

Spotlight on: First commitment s by phone appointment

Introduction

Government easing of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions means that the requirement for a claimant to accept a claimant commitment has been reinstated.

All new claimants must accept a claimant commitment regardless of what Labour Market regime they are allocated to.

Claimants in the Intensive work search, Work preparation and Work focused interview only regimes will now need to have a First Commitments appointment by phone.

This helps work coaches to:

- provide individuals with the information, advice and help they need
- address barriers that make finding work more difficult, for example, a health problem, poor work search skills or coronavirus restrictions

- identify the work a claimant is expected to look for and be available for
 - agree work search and work preparation activities
- Whenever there are work related requirements, claimants must be advised that there is a risk of Universal Credit payments being reduced if not carried out.

Face to face support is available in jobcentres for claimants who cannot access our services by telephone or online. Please see Coronavirus guidance.

Booking the first commitments appointment by phone

First commitments appointment by phone are 30 minutes.

The 'Book first commitments appointment' to-do is automatically generated.

Agents can follow the instructions in the 'Book first commitments appointment' to-do when booking appointments.

First commitments appointment by phone

It is essential that the claimant's identity is confirmed before discussing any personal details.

The appointment should facilitate:

- a positive, individual and supporting relationship that treats each claimant as an individual
 - an understanding of how close the claimant might already be to getting work, moving closer to work or increasing their earnings
 - confirmation the claimant fully understands their responsibilities and the consequences of not carrying them out
 - confirmation the claimant understands to tell us of any changes in circumstances
 - a summary of what has been agreed in the meeting
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Building claimant commitments

Guidance around claimant commitments has not changed. Work coaches should consider current coronavirus restrictions and National and local health advice when supporting claimants.

It is important that claimants are only asked to do what is reasonable under the current coronavirus restrictions and health advice.

In these times work coaches are able to agree reduced claimant availability on an individual basis, even if that means reducing to zero hours.

Work coaches should tailor claimant commitments for all claimants. These should be personalised, whilst taking into consideration those claimants who:

- have declared a health condition that restricts their ability to work
- are self-isolating
- are caring for vulnerable relatives, friends and neighbours
- have child care responsibilities
- have been affected by school closures
- are shielding

This list is not exhaustive.

For claimants who can prepare and look for work, work coaches must provide information on the support available to help them get back to work.

Work coaches must agree with the claimant reasonable work search activities that allow them to look for work safely. Work coaches must also agree the hours that the claimant is available for work.

Specific work search and work preparation activities can be set as voluntary where appropriate.

Work coaches must ensure the claimant is clear on the potential consequences if they fail to comply with mandatory requirements.

Meetings with my work coach

The first intervention after the commitment interview must be a 10-minute telephone work search review. For more information, please see spotlight: Work search reviews by phone.

After the first telephone work search review, work coaches should tailor the interventions using a mixture of phone and digital channels.

Work coaches have the flexibility to decide whether a digital work search review is appropriate. This depends on:

- the claimant's digital skills
- whether they have recorded their activity in their account

Work coaches must explain to claimants:

- the importance of recording work search activity on their account
- that between work search reviews by phone appointments, their account will be reviewed for work search activities
- that if the claimant fails to carry out reasonable work search activities this may result in a reduction in their Universal Credit payment

Work coaches should discuss and agree with the claimant a suitable time for the next phone appointment.

Work coaches should explain to claimants the importance of participating in future interventions and the help and support we can provide.

If claimants can't attend their appointment they should be advised to get in contact via their journal, and do this before the appointment if possible, but if not as soon as they can after.

Work coaches must make it clear to claimants that if they have good reason for missing an appointment, no further action will be taken. The

claimant must always get in contact via their journal to let us know what is happening.

Unless easements are applied, claimants in the Intensive work search regime must have a fortnightly phone or digital work search review.

A minimum of one intervention in every 3 interventions must be a 10-minute telephone work search review.

There are no changes to the frequency of interventions for claimants in the Work preparation and Work focused interview regimes.

Labour market activities

It is important that work coaches continue to identify and support claimants who:

- are self-employed
- should be on the health journey
- have complex needs

Claimants must not be required to undertake any activities that would put them at unreasonable risk or in breach of existing national and local public health guidelines on coronavirus.

The coronavirus pandemic has placed restrictions on many services claimants rely on, including public transport, recruitment, childcare / schools, and other facilities – for example libraries/community centres. Coronavirus restrictions must be taken into account when setting claimant requirements around:

- travel
 - availability of jobs
 - reasonable work search expectations
 - availability for work
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Accepting commitments

Claimants must be made aware that they will need to use online services to maintain their claim and to job search.

All claimants must accept their commitments. Couples must both accept their own individual commitments for the household to qualify for Universal Credit.

Whenever commitments are updated they must be accepted by the claimant.

Encourage the claimant to log in to their account and complete 'Accept commitment' to-do.

Explain the consequences to the claimant, that unless they accept their commitments, they won't get paid and their claim will close.

If the claimant is unable to access their account to accept their commitments, the work coach must:

- read the commitments to the claimant

- ensure the claimant understands their commitments
 - ensure the claimant agrees and accepts their commitments
- The work coach must then:
- accept the commitments on the claimant's behalf
 - add a history which must contain the reason
- The history note should read:

'Covid related claimant commitments. Claimant commitments read out and verbally accepted by the claimant. Claimant is unable to accept claimant commitments digitally due to [insert reason why]'

For further updates regarding coronavirus please see, Coronavirus section

Telephone interviews tips

Work coaches should preview the claim before calling the claimant.

1. Tell the claimant what they can expect

Be clear about the purpose of the appointment.
Be clear about what the claimant commitment is for and the claimant's responsibilities.
Tell the claimant that the meetings will last 30 minutes.

2. Let them know you're listening

Verbal nods let the claimant know that you are listening without interrupting their flow. Saying "OK" or verbal affirmations, gives the claimant cues that you're still on the line and listening.

3. Take notes

Make a note of points you want to talk about. Don't interrupt the flow of the conversation early on.

4. Ask questions

Asking open questions can help claimants to consider things from another point of view.
How do you think you could do that?
What help do you think you would need?
How might the other person think and feel about that?