

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
Central Freedom of Information Team

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.gov.uk

Our reference: Fol 1892

Date: 8 June 2016

Dear Glenys Harriman,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request of 16 May 2016. You asked:

I understand that normally a UC claimant in digital service areas is expected to receive and send all communications digitally via their online account.

However some claimants will be unable to do this - for example if they have no online access or have run out of credit on their mobile phone.

Please could you send me any guidance for DWP staff on what they should do, in the digital service (either pilot or "full" service)-

a) when a claimant sends a letter to notify of a change in circs, or requests a variation in their claimant commitment, or asks a question

b) when a claimant uses the UC helpline to notify of a change in circs, or requests a variation in their claimant commitment, or asks a question

c) when a Work Coach or other DWP staff member is unable to contact the claimant digitally

d) when a Work Coach or other DWP staff member has sent information digitally to the claimant but receives no reply or the claimant has not acted on it

e) when a Work Coach or other DWP staff member is aware that the claimant has problems accessing the internet.

DWP Response

Universal Credit full service is an intuitive system and so traditional forms of guidance are not provided to staff. As part of their preparation for delivering Universal Credit full service, all DWP case managers and work coaches undertake learning specifically designed to help them provide support to claimants who are not able to self-serve using the online portal. This covers how they would identify someone who was in need of support and how they would go about providing the appropriate assistance. This may include coaching the claimant in person or over the phone, or, where necessary, acting as an agent by proxy or arranging a home visit.

a) Upon receiving a letter, the work coach or agent will contact the claimant online or, where required, by phone or by letter to book a face to face meeting. The purpose of this meeting will be to discuss their Claimant Commitment and look at the impact of the change/variation; this may result in

a new Claimant Commitment being created which is tailored to their new circumstances.

If the letter received asks a question, the work coach or agent will provide a response via the claimant's online account, unless they specifically requested a telephone call or letter response.

b) The Service Centre agent will firstly make the claimant aware of the online functions to enable them to notify a change in circumstances, request a variation in their claimant commitment, or ask a question online. If the claimant has access to their online account, the agent will talk the claimant through the process to do this.

If the claimant is unable or unwilling to action the change online, the agent will action the change on the telephone, they will explain to the claimant they must view details of the change on their online account and accept this.

c & d) If claimants cannot be contacted online, or do not respond to information sent, DWP staff will attempt to contact the claimant by phone or a letter will be sent.

If the claimant still doesn't take the action needed, the claimant may be referred for a sanction.

A low level sanction will apply to claimants who are subject to all work related requirements and work preparation and work focused interview requirements who without good reason fail to:

- undertake specified work search action
- comply with a work preparation requirement
- comply with a work-focused/work search interview requirement
- comply with a requirement to provide evidence or confirm compliance
- comply with a connected requirement relating to interviews and verification compliance including the provision of information and evidence
- comply with a requirement to report a specified change of circumstance (this will relate to failure to report the loss of a job).

e) Universal Credit claims are made online via www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit.

If a claimant needs support to do this, help is available by the following means:

- telephone
- face to face support from a partner organisation
- in the office
- exceptionally, through a home visit

If you have any queries about this letter please contact me quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Fol Team

Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing freedom-of-information-request@dwpgsi.gov.uk or by writing to: DWP, Central Fol Team, Caxton House, Tothill Street, SW1H 9NA. Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF
www.ico.org.uk/Global/contact_us or telephone 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745