

Worried About Money? Know Your Rights

An advice leaflet for Usdaw members

USDAW EQUALITIES



Working age households in the UK are facing spiralling costs of living in 2023. Rising gas, electricity, fuel and food costs means millions in the UK continue to struggle to pay for basic items.

From day one working families have been at the sharp end of cuts and caps to in-work benefits. The Union's most recent cost of living survey revealed almost three-quarters of members have relied on loans and borrowing to pay essential bills and three-quarters say financial worries are having an impact on their mental health. Usdaw's New Deal for Workers Campaign is calling for better pay and a social security system that ensures everyone receives enough to live on.

This leaflet is one of a range of leaflets Usdaw has published to better support members who are juggling paid work with bringing up children. It gives:

- Basic benefit, pensions and money advice.
- An overview of Universal Credit.
- Information about where to go for free, independent money advice and support.

Benefit Advice

This section outlines some of the main benefits available to working parents.

Universal Credit (UC)

Please be aware that the rules governing entitlement to benefits including Universal Credit are complex and subject to frequent change.

Universal Credit is a means-tested benefit for people of working age. It replaces the following benefits:

- Income Support.
- Income-based/New Style Jobseeker's Allowance.
- Income-related/New Style Employment and Support Allowance.
- Housing Benefit.
- Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

These benefits have become known as 'legacy benefits'.

Other benefits that are not means-tested continue to be paid separately to Universal Credit such as Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Carer's Allowance. Child Benefit also continues to be paid separately.

Benefits based on National Insurance contributions, such as contribution-based/New Style Jobseeker's Allowance and contributory Employment and Support Allowance work alongside Universal Credit.

Benefits for those over the State Pension Age, such as the State Pension and Pension Credit, are not being replaced. Neither is Council Tax Reduction/ Support so you should check to see if you can claim it in addition to Universal Credit.

Who gets it?

Universal Credit is a means-tested benefit for both single people and couples on a low income. It is designed to provide financial support to help with living costs. It can be paid to people in or out of work.

You can claim if you:

- Are aged 18 or over (although there are exceptions for some 16 or 17 year olds).
- Are under the qualifying age for Pension Credit. If you are in a couple and only one of you is over Pension Credit age, then you will have to claim Universal Credit.

- Are in Great Britain.
- Are not in education.
- Accept a 'claimant commitment'. This is a contract between you and the Department for Work and Pensions and may include requirements about what you will do to look for work or increase the number of hours you work. If you are doing some work you will normally be expected to search for work for at least 35 hours a week (less if you are a parent or carer). However, no work-related requirements can be imposed on you if you are:
    - i. The responsible carer for a child under one; or
    - ii. You are pregnant and there are 11 weeks or less before the week your baby is due; or
    - iii. You had a baby not more than 15 weeks ago; or
    - iv. You are an adopter and it is not more 12 months since your child was placed with you for adoption.

There are other exemptions from work-related requirements for parents of children aged under three, carers of disabled children or adults and sick and disabled adults.

How Much Will I Get?

When calculating how much Universal Credit people will get, a basic rate called the 'standard allowance' is included and extra amounts for people in different circumstances are paid on top. For example, additional amounts are paid if you have children, you or they are disabled or you need help with housing costs.

For claimants in work, Universal Credit operates in a similar way to Tax Credits. In other words, earnings below a certain threshold are disregarded (known as the work allowance). Net earnings above the work allowance are deducted from Universal Credit at the rate of 55p for every pound of extra earnings. In other words, claimants keep 45p for every pound earned above the work allowance.

The work allowance will vary depending on family circumstances and whether or not your Universal Credit award includes an amount for housing costs.

However, unlike Tax Credits there are no rules about the number of hours you have to work to qualify. This means that if you are in paid work of only one or two hours a week you may qualify.

Most people with children, disabled people and single parents will be worse off on Universal Credit. Once you claim Universal Credit, your Tax Credit(s) award will end and with very few exceptions you cannot go back.

You should therefore seek independent advice from your local Citizens Advice Bureau before taking a decision to move from Tax Credits to Universal Credit.

