

Lead carers with youngest child aged 3 to 12 increase in expected hours Spotlight

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Introduction

This spotlight has been developed to help work coaches to support lead carers in the Intensive Work Search regime whose youngest child is aged 3 to 12 years, to manage:

- an increase in expected hours of up to 30 hours per week
- changes to their work-related activity

From the 25 October 2023, lead carers whose youngest child is:

- aged 3 to 4 years will see their expected hours of work-related activity increase from up to 16 hours to up to 30 hours
- aged 5 to 12 years will see their expected hours of work-related activity increase from up to 25 hours to up to 30 hours.

Gainfully self-employed claimants are not currently affected by these changes and guidance will be shared in due course when the changes are due to take effect.

Any claimants found gainfully self-employed from 25 October 2023 will continue to have their expected hours and Minimum Income Floor set at:

- 16 hours if their youngest child is aged 3 to 4
- 25 hours if their youngest child is aged 5 to 12

This includes both claimants eligible for a Start-up Period and claimants who immediately have the Minimum Income Floor applied.

Claimants who are found not gainfully self-employed from 25 October 2023 will have their expected hours set at up to 30 hours in line with the changes.

Couples threshold change following the increase in expected hours for main carers

Following the increase in expected hours for main carers and the Conditionality Earnings Threshold being updated in the system to 30 hours, this has resulted in the couples threshold calculation now being adjusted to use the 30 hour figure. This is only applicable in couple claims with one person who is gainfully self-employed and the other person not being gain-fully self-employed and may or may not be receiving earnings.

For couples where only Partner A is gainfully self-employed and subject to the Minimum Income Floor (MIF), the couple threshold is found by calculating what Partner B's MIF would be for their expected hours if they were gainfully self-employed and **not** in a Start-up Period and adding the two amounts together.

The following table shows the old and new figures for the main carer:

	Youngest child aged 3 or 4	Youngest child aged 5-12	New figure
Claimant aged 23 or older	£722.45	£1090.30	£1250.59
Claimant aged 21-22	£705.81	£1071.84	£1228.44
Claimant aged 18-20	£519.31	£811.42	£973.70
Claimant aged under 18	£366.08	£572.00	£686.40

Columns 2 and 3 are the old figures and the new figure is on the end column.

Example:

The claimant is 25 and is the main carer for a 4 year old. Their contribution to the couple threshold will have gone from £722.45 to £1250.59 and assuming that the gainfully self-employed person's MIF is £1410.89, the couple threshold has increased from £2133.34 to £2661.48.

The Conditionality Earnings Threshold will be increased in the Service from 30 October 2023 and the following will be affected by this change, claimants:

- in the Intensive Work Search Regime
- currently in the Working Enough Regime who will move to Intensive Work Search Regime
- currently in the Working Enough Regime who will move to Light Touch Regime

Claimants in the Intensive Work Search regime

Claimants in Intensive Work Search Regime affected by this change will be sent the following journal message on 25 October 2023 advising them of the upcoming change:

OPEN ALL

Journal message

These claimants will be identified by a new 'Book Claimant Commitment Review for main carer' to-do which will also generate on 25 October 2023.

This new to-do will alert the work coach to book a Claimant Commitment Review appointment to review expected hours of work-related activity on the Claimant Commitment and consider individual claimant circumstances.

Action on this to-do must take place at the claimants next Work Search Review on or after 25 October. The to-do will remain on the Work Coach Dashboard until the Commitments Review appointment is booked.

If the Commitments Review cannot be booked within the claimant's normal frequency, Work Search Reviews must continue at their normal frequency until the Commitment Review appointment takes place and is completed.

If a claimant fails to attend the Commitment Review, the usual failure to attend process must be followed. Re-engagement will be attendance at the Commitment Review and the appointment must be booked as the claimant is required to agree a new Claimant Commitment with the increase in expected hours up to 30 hours change included.

If the youngest child reaches age 13 before the Commitment Review appointment is booked, work coaches need to be aware that the claimant must still attend as the expected hours will increase to up to 35 hours when their youngest child turns 13. This is because claimant may be expecting work-related activity hours to be up to 30 hours when it will have actually changed to up to 35 hours.

Attending the Jobcentre

At the Claimant Commitment Review, the work coach will create and follow the 'Prepare Commitments' to-do. They must also have a discussion with claimant regarding their current circumstances in order to tailor the Claimant Commitment.

The Claimant Commitment Review is an opportunity to understand the claimant's requirements and to provide the necessary support in order for the claimant to find work or increase their earnings.

