



A local network  
for people  
working in  
money and  
benefits advice  
services

Grampian Advice Forum

# Benefits Bulletin



**April 2026**

## ACC Rent Increases – Important Reminder for Universal Credit Claimants



From **Monday 6 April 2026**, Aberdeen City Council (ACC) rents increased, and this has an important knock-on effect for tenants who receive Universal Credit (UC).

### What UC claimants need to do

Any ACC tenant on Universal Credit must update their housing costs themselves. This is a change of circumstances and will **not** be done automatically.

### Claimants should:

- Log in to their UC online journal
- Report a change to housing costs from **06/04/2026**
- Enter:
  - The new rent amount
  - The service charge, if applicable
  - **0 rent-free weeks** (this has changed from the previous 4)
- Tenants with telephone claims should call Universal Credit to report the change.

👉 **Key change:** There are now **no rent-free weeks**.

### Why this matters

- If housing costs are not updated, UC will continue to pay the old amount, and rent arrears will build up.
- A quick reminder at the right time could help prevent avoidable arrears and future debt problems.

## Benefitscast

Our monthly Benefitscast features three of our benefits experts discussing the latest benefits news stories including changes to legislation, DWP announcements, relevant case law and guidance. There are links to the sources of the items discussed, and some that aren't discussed if we think they might help.



**The Benefits Training Co.**

David, Will and Charlotte discuss: Student loans and UC, PIP mobility activity 1, Planning and following journeys, Childcare element & attributing of costs, Statutory Sick Pay changes, Institutional child abuse compensation from Republic of Ireland, Crisis and Resilience Fund.

[Benefitscast - The Benefits Training Company](#)

## ACC Benefit calculator

Our benefits calculator will help you find out what benefits you can claim. The calculator is free to use, and the details you provide are anonymous.

Before you start, make sure you have information about your savings, income, pensions and existing benefits (for you and your partner).

If you run out of time, you can save your calculation and come back to it later, and pick up right where you left off.

- *Should take 10 minutes to complete*
- *Please complete all fields with an asterisk(\*)*

**START >>>**



# Trying Work: What Advisers Need to Know

New legislation laid in April 2026 removes significant barriers for disabled people and those with health conditions who want to try work or volunteering without fear of immediate benefit loss.

The changes are brought in by [The Social Security \(Restrictions on Amounts for Failure to Comply with Work-Related Requirements\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2026 \(SI 2026/395\)](#) and underpin the Government's new "Right to Try" policy announced by the Department for Work and Pensions on 9 April 2026.

## What has changed?

- The Regulations amend existing benefit sanction rules so that **trying work or volunteering is no longer treated as a failure to comply with work-related requirements** for disabled claimants and those with health conditions. This removes the risk of **automatic sanctions or immediate financial penalties** where a claimant attempts work but cannot sustain it.
- Alongside this, the Government has confirmed that **entering work or volunteering will not automatically trigger a benefit reassessment**. This protection applies to claimants receiving **New-style Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit (UC) health elements (LCW and LCWRA)**.
- This marks a significant shift away from a system where claimants often avoided work for fear that any attempt could jeopardise their existing entitlement.

## Volunteering explicitly protected

- For the first time, legislation **explicitly guarantees that volunteering will not lead to sanction or reassessment**. This responds to long-standing concerns from advisers and claimants that informal activity, confidence-building or community involvement could be misinterpreted as evidence of work capability.

## What Has Not Changed

- While [ADM Memo 06/26](#) introduces important protections for people with health conditions who try paid or voluntary work, it is equally clear about the limits of those changes.
- The memo does not remove all reassessment powers.
- Decision Makers still retain the ability to carry out a Work Capability Assessment or benefit review where:
  - there is evidence of a genuine change in a claimant's physical or mental condition,
  - where there is doubt about the validity of an earlier decision, or
  - where reassessment powers are exercised under existing rules after the minimum qualifying period.
- Crucially, the change only prevents reassessment being triggered solely because someone starts work; it does not create a blanket exemption from review, **nor does it prevent Decision Makers from considering whether the nature of work undertaken indicates a change in functional ability**.