Help with Housing Costs via Universal Credit

Universal Credit can include a housing costs element if you are renting accommodation, are an owner occupier or if you pay service charges.

If you are a private tenant or you are in the socially rented sector and your home has more bedrooms than the rules allow, your rent is either restricted or your housing costs reduced by a percentage (see page 12 for details).

You cannot get any help with your mortgage payments if you (or your partner) have any earned income, no matter how low your earnings are. This is very much a change for the worse as previously people in work on low incomes were able to receive some help towards their mortgage interest payments via Income Support.

How Do I Claim?

In most cases, claims for Universal Credit must be made online at: **www.gov.uk/universalcredit**

Trade unions, together with welfare rights and disability rights organisations, have expressed serious concern about this requirement as not everyone has access to the internet or is able to use a computer to claim or manage their claim online.

In practice, the DWP says that people in these circumstances will be helped to make a claim online via the telephone service, or possibly at a local office or via a home visit. The Universal Credit helpline number is **0800 328 5644** (Relay UK 18001 then **0800 328 1344**) Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm (closed on Bank Holidays).

How Will I Be Paid?

If you live in England and Wales

Your award is assessed over an assessment period of one calendar month, beginning from the date of your claim. Universal Credit should normally be paid directly into your account within seven days of the last day of the monthly assessment period.

If you find monthly payments difficult to budget for, or having payment of Universal Credit housing costs for rent paid directly to you, rather than your landlord, is leading to serious arrears, it may be possible to be paid more frequently through 'alternative payment arrangements'.

If you live in Scotland

You have the option of twice-monthly payments instead of once a month. You can also ask for the housing costs element to be paid directly to your landlord instead of you.

If you live in Northern Ireland

Things are slightly different in Northern Ireland as, unlike the rest of the UK, unless you ask to be paid your Universal Credit monthly you will get two payments a month instead of one.

Help with your housing costs is also slightly different as your rent will usually be paid directly to your landlord instead of to you.

Will I Be Better Off on Universal Credit?

Whether people will be better or worse off under Universal Credit will depend upon their income, housing costs and the make-up of their household, but many working people, particularly those with children, single parents and disabled workers will be worse off.

There is a free, anonymous, online benefit calculator on the 'Entitled to' website at: **www.entitledto.co.uk**

Tax Credits

Now that Universal Credit has been fully rolled-out across the UK, most people can no longer make a new claim for tax credits and have to claim UC instead (renewal claims can continue).

People currently receiving Tax Credits and other 'legacy benefits' (see page 2) will be contacted to transfer automatically onto UC when it is introduced in their area.

The transfer process has been subject to delay. The Government now expect everyone in receipt of 'legacy benefits' will move onto Universal Credit by the end of 2024.

If you are already in receipt of Tax Credits then your claim should not be affected by Universal Credit unless you:

- Choose to claim Universal Credit. Note – most people with children, disabled people and single parents will be worse off on Universal Credit. Once you claim Universal Credit, your Tax Credit(s) award will end and with very few exceptions you cannot go back. You should therefore seek independent advice from your local Citizens Advice Bureau before taking a decision to move from Tax Credits to Universal Credit.
- Have a change in circumstances that ends your Tax Credit award including:
    - **i.** A partner leaves or joins your household.
    - **ii.** You or your partner stop work or reduce your hours below the level required for your Tax Credit claim to continue.
    - **iii.** You are claiming for only one child and your circumstances change so that you are no longer responsible for them (ie they leave home).
    - **iv.** You need to make a claim for another benefit which UC has replaced (such as housing benefit).

Child Benefit

Anyone who is responsible for a child can get Child Benefit. Find out more details at: **www.gov.uk/child-benefit**

Although Child Benefit is a non means-tested benefit, if your income or your partner's income exceeds £50,000* you may be liable to pay tax in respect of Child Benefit.

Claim by calling the Child Benefit helpline on **0300 200 3100** or Relay UK 18001 then **0300 200 3100** or download a claim form from: **www.gov.uk**

*Individual income, not combined joint income.

