

Universal Credit – Updated Guidance February 2016

ACTION

Please bring this guidance to the attention of all relevant staff.

For convenience the key steps guidance below is repeated in Annex 1 which can be customised and reproduced for staff rooms, reception desks and standing operating procedure.

In any cases of uncertainty please contact your Optical Confederation representative body (see *Help below*)

Issue

Universal Credit is the new single payment system which is gradually being phased in across the UK to replace the old income- related benefits system¹ for people who are looking for work or on low incomes. Other entitlements e.g. patients under 16, patients over 60, patients diagnosed with diabetes or glaucoma etc remain unchanged.

As with the old system many people on Universal Credit will be entitled to an NHS (GOS) sight-test and assistance towards the cost of spectacles or contact lenses via a GOS voucher on income grounds.

This guidance sets out what you should do when a patient claims an NHS sight test and /or voucher on the grounds that they are in receipt of Universal Credit.

KEY STEPS

Handling Universal Credit eligibility for GOS – What you should do

As previously and with other entitlements, the responsibility is on the patient to declare that they are in receipt of Universal Credit and within the relevant earnings thresholds, by ticking and signing the appropriate GOS form and ideally showing proof of eligibility.

Evidence

Universal Credit beneficiaries should have an award letter from the Department for Work and Pensions or their local Jobcentre bearing their name - either as recipient or partner or child of recipient - stating that they are in receipt of universal benefit.

¹ Benefits that are being replaced by Universal Credit include: income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit.

The format may vary from region to region but all will be dated and date-limited.

Not Seen

If the patient cannot produce evidence of entitlement, you should still provide the NHS care the patient needs and, as with other entitlements, you should put a cross in the Evidence Not Seen option (below the boxes for the claimant's N.I. number).

GOS Forms

The paper GOS forms have not yet been updated. Patients in receipt of Universal Credit should therefore tick the Income-based Jobseekers Allowance box on the relevant GOS forms instead until new forms become available.

e-GOS and Exeter

A number of practices submit their GOS claims through the Exeter system via their practice management system. The Exeter system's input screen has been updated to include Universal Credit as an option, however it is unlikely to be available on practice management software (PMS) until Universal Credit roll out is complete. At practice level, PMS users should select the Income based Jobseeker's Allowance option until the Universal Credit option is available.

Other benefits

As the new system is being rolled out in stages, the old benefit entitlements continue to be valid for NHS eligibility (if in date) as does a Universal Credit entitlement in an area where Universal Credit has not yet been introduced.

A practice may therefore see some patients with old benefit entitlements and some with Universal Credit entitlements. No patient should have both however and, if they do, in-date Universal Credit takes precedence.

New Eligibility Requirements (from 1 November 2015)²

The earning thresholds from 1 November 2015 are

- the patient receives Universal Credit (either as a single person or a member of a couple), but does not receive the child, limited capability for work (LCW) or limited capability for work related activity (LCWRA) elements of Universal Credit³; and had no earnings or net earnings up to £435 during the most recent assessment period⁴
- the patient receives Universal Credit (either as a single person or a member of a couple), and receives the children, the LCW or LCWRA element/s, and had no earnings or net earnings up to £935 during the most recent assessment period.

If a patient is not sure of their eligibility, they can self-check against the above thresholds.

² The details of the new requirements are laid out in the **NHS (Exemptions from Charges, Payments and Remission of Charges) (Amendment and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2015**

³ The child element, LCW element and LCWRA element are defined in the Universal Credit Regulations 2013

⁴ The assessment period is detailed in the Universal Credit Regulations 2013.

Vouchers issued before November 2015

If a patient receiving Universal Credit was issued with an optical voucher prior to 1 November this will still be valid and may still be accepted provided it has not already been used.

Has Universal Credit been rolled out to my area yet?

An updated list of Jobcentre areas where Universal Credit can be claimed is available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/jobcentres-where-you-can-claim-universal-credit>

As Universal Credit is being introduced stage-by-stage to different groups - single people, couples, and then families - even when it is available in specific areas, not everyone will be able to access it immediately.

The aim is for Universal Credit to be offered in all Jobcentres in England, Scotland and Wales by spring 2016.

Northern Ireland has yet to announce when Universal Credit will be introduced.

Help

In any cases of uncertainty please contact your Optical Confederation representative body

- ABDO – Barry Duncan bduncan@abdo.org.uk
- AOP – Geoff Roberson geoffroberson@aop.org.uk
- FODO – Rebecca Sinclair rebecca@fodo.com

Further information

Previous Optical Confederation Guidance on Universal Credit

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

<http://www.opticalconfederation.org.uk/downloads/guidance/universal-credit-update-march-2015.pdf>

Government advice

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-toolkit-for-partner-organisations>

Universal Credit national expansion

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/453657/universal-credit-national-expansion-tranche-three-and-four.pdf

NHS Choices website

www.nhs.uk/uc-healthcosts

Universal Credit Regulations 2013

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2013/9780111531938/pdfs/ukdsi_9780111531938_en.pdf

NHS (Exemptions from Charges, Payments and Remission of Charges) (Amendment and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2015

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/1776/pdfs/uksi_20151776_en.pdf