

Accessing Benefits Support

Unite Community Guide



April 2021



Contents

Foreword by Steve Turner, Assistant General Secretary	4
1. Introduction	5
2. How to claim benefits	5
3. Maximising your income	6
Universal Credit (UC) - England, Scotland and Wales	6
Universal Credit (UC) – Northern Ireland	7
Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) - England, Scotland and Wales	7
New style JSA - Northern Ireland	7
Housing Benefit – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland	7
Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) – England, Scotland, Wales	8
Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) – Northern Ireland	8
Council Tax Reduction Scheme – England, Scotland and Wales	8
Rate Rebate Scheme for people on Universal Credit – Northern Ireland	8
Contributory or New Style Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)	9
Grants	9
Local welfare schemes – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland	9
NHS Prescriptions, dental treatment and eye tests – all four nations	9
Sites with more information and benefits calculators	10
The Benefit Cap	10
4. Help for Children and Young People	10
Child Benefit and Scottish Child Payment	10
Healthy Start Food Vouchers - England, Wales, Northern Ireland	11
Best Start Food Vouchers – Scotland	11
Free School Meals	11
Free Early Education and Childcare	11
Get help with the cost of school uniform	11
Get help with the cost of home to school transport	12
Education Maintenance Allowance and Bursary Fund	12

5. Reducing your outgoings	12
If you have a mortgage or a loan secured against your home	12
If you are renting from a private landlord	13
If you rent from the Council, Housing Association or other social housing provider	13
Council Tax	13
Gas and electricity bills	13
Water Bills	14
Advice on reducing other household bills	14
Free and low-cost food and other day-to-day essentials	14
Furniture, electrical appliances, paint, flooring, bicycles and books	15
6. Tackling debts	15
If you need debt advice urgently	16
Debt Counselling for Unite Members	16
Priority Debts	16
Non-priority Debts	18
7. Borrowing Money	18
Budgeting Loans – England, Scotland and Wales	18
Budgeting Loans – Northern Ireland	18
Unite Credit Union	19
8. Further advice, information and online tools	19
9. How to get involved in Unite Community	19
10. Appendix One – Redundancy Rights	20
Notes	24
Acknowledgements	23



Foreword by Steve Turner, Assistant General Secretary

Losing your job, or even the threat of losing your job is an instant worry, whether you live alone or have people dependant on you.

Most of us budget on a weekly or monthly basis and a missed pay cheque can cause a financial crisis and create debts.

Cuts and Covid have had a devastating impact on people's lives and on the wider economy. We are now facing the biggest increase in unemployment since the early eighties. Back then I lost my job and spent a couple of years on the dole. I used to spend hours searching for work that didn't exist, I used to walk miles for interviews because I couldn't afford the bus fare. And I often went without food.

So I know just how hard it is.

Trying to manage your finances when you are feeling stressed is hard and the benefits system can be like a navigating a maze where the route changes at every corner turned. Our welfare system isn't fit for purpose and it makes me angry to see people struggling.

That's why I have asked Unite Community to put together this guide. I want this to be a starting point so you have a good idea of where you can get help and financial support for as many things as possible.

This government have a lot to answer for. We are one of the richest countries in the world, yet we have a growing number of people reliant on food banks. But feel no shame and don't blame yourself. Instead, join with me in taking action to change things – we have power by campaigning together.

First things first though, take care of yourself and your family. Please use the information here to guide you through the system to keep a roof over your head and the lights switched on.

The social security system can be made fairer and Unite Community has led the way in fighting for improvements that will allow people to live in dignity. We need to work together to put pressure on Government to provide a safety net that works for us.

Please, go on our website and find out how you can get involved. Join the campaign. www.unitetheunion.org/community - Together we can keep millions of families afloat.

Steve Turner
Unite Assistant General Secretary
with responsibility for Unite Community

1. Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to help you access the social security system so that you can maximise your income.

We have also added a whole section on how to cope with a reduced income and where you can turn for support and advice.

The benefits system changes all the time and is different across the four nations of the UK. If as you go through the guide, you find anything that you think is wrong or links that are broken, please let us know so that we can correct it. You can contact us at community@unitetheunion.org

2. How to claim benefits

The first thing to do is gather all the information you are likely to need when trying to claim benefits or reduce your outgoings.

You often need to give the same information to different organisations. We have provided some extra pages at the back of this guide and you can scribble down names, numbers and contact details so you always have them to hand.

- Personal details like your date of birth and that of your partner and children if you have them or any other dependants.
- Proof of identity and/or address such as a passport, driving license, a couple of recent utility bills, your last Council tax bill and a recent bank statement.
- Work history and date of redundancy if you have been made redundant.
- Details of your income: from benefits, pensions and any other sources.
- Details of your savings. You may need to provide bank statements.
- If you live with a partner, you may also need details of their income, savings and any benefits they are claiming.
- Details of rent or mortgage payments.
- How much your annual Council Tax bill is and whether you get any help with it.
- Your reference number or customer number for each bill.