The Main Differences Between Universal Credit and Tax Credits

Tax Credits	Universal Credit
Working Tax Credit is only paid to people who are working enough hours (see section on Working Tax Credit for details).	Universal Credit is paid whether or not you are in work. It has no rules about the number of hours you must work.
If you do not have children and are not disabled you have at to be at least 25 years old to claim Working Tax Credit.	You can get Universal Credit even if you are single and under 25 years old (although you usually have to be at least 18 years old).
You do not have to sign a claimant commitment and agree to look for more work to get Tax Credits.	You have to sign a claimant commitment and you will normally be expected to search for work for at least 35 hours a week although there are exceptions for parents, carers and disabled people.
Tax Credits are administered by HMRC.	Universal Credit is administered by the DWP.
Claims must be made in writing on Form TC600.	Claims must usually be made and managed online.
To get help with childcare costs you have to be working at least 16 hours a week.	There are no rules about the number of hours you must work to get help with childcare costs as long as the amount of childcare is not considered excessive and you are in work. If you are part of a couple, you must both be working (unless the non-working partner has been assessed as having limited capability for work, is a carer, or is temporarily absent).
You must be in work before you claim for help with childcare costs.	You can get help with childcare costs before you start work, if you have a job offer that is due to start in the next month.
Tax Credits are assessed on annual gross income.	Universal Credit takes into account your net income in a monthly assessment period.
There is no capital limit for Tax Credits.	You cannot usually get Universal Credit if you have more than £16,000 in savings.

*Thanks to CPAG for the information in this section concerning Universal Credit.

Reporting Changes in Your Circumstances

It's important to tell the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) all the changes they ask you to report as well as any other changes you think might affect your award. Once you've reported a change you should get a letter that confirms the change and tells you how your award of Universal Credit is affected.

If you are employed you don't normally need to report changes in your earnings. The DWP gets information on your earnings from His Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC) through its 'real time information system'. Under this, your employer sends HMRC information about your earnings every time you are paid. However, you may be asked to report your earnings if, for example, your employer isn't doing this properly or a report is missing or is wrong.

£500 Sure Start Maternity Grant

This is a one-off £500 payment. To qualify you must be in receipt of a qualifying benefit. For parents in paid work this means you will qualify where:

- You are in receipt of more than the basic family element of Child Tax Credit.
- You qualify for Working Tax Credit with a disability or severe disability element.
- You are in receipt of Universal Credit.
- There are no other children in your family under 16. However, a grant may be awarded if you're expecting a multiple birth (even if you have other children under 16).

Claim from 11 weeks before your baby is due, to up to six months after your baby's birth. Claim on Form SF100 which you can get from your local Jobcentre Plus office, by calling **0800 055 6688** or from: **www.gov.uk**



Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods – Scotland

Best Start Grants

Best Start Grants include a Pregnancy and Baby payment, an early learning payment and a school age payment.

In order to qualify for the Pregnancy and Baby payment you (or your partner) must:

- live in Scotland, and
- be eligible for Universal Credit, income support, income-related/ new style Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment Support Allowance (not contributory benefits), Housing Benefits, Working or Child Tax Credit or, if you are under 18, you do not need to be eligible for a qualifying benefit, and
- have given birth or had a stillbirth after the end of the 24th week of pregnancy or become responsible for a baby under one, including through adoption or surrogacy.

OR

- be under 18 and pregnant.

OR

- if you have no recourse to public funds you can claim for a British child under 3 if your income is less than £726 per month (after tax).

The Pregnancy and Baby payment is £707.25 for your first baby (or if there are no other children under 18 in your household) or £353.65 for subsequent children. For twins or multiple births you are entitled to £707.25 for one baby and £353.65 for each other baby.

You can claim a Pregnancy and Baby payment of £707.25 if you have older children if you have been granted refugee status, humanitarian protection, leave under the Afghan resettlement scheme or Ukraine resettlement scheme if your other child/children were born prior to your arrival in the UK.

You can also claim £707.25 if you have been forced to leave your home because of domestic abuse or you have become responsible for another child/children when they were more than one year old.

The early learning payment is £294.70 per child.

The school age payment if £294.70 per child.

How do I Claim the Pregnancy and Baby Payment?

