

# How to Apply for Universal Credit After Leaving Prison



Universal Credit (UC) is a monthly payment from the government to help you with living costs — such as rent, food, and bills.

It replaces older benefits like Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit, and Income Support.

If you've just been released from prison, you can apply straight away.

# Understand What Universal Credit Covers

Universal Credit combines several benefits into one monthly payment. It helps with:

- Living costs
- Rent or housing costs
- Childcare costs (if you have children)
- Support for people who are out of work, looking for work, or on a low income

You'll normally receive one payment each month directly into your **bank account**.

If you've just left prison and don't have a bank account yet, ask your **probation officer, keyworker, or resettlement worker** for help — or use the Prisoner Banking Programme.

# Apply Online as Soon as Possible

You can apply online at:  
[www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit](http://www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit)

If you are staying at an Approved Premises, you will likely have access to a computer. A support worker or your keyworker can assist you in using it if you are not confident.

Some APs are visited by members of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), who are specifically there to assist you with all matters related to benefits.

**If you don't have access to a computer or smartphone, you can:**

- Use a computer at your Jobcentre Plus or public library
- Ask your probation officer, resettlement worker, or support organisation to help you apply

You can **start your claim on the day you're released** — don't wait.

# What You'll Need to Apply

Before starting your online application, make sure you have:

## Identification

- Passport, driving licence, or prison discharge papers
- Letter from your probation officer, approved premises, or housing provider confirming who you are

## Bank Account

- You need this to receive your UC payments.
- If you don't have one yet, apply for a **Basic Bank Account** (many banks will accept a probation letter or release ID).

## Address

- This can be your new accommodation, approved premises, hostel, or the address of your probation office if allowed.

## Contact Details

- A phone number and/or email address so DWP can contact you about your claim.

## Income and Work Details

- If you've started work, you'll need to give details of your job and pay.
- If not, you'll be placed in the "looking for work" group and supported to find a job.

# Verify Your Identity

When you apply online, you'll be asked to prove your identity through the government's **Verify service**.

If you can't do this online, don't worry — you can go to your local **Jobcentre Plus**, where staff will check your ID manually (using your release papers, probation letter, or prison ID).

# Attend Your First Appointment

After applying, you'll need to attend an appointment at your **Jobcentre Plus**.

This is called your "Initial Work Search Interview."

## At the appointment:

- Bring your ID and any documents you have (release papers, bank details, proof of housing).
- You'll meet your **Work Coach**, who will:
  - Confirm your details
  - Discuss your job goals
  - Create your "**Claimant Commitment**" (an agreement about what you'll do to receive UC)

# Wait for Your First Payment

Universal Credit is usually paid 5 weeks after you apply. If you need money before that, you can ask for a “New Claim Advance.”

## Advance Payment

- You can request this through your online UC account or at your Jobcentre.
- It's a loan, so you'll repay it slowly from future UC payments (over 12–24 months).
- You'll get it within a few days if approved.

# Keep Your Claim Active

## Once your UC is set up:

- Log in regularly to your online UC account.
- Reply to messages from your Work Coach.
- Attend all appointments at Jobcentre Plus.
- Tell UC immediately if your situation changes (new address, new job, new income).

Missing appointments or messages can delay or stop your payments — so keep in touch with your Work Coach.

# Get Extra Support If You Need It

If you're struggling, several organisations can help you apply or manage your claim:

## Government Support

- Jobcentre Plus – Help with your UC claim and ID.
- Probation Service / Offender Manager – Can provide proof of ID and housing letters.
- DWP Prison Work Coaches – Some prisons have them to help set up UC before release.

## Charities and Reentry Support

- St Giles Trust – Help with Universal Credit and ID.  
[www.stgilestrust.org.uk](http://www.stgilestrust.org.uk)
- Nacro – Support with housing, benefits, and resettlement  
[www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk)
- The Salvation Army – Offers help applying for UC and budgeting support.  
[www.salvationarmy.org.uk](http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk)
- Unlock – Information for people with criminal records.  
[www.unlock.org.uk](http://www.unlock.org.uk)

# If You Have No Fixed Address

You can still claim Universal Credit even without a permanent address.

## Use one of the following:

- The address of your probation office (if allowed)
- The address of your approved premises or hostel
- The Jobcentre Plus address (with their permission)

# Quick Checklist

- | Step | Task                                                                                                  |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Get ID and proof of address                                                                           |
| 2    | Open a Basic Bank Account                                                                             |
| 3    | Apply online at <a href="https://www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit">gov.uk/apply-universal-credit</a> |
| 4    | Verify your identity                                                                                  |
| 5    | Attend your Jobcentre appointment                                                                     |
| 6    | Ask for an Advance Payment if needed                                                                  |
| 7    | Keep your UC account updated                                                                          |

Done

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# Who we are

New Connections is an organisation which provides support for prisoners and ex-offenders with addiction and mental health challenges who are preparing for Parole or release after a substantial period of imprisonment.

New Connections provides support and guidance in prison through individual and group sessions and the agreement of individual recovery plans to give the ex-offender the opportunity to recover from their addiction and change the direction of their life away from drugs and crime.

If you are interested in hearing more about our work, have any questions, or know someone who could benefit from our services, please contact us via our website.



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