

# Spotlight on: National Services handling telephony enquiries

## Introduction

This spotlight has been designed to support National Services case managers in DWP to handle telephone enquiries. It is not to be used by Outsourced Provider Agents due to differences in roles.

National Services were previously called National Hubs. National Services consists of:

- National telephony enquiries
- National inbox

- Child Benefit Online (CBOL)  
For further information on the job role, see National Services case managers job role.  
In every contact with a claimant, case managers must:
- adhere to a 'once and done' approach to clearing any to-do's relating to the query - but **not** fully case cleanse
- include notes in the journal and claimant history of any actions taken - this provides a history of contact with the claimant
- encourage claimants to self-serve
- handoff if necessary - if the query is complex and cannot be answered within reasonable timescales
- always check Universal Learning or seek support if they do not have the skills to answer the query

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# National Services case manager actions

Case managers must identify if the claimant is calling from a different number to that registered on their Universal Credit account. If they are, see Claimant calls from a different contact number to that registered on their account.

Case managers must also establish if the claimant's query can be answered by self-service, or do they need help.

If the claimant can self-serve, the case manager must advise them where to get the information and find the answer to their query. If the claimant needs help, the case manager must:

- make sure the claimant fully understands the answer
- clear any journal entries relating to the query
- update notes

If the case manager needs to handover the query, they must ensure the claimant fully understands what is happening and what will happen next before the handover takes place.

The case manager must then:

- select the appropriate handover category within the Handover Tool and the timescales for handover
- update all notes with the actions taken and the reason for the handover
- include any contact details for the claimant if the number is different from their registered number (for example, if it is a third party, corporate appointee or landlord)

If the claimant is not assigned a case manager, create a handover using the 'CM Not listed' option on the drop-down list within the Handover Tool.

If the query relates to an outstanding Tier 1 decision and escalation is appropriate, complete the template and email to DWP UCFS Decision Makers ([link sends e-mail](#)) for decision maker escalation and send to a team leader.

For outstanding Tier 2 decisions, escalation is via the drop-down list on the Handover Tool.

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# Query examples

## Payments

There could be a wide variety of enquiries around payments including:

- there is no payment
- the amount of the payment

### **Basic payment queries**

Some basic payment queries could be answered by the claimant accessing the information on their online account. If the claimant is able to self-serve, advise them on where to find this information.

The claimant must always be encouraged to self-serve where possible.

### **Missing statement**

A claimant may contact Universal Credit to advise that they cannot view their statement in their online account. You must clarify the claimant's pay date and inform them that the statement can be generated at any time up to that date. Advise them to keep checking and to contact again if the statement has not been generated after the pay date.

### **Payment not issued**

A claimant may contact Universal Credit to ask where their payment is. Initially you will need to identify what date the payment is due to be paid.

### **Enquiry before the date of payment**

If the enquiry is before the date of payment, where appropriate - clear any to-do's that may block payment whilst on the phone with the claimant and advise them when the payment is due.

### **Enquiry after the end of the assessment period**

If the enquiry is after the date of payment, within the 'Overdue to-dos to calculate payment' to-do - identify any outstanding action required for payment to be calculated and complete any to-dos you are able to. Inform the claimant of any actions they need to take and handover to the appropriate agent for them to complete.

You must also check:

- for any 'Check automated calculation' to-dos and accept the calculation and issue the payment.
- the 'Sanctions' tab and take any appropriate actions

### **Querying the amount of the payment**

A claimant may query the amount of their payment. To help explain how the payment has been calculated, you must work through the claimant's statement with them. Consider if any of the following have affected the amount paid:

- sanctions – check the 'Sanctions' tab and if the claimant does not agree with the sanction, create a Mandatory Reconsideration to-do (if there is an open-ended sanction in place, book an appointment for the claimant at their jobcentre)
- deductions – explain what deductions have been taken, see Spotlight on: signposting claimants with debt and deductions

- earnings – explain how earnings affect Universal Credit payments see Spotlight on: Disputed earnings and Surplus, fluctuating and irregular earnings plus payment cycles

### **Real Time Information disputes**

A claimant may dispute the earnings used in the calculation of their Universal Credit payment. Explain that Universal Credit takes into account all earnings received within the assessment period according to the date they were reported. Advise the claimant to check the dates their payments were received to confirm if they fall within the dates of their assessment period.