You can apply for a Best Start Grant online at **www.mygov.scot/best-start-grant-best-start-foods/** or you can download a form and apply by post. If you need help or want to apply by telephone you can ring **0800 182 2222**.

You can apply once you are at least 24 weeks pregnant, up to six months after the birth. If you have become responsible for a child you can apply up to the day before your child's first birthday.

Best Start Foods

Best Start Food payments are paid during pregnancy, up to your child's 3rd birthday. You can get

- £18 every 4 weeks in pregnancy
- £36 every 4 weeks until your child is one
- £18 every 4 weeks between age one and three.

To qualify for Best Start Food payments you must be on a qualifying benefit (see Best Start Grant above) and be on a low income.

For more information and to apply online see: **www.mygov.scot/best-start-grant-best-start-foods** or you can download a form and apply by post. If you need help or want to apply by telephone you can ring **0800 182 2222**.

For Northern Ireland, see: **www.nidirect.gov.uk**



Help with NHS Costs

If you are pregnant or have given birth within the last year, you qualify for free prescriptions, free dental treatment and other help with NHS costs.

Your midwife, GP, Practice Nurse or Health Visitor must apply for a Maternity Exemption Certificate for you.

Other people may qualify on the grounds of low income or other personal circumstances such as disability.

How much help you get depends on your weekly income and necessary outgoings plus any savings you have. Visit: **www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk**

Help with the Cost of School Meals

In England, free school meals are provided to all children at state school during their first three years of primary school.

In Scotland, if you have children at a state school in any year between reception and year 5 they are entitled to free school meals regardless of your household income.

In Wales, free school breakfasts are provided to all children in primary schools maintained by the local authority.

If you are in Northern Ireland or Wales (or in England or Scotland and your child is not covered by the rules above) for your child to qualify for free school meals, you must get one of the following benefits:

- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance.
- Income Support.
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance.
- Universal Credit.

The following benefits and assistance also apply for qualifying for free school meals:

- The guarantee part of Pension Credit.
- Child Tax Credit, as long as you are not getting Working Tax Credit and have an annual income of less than £16,190 (£18,725 in Scotland).
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.
- In England and Wales, if you are getting Working Tax Credit for a run-on period of four weeks because you have stopped work or reduced your hours to less than 16 hours a week, or in some cases, less than 24 or 30 hours a week, you may still be able to get free school meals for your children.
- Children who get Income Support or Income-based/New Style Jobseeker's Allowance in their own right qualify as well.

Existing entitlements to free school meals for pupils at key stages 2-4 will continue for those who are eligible.



In England, Scotland and Wales, families in receipt of Universal Credit (when it is introduced into your area for new claimants or when you are moved onto it from Tax Credits) should qualify for free school meals where earnings are below £616.67 per month or £7400 a year in England and Wales, or £726 per month in Scotland.

The Universal Credit earnings threshold is £14,000 a year in Northern Ireland.

You are also eligible in Northern Ireland if your child has a statement of special educational needs and is designated to need a special diet, or they board at a special school.

Help with the Cost of School Uniforms

Local authorities can give grants for school uniforms and other school clothes. Each authority has its own rules about who is entitled to claim help so check by contacting the Benefits Section of your local Council Office.

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support

Housing Benefit

If you are of working age you can only make a new claim for Housing Benefit if one of the following applies:

- You or your partner are pension age.
- You're staying in a refuge, hostel or some types of supported or temporary housing.

Otherwise, you must claim help with your rent via Universal Credit instead.

Mixed Age Couples

You can't usually make a new Housing Benefit claim as a couple unless you've both reached pension age. Mixed age couples will usually have to claim Universal Credit instead.

If you already get Housing Benefit because one of you is pension age, you can continue to receive it after this date.

Similarly, you might be able to claim help with your Council Tax if you pay Council Tax and your income is low enough. It doesn't matter for the purposes of Council Tax Support if you rent or own your own home.

Eligibility for Council Tax Benefit depends upon your local authority's own rules.

To claim contact the Benefits Section of your local Council Office.



The 'Bedroom Tax'

Universal Credit replaces Housing Benefit. Your housing costs are usually paid directly to you as part of your single monthly Universal Credit, it's your responsibility to pay your full rent to your landlord.

