

# We need to fix Universal Credit

## Why Universal Credit matters

By 2022, 7 million families in the UK will be on Universal Credit. Over half of those will be in work.

The aim – to simplify our benefits system – is right. But Universal Credit is already failing many people.

It is forcing people into debt and leaving them without the means to make ends meet.

At Citizens Advice we're already helping thousands of people who are claiming Universal Credit.

If the problems with Universal Credit aren't fixed they will escalate. From October this year, roll-out speeds up and many more people will be affected.

The government needs to address the issues with Universal Credit before this happens.

If they don't, 7 million households will face serious financial risk.

## The government needs to pause roll-out of Universal Credit and fix 3 significant problems



People are waiting up to **12 weeks** for their first payment without any income.



Universal Credit is **too complicated** and people are struggling to use it.



People **aren't getting help** when the system fails them.

**citizens  
advice**

## To fix Universal Credit, we recommend:

### Reduce how long people have to wait for their first payment

Make sure everyone moving to Universal Credit is told they can get an Advance Payment.

Remove the 7 waiting days at the start of a claim.

### Improve the support available to people so they can make ends meet

Make the Universal Credit helpline free of charge, at least until the roll-out is complete.

Introduce an online booking system for Jobcentre appointments to reduce Universal Credit helpline calls.

Offer everyone options in how the benefit is paid to allow people to adjust to Universal Credit.

Put in place a comprehensive support package before roll-out speeds up, to make sure people get advice to manage their money and deal with any complications in the application process.

To find out more about Universal Credit, read our latest report *Delivering on Universal Credit*.

[citizensadvice.org.uk/welfare](https://citizensadvice.org.uk/welfare)

## What our data shows us

Our data gives us some of the clearest insights yet into how Universal Credit is working and the problems people are having.

\*All stats are from a representative survey of people coming to Citizens Advice in Universal Credit full service areas as of May 2017.



More than **1 in 3** people we've helped on Universal Credit are waiting more than **6 weeks** to receive any income.

**11%** are waiting over **10 weeks**.



**30%** of people we've helped have made **10 or more calls** to the helpline to sort out their claim.



**Everyone** claiming Universal Credit has to call the helpline to complete their claim.

This costs up to **55p per minute**.



**40%** of people we've helped reported they were **not aware** they could get an advance payment to help with the initial waiting period for their first payment.



**Over half** of the people we've helped who receive Universal Credit **borrowed money** whilst waiting for their first payment.



The people we see on Universal Credit are nearly **one and a half times as likely** to seek advice on **debt issues** compared to those on other benefits.

## Client story: Lack of support leads to financial risk

Karen and her husband tried to make a joint Universal Credit claim when full service rolled out in their area of East Anglia. Karen was given a code to register her husband's details, but it wasn't accepted by the online application system. She tried to get through to the helpline but after numerous attempts, she gave up because her credit was running out. She had spent £9 on the calls.

Karen came to Citizens Advice and an adviser called the helpline on her behalf. After waiting to get through for around 40 minutes, Karen was told the Universal Credit service centre did not have the IT required to deal with her problem and that she needed to go to the Jobcentre. By the time she had visited the Jobcentre to have the problem resolved, the family's application had been delayed by an extra week. Given this is then followed by a six-week wait for a first payment, small implementation issues considerably increased the financial pressures on Karen and her family.