## Why this matters

- DWP research shows that **37% of disabled people who want to work are held back by fear of losing their benefits**. The "Right to Try" is intended to remove that fear by providing legal protection if work does not work out.
- The changes form part of a wider programme of welfare reform, backed by **£3.5 billion in tailored employment support by the end of the decade**, aimed at supporting sick and disabled people into suitable and sustainable work.

## Adviser takeaway

Advisers can now:

- Advise disabled clients that **trying work or volunteering is safer than before**
- Support clients to test what they can manage without immediate risk of sanction
- Encourage gradual or tentative steps towards work where appropriate

This is a **significant cultural and legal change**, and advisers should consider how it affects ongoing work-focused conversations, conditionality advice, and claimant confidence.

## New Care Leaver Payment launched in Scotland (from 1 April 2026)

A new Care Leaver Payment has been introduced across Scotland from 1 April 2026, providing a one-off £2,000 payment to eligible young people leaving care. The payment is intended to help reduce financial barriers as young people move into independent living and to promote more consistent support across local authorities.

### Who is eligible?

A young person will be entitled to the Care Leaver Payment if they:

- Were **looked after by a local authority on or after their 16th birthday**, and
- **Left care on or after 1 April 2026**, or
- Were in **continuing care** and stopped receiving it on or after 1 April 2026.

Only **one Care Leaver Payment** can be made to an individual, regardless of how many times they may leave and re-enter care.

### How and when it is paid

- The payment is **£2,000**, usually paid as a **single lump sum**. Where appropriate and agreed with the young person, it may instead be paid in **two instalments**, partly or wholly as **vouchers**, or directly to a **provider of goods or services**.
- Local authorities may choose non-cash payment methods where there is a **risk of financial abuse**, but must take the young person's views into account.
- The payment should be made **as soon as practicable** after the young person leaves care or continuing care.

### No application required

Young people **do not need to apply**. Local authorities are responsible for:

- Identifying eligible care leavers,
- Making the payment, and
- Notifying the young person of their entitlement and how the payment will be delivered.

Where a young person believes they have been missed, they can request an **entitlement determination**, and local authorities must provide information about review rights.

### Adviser role and good practice

The practitioner guidance emphasises that the payment should be accompanied by **appropriate advice and support**, including:

- Help with budgeting and financial planning,
- Discussion about safe ways to receive and use the payment,
- Ongoing throughcare and aftercare support where needed.

Advisers should also be aware that the payment is intended to **support, not replace**, other financial assistance or benefits a young person may be entitled to.

### Further information

Full guidance for practitioners is available here: [Care Leaver Payment – guidance for practitioners](#)

# UC, Earnings and AET: What's Changing for Working Claimants

## Universal Credit & Earnings: Quick Adviser Update

Universal Credit (UC) continues to fluctuate for working claimants because awards are calculated using **monthly assessment periods** and earnings **actually received** in each period. UC does not average income, meaning irregular or early pay can still cause sharp changes to entitlement.

### Key rules at a glance

- **55% taper:** For every £1 earned, UC reduces by **55p** (after any work allowance).
- **Work allowance:** Only available where the claimant (or partner) has a child or a health condition affecting their ability to work.
- **Statutory payments count as earnings**, including SSP and statutory parental payments.
- **Irregular pay risks:** Being paid twice in one assessment period – or not at all in another – can temporarily reduce or end UC.

## Administrative Earnings Threshold (AET) – current rates

From **1 April 2026**, AET levels are:

- **£991 per assessment period** for individual claimants
- **£1,597 per assessment period** combined for couples

AET affects **in-work conditionality**, not the UC taper. Earnings below AET can place claimants in a more intensive regime requiring steps to increase hours or pay.