If you receive help with your rent and rent your home from a 'social landlord' (the council or a housing association) the amount of Housing Benefit or housing costs included in your Universal Credit payment will be reduced if it is decided you have more bedrooms than you need.

You are allowed one bedroom for each of the following:

- You, the tenant (and your partner if you have one).
- A person who is not a child (aged 16 or over).
- Two children of the same sex under the age of 16.
- Two children of the opposite sex under the age of 10.
- A non-resident adult carer providing overnight care.

Exemptions

- People in privately rented or social housing who do not receive help with their rent via Housing Benefit or Universal Credit will not be affected.
- The bedroom tax only affects people of working age. Anyone who is over the qualifying age for State Pension Credit or who has a partner over the age (ie anyone born before 5 October 1951) will be exempt from the bedroom tax.
- If you have recently been bereaved you will be exempt for 12 months after the bereavement.

Following a Court of Appeal judgement, an additional room must be allowed for children in receipt of the care component of Disability Living Allowance at the middle or higher rate where the decision maker is satisfied that the child is not reasonably able to share a room.

Adults in receipt of the daily living component of personal independence payment or adult disability payment (or the middle or higher rate carer component of Disability Living Allowance) are also entitled to an additional (separate) room.

- You will also be allowed an additional room where a joint tenant who occupies the same property as the claimant, but is not their partner or a member of their household, has an overnight carer or is a foster carer.
- People who are approved foster carers (and formal kinship carers in Scotland) are allowed an additional room, whether or not a child has been placed with them or they are between placements, so long as they have fostered a child, or have become an approved foster carer in the last 12 months. This also covers a claimant who is in the process of adopting a child and has had the child placed with them by the local authority before the adoption order is made.

Rates of Reduction

- 14% of the total eligible rent if you are considered to have one bedroom too many.
- 25% of the total eligible rent if you are considered to have two or more bedrooms too many.

If your Housing Benefit is restricted you will be expected to meet the shortfall yourself.

Discretionary Housing Payments

If you are affected by a reduction in your Housing Benefit because you are considered to have too many bedrooms you should apply for a 'Discretionary Housing Payment' from your local authority.

Guidance to local authorities suggests:

"For those claimants who cannot cover a reduction in Housing Benefit from their own resources and who have a compelling case for remaining in their current accommodation, there is the Discretionary Housing Payments Fund."

Ask your local authority how to make a claim for discretionary housing payments. It is up to your local authority to decide for how long you can be paid and how far your payments can be backdated.

Council Tax Support

Localised Council Tax Support schemes provide help for people on low incomes with their Council Tax bill. The schemes apply differently in different parts of Great Britain.

There is no Council Tax in Northern Ireland but you might get help with your rates by claiming Housing Benefit.



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If you're aged between 16 and 64 there is now a limit on the amount of benefit you can receive. This has become known as the benefits cap.

Most benefits which you and your partner (if you have one) are entitled to, are taken into account.

The benefit cap is set at a different level depending on whether you live inside or outside London.

The Benefits Cap

If you're aged between 16 and 64 there is now a limit on the amount of benefit you can receive. This has become known as the benefits cap.

Most benefits which you and your partner (if you have one) are entitled to are taken into account.

The benefit cap is set at a different level depending on whether you live inside or outside London:

- £486.98 a week if you are a couple or have children and live in London.
- £423.46 a week if you are a couple or have children and live outside London.
- £369.29 a week if you are a single person and live in London.
- £283.71 a week if you are a single person and live outside London.

If your benefit is capped, the cap is applied:

- By reducing your Housing Benefit/ your Universal Credit.

If you are not entitled to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit the cap is not applied.



However, there are some exceptions. Generally the cap is not applied if:

- You or your partner have been working recently, there may be a 'grace period'.
- You or your partner claims Guardian's Allowance.
- You or your partner are getting Working Tax Credit.
- You or your partner (or in some cases your child) are entitled to a disability benefit, such as Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment or the support component of Employment and Support Allowance.
- You or your partner receive Carer's Allowance.
- If you receive Universal Credit you will be exempt if you are in work and, between you and your partner, you are earning at least the amount you would get for 16 hours per week on National Minimum Wage.
- You do not receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

Local councils and job centres have a responsibility to advise families what action they can take if they have their benefits capped.

