We have published several reports on Universal Credit based on our client data, insights from frontline advisers, and interviews with clients.

Introduction

Coronavirus has had a sudden impact on people's jobs and incomes. Our national research shows that nearly 4 out of 10 (38%) people have lost income because of this crisis, with nearly 1 in 10 (8%) losing 80% or more.¹

We've also seen this through the increase in demand for our advice at Citizens Advice. Over the past month (9 March - 9 April) our website had nine million pageviews - a 39% rise on the same period last year. 'Coronavirus' was the most searched word on our website, followed by people looking for information on Universal Credit.

In addition to accessing information on the website, people have been coming to us for advice via telephone, email and webchat. Since we started recording whether a problem was related to coronavirus, advisers recorded 32,000 people contacting them with queries related to the pandemic. Half of those wanted to discuss Universal Credit.

Enquiries about Universal Credit first began to spike in mid-March, and have remained at high levels, mirrored by the unprecedented numbers of people applying for the benefit through the DWP.

The DWP has processed 1.4m claims since 16 March. We welcome the changes they have started to put in place to deal with this unprecedented pressure and make the claims process run more smoothly. These include:

¹ Polling with 2016 UK Adults, carried out between 2-7 April

- [The switch to calling claimants to check information](#)
- [Suspending benefit overpayment deductions temporarily](#)

Given the rapidly changing situation and unprecedented demand, we will be monitoring the evidence from our clients about pain points within applying for benefits closely over the coming weeks.

Key issues emerging from our national data

The top ten issues clients making an initial Universal Credit claim needed help with between March 23rd and April 6th 2020 (excluding issues not coded or marked 'other') are outlined in the table below.

Issue

1. Eligibility
2. Understanding UC payments
3. Advance payment
4. Initial wait for payment
5. Gov.uk Verify
6. Evidence & verification
7. Better-off calculation
8. Access to internet / digital literacy
9. Helpline issues
10. Access to contribution based JSA/ESA

Issues raised by our advisers

If our advisers see a client with an issue they think is relevant to our policy and advocacy work, they can send us a short summary evidence form of the problem. Between 25 March and 9 April, we received almost 2,000 evidence forms relating to people's problems with benefits. A review of a random sample² provides an indication of some of the types of issues among people we're helping with Universal Credit. These are summarised below:

Universal Credit application issues

- A commonly mentioned issue was claimants **not being able to get through to the Universal Credit helpline** (which is now also the number people have to call to claim new-style Employment and Support Allowance).
- Issues with **verifying a claimant's ID** through the online system were also commonly mentioned.

² 6% of evidence submitted during this period - 120 evidence forms