



UNIVERSAL CREDIT FOR LONE PARENT STUDENTS

April 2024

Child Poverty Action Group works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty. It doesn't have to be like this. We work to understand what causes poverty and the impact it has on children's lives, and how it can be prevented and solved – for good.

We provide training, advice and information to make sure hard-up families get the financial support they need.

April 2024. This factsheet will be updated online. Check for the latest version at: cpag.org.uk/welfare-rights/benefits-scotland/more-info/benefits-students-factsheets

INTRODUCTION

Universal credit for lone parent students is one of a series of Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland factsheets giving guidance to advisers who are working with people who are studying or thinking about doing a course of education.

Lone parents considering going into education need accurate information about the money that will be available to them. This factsheet has information about universal credit for lone parents on a course of education. The factsheet also includes brief information on help with childcare costs. It does not include information about entitlement to 'legacy benefits' (see p3).

Note that in this factsheet you will find information about the main universal credit eligibility rules for lone parents, but there are other general rules to satisfy, so seek advice (see 'Further information and advice'). European nationals must satisfy additional rules - see CPAG in Scotland's [*Rights to benefits and tax credits for European nationals factsheet*](#) for more details.

STUDYING FULL TIME

It is not usually possible to make a new claim for 'legacy benefits' (income-based jobseeker's allowance, income support, income-related employment and support allowance, housing benefit, child tax credit and working tax credit). There is an exception if you live in 'specified' supported or temporary (homeless) accommodation. In this case you can still claim HB for help with rent.

If you have a change in circumstances you may have to claim universal credit (UC), or you may have to claim UC through 'managed migration'.

If you are already getting legacy benefits and start studying, see CPAG's factsheet *Benefits and tax credits for lone parent students* for more information.

Key facts

If you are a lone-parent full-time student then:

- you are eligible for UC if you are 'responsible for a child';
- in higher education, you might not get any/much UC during the academic year if your grant or loan is too high, but are likely to get more in the summer vacation, when the grant and loan are ignored as income;
- in further education, you can stay on UC, and may be eligible for a discretionary bursary maintenance allowance of £28 per week as well;
- in the summer vacation you are likely to have to look for work, to continue to get the full amount of UC;
- you can claim Scottish child payment, if you get UC and have a child under 16.

Are you eligible for universal credit?

Being 'eligible' means you have passed the first hurdle to getting benefit. The next step is an income assessment to decide if you actually get benefit, and how much. Check this section first to see if you are eligible. Then look below under 'During the academic year' and 'During the summer vacation' to see how your grant or loan might affect things.

If you are a lone parent student you are eligible for UC if you are responsible for a child under 16, or a young person aged 16-19 in full-time non-advanced education. You no longer count as responsible for a child once they reach 1 September after their 19th birthday. You can continue to get UC for a 16-year-old who has left education until 31 August after their 16th birthday.

UC can help with living costs, rent and the costs of children. If you get UC you may be eligible for a loan for mortgage interest. It can also help with the cost of registered childcare while you are working.

UC claims and payments

UC is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Claims are normally made online and payments are monthly, in arrears. The first pay day is 7 days after the end of the first 'assessment period' (a period of a month which begins on the date of claim). The first pay day will, therefore, be at least 5 weeks after the date of claim.

However, a recoverable short-term benefit advance can be made to claimants who are waiting for their first payment of UC. Payment of up to 100% of the UC award can be paid as a short-term benefit advance. It must be repaid over the subsequent 24 UC payments.

Example

Clare claims UC on 3 May 2024. The initial assessment period runs from 3 May until and including 2 June. Her first payment is received on 9 June and then on 9th of each month. She receives an advance of £600. Her first 24 UC payments are reduced by £25 each, to repay the advance.

There are no payments for less than a month. Changes of circumstance take effect from the start of the monthly assessment period. So, if a change means that an award stops, there is no payment at the end of that month.

UC claimants in Scotland can request twice-monthly payments, and/or for rent payments to be made direct to the landlord.

