

Universal Credit and Access to GOS update – March 2015

The Optical Confederation issued guidance regarding Universal Credit, a monthly single payment system for people looking for work or on a low income, in May 2013. In that guidance we advised we would provide updates as and when they were available.

December 2014 saw the inclusion of the Universal Credit scheme in all North West England Jobcentres. However there are different rules regarding who is entitled to claim in each area, ie whether the claimant has dependent children or not.

On Monday 23 February 2015 the pilot was extended, taking the form of a gradual roll-out across Great Britain, with the new claim areas only accepting claims from single jobseekers. This is because the system is being introduced stage-by stage to different groups - single people, couples then families - meaning even when it is available in specific areas not everyone will be able to access it immediately. The current aim is for Universal Credit to be offered in all job centres in England, Scotland and Wales by Spring 2016. Northern Ireland has yet to announce when Universal Credit will be rolled out.

An updated list of Jobcentre areas where Universal Credit can be claimed is available via the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/jobcentres-where-you-can-claim-universal-credit>

Until October 31 2015 anyone who is in receipt of Universal Credit is entitled to an NHS sight test and optical vouchers. This is a temporary arrangement and the Department of Health will issue further guidance about future arrangements in due course.

At present GOS forms have still not been updated to include a Universal Credit option, therefore the income-based jobseekers allowance box should still be used on GOS 1, 3, 4 and 6 forms. The patient must show proof of NHS sight test and voucher entitlement by presenting a Universal Credit award letter¹. For further information please refer to the original Universal Credit and Access to GOS Guidance.

<http://www.opticalconfederation.org.uk/downloads/guidance/Universal-Credit---OC-Guidance-17-May-2013-FINAL.pdf>

¹ The **NHS (Charges, Payments and Remission of Charges)(Uprating, Miscellaneous Amendments and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2015** provide for entitlement to a Primary Ophthalmic Services Sight Test, supply and repair and replacement of optical appliances to persons in receipt of Universal Credit.