### Important context on AET increases

**NB:** AET has increased several times in recent years, most recently due to:

- **National Living Wage increases** (including April 2025), and
- a structural change from **13 May 2024**, when the assumed hours used to calculate AET rose from:
  - **15 → 18 hours per week** (individuals), and
  - **24 → 29 hours per week** (couples).

These changes mean more low-paid workers are now below AET and subject to earnings-related conditionality despite working regularly.

### Conditionality safeguards

Advisers should remember **Regulation 99 of the Universal Credit Regulations 2013**, which limits when work-related requirements must be imposed. This can be relevant where increased expectations are inappropriate due to the claimant's circumstances.

### Adviser checklist

- Check **assessment period dates** where UC drops unexpectedly
  - Watch for **regime changes** when earnings move around AET
  - Review claimant commitments carefully
  - Challenge inappropriate requirements using **Reg 99**
- 
- **Universal Credit and earnings – GOV.UK**
  - **The Universal Credit Regulations 2013 – The work-related requirements Regulation 99**

# Universal Credit: LCWRA Changes from April 2026

From **6 April 2026**, major changes apply to the **Limited Capability for Work and Work-Related Activity (LCWRA)** element of Universal Credit, following the **Universal Credit Act 2025** and the **UC and ESA (Rates of Allowances) (Amendment) Regulations 2026**. DWP guidance is set out in **ADM Memo 04/26**.

## Two LCWRA rates now apply

LCWRA is no longer a single flat-rate addition. Instead, there are now **two separate rates**, depending on when LCWRA is awarded and the claimant's circumstances.

- **Lower rate LCWRA.** Applies where LCWRA is **first determined on or after 6 April 2026**, unless the claimant is protected.  
**Rate (6 April 2026 – 5 April 2027): £217.26 per assessment period.**
- **Higher rate LCWRA.** Continues to apply to certain protected groups.  
**Rate (6 April 2026 – 5 April 2027): £429.80 per assessment period.**

## Who keeps the higher rate?

Claimants will continue to receive the **higher-rate LCWRA** if they fall into one of the following categories:

### 1. Pre-2026 claimants

A claimant is protected if they:

- Were **entitled to LCWRA before 6 April 2026**, and
- Have been **continuously entitled** to UC including LCWRA.

Short gaps caused solely by non-payment (award under £0.01) **do not break continuity** if they last **under 6 months**.

Protection also applies where, on 5 April 2026, the claimant:

- Was awaiting a first WCA decision
- Had LCW and was awaiting reassessment
- Had been found LCWRA but had not yet served the relevant period
- Was moving from **ESA Support Group** into UC without a break

### 2. Terminally ill claimants

Terminally ill claimants (where death can reasonably be expected within 12 months) are automatically treated as having LCWRA and always receive the **higher rate**.

### 3. Severe Conditions Criteria (SCC)

Claimants meeting the SCC also remain on the **higher rate**. This applies where:

- An LCWRA descriptor applies **constantly and for life**
- The condition is lifelong and **diagnosed via NHS services**
- No further reassessment is required unless there was an error or a relevant change of circumstances

## Why this matters for advisers

- Most **new LCWRA awards after 6 April 2026 are significantly lower**
- Transitional protection is **complex but critical** – many claimants may wrongly be placed on the lower rate
- Continuity of entitlement, assessment timing, and ESA history must be checked carefully
- SCC and terminal illness routes remain essential safeguards against reduced awards

## Action for advisers:

Always establish **when LCWRA was first determined**, whether entitlement has been **continuous**, and whether any **protected category** applies before accepting a lower-rate award.

## [04/26 - Universal Credit - Changes to the LCWRA Element](#)

## If you support someone who receives certain disability benefits you could qualify for financial support for yourself.

### Carer Support Payment

Money to help if you are an unpaid carer who looks after someone 35 hours a week or more.