If you live in Northern Ireland you may be eligible for a top up called supplementary payment.



A decent pension is the most important source of income in later life. However, unexpected life events, like divorce or ill-health, can interrupt members' saving towards their pension. Financial pressures can also lead to members considering releasing funds from their pension early.

This section explains your pension rights in relation to divorce, ill-health and early retirement. It also warns members about the dangers of releasing money from pension funds early (known as pension liberation fraud).

Pensions Advice

Divorce

If you are getting a divorce and you and your ex-spouse/partner are dividing up your assets, then your pension rights from a workplace or personal pension can be taken into account.

There are several ways this can be done:

- The value of your pension rights can be offset against another asset (such as your home for example). This is called Pension Offsetting.
- You can arrange for a pension to be split and paid to two people from the date when it is due to come into payment. This is called Pension Earmarking.
- The value of your pension rights can be split at the date of the divorce and a transfer payment made into a pension scheme chosen by your ex-spouse/partner. This is called Pension Sharing.

The amount of the split is up to either the divorcing couple to agree or the courts to decide.

Many occupational pension schemes will now charge you for any additional administration work that goes into splitting pension rights on divorce – particularly in Defined Benefit Schemes where the calculation is not straightforward. This charge may be hundreds of pounds depending on the amount of extra work involved.

While pensions do not need to be shared they should not be ignored when deciding how assets should be allocated. Very often pensions are a couple's most significant asset, after a house, and can be easily overlooked.

State Pensions

Some parts of the State Pension may also be shared depending on your circumstances.

Contact Usdaw's Pensions Section on **0161 224 2804** to obtain a copy of Usdaw's guide *Understanding Your State Pension (Leaflet 428)* for more information, or download a copy at: **www.usdaw.org.uk/428**

Ill-Health Retirement

Most occupational pension schemes, particularly Defined Benefit Schemes, provide a pension if you are forced to retire early due to ill-health.

The pension scheme will only pay you an ill-health pension if your condition is permanent and usually only if your condition prevents you from taking on any other job in future.

Other schemes may offer a lower ill-health pension in cases where you can no longer carry on doing your job for your current employer but you might be able to do a different job somewhere else.

Medical evidence of your incapacity will be needed and the pension scheme trustees will want proof that your condition is permanent. Sometimes the company's consent is needed as well as the trustees'.

If you are eligible for an ill-health pension this can be payable from any age, even before the current minimum pension age of 55.

In cases where the trustees have turned you down for an ill-health pension it is usually difficult to challenge their decision, unless it can be proved that they acted in an unreasonable way when arriving at their decision.

Some employers, instead of providing ill-health pensions, may set up a Permanent Health Insurance (PHI) policy with an insurance company that will pay you an income for a fixed period of time – for example three years or for as long as you are off sick up until you reach retirement age.

An alternative to PHI is a Critical Illness policy. Also taken out with insurance companies these policies are usually more affordable for employers because they only pay out in cases of the most serious illnesses such as stroke or cancer.

Access to Medical Reports Act 1988

Your employer, pension scheme or insurance company cannot apply to your own doctor for a medical report about you without first notifying you and telling you what your rights are under this Act.

You have the right to see the report free of charge before it is sent. You can have your own copy of the report for a reasonable charge. If you think anything in the report is inaccurate or misleading then you can ask the doctor to change it. If the doctor won't change it then you can attach a statement to the report giving your own opinion.

The Act only applies to reports requested from your own doctor and not to reports obtained from independent or company doctors.

We advise you to make sure you ask for your own copy of any medical report made about you.

Early Retirement

There are basically two types of pension schemes, those known as Defined Benefit (for example a final salary or CARE scheme) or Defined Contribution (for example Group Stakeholder or Group Personal Pension), your rights differ depending on which type of scheme you are contributing to.