If the claimant can provide evidence to support their dispute, an evidence appointment must be booked. For more information on when and how to raise a dispute, see Spotlight on: Disputed earnings.

### **Post - Real Time Information dispute**

Following a Real Time Information dispute, if the claimant receives a decision to advise that their payment needs amending but this hasn't yet been done - handover to the owning case manager.

### **Re-issuing payments**

If a claimant advises that they have not received their payment and you establish via Central Payment System that the payment has been returned, you can re-issue the payment. This is issued by creating and completing the 'Make a payment' to-do.

### **Recoverable Hardship Payments**

When a claimant asks for a Recoverable Hardship Payment, open the 'Apply for Recoverable Hardship Payment' to-do. You must confirm whether the claimant meets the eligibility criteria. For more information, see Recoverable Hardship Payments.

Complete the 'Apply for a Recoverable Hardship Payment' to-do and upload the appropriate letter to the journal advising if the payment has been approved or rejected.

If the payment is approved, launch the 'Extra frequency payment' to-do and complete CPS with the payment details.

### **Request for a Universal Credit Advance**

If a claimant requests a Universal Credit Advance, explain the eligibility criteria. For more information see Financial hardship.

### **Deferral of a Universal Credit Advance recovery**

During the recovery of the Advance, exceptional circumstances may occur that were not foreseen when the Advance was taken out (for example, a child going into hospital which results in unexpected and regular bus or taxi fares for the parents to visit).

If there is a risk that these circumstances will push the claimant into genuine hardship and cause difficulty repaying the Advance over the agreed recovery time, a deferral of the recovery can be considered.

Deferral means the claimant has up to 3 months for New Claim, Change of Circumstance and Benefit Transfer advances, or up to 6 months for Budgeting Advances where no recovery action is taken. However, if the claimant has other deductions on their account that may not currently be deducted as they are lower down the priority order, these may now commence. See Deductions priority order.

A request for a deferral can be handled by a National Services case manager.

For more information on the recovery and deferral of the different types of Advances see Financial hardship.

### **Self-reported earnings**

If the 'Self-reported earnings' to-do is outstanding, complete it and take action as per the to-do if the claim is suspended for this reason - and lift the suspension if there is one.

If a claim has been suspended because the claimant has not self-reported their earnings, take the earnings details over the phone and lift the suspension. There is no need to create a handover to the owning case manager.

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## Habitual Residency Test

Where a claimant enquires about their Habitual Residence Test (HRT) decision, they may require:

- an explanation of the decision
- to know how the decision was made
- to know what evidence was used to make the decision

If the HRT decision is outstanding, do not give any timescale for completion of the decision. You must manage the claimant's expectations and advise them to await the decision.

The case manager should not try to explain the HRT decision to the claimant. If they want more information about the decision, then create and complete a 'Refer to decision maker (written explanation)' to-do for a decision maker.

If the claimant asks for a Mandatory Reconsideration or to appeal against the decision, create and complete a 'Refer to decision maker (Mandatory Reconsideration)' to-do for a decision maker.

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## Childcare

A claimant may enquire why they have not been paid their childcare costs. This could be where a claimant:

- has not provided the necessary evidence, or
- has provided evidence but this has not been accepted

If the 'Verify childcare costs' to-do is outstanding in the claim overview, This indicates that the evidence has not been provided physically in the jobcentre or the evidence has been uploaded to this to-do but has not yet been verified.

If the 'Verify childcare costs' to-do is not outstanding, this indicates that:

- the costs could have already been verified either automatically by the Service or by another agent - the completed to-do history will state whether the childcare evidence has been accepted (if the evidence has been verified, advise the claimant that any due payment will be made at the end of the relevant assessment period(s) - if the claimant advises that they should have been paid, create a handover to the owning case manager)

- the claimant has not yet completed their 'Provide proof of your childcare costs' to-do - inform them that they need to do this

If there are no notes on the journal or claimant history to explain why childcare costs have not been paid, hand-off to the owning case manager.

For more information on the types of acceptable childcare evidence and timescales to report the costs, see Spotlight on: Childcare Declaration and evidence and Childcare costs.

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## Claim closures

Claims can be closed for a number of reasons and occasionally can be closed in error.