3. Maximising your income

Everyone's circumstances are different and what you can claim depends upon your individual situation. Benefits interact and claiming one kind of allowance may reduce another. There is a cap on the total amount of benefits you can claim which is explained in another section.

What your partner earns, their savings and any benefits they claim, can also have an impact on you. We have given an outline of some of the main benefits here, but it is not an exhaustive list. You may be able to claim other benefits if you have a disability; if you are a carer or if you are pregnant or on maternity leave.

This guide outlines the following benefits:

- Universal Credit
- Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)
- Housing Benefit
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Council Tax/Rates
- Grants
- Budgeting Loans



Universal Credit (UC) - England, Scotland and Wales

Universal Credit has replaced many other types of benefits. It is a means-tested payment to help with living costs. You may be able to get it if you're on a low income, out of work or you cannot work.

It can include topping up JSA, income from work and other benefits or pensions. It also provides help with rent, there are also amounts for children and carers.

Universal Credit payments are affected by any savings over £6,000 and if you have over £16,000 you cannot claim it.

You can use the following online independent benefits calculators at www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators to see how much you could get.

Standard allowance

Your circumstances	20/21 Monthly	21/22 Monthly
Single – 25	£342.72	£257.33
Single – 25 or over	£409.89	£324.84
Couple – both under 25	£488.59	£403.93
Couple – one or both over 25	£594.04	£509.91

NB: in Budget 2021, the government announced that the £20 a week 'uplift' paid in 2020/2021 is to continue until the end of September 2021

You can find out more and apply at www.gov.uk/universal-credit

Universal Credit (UC) – Northern Ireland

If you live in Northern Ireland, go to www.nidirect.gov.uk and search for Universal Credit

Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) - England, Scotland and Wales

You can apply for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) to help you when you look for work. There are three types of JSA depending on your circumstances. There's a maximum amount you can get - but how much you're entitled to depends on things like your age, income and savings.

To check if you are eligible and apply, go to: www.gov.uk and search JSA

Age	JSA weekly amount
Under 25	£59.20
25 or over	£74.70
Couples (both aged over 18)	up to £117.40

You could get Universal Credit at the same time or instead of 'new style' JSA.

New style JSA - Northern Ireland

Universal Credit replaced Jobseeker's Allowance. However if you have been credited with enough National Insurance contributions, you may be entitled to 'New Style' Jobseeker's Allowance. Your partner's income and savings won't affect how much you're paid.

To apply online go to www.nidirect.gov.uk and search for JSA

Housing Benefit – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

This has largely been replaced by Universal Credit; however, If you are in temporary or supported accommodation and severely disabled, you can still claim Housing Benefit instead of UC for help with your rent. You can either apply through your local council or as part of a Pension Credit claim, if you're eligible for this.

For further details about how to claim Housing Benefit: go to www.gov.uk and search Housing Benefit

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) – England, Scotland, Wales

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) can provide extra money to help to meet your housing costs or if you can't afford rent deposits or rent in advance if you need to move home.

You can make a claim if you are currently claiming Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

Check with your Council how to apply. Your council will then look at your circumstances to see whether you are eligible for a DHP.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) – Northern Ireland

If you find the help you're already getting through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit to pay your housing costs (rent/rates) is not enough then you may be able to claim Discretionary Housing Payment, Additional Housing Benefit or under the Rate Relief Scheme.

To find out more and claim, go to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive website and download an application form.

Go to: www.nihe.gov.uk and search Discretionary Housing Payment

More information:

What is Discretionary Housing Payment? - Turn2us

Claiming Discretionary Housing Payments - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Council Tax Reduction Scheme – England, Scotland and Wales

You may be eligible for Council Tax Reduction if you are on a low income or get benefits or a reduced council tax bill if you live on your own.

In England, the details of Council Tax Reduction schemes are specific to each local authority. Both the rules and the amount you can claim will vary according to where you live.

Both the Scottish Government and Welsh Government set up a national Council Tax Reduction scheme, so all local authorities in Scotland and Wales respectively offer the same reductions and administer the scheme in their areas.

To apply go to GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) and search for Council Tax Reduction. You can put in your postcode to find your local scheme.

Rate Rebate Scheme for people on Universal Credit – Northern Ireland

To claim Rate Rebate, you must be entitled to Universal Credit. You can apply for Rate Rebate if you're already getting Universal Credit and you're:

- A homeowner living in your own property.
- A tenant living in social housing owned by the Housing Executive.
- A tenant living in social housing owned by a housing association.
- A tenant living in private rented housing.