Expected hours for Work-related activities include the following:

- looking for work

- preparing for work (for example, updating their CV, developing skills)
- arranging suitable childcare
- improving skills (for example, through online courses and workshops)

It is important that work coaches have meaningful conversations with claimants and that a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound) Claimant Commitment is drawn up around the claimant's individual circumstances. The Claimant Commitment Review must include discussions on:

- tailoring the Claimant Commitment for expected hours for work-related activity will include any circumstances that could prevent the claimant doing work-related activity (for example, childcare commitments, childcare availability, health conditions or caring responsibilities)
- Childcare Offer including advice on upfront childcare costs, reimbursement of 85% of childcare costs, signposting to locally available childcare and upcoming changes to childcare which may be different for each UL member nation
- achievable work-related activity as the claimant's circumstances allow, for example:
 - attending a skills assessment
 - preparing a CV
 - improving personal presentation
 - searching for work
 - participating in an employment programme
 - developing a business plan
 - researching childcare costs and provision

See Work search activities and Work-related requirements for claimants with children.

Tailoring the Claimant Commitment

A lead carer whose youngest child is aged 3 to 12 can limit their work availability due to their caring responsibilities and will have their expected hours of work-related activity set at up to 30 hours per week before any tailoring is applied. The 2 figures for work hours and work-related activity on the Claimant Commitment can be and often will be different. The number of hours that a claimant is able to work can have a different tailoring to hours of work-related activity (for example, they may already be working).

For examples of how to calculate work hours and hours of work-related activity, see Increased expected hours for lead carers and tailoring the Commitment: Bitesize learning(link is external) .

The Claimant Commitment Review is an opportunity to understand the claimant's requirements and provide the necessary support to find work.

The claimant must not be put at risk of a sanction if they are not able to meet their work-related requirements so tailoring should be agreed through discussion with them at the Claimant Commitment Review.

Claimants in this specific group must have their Claimant Commitment tailored according to individual circumstances, for example with regard to:

- travel time to a childcare provider for a child who is under school age which could include poor public transport links
- travel time to and from school if the claimant escorts the child themselves
- travel time to and from any current work
- childcare options
- any courses the claimant may be doing currently

This list is not exhaustive.

Tailoring must be reviewed regularly as more childcare hours become available (due either to changes in the Childcare Offer or because the claimant's circumstances have changed), for example:

- when a child starts school, the claimant's availability may change due to variable changes in the school timetable (for example, nursery times, breakfast clubs or after school clubs becoming available)
- as the child gets older, they may not require the claimant to take them to and from school

This list is not exhaustive.

Work coaches will need to be aware that some claimants may not just have childcare support needs, they may have other circumstances in their life that they need support with.

See Work-related requirements for claimants with children, Availability for work, Tailoring expectations: Bitesize learning and Switching-off requirements (easements) for Labour Market regime interventions.

Childcare discussions

These claimants will need more support than job-ready claimants and we need to ensure that they understand:

- what is available to them with regard to the Childcare Offer
- that they must make use of the free places that are available
- where to go to find out about childcare in their local area
- if there is any availability
- if they can claim upfront costs

- what they can be reimbursed for
- what support is available to help them look for work and increase their skills and confidence (for example, contracted or non-contracted provision)

Work coaches need be up to date with all the childcare offers and be confident in advising the claimant of what is available including:

- how to correctly process upfront childcare costs through the Flexible Support Fund
- how to reimburse childcare costs to claimants
- to where they can signpost claimants so they can find out what childcare would fit their circumstances
- how to use the District Provision Tool for childcare information
- who the Childcare Champions are so that if a claimant is unclear on any aspects of the Childcare Offer or processing payments, they can go and speak to them

See also:

Work-related activities and Labour Market regimes: Guidance

Childcare costs: Guidance

Childcare Choices | 30 Hours Free Childcare, Tax-Free Childcare and More | Help with Costs | GOV.UK(link is external)

Childcare: other childcare offers: Spotlight

Childcare costs Bitesize - Overview(link is external)

Flexible Support Fund guide

Claimants moving from the Working Enough regime to the Intensive Work Search regime

There will be a small number of lead carers whose youngest child is aged 3 to 12 years who will move from the Working Enough regime to the Intensive Work Search regime.

This will mainly be those aged 18 to 20 years old who receive earnings at the National Minimum Wage rate. This will be due to their expected hours changing to 30 hours per week and thus increasing their Conditionality Earnings Threshold.

Example:

Mary is 20 years old with a child aged 4 years. She works 17 hours a week and her current expected hours requirement is 16 hours per week. Because Mary works more than this she exceeds the Conditionality Earnings Threshold (CET) but earns less than her Administrative Earnings Threshold (AET). Therefore, her work group is currently Working Enough so she is not required to attend the jobcentre.

