UNIVERSAL CREDIT

**STAGE 3: After Meeting with your Work Coach**

During the first meeting with your work coach you will establish a “Claimant Commitment.” (See factsheet stage 2) Part of this commitment will require you to be placed into a group that will help you prepare for work or look for a job. These groups are called “Conditionality Groups.”

**CONDITIONALITY:**

You will be placed in one of four groups that so you will be assessed on your individual circumstances.

You cannot choose your group, but do not be afraid to question your work coach if you think they are putting you in the wrong group. **This is important** because if you are put in the wrong group and struggle with the activities, you could end up having some of your Universal Credit payments reduced temporarily. This is called getting “**sanctioned**.” (see more on sanctions below)

After being placed in a group, the specific tasks you are asked to do may be negotiated. For example, you might want to limit the hours you look for work because you have to pick your children up or you may have caring responsibilities.

**The 4 Conditionality groups are:**

* **‘No work-related requirements group/working enough’** - you don’t have to do any activities to prepare or look for work
* **‘Work-focused interview group’** - you have to go to 6 monthly interviews with your work coach at the Jobcentre to get support with preparing for work in the future. You won’t have to look for work, be available for work or prepare for work now.
* **‘Work preparation group’** - you have to do activities to prepare for work, e.g. attend training, do some work experience, write a CV, go to 3 monthly interviews with your work coach at the Jobcentre to help you find work. You won't have to actually search for work or be available for work.
* **‘ Intensive work search** - you have to do all you can to find a job or a higher paid job. This includes looking for jobs, applying for jobs, going to interviews, etc. You have to be ready and available to take up work straight away
* **Light touch** – You income, or your partner does. Your claim will be managed via your online account.

What group you are in can change over time, as your personal circumstances change.

**Universal Credit deductions:**

This is where part of your Universal Credit is reduced for a period of time, because you have not done something that was part of your claimant commitment.

If you are in the ‘intensive work search the reasons for a sanction includes:

* failure to prepare for or apply for work;
* failure to take up an offer of paid work;
* ceasing work or losing pay voluntarily or through misconduct.

This may result in a reduction of the award, for a period up to a maximum of three years, depending on how many and how often these happen.

You can also be sanctioned in the ‘work preparation group’ for failing to conduct agreed activities or in the ‘work-focused interview group’ for failing to attend an interview.

The sanction can be until the failure is resolved, for up to 26 weeks.

**How much is the sanction?**

* The amount sanctioned is the same as the adult personal allowance (£10.40 per day for over 25s, £8.20 for u25s at March 2018), or half of it if one member of a couple is sanctioned (£249 per month at March 2018).
* Hardship payments may be available for claimants who have been subject to sanctions and are, or will be, in ‘hardship’.
* Hardship payments are at 60 per cent of the amount reduced, and are effectively in the form of a loan to be recovered in future.

**What if I disagree with the sanction?**

You can ask the Job Centre to look again by asking for a mandatory reconsideration.

If you still disagree after that decision, you can appeal to an independent Tribunal.

Call us for more information or help

0300 330 1162

(Monday-Friday 10am-4pm)

Online information at:

[www.gov.uk/universal-credit](http://www.gov.uk/universal-credit)

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/universal-credit](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/universal-credit)