During the academic year

Your student loan for maintenance and most grants count as income for UC. They are taken into account from the assessment period in which your course/course year starts, until the assessment period before the one in which your course ends, or before the one in which your summer vacation starts. Your assessment period is a period of one month linked to your date of claim. When you start a higher education (HE) course at university or college, although you may still be eligible for UC, in practice it normally stops or reduces because of your student loan and/or grant income. You may need to rely on your student loan and/or grant together with child benefit during the academic year.

You cannot substitute UC for a student loan for maintenance. For UC, you are always treated as though you have taken out the maximum loan for which you are eligible, even if you have not applied for one, if you can get one by taking 'reasonable steps'.

Further education (FE) lone parent students can, however, stay on UC. You are likely to get a top-up of £28 per week of the discretionary bursary maintenance allowance. You should not be treated as having access to a discretionary bursary if you do not have one because, by its nature, there is no guarantee you would get it if you applied.

Example

Katharine is on UC and has a six-year-old child. She started a full-time HE course on 4 September 2023 and gets a student loan. Her course ends on 31 May 2024. Her assessment periods run from the 7th of each month to the 6th of the next month. Her UC is reduced from 7 August 2023, the start of the assessment period in which her course starts, to 6 May 2024, the assessment period before the one in which her course ends. Her UC increases again from the assessment period beginning 7 May 2023, when her student income is ignored, and she is paid a higher amount of UC on her next payment date after that, 13 June.

During the summer vacation

Your student loan for maintenance and most grants count as income for UC until the assessment period before the one in which your course ends, or before the one in which your summer vacation starts. You get more UC over the summer, when student income is not counted, but you may have to look for work if your youngest child is three or over (see *Conditionality*, below).

Examples

Robert is a lone parent with a 14-year-old son. Robert leaves his job to start a four-year degree course, and gets a student loan and lone parents' grant. He gets child benefit and a reduced amount of UC. In the summer between years one and two Robert gets maximum UC, which provides him with income over the summer while he looks for work.

Beatrice is a lone parent with a two-year-old daughter. She is on a full-time HE course. In the summer between years of her course she can get maximum UC. She does not have to look for work in the summer because her child is under three.

Conditionality

To get UC paid in full without a sanction, if you are a lone parent student whose youngest child is one, you must attend work-focused interviews at the jobcentre when required. If your youngest child is two you must attend these interviews and also take part in work preparation, if required to do so. You must normally undertake all work-related requirements (ie, looking for work and being available for work) if you are a lone parent student claiming UC and your youngest child is aged three or over, in order to get your UC paid without a sanction.

There is an exception to these rules if you are claiming UC as a lone parent student and you get a loan or grant for maintenance which counts as income for UC, eg, a student loan or an

FE bursary maintenance allowance. In this case you do not have any work-related requirements during the period your loan or grant is taken into account as income (ie, during the academic year).

Examples

Pamela, a lone parent with a four-year-old child, started a higher education course in September 2023. She gets a student loan, and UC. She does not have to look for work during the academic year, because she gets a loan for maintenance, but she does have to look for work over the summer.

Emily is a single mum with a three-year-old child, claiming UC. She starts an FE course. She gets a £28 bursary maintenance allowance. Her UC reduces slightly. She is also eligible for help with travel expenses and course costs. She does not have work-related requirements, because she gets a bursary for maintenance.

STUDYING PART TIME

If you get universal credit (UC) and are a lone parent studying part-time you can stay on UC, but you must meet your work-related requirements to get your full UC paid without a sanction.

Note that there are flexibilities in UC for people with childcare responsibilities. In particular, if you have a child aged 5 to 12, you can limit your availability for work to less than 25 hours a week, depending on caring responsibilities.

You may be able to get a grant for fees if you are a part-time student (or a fee waiver in further education). This is disregarded when your UC is worked out. You can also apply for help from the childcare and discretionary funds.

Example

Susan started studying part time in September 2023. She is a lone parent with two children aged 3 and 5 and gets UC. She can stay on UC while she studies part time, and will get this paid in full as long as she meets any work-related requirements. She can also get a fee grant, and may get help with childcare costs.

