

Money Matters Update No 9 31 March 2020

Restriction of Scottish Welfare Fund crisis grants to three per person per year no longer applying

The regulations governing the Scottish Welfare Fund allow a local authority to make more than three payments to an individual in a 12-month period if it considers there are “exceptional circumstances”.

The Scottish Government have confirmed the current circumstances are exceptional and they have provided an additional £45 million for the Scottish Welfare Fund to deal with the increase in demand.

Unable to Access Post Office Accounts

People who are self-isolating, affected by the virus, or other reasons may be unable to access their benefits in person via their Post Office Accounts. The Post Office website contains information as to what to do in these circumstances.

“I am worried about going to the Post Office to collect my payments, can someone collect my money on my behalf?”

You should not give your card and PIN to somebody else to use. You can nominate someone you trust to become a Permanent Agent on your account this person will be given their own card and PIN to collect cash on your behalf. To nominate a Permanent Agent, please complete the ‘Permanent Agent access form’ (P6163), available from most Post Office branches.”

<https://www.postoffice.co.uk/post-office-card-account>

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Alternatively, people can contact the Pension Service and they can have their pensions paid into a bank account (if available) instead but that would take 28 days (or more) to process.

Harrowgate Move to Universal Credit (UC) pilot suspended

Move to UC pilot in Harrogate, where DWP aimed to learn how they could safely move claimants in receipt of legacy benefits such as Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit on to Universal Credit has now been suspended due to the coronavirus.

New Regulations

In force from 30 March 2020, the Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) Regulations 2020 (SI.No.371/2020) provide –

- for the Secretary of State to have discretion to apply a number of measures in relation to the minimum income floor (that applies to self-employed claimants in universal credit), including reducing it to a lesser amount or to zero, delaying making a determination that a person is in gainful self-employment, treating a person as not being in gainful self-employment, extending a start-up period, or exempting a self-employed claimant from a requirement to seek work or be available for work;
- for modification of the amount of the standard allowance in universal credit in relation to 2020/2021 (although the temporary increase will not apply for the purposes of calculating transitional protection in relation to a claimant who is moved to universal credit under managed migration);
- that rent officers must determine a local housing allowance in the private rented sector for each relevant category of accommodation in each broad rental market area on 31 March 2020 so that the allowance is set at the lower of rent at the 30th percentile of local rents and revised national caps (these

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determinations are to replace those made on 31 January 2020 and are to take effect for the 12 months beginning on 1 April 2020);

- for an increase in the housing benefit income disregard that applies where a person is entitled to working tax credit, or works for a specified minimum number of hours per week, from £17.10 to £37.10 for 2020/2021 (to take account of the temporary increase being made to the basic element of working tax credit);
- that work search requirements for claimants of universal credit or new style JSA are not imposed for a period of 3 months, and that any existing work search requirement no longer applies so that the requirement to be 'able and willing immediately to take up paid work' no longer applies;
- for claimants who have an award of old-style JSA to be treated as available for work and actively seeking employment for at least the next 3 months;
- for any period during which a JSA claimant is infected or contaminated with coronavirus disease, is in isolation or is caring for a child or qualifying young person in their household who is infected, contaminated or in isolation, to not count towards a period of sickness that might otherwise have led to them losing entitlement to their JSA; and
- for carers (in England and Wales only) to retain their entitlement to carer's allowance if they have a temporary break in caring as a result of isolation due to, or infection or contamination with, coronavirus disease of either the carer or the person cared for.

In relation to the minimum income floor, the government has said that 'from 6 April the requirements of the Minimum Income Floor will be temporarily relaxed. This change will apply to all Universal Credit claimants and will last for the duration of the outbreak. New claimants will not need to attend the jobcentre to demonstrate gainful self-employment.' SI.No.371/2020 is available from [legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)



WELFARE RIGHTS ADVICE IN NORTH AYRSHIRE

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Health & Social Care Partnership

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