



## Claiming Universal Credit for the first time to help you pay your rent

We have been told by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that you have made a new claim for Universal Credit. When you make a new claim for Universal Credit, any help towards your housing costs (rent) will usually be paid as part of your Universal Credit payment.

This may be the first time that you have had to claim any help to pay your rent. To help you understand how Universal Credit works if you are a Moray Council tenant, below are some frequently asked questions and answers to help you.

### Remember

- It is your responsibility to make sure that you pay your rent to us
- We are here to help you if you are struggling to pay your rent

### What happens after I apply for Universal Credit?

Once you have made your claim for Universal Credit, we will be asked by the DWP to verify the rent details that you have put on your claim. **If the amount of rent, any service charges, or names do not match the details that we hold on record, there may be a delay in us being able to verify the information.** You may also get a request called a 'To-do' on your claim asking if you agree with the revised details we have provided. If you get any request to respond to information, please action these as soon as possible. This will help prevent any delays in the processing of your claim.

Examples where problems have been experienced include where people have changed their name or relationships have changed which affect the name on the tenancy. If you have any concerns about any of the details you have put on your claim about your rent, speak to your Area Housing Officer.

### **When will I get my first payment?**

The date you submit your claim is the date of the month your Universal Credit payment will be paid. This is called your assessment date.

Universal Credit is paid **monthly in arrears**, so you'll have to wait one calendar month from the date you submitted your application before your first UC payment is made. This is called your assessment period.

You then have to wait up to seven days for the payment to reach your bank account. **This means it can take up to five weeks before you get your first payment.**

You should contact your Area Housing Officer as soon as possible and discuss the implications this has for you and your rent account in more detail.

### **What if I don't have enough money to manage until my first payment?**

If you will have little or no money until your first payment, you can ask for an advance payment, which will include your housing costs. You may be able to get up to 100% of your estimated Universal Credit payment. You will have to pay this money back within 12 months from your ongoing benefit entitlement which will reduce the amount of money you receive each month. The first repayment is usually taken from your first Universal Credit payment, so only ask for what you need.

To apply for an advance payment, contact your work coach or phone the free Universal Credit helpline.

If you have a financial crisis, you can apply for a grant from the [Scottish Welfare Fund](#).

### **Paying your rent**

It is **your** responsibility to make sure that your rent is paid on time and in full. This is a requirement of your tenancy agreement. We want to avoid action being taken against you for rent arrears, so please tell us as soon as you have made a claim for Universal Credit.

The Universal Credit award letter that is sent out by the DWP gives a breakdown of the different elements which you and your household are entitled to. If the housing costs element does not cover your rent in full, you can apply to us for [Discretionary Housing Payments](#).

You can ask your Area Housing Officer for advice on Universal Credit and paying your rent. **Please tell us as soon as possible, if you are having any financial difficulties.**

### **What happens if I accrue rent arrears while I am waiting for my first payment?**

While you wait for your Universal Credit claim to be processed, we will continue to contact you if you are in arrears. This is to make sure that we are working in line with our rent arrears policy, which applies to all our tenants. It also makes sure that you get all the advice, help and information that you may need to manage your arrears. This includes:

- If you are eight weeks or more in rent arrears, or fall into one of the vulnerable categories listed by the DWP (e.g. you have debt or addiction issues, learning or mental health problems) we can ask the DWP to deduct money from your Universal Credit payment to repay your arrears. The DWP can pay up to 20% of your Universal Credit payment to us every month. We do not need your permission to do this, but we will always do our best to discuss this with you.
- You can also request payments to be made to us through the “Scottish Choices” (see next page).
- We can also ask the DWP to pay your fortnightly rent direct to us and not to you as part of your Universal Credit payment. We would always prefer to make arrangements directly with you to repay any rent arrears. However, if you do not do this, we will take action to recover any debt you owe.

### **Can my housing costs be paid directly to you?**

In Scotland, if you claim Universal Credit, you can choose to:

- be paid monthly or twice monthly; and
- have housing costs (rent) paid to yourself or to your landlord.

These are called the “Scottish Choices”. You can make one or both choices. You can ask that the housing cost element is paid direct to the Council by speaking to your Work Coach, applying through your online journal, or calling the Universal Credit helpline on **0800 328 5644**. You will be offered these choices at the start of your second assessment period (after your first payment). The offer will include more information about the choices you have and how you can take them up.