BENEFITS TO HELP WITH THE COSTS OF CHILDREN

Child benefit

Child benefit is paid to almost everyone with a child/ren (some high earners may choose not to get child benefit, or get it but pay an equivalent tax charge). You can get child benefit if you are studying full time. Broadly, you must care for a child under 16, or under 20 and in full-time non-advanced education or approved training, which they were accepted on or started before they turned 19. For more information, see CPAG in Scotland's factsheet *Parents claiming for young people in further education or training* (see p9).

Scottish child payment

This is an extra payment of £26.70 per week per child under 16. You are eligible if you are getting UC, and you are responsible for a child/ren. You are responsible for a child/ren if you or your partner get child benefit or other benefits for the child/ren, or you are a kinship carer for the child/ren. If your UC stops during the academic year and you have to reclaim it in the summer vacation, make sure you also reclaim Scottish child payment.

Apply at www.mygov.scot/scottish-child-payment/how-to-apply

Best start grants

There are grants available during pregnancy or shortly after you have a baby, when a child is between 2 and 3.5 years old, and in the year a child starts school. Normally you can only get these if you get a qualifying benefit such as UC. You may also get a payment card for certain foods under the Best start foods scheme. For more information see cpag.org.uk/welfare-rights/benefits-scotland/scottish-benefits

OTHER MATTERS

Childcare

There is a childcare grant for lone parents of up to £1,215 if you are a full-time further or higher education student. You apply to your university or college for this grant, and also for additional help from the childcare fund, or help from the discretionary fund. Part-time students can apply to the discretionary fund for help with childcare.

You may be able to get additional funding from an educational trust. Use the Grants Search at grants-search.turn2us.org.uk or see the Register of Education Endowments at <https://www.saas.gov.uk/full-time/register-of-education-endowments>. You can also find a list of educational grants at www.lead.org.uk/charitable-trusts-providing-educational-grants-for-individuals/

If you are claiming UC you can get help with up to 85% of your childcare costs, but only to cover your hours of work. If you receive childcare funding from your college or university for the same childcare costs that you are receiving help with from UC, your UC childcare help is likely to be reduced to 85% of the total that you are left to pay. Childcare funds from the college or university for hours of childcare while you study should not affect UC. For more information on childcare, including free pre-school childcare, see cpag.org.uk/welfare-rights/benefits-scotland/more-info/families-factsheets/childcare-costs

Council tax

You are usually exempt from council tax if you are a full-time student. If you do have a council tax bill to pay, you are eligible for council tax reduction if you are a lone parent student with a child that you get child benefit for. This may apply if you have grown-up children at home who are working, as although you yourself are exempt, you are nonetheless liable to pay some council tax based on the other adults living there. You apply to your local authority for council tax reduction.

If you are a part-time student, you are not exempt from council tax. Your bill is reduced by 25% if you are the only adult in the household. If your income is low, you can apply to your local authority for council tax reduction to help pay your council tax.

CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP IN SCOTLAND

Advice line for frontline advisers and support workers

0141 552 0552 Monday – Thursday 10am – 4pm; Friday 10am – 12 noon

Email: advice@cpagscotland.org.uk

CPAG in Scotland advice line is only for advisers. If you are a student or thinking of doing a course of education and are in need of advice, contact your college/university student welfare services, or your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- CPAG in Scotland's Benefits for Students work, including factsheets, and training courses on students and benefits for workers of different levels of experience, go to cpag.org.uk/welfare-rights/support-advisers/support-advisers-scotland/advising-students-scotland
- CPAG in Scotland's free online Benefits for Students in Scotland Handbook go to askcpag.org.uk/publications/scotland
- View our full range of factsheets on benefits for students at: cpag.org.uk/welfare-rights/benefits-scotland/more-info/benefits-students-factsheets
- CPAG publishes the Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook, a comprehensive guide to benefits and tax credit for claimants and advisers. Find out more at: cpag.org.uk/shop
- We have a free Scottish student income and UC elearning course. See this and other elearning courses at elearning.cpag.org.uk
- Follow us on X @CPAGScotland
- For more information about the student funding available in Scotland (loans, grants etc) see www.studentinformation.gov.scot. You can also get more information at saas.gov.uk or from student services or advice staff in colleges and universities.

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