### **Claim closed in error**

If the 'Additional actions (close claim)' to-do is still outstanding, hand-off to the owning case manager to consider re-opening.

If the 'Additional actions (close claim)' to-do is not outstanding, raise a CIL with your Service Innovation Lead (SIL).

### **Claim closed by the claimant**

If a claimant has closed their previous claim and they wish to reclaim, advise them of the process to do this. For more information, see Re-claims.

Claim made by phone

If a claimant has made their claim by phone, they are not able to accept their Claimant Commitment on the Service. For more information, see Spotlight on: claims by phone. If their claim is close, as they have not accepted their Claimant Commitment, you should apologise to the claimant and handover to the owning case manager to raise a CIL.

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## Landlords

You may receive enquiries from landlords asking for details about their tenant's claim to Universal Credit. For more information, see Consent and disclosure.

If an Alternative Payment Arrangement (which is a Managed Payment to a Landlord) is in place, the following information can be disclosed to the landlord if requested without explicit consent:

- the start date of the Managed Payment and/or a third party deduction
- when they can expect to receive the first Managed Payment and/or the third party deduction from DWP
- the amount of the next Managed Payment to a Landlord
- the maximum additional amount of housing costs payable in the next payment of Universal Credit (the circumstances that led to the change will not be discussed)

If an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA) has been stopped, you must not provide the landlord with any details about the claimant's Universal Credit - apart from confirming that the APA has stopped. You can signpost the landlord to GOV.UK (link is external) for more information.

### **Reporting a change of circumstance**

If a Managed Payment to a Landlord is in place, a landlord may contact Universal Credit to report a change in circumstances. The change must be accepted and action taken accordingly.

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## Claimant requires a home visit

Some claimants may not be able to attend their appointment - for example, due to health conditions, caring responsibilities or accessibility needs.

For further information see Home Visits.

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## Claimant calls from a different contact number to that registered on their account

If you identify that a claimant is calling from a contact number which is different to that registered on their Universal Credit account, confirm if they have changed their contact number. If they have, ask the claimant if they are able to update their Universal Credit account. Explain to the claimant the benefits of keeping their contact number up to date, which are:

- if we need to make an outbound call to them
  - they will miss out on important updates that are sent by SMS text.
- If the claimant is locked out of their account, advise them to use the 'Problems signing in' link on the 'Sign in to your Universal Credit account' option. The claimant should then raise a change of circumstances and update the registered contact number.

If the claimant is unable to access their account after following this process, try to help the claimant by re-issuing the PSN or raising a JIRA ticket if there appears to be a technical problem. A handover to the owning case manager is not necessary.

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## Claimant calls to request an Alternative Payment Arrangement

If a claimant requests an APA, create the 'Request an Alternative Payment Arrangement' to-do. Once this to-do has been marked as 'Done', it will create a further to-do called 'Create Alternative Payment Arrangement'. This creates a payment blocker on the owning case manager's dashboard - therefore, a handover is not necessary.

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## Students

If a student enquires about claiming Universal Credit, explain the eligibility criteria. For more information, see Students: eligibility, conditionality and student income.

If a student queries the amount of student income taken into account, or regarding how their student income has been calculated - handover to the owning case manager.

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## Fail to attend

If a claimant advises they have failed to attend an appointment, record the reason why and re-book the appointment.

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## Backdating a Universal Credit claim

If a claimant requests that their claim to Universal Credit should be backdated, create a 'Refer to decision maker (consider backdating)' to-do. This displays in the owning case manager's dashboard - therefore, a handover is not necessary.

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## Missing element

### **Child**

If a claimant enquires about a missing Child element, check the 'Verify people who live with you' to-do. Wait for the CBOL check unless notes advise otherwise. Advise the claimant of the current situation and of any next actions. If evidence has been requested but not yet provided, consider booking an appointment if necessary.

### **Housing**

If a claimant enquires about a missing Housing element, establish if the claimant is renting from a landlord in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) or the Social Rented Sector (SRS).

- Private Rented Sector - if the claimant is renting from a PRS landlord, book an appointment so they can provide evidence to verify their housing costs
- Social Rented Sector – a handover to the owning case manager is only needed if it is unclear from checking the 'Verify social housing cost' to-do at what stage the verification is (the blue banner at the top of the to-do usually indicates the current stage)

### **Limited Capability for Work and Work Related Activity**

If there is an outstanding underpayment of the Limited Capability for Work and Work Related Activity element, handover to the owning case manager.