### Young Carer Grant

A yearly payment for 16, 17, 18 and 19 year olds who look after someone for around 16 hours a week.

### Scottish Carer Supplement

Paid automatically at the same time as Carer Support Payment.

### Carer Additional Person Payment

Paid alongside Carer Support Payment if you look after more than one person 20 hours a week or more.

Find out more at [mygov.scot/carers](https://mygov.scot/carers) or freephone **0800 182 2222**

As a carer there is a wide range of other support available to you, visit [mygov.scot/help-if-youre-a-carer](https://mygov.scot/help-if-youre-a-carer)



Scan for additional languages and accessible formats.

## May edition of ACVO News

We're excited to bring you the latest edition of ACVO News - your go to source for all that's happening across Aberdeen's third sector.

From inspiring community stories to essential updates and opportunities, ACVO News keeps you connected, informed, and engaged with the work making a real difference locally.

[ACVO News May 2026 - ACVO TSI](#)

## Home Energy Scotland Partner Feedback

Home Energy Scotland are planning their quarterly Information Session. The session will be taking place at the end of this month; invites will follow shortly with the date and time.

In advance of the session, Home Energy Scotland are interested in gathering your feedback with regards to any relevant, positive, experiences you have had with Home Energy Scotland. Whether this is a successful client referral or a successful partnering relationship whereby you have felt supported by the Home Energy Scotland team to access the service.

Home Energy Scotland ask if you have an example, could you please email this across to them to collate ahead of the meeting.

Home Energy Scotland - North East - Community Partnership Team  
[Partnerships@ne.homeenergyscotland.org](mailto:Partnerships@ne.homeenergyscotland.org)



# JOIN THE NRNE LIVED EXPERIENCE GROUP

## Are you affected by No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)?

Would you like to meet others, share your experiences, and help improve support in the North East?

### What is the group?

- The NRNE Lived Experience Group brings people together who have experience of NRPF to:
- Connect with others
- Share experiences (only if you feel comfortable)
- Help shape how services and support are delivered



### Why join?

Be part of a safe, welcoming space where you can:

- Meet people with similar experiences
- Learn about local services and opportunities
- Build confidence and skills
- Help create positive change

### What to expect

- Friendly group meetings every 6 weeks
- Flexible participation
- Vouchers provided as a thank you for your time

Interested? Get in touch  
For more information or an  
informal chat:

✉ [kemslie@nrnepartnership.org](mailto:kemslie@nrnepartnership.org)

<https://nrnepartnership.org>

**No Recourse  
North East  
Partnership**



## Universal Credit update for former ESA claimants

The DWP has admitted it made a mistake affecting some people who moved from ESA to Universal Credit.

This may affect you if:

- you were on ESA with limited capability for work-related activity (LCWRA),
- you missed your deadline to move to Universal Credit,
- your ESA stopped, and
- you later claimed Universal Credit.

The law says your LCWRA decision should still apply when you later claim Universal Credit. But the DWP failed to do this in some cases. This meant some people:

- were paid less Universal Credit than they should have been, and/or
- were wrongly asked to look for work or prepare for work.

The DWP has now accepted this was wrong and says it is correcting affected cases, including paying any money owed.

### What to do:

Don't wait to be contacted. Get advice as soon as possible so someone can check whether your Universal Credit is correct and whether you are owed backdated money.

This was a DWP error, not anything you did wrong.

## Guidance - Benefits for families with more than 2 children before 6 April 2026

The rules and exceptions that apply if you had more than 2 children before 6 April 2026 and claimed Universal Credit.

### The 2-child limit ended on 6 April 2026

- If you get Universal Credit, you could get an extra amount to help support your children if they normally live with you.
- Universal Credit now pays the extra amount for every child, no matter how many children you have.

You will receive any increased payment from May or June onwards, depending on the dates of your monthly assessment period. Check your Universal Credit statement to confirm your payment.

[Benefits for families with more than 2 children before 6 April](#)