Contributory or New Style Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

ESA has generally been replaced by UC but you may still be able to claim it if have paid enough national insurance contributions and have limited capability for work.

ESA gives you:

- Money to help with living costs if you're unable to work.
- Support to get back into work if you're able to.
- You can apply for ESA if you're employed, self-employed or unemployed.

You can get New Style ESA on its own or at the same time as Universal Credit. If you apply for and are awarded both benefits, the New Style ESA you are paid will reduce your Universal Credit payment by the same amount.

Grants

Most grants do not have to be paid back. They can be given as money, products or services. They might be paid directly to you or through a charity or supporting organisation.

To qualify for a grant, you will need to meet the eligibility rules of that fund. Some may be related to where you live whilst others may be age-specific so it is worth checking for each member of your family.

There is a Grants Search tool on the Turn2us website - Search for charitable and educational grants - Turn2us
Different funds become available at different times so it is worth checking back occasionally, even if you don't find something straightaway.

Each fund on the Grants Search should tell you what they do, or you can check their website or contact them to find out more.

Local welfare schemes – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

If you need help with heating, fuel or food bills or have an emergency expense, you can see if your local welfare scheme can help.

- **England** - this scheme is run by your local council – Find your local council - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- **Scotland** - find out more about the Scottish Welfare Fund for Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants on the Scottish Government website - www.gov.scot
- **Wales** - find out more about the Discretionary Assistance Fund on the Welsh Government website - gov.wales
- **Northern Ireland** - find out more about extra financial support on the nidirect website www.nidirect.gov.uk

NHS Prescriptions, dental treatment and eye tests – all four nations

You might be able to get free NHS prescriptions, dental treatment, eye tests and help with other NHS costs. Whether you get help depends on things like your age, income, where you live, if you get other benefits, if you're pregnant or have a medical condition.

You can check here – this site covers England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Get help with NHS prescriptions and health costs - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Sites with more information and benefits calculators:

- **Fighting UK Poverty** - Turn2us
- **Benefits** - Citizens Advice
- **Benefits calculators** - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)



The Benefit Cap

The benefit cap is a limit on the total amount of benefit you can get. It applies to most people aged 16 or over who have not reached State Pension age.

It applies to many benefits including Universal Credit, Child Benefit, Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance. A full list can be found at www.gov.uk/benefit-cap.

If you're claiming Universal Credit the benefit cap might not start for 9 months, depending on your earnings.

The benefit cap outside Greater London is:

- £384.62 per week (£20,000 a year) if you're in a couple or if you're a single parent and your children live with you.
- £257.69 per week (£13,400 a year) if you're a single adult.

The benefit cap inside Greater London is:

- £442.31 per week (£23,000 a year) if you're in a couple or if you're a single parent and your children live with you.
- £296.35 per week (£15,410 a year) if you're a single adult



4. Help for Children and Young People

Child Benefit and Scottish Child Payment

Child Benefit - England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: You can claim if you are responsible for bringing up a child aged under 16 or a young person aged under 20 if they are still in full-time education up to A level or equivalent, or on certain approved training courses. Child Benefit is paid at £21.05 a week for your oldest child. If you have other children, you get £13.95 a week for each of them.

Scottish Child Payment: The Scottish Child Payment is a payment for families on benefits with children living in Scotland. You will get £10 per week per child under six.

Healthy Start Food Vouchers - England, Wales, Northern Ireland

If you are pregnant or have a child under four years old and live in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, you could get vouchers for plain cow's milk, plain fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables and infant formula milk. The vouchers are worth between £3 and £6 per week for children under four. Claims need to be approved by a healthcare professional.

Best Start Food Vouchers – Scotland

The money comes on a pre-paid Mastercard and can be used for plain cow's milk, first infant formula, fresh, frozen or tinned vegetables, fresh or dried pulses and fresh eggs. There are no specific age rules. The vouchers are worth between £4 and £8.50 per week for children under three. You can claim Best Start Foods online on the mygov.scot website or by calling: 0800 182 2222.

Free School Meals

Schools must provide some pupils with a free midday meal. There are different schemes for free school meals in different parts of the UK. For your child to qualify for free school meals you must be claiming benefits.

England/Scotland and Wales - You need to get in touch with your local council

Northern Ireland - Northern Ireland Education Authority website at www.eani.org.uk

Free Early Education and Childcare

There are different early education schemes for each country of the UK and you can claim for a number of free hours of childcare.