### **Requesting an element is backdated**

If a claimant requests the backdating of any element, create a 'Refer to decision maker (late reporting of a change)' to-do. This is raised to determine the reasons why the change was reported late and to establish if retrospective payments can be made. It is not necessary to handover to the owning case manager.

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# Carer's Allowance

A claimant may advise that they have either started to receive, or have stopped receiving Carer's Allowance.

If a claimant has started to receive Carer's Allowance check CIS (Searchlight) and if it confirms that Carer's Allowance is in payment, advise the claimant that the amount is fully taken into account. For more information, see Other benefits.

If the claimant advises they are no longer receiving Carer's Allowance, or there is no record on CIS (Searchlight) - handover to the owning case manager.

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# Deceased

If you are notified that a claimant has died, handle the call sensitively. Complete the 'Report death of a claimant' to-do. Once completed, this automatically creates the necessary to-dos for the owning case manager - therefore, a handover is not necessary.

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# Outstanding decision maker decisions

If a claimant enquires about an outstanding decision maker's decision, you must manage the claimant's expectations and not give a timescale for completion of the decision.

If the claimant meets the criteria for the escalation process, complete the template for decision maker escalation and send to your team leader.

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# Claimant requests an update on their Work Capability Assessment referral or outcome

A claimant may request an update on their Work Capability Assessment referral. If you have access to the Medical Services Referral System (MSRS) advise the claimant appropriately. If you don't have access to MSRS, handover to the owning case manager.

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# Querying an arrears payment of the Limited Capability for Work and Work Related Activity element

A claimant may enquire about an arrears payment of the Limited Capability for Work and Work Related Activity element. If action on the underpayment needs to be taken, handover to the owning case manager. Advise the claimant that if they have an outstanding debt, the arrears payment can be offset against the debt.

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## Benefit Cap

A claimant may want an explanation of:

- what the Benefit Cap is
- whether they are exempt from it, or
- how it might affect their Universal Credit payment

Explain the importance of providing details of their earnings for the 12 months prior to their Universal Credit claim. This is because the claimant may be eligible for the 9-month Grace Period when the Benefit Cap will not be applied to the Universal Credit award. For more information, see Benefit Cap.

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## Queries to be treated as a handover

### **Calculate retrospective payment**

If a claimant calls and there is a 'Calculate retrospective payment' to-do on their claim, a handover to the owning case manager will only be required if it's unclear from notes whether action is being taken or not. The creation of this to-do by the owning case manager indicates they are in the process of re-calculating the payment and so already aware of the situation without the need for a handover.

### **Review an overpayment or underpayment**

If a claimant calls and is chasing an underpayment of Universal Credit, you must handover to the owning case manager.

If there is a 'Review an overpayment or underpayment' to-do but the claimant is not chasing a payment, do not handover to the owning case manager.

### **Ineligible partner**

If a claimant calls and they have an ineligible partner, handover to the owning case manager so they can complete the relevant to-do.

### **Claim suspension**

If a claimant calls because their claim is suspended, lift the suspension if self-reported earnings are being declared or if the claim was auto-suspended.

If the claim has been suspended for a specific reason, handover to the owning case manager so they can consider lifting the suspension.

### **Investigate a duplicate account**

If a claimant calls and there is an 'Investigate duplicate account' to-do on their account, a handover to the owning case manager is not necessary. This is a payment blocker so that the owning case manager will consider which claim to close.

### **Absent joint tenancy**

An absent joint tenancy is where one of the claimants named on a tenancy agreement no longer lives at that address.

If a claimant in an absent joint tenancy queries the payment of their Housing Costs element, handover to the owning case manager so they can pay the balance manually.

### **Severe Disability Premium**

If the claimant calls with a general enquiry about Severe Disability Premium (SDP), answer the query or signpost the claimant. For more information see Spotlight on: Severe Disability Premium transitional payments.

If the claimant's enquiry relates specifically to their claim, you must handover to the SDP team.

### **Prison leavers**

If a prison leaver calls and their previous Universal Claim has been suspended, you must handover to the owning case manager.