### **What you should do when you get your first Universal Credit Payment**

It is important to note that if you have asked DWP to pay your rent directly to us or if we have asked for a direct payment because you are in arrears or vulnerable, the first rent payment will not always be paid direct to us. You must check your online journal and bank account to see if a Universal Credit payment (including your housing costs) has been paid direct into your bank account. If this has happened, you must pay your rent to us from the Universal Credit payment that you have received.

### **What you need to know if you are having your rent paid directly to us**

If you choose to have your housing costs paid direct to us, or we apply for direct payments on your behalf, it is important to understand that these are paid to us at a different time to when you will receive your Universal Credit payment. Your Universal Credit payment will state that the housing costs element has been deducted and will be paid to your landlord. This payment will be held by the DWP until the next payment is due to us, as explained below.

Currently, social landlords are paid every four weeks, whereas you will receive your Universal Credit monthly. This means that at certain points during the year the amount of rent that you owe will be more than you are expecting it to be. Your Housing Officer will be able to explain this in more detail to you, as the time of the year that this occurs is determined by the date you get paid in relation to the date that we get paid. It can be very complex, and we have visual aids to help you understand how this will affect you.

### **What if I have a spare bedroom?**

The amount you receive towards your housing costs may be reduced if your home is considered to have any spare bedrooms. The amount you will get towards your rent will be reduced by 14% if you have one spare bedroom, or 25% if you have two or more spare bedrooms.

Currently the Scottish Government is making a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to cover the reduction for spare bedrooms. You can get more information about this at [Discretionary Housing Payments](#).

### **What if I have other people in my household?**

Your Universal Credit housing costs may also be reduced if someone aged 21 or over lives with you and is not a dependent. If this is the case, the other person in your household will be expected to help you meet your full rent payment or you will need to make up the shortfall from your own income.

### **What should I do if I have a change in my circumstances?**

If you are claiming Universal Credit, you must report any changes in your circumstances to the DWP immediately. Examples of changes include:

- changes in your income
- changes in your household
- finding or finishing a job
- a change to your address
- a change to your banking details
- your rent increasing or decreasing
- becoming too ill to work or to meet your Work Coach

You should report changes in your circumstances through your Universal Credit online account. Or you can phone the Universal Credit helpline on **0800 328 5644**.

You should also tell us about any changes to your household. If you don't, it may affect your rights to make these changes under your tenancy agreement. You can tell us of any changes by filling in our online [Tenant Personal Details Form](#).

### **What if I need help with budgeting?**

We know that some people may find switching to a monthly payment challenging. Our Income Maximisation team can give you free and confidential help if you're of working age and facing money or debt problems. The team can meet with you, assess your circumstances, and:

- help you deal with a crisis situation;
- look at your income to make sure you are getting all the benefits you are entitled to;
- help you create a personal budget, giving you more control and helping your money go further;
- help you make benefit applications and fill in forms;
- refer you to other services if you need further advice or support.

To make an appointment, phone **0300 123 4563**.

### **Can I get help towards Council Tax and other Council administered benefits?**

If you are claiming Universal Credit you can apply to the council for other benefits such as:

- Council Tax Reduction;
- Free School Meals;
- Educational Clothing Grant; and
- Educational Maintenance Allowance.

You will also have to notify the council of any changes in your circumstances that may affect your entitlement to these benefits, even if you have already notified the DWP.

## **More information and useful contact details**

### **Housing**

Area Housing Officer                      **0300 123 4566**  
Rent Information                              Visit our website:  
[www.moray.gov.uk/moray\\_standard/page\\_135456.html](http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_135456.html)

### **Universal Credit**

Website                                        [www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk](http://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk)  
Phone    **0800 328 5644**  
Text phone                                      **0800 328 1344**

### **Advice on welfare benefits, money and debt advice**

#### **Moray Council income maximisation team**

Website                                        [www.moray.gov.uk/incomemaximisation](http://www.moray.gov.uk/incomemaximisation)  
Phone    **0300 123 4563**

#### **Moray Council welfare benefits**

Website                                        [www.moray.gov.uk/welfarebenefits](http://www.moray.gov.uk/welfarebenefits)

#### **Moray CAB**

Website                                        [www.moraycab.org.uk](http://www.moraycab.org.uk)  
Phone    **01343 550088**

#### **Scottish Welfare Fund (Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants)**

Website                                        [www.moray.gov.uk/Scottishwelfarefund](http://www.moray.gov.uk/Scottishwelfarefund)

#### **Home Energy Scotland**

Website                                        [energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland](http://energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland)  
Phone    **0808 808 2282**