Defined Contribution Schemes

In a Defined Contribution Scheme, ordinarily, you can choose to access your pension pot at any time from age 55. You can do this even though the normal age under your scheme for taking benefits is likely to be later.

However, there are some disadvantages in opening your pension pot early:

- The younger you are when you use it, the smaller your pension pot will be. This is because you have had less time to pay into it and there has been less time for the pot to grow.
- If you choose to buy an income (annuity) this will cost you more, because that income is likely to be paid for a longer period of time. This means your income is likely to be smaller than if you had waited to take it.
- If you are invested in a with-profits fund your fund may reduce because of a market value reduction or market value adjustment.

If you are thinking about accessing your pension pot early, you might want to consider paying more into your pot if you can, ie pay Additional Voluntary Contributions.

Defined Benefit Schemes

You may be able to take your benefits early, from age 55. You may be able to do this even though the normal age under your scheme for taking your benefits is likely to be later. It will depend on the rules of your scheme.

You may find that your scheme reduces your benefits if you take them early. This is because the pension is likely to be paid to you for longer.

To find out if you can retire early, ask your scheme about the rules, and who you should apply to for early retirement. You should also ask for details of how much reduction, if any, will be made.

Flexible Retirement

Since 2006 you can start drawing your company pension and carry on working. This can be attractive for people who want to 'phase in' retirement by receiving their pension and reducing the hours they work. It's up to your employer whether they have a flexible retirement policy and what terms and conditions they attach to it.



Pension Scammers

Be Smart

It is now an offence to cold call pension holders, randomly and out-of-the-blue.

You can still be contacted if you have given someone consent, for example by your existing financial adviser or pension scheme administrators.

However, if you are approached over the phone unexpectedly about your pension and you are in any doubt, hang up!

Be Sure

Contact: **fca.org.uk/scamsmart** to find out more about how you can spot a scam and who you are dealing with.

If you would prefer to speak to someone on the Usdaw Pensions Section, you can call us on **0161 224 2804** or email us at: **pensions@usdaw.org.uk**



Be Safe

Follow 4 simple steps...

1. Reject any unexpected offers made by phone, text or email.
2. Check who you are dealing with. Contact the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to make sure whoever has contacted you is authorised.
3. Don't feel rushed or pressured; take your time to make all the checks you need.
4. Get impartial information or advice. Speak to Usdaw's Pensions Section in the first instance and we can connect you with our affinity partners, Lighthouse Financial Advice.

The cold calling ban may not totally stop the scammers, so we need you to stay vigilant – be smart, be sure and be safe!

Worried You May Have Been Scammed Already?

Act immediately!

- Call Usdaw's Pensions Section on **0161 224 2804** or email us at: **pensions@usdaw.org.uk**
- Contact your workplace pension department or pension company — they may still be able to stop a transfer that hasn't taken place yet.
- Call Action Fraud and report it on **0300 123 2040**.

Debt Advice

Being in debt or worrying about money can be very frightening. It is often difficult to talk to others or to ask for help because we tend to blame ourselves for our financial difficulties and feel guilty and ashamed. Debt can make you feel anxious, depressed, hopeless, isolated and alone.

But if you are in debt or worried about money, it can sometimes help to understand that you aren't alone.

It's not surprising that in the current economic climate more and more householders are finding it difficult to make ends meet. If you are struggling to pay your bills, to keep up with credit card, loan or debt repayments, or are falling behind with your mortgage repayments or rent payments then don't delay, get advice.

However much you owe, taking advice is the first step to sorting out your money problems and once you've taken that first step it can help you feel better. Ignoring debt almost always makes things much worse.

At the end of this leaflet there is a list of well established organisations that offer free, independent, expert debt advice.

Generally speaking, a money adviser will:

- Interview you to find out what the problems are and help you to sort out which are the most important ones.
- Help you draw up a budget – they can advise you on ways to increase your income and reduce your expenditure.
- Advise you on how to deal with the debt, including bankruptcy, negotiating with creditors and any arrangements you have made yourself.
- Advise you on other sources of help or options.

They may also be able to:

- Help you to negotiate with creditors.
- Help with form filling (eg claiming social security benefit).
- Represent you at court hearings for debt.

