Universal Credit sanctions

6.4.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Your Universal Credit payments can be reduced if you do not complete your agreed work-related activities without a good reason. This is known as a sanction.

What a sanction is

To get Universal Credit payments, you'll need to accept an agreement called a 'claimant commitment'. This includes 'work-related requirements' - any work-related activities you must complete to receive Universal Credit.

What you must do will depend on your circumstances. It could include:

- appointments with your work coach
- updating your CV
- searching for jobs

You must do everything you agree to as part of your commitment or your payment may be reduced. This is called a sanction.

How to avoid a sanction

Make sure you understand:

- all the things you must do to receive Universal Credit
- what will happen if you do not complete one or more of your work-related activities

To avoid a sanction you must do all the things you've agreed to as part of your claimant commitment, such as:

- going to all Universal Credit appointments on time and taking part in interviews
- doing everything you have agreed to do to find work, such as taking part in training courses and applying for suitable jobs

Make sure your claimant commitment is based on your current circumstances by reporting changes in your circumstances.

If you cannot meet your commitments

If you're not able to do the things in your claimant commitment, you must contact us straight away by adding a note to your journal in your Universal Credit account, or using the contact details provided by your work coach.

For example, if:

- you have a hospital appointment at the same time as a meeting with us
- you're unexpectedly ill and cannot do a work-related activity
- a domestic emergency means you cannot go to a job interview

If we decide that you had a good reason, your payment will not be reduced. If we decide you did not have a good reason, you may get a sanction.

If you get a sanction

If you get a sanction, your next Universal Credit payment, or series of payments, will be reduced. You'll get a journal message in your Universal Credit account or a letter telling you:

- how much your payment is reduced by
- how long the sanction may be for or what you need to do to end the sanction
- what you failed to do

You will not have 2 sanctions at once, but sanctions can run back-to-back.

How much your payments will be reduced by

A sanction reduces the amount of Universal Credit standard allowance you receive.

Your payments will be reduced by 100% of the Universal Credit standard allowance rate for each day the sanction is in place. However, if you are aged 16 or 17, or if your only responsibility is to attend appointments with us to discuss work, your payments will be reduced by 40% of the standard allowance rate for each day the sanction is in place.

If your payments are already reduced due to earnings or other income and there is not enough of your Universal Credit to take the full sanction amount, your payments will be reduced to nil and the sanction is regarded as fully applied.

If you get extra amounts on top of your standard allowance such as for children or housing costs, these will still be paid to you.

You may lose your entitlement to other benefits, such as financial help with NHS costs if you get a sanction.

Daily reduction rates

Your circumstances	100% reduction rate per day	40% reduction rate per day
Single under 25	£11.10	£4.40
Single 25 or over	£13.90	£5.50
Joint claimants both under 25 (per sanctioned claimant)	£8.60	£3.40
Joint claimants, one or both 25 or over (per sanctioned claimant)	£10.90	£4.30

Your daily reduction rate could change if the amount of Universal Credit we pay or your circumstances change.

When you might have less money taken off

You might have less money taken off your Universal Credit in some circumstances, for example:

- you’re caring for young children and people with disabilities
- you’re pregnant and your baby is due in less than 11 weeks
- you had a baby less than 15 weeks ago
- you’re adopting a child, and it is less than one year since the child was placed with you

Sanction levels

There are 4 sanction levels depending on which work-related activity (or ‘conditionality’) group you’re in.

The sanction levels are:

- lowest
- low
- medium
- high

Lowest level sanctions

What they’re for

You may get the lowest level sanction if your only responsibility is to take part in appointments with us to discuss work, and you do not take part without good reason.

How long they last

These sanctions last from the date of the appointment until the day before you contact us to arrange a new one. You must take part in the new appointment.

Low level sanctions

What they’re for

Most Universal Credit sanctions are low level. They are related to what you’re expected to do to get your Universal Credit.