From 30 October 2023, Mary's expected hours will be increased to up to 30 hours per week. This will take her earnings below the CET and AET so Mary's work group will change from Working Enough to Intensive Work Search. She will need to attend the jobcentre for Work Search Reviews.

The AET and CET determine the requirements placed on individuals who are in work and receiving earnings, or in a household with earnings and ensures that they are allocated to the correct Labour Market regime relevant to their individual earnings or the household earnings.

Work coaches should give particular consideration to the circumstances of these claimants and be aware of existing guidance regarding easements especially relating to the CET for lead carers of pre-school age children who may be experiencing difficult issues. See Labour Market regimes and overrides and Work-related requirements for claimants with children.

These claimants will receive the following journal message on 25 October 2023:

OPEN ALL

Journal message

A 'Check work group and commitments' to-do will be generated due to the change of work group and a Commitments Review appointment must be booked as soon as possible. This is to consider and take into account the claimant's hours of work and childcare commitments.

If the claimant asks for the appointment to be changed due to work commitments or childcare issues, this should be accommodated and a new appointment time arranged. If rescheduling is required for any other reasons this should be considered as per business as usual.

When completing the 'Check work group and commitments' to-do, agents must check the claimant's journal to see if they have received the above message.

If the message has been received and a Commitment Review is being booked, the agent must attach a pinned note on the claim to highlight that the claimant is affected by the lead carer changes. This is to make the work coach who is carrying out the appointment aware that this claimant may:

- not have had contact with the jobcentre for some time, and
- may be unsure why they have been called in for an appointment

The same considerations should be made for these claimants as with all other Intensive Work Search claimants.

The pinned note must not be removed until the new Claimant Commitment has been completed and accepted by the claimant.

See Administrative and Conditionality Earnings Thresholds.

Claimants moving from the Working Enough regime to the Light Touch regime

There will be some claimants who will move from Working Enough regime to the Light Touch regime and the majority of these will probably not have accessed their account for a long time.

On 25 October 2023, these claimants will receive the following journal message:

OPEN ALL

Journal message

Since the new Conditionality Earnings Threshold (CET) for expected hours of up to 30 hours is increasing from 30 October 2023, this means that all assessment periods that end on or after this date will use the 30 hours figure for the CET rather than the existing 16 or 25 figure. This will be when the claimant starts to move from the Working Enough to the Light Touch regime.

From the assessment period beginning on or after 30 October, an auto-generated Claimant Commitment and a 'Check work group and commitments' to-do will be generated.

Action on this to-do must be taken by the Jobcentre as per business as usual. If the claimant does not accept the new Claimant Commitment within 7 days, a 'Claim closure' to-do will generate on the eighth day.

When taking action on the 'Claim closure' to-do, the following stapes must be taken. The work coach:

1. Checks to confirm if the claimant is affected by the changes. This is done by checking if there is a message in the claimant's journal generated on 25 October 2023 telling them of the upcoming change **and** checking the work group to see if the claimant moved from the Working Enough to Light Touch regime on their assessment period end day on or after 30 October 2023.
2. In the case of this being an affected lead carer, telephones the claimant and explains that they:
 - will have received a message in their journal to look at their new Claimant Commitment,
 - need to accept this but they have not done so
 - must accept it within the next 7 days and the consequences of not accepting
3. Defers the claim closure for a further 7 days.
4. Follows business as usual pre-checks and claim closure actions if after a further 7 days, the 'Claim Closure' to-do is generated.

The jobcentre will not speak to the claimant, they must send a journal message to the claimant including the same 3 points noted at step 2 above and defer for a further 7 days. If there is no response after 7 days, the 'Claim closure' to-do is generated and the jobcentre follows business as usual pre-checks and claim closure actions.

Phone claims

Intensive Work Search Claimants

This will be business as usual for phone claimants. They should already be attending the Jobcentre weekly or fortnightly and there are no procedural differences for this change. Claimants must be verbally advised of the Commitment Review appointment and a note entered in their journal to confirm this.

Working Enough to Intensive Work Search regime claimants

The 'Check work group and commitments' to-do will generate in these cases and the Jobcentre will take action as per business as usual ensuring that a note is added to 'Claimant history' recording any conversations with the claimant.

Working Enough to Light Touch regime claimants

These phone claimants will get an alert when the journal message goes onto their account and a further alert when the Claimant Commitment is auto-generated and a 'Check work and commitment' to-do raised.

The claimant must phone to find out what is happening. Business as usual processes must be followed when the claimant phones in and when jobcentres are completing the 'Check work group and commitments' to-do.