Before you visit an advice centre, get together all your paperwork and bills so you know roughly what you owe and to whom. Make a note of how much income you have coming in each month.



Get Advice

Advice in England, Scotland and Wales

Citizens Advice

Free confidential advice on money and benefits, from over 3,000 local offices – see the website or your local phone book for your nearest branch.

Web: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Gov UK

Information on government services, including the areas of money, tax, benefits, disability, employment and carers.

Covers the whole of the UK.

Web: www.gov.uk

entitledto

Visit: www.entitledto.co.uk to find out which benefits you might be entitled to.

Mind

A leading national mental health charity.

Infoline: 0300 123 3393

Web: www.mind.org.uk

MoneyHelper

A free, independent service that gives clear, unbiased money and pensions advice, set up by the Government and funded by a levy on the financial services industry.

Money Guidance Helpline:
0800 138 7777

Pensions Guidance Helpline:
0800 011 3797

Mon-Fri 8am-6.30pm
(closed Sat/Sun/Bank Holidays)

Web: www.moneyhelper.org.uk

National Debtline

Free, confidential and independent advice on how to deal with debt problems.

Tel: 0808 808 4000

Mon-Fri 9am-8pm, Sat 9.30am-1pm

Web: www.nationaldebtline.org

The Samaritans

Tel: 116 123

Web: www.samaritans.org

email: jo@samaritans.org

Shelter

Shelter is a national housing advice charity. They offer free, confidential advice, face-to-face, over the phone and via email about any housing problem (not just homelessness). They can also direct you to a housing advice centre in your area.

Housing advice helpline:
0808 800 4444

Web: www.shelter.org.uk

Shelter Cymru

Housing Support Line:
08000 495 495

Web: www.sheltercymru.org.uk

StepChange Debt Charity

StepChange are a registered charity who offer free, confidential debt advice and solutions such as free debt management plans.

Tel: 0800 138 1111

Mon-Fri 8am-8pm, Sat 9am-2pm

Web: www.stepchange.org

Advice in Northern Ireland

Debt Advice NI

Freephone: 0800 915 4604

Web: www.adviceni.net

Citizens Advice Northern Ireland

Web: www.citizensadvice.co.uk

Gov UK

Information on government services, including the areas of money, tax, benefits, disability, employment and carers.

Covers the whole of the UK.

Web: www.gov.uk

Housing Rights

Free advice and representation to people at risk of homelessness.

Housing and debt helpline:
028 9024 5640

Web: www.housingrights.org.uk

Lifeline

Lifeline is the Northern Ireland crisis response helpline service for people who are experiencing distress and despair.

Tel: 0808 808 8000

Textphone: 18001 0808 808 8000

Web: www.lifelinehelpline.info

MoneyHelper

A free, independent service that gives clear, unbiased money and pensions advice, set up by the Government and funded by a levy on the financial services industry.

Money Guidance Helpline:
0800 138 7777

Pensions Guidance Helpline:
0800 011 3797

Web: www.moneyhelper.org.uk

Inspire Wellbeing

Delivering mental health, autism, addiction and learning disability wellbeing services across Ireland.

Tel: 028 9032 8474

For support or information about mental health, call 0808 189 0036

Web: www.inspirewellbeing.org

The Samaritans

Tel: 116 123

Web: www.samaritans.org

email: jo@samaritans.org

More Information

Usdaw Nationwide

Wherever you work, an Usdaw rep or official (Area Organiser) is not far away. For further information or assistance, contact your Usdaw rep or local Usdaw office. Alternatively you can phone our Freephone Helpline **0800 030 80 30** to connect you to your regional office or visit our website: **www.usdaw.org.uk**
You can also write to the Union's Head Office. Just write **FREEPOST USDAW** on the envelope and put it in the post.

Join Usdaw

You can join online at:
www.usdaw.org.uk/join

Scan the QR code to join today.

What Happens Next

Once we process your application, you will receive a membership card with our Helpline telephone number and a New Member's Pack giving details of all the benefits and professional services available to you.

Lft 385 May 2023
Stock photography, posed by models

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EQUALITIES