

Progress report

9. A number of claimants will have applied independently for a NINO prior to the changes and the procedure applied to those applications will therefore have been the procedure for employees. The steps that have been taken to ensure that Universal Credit claimants are allocated to the correct NINO application process were necessarily prospective. They could also not be implemented immediately since without appropriate quality assurance the revised process could face further obstacles and cause more problems. SSWP is sympathetic to cases where any applications pre-date the improved processes and will (where possible) take steps to assist, but they do not justify a judicial review challenge.
10. An updated operational instruction was sent out on 29 March 2019 covering the checks to be carried out on the claimant's personal details, including verifying the NINO provided in the claim or searching for a NINO on the DWP systems. **If a NINO cannot be identified after an in-depth trace has been performed then staff have been instructed to follow the procedure summarised below.** It has been emphasised that **claimants should not be advised or encouraged to apply for a NINO via the contact centre/employee route.**
11. **The agent will complete a dedicated form for the NINO application.** This will be largely pre-populated, but agents are expected to check the information carefully. Such forms are then sent to a **dedicated inbox monitored by the NINO allocations team.** The claimant will be notified that this step has been taken on their behalf with a message on the UC journal as follows:

A request has been sent to the NINO allocation office for them to commence the process for you to be allocated a National Insurance number. You will be contacted by them directly to attend an interview. Once you have been allocated a National Insurance number you must tell us so your claim can proceed.
12. Subject to the claimant's availability and engagement with the NINO staff, this should **enable a NINO to be allocated much more quickly than under the employee route.** Whilst the onus remains on the claimant to provide the NINO (as they take responsibility for all data within their Universal Credit claim), the NINO allocation team will also let the service centre know when the number is issued as a fall-back position.
13. **The www.gov.uk website has been updated and the reference to requiring a NINO has been removed from the section on how to claim Universal Credit.** Your suggestion of referring claimants to the helpline would involve a reallocation of resources and the claimant should not require assistance in making the NINO claim in any event since this will now be undertaken on their behalf as a matter of course where they do not have an allocated NINO.
14. You have acknowledged that changes, once implemented, need to be assessed over a reasonable period of time to determine whether or not they have had the intended effect. We are confident that the steps taken will improve the experience of Universal Credit claimants who do not have a NINO at the date of claim and it would be premature to reach conclusions, and commence a legal challenge, at this point in time.