For example, you may get a low level sanction if, without good reason, you fail to:

- attend and take part in work-focused interviews or appointments, and a lowest level sanction does not apply
- provide work-related evidence that we have asked for
- report work-related changes such as losing pay
- go to or take part in a training course or employment scheme that has been recommended as part of your work preparation
- take a specific action to get paid work, or to increase your earnings from work

How long they last if you’re aged 18 or over

A low level sanction usually lasts from the date you failed to do the activity you were sanctioned for, until the day before you do the activity, plus a fixed number of extra days.

If you have not received a sanction in the last 365 days, the fixed number of extra days is usually 7.

Example

Tom is 20. He was supposed to attend a training course recommended by his work coach, but he forgot to go.
He does not have a good reason for not attending.
He goes to the next training course session 3 days later.
This is the first time he has been sanctioned.

His sanction period will be 2 days plus 7 extra days = 9 days.

If you received a sanction in the last 365 days, the fixed number of extra days added to your next sanction usually depends on how many extra days your most recent sanction included:

Extra days added to your most recent sanction	Extra days added to the length of your next sanction
7 extra days	14 extra days
14 extra days	28 extra days
28 extra days	28 extra days

If your previous low level sanction was within the last 14 days, the number of extra days added to your next sanction does not go up. The extra days are the same number as you received for your most recent sanction.

How long they last if you're aged 16 or 17

If you did not receive a low level sanction in the last 365 days, a low level sanction usually lasts from the date you failed to do the activity you were sanctioned for, until the day before you do the activity.

If you received a low-level sanction in the last 15 to 365 days, your sanction usually lasts from the date you failed to do the activity you were sanctioned for, until the day before you do the activity, plus an extra 7 days.

If your most recent low level sanction was within the last 14 days, your sanction usually lasts from the date you failed to do the activity you were sanctioned for, until the day before you do the activity, plus the same number of extra days your most recent sanction included.

Medium level sanctions

What they're for

If you do not do enough to look for work or are not available for work, you may get a medium level sanction.

For example, you may get a medium level sanction if, without good reason, you:

- have to look for work, but you do not apply for a particular job when told to do so
- do not take all reasonable actions to find paid work or increase your earnings from work
- have to be available for job interviews, but you are not available to go to interviews or start work
- have to be available for work, but you're not able and willing to do paid work immediately

How long they last

You'll be sanctioned for 28 days (4 weeks) for your first medium level sanction in any 365-day period. If you have had a medium level sanction in the past year, but not within the last 14 days, the sanction might last for 91 days (13 weeks).

16 and 17 year olds

If you're 16 or 17 years old a medium level sanction will usually be 7 days. If you have had a medium level sanction in the past year, the sanction will usually be 14 days.

High level sanctions

What they're for

A high level sanction is for certain types of failures to do with paid work.

For example, you may get a high level sanction if you:

- have to look for work, but you do not apply for a particular job when told to do so without good reason
- have to be available for work, but you fail to accept a job that's offered to you without good reason
- leave a job or lose pay by choice while claiming Universal Credit or just before you claim, without a good reason
- leave a job or lose pay due to misconduct, while claiming Universal Credit or just before you claim

How long they last

You'll be sanctioned for 91 days (about 3 months) for your first high level sanction in any 365-day period. If you have had a high level sanction before in the past year, but not within the last 14 days, the sanction can be up to a maximum of 182 days (about 6 months).

If you leave work or failed to take up a job offer before you claimed Universal Credit there are special rules for how long your sanction will last for.

16 and 17 year olds

If you're aged 16 or 17, a high level sanction will usually be 14 days. If you have had a high level sanction in the past year, the sanction will usually be 28 days.

If you disagree with a sanction decision

If you disagree with a sanction decision, or have more evidence, you can ask for a review. This is known as a mandatory reconsideration.

You can do this by putting a note in your journal in your Universal Credit account, over the phone, face to face or in writing. To find out more, see Challenge a benefits decision (mandatory reconsideration).

Financial help if your payment is reduced

If you cannot pay for your rent, heating, food or hygiene needs because you got a sanction, you can ask for a hardship payment.

You will repay the hardship payment through your Universal Credit payments. These will be lower until you pay it back.

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-sanctions