Wherever you live in the UK, you can find information at www.turn2us.org.uk



Get help with the cost of school uniform

You may be able to get a school uniform grant if you live in **Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales**. Search for school uniform on your government website.

www.nidirect.gov.uk

www.gov.scot

gov.wales

England - check if your local council provides help with the cost of school uniform and PE kit. If your council does not offer help, ask your child's school directly or approach your local Councillors to see if they will support your case and put pressure on schools to reduce the number of expensive, branded items of clothing required.

Get help with the cost of home to school transport

England, Scotland and Wales - find out if your child is eligible for help with the cost of home to school transport through your local council website.

Northern Ireland - the Education Authority (EA) is responsible for assessing eligibility for transport assistance. Go to www.eani.org.uk

Education Maintenance Allowance and Bursary Fund

You may be able to claim Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) if you're aged 16-19 and studying in **Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales**.

For more information and to apply, go to www.gov.uk and search EMA.

England - The EMA scheme in England is now closed. However, schools and colleges have funds to award bursaries to people aged 16-19 who need help. You could receive a bursary of £1,200 a year from your school or college. Search 16-19 Bursary Fund on www.gov.uk



5. Reducing your outgoings

To drive down your outgoings, work systematically through your regular bills and check if:

- You can renegotiate terms for example by extending repayment terms or having a temporary freeze on payments.
- Low cost or budget options are available.
- You are paying for something you no longer use e.g. old subscriptions.
- You can cancel non-essential contracts and if you can do so without incurring a penalty.
- You can get some services at low cost or free, especially if you are able to claim any benefits.

If you have a mortgage or a loan secured against your home

- You may be able to take a payment holiday for up to 6 months. If you are currently behind on payments, this does not necessarily exclude you from being able to take a mortgage holiday.
- You may be able to extend the term of your mortgage or move to interest only payments to reduce the amount you pay to something you can afford.
- You may be eligible for Support for Mortgage Interest.

The Money Advice Services website has lots of information – go to the Help with mortgages section www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

If you are renting from a private landlord

- You can apply for Universal Credit if you're on a low income, out of work or you cannot work and if you and your partner have £16,000 or less in savings between you. If you are applying for Universal Credit it will take 5 weeks to come through.
- You may be able to claim a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) from your local council to cover the shortfall in rent. You can only claim a DHP after you have received your first Universal Credit payment.
- If you are living in a 'buy-to-let' property, then the landlord may be able to apply for a payment holiday from their mortgage. Your landlord should take every step to help you stay in the property including working out an affordable repayment plan.

If you rent from the Council, Housing Association or other social housing provider

- You can apply for Universal Credit if you're on a low income, out of work or you cannot work and if you and your partner have £16,000 or less in savings between you. If you can claim Universal Credit, you can opt for your rent to be paid direct to your landlord.
- You may be able to claim a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) from your local council to cover the shortfall in rent. You can only claim a DHP after you have received your first Universal Credit payment.
- Your housing officer should take every step to help you stay in the property including working out an affordable repayment plan.

Council Tax

- You may be entitled to an ongoing discount if you are a single person; if you have a disability or if you are a full-time student.
- You may be able to spread your payments over 12 months instead of the usual 10 to reduce the amount you're asked to pay on each bill. Ask your council if they can set this up for you.
- Your council may give you a one-off discount if you owe money on your bill. Discounts are based on your circumstances and not your income or savings.
- You may be eligible for Council Tax Reduction if you are on a low income or get benefits. Or you might qualify for a reduced council tax bill if you live on your own. The details of Council Tax Reduction schemes are specific to each local authority. Both the rules and the amount you can claim will vary according to where you live.
- Search 'find local Council' at www.gov.uk

Gas and electricity bills

Even if you are on top of your bills, it is still worth checking to see if you can reduce your payments or get a government grant or other support.

- See if you can switch to a cheaper deal. Go to the USwitch website www.uswitch.com to use the calculator or call them on 0800 6888 557 and get advice on cheaper energy deals – it is very straightforward and only takes a few minutes to find out if there are cheaper options available to you.
- If you've been told you can't switch suppliers due to your debt, ask how much you owe. Households owing £500 or less per fuel on prepayment meters must be allowed to switch, according to Ofgem's Debt Assignment Protocol.
- If you want to stay with your current supplier, ask them if you are on the lowest available tariff and what help they can offer you to repay any amounts outstanding over time or to reduce your bills.
- Check if you are eligible for a government grant or scheme such as the Warm Home Discount. Your electricity supplier decides who can get the Warm Home discount - check with your supplier to see if you're eligible and how to apply.



Water Bills

England and Wales - Many water companies have now introduced social tariffs which offer reduced bills or other schemes and/or have charitable trusts to help people who are in debt or struggling to pay their water bills.

Scotland – if you don't have a water meter, ask your local Council about payment options and any discounts or exemptions. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) website has links to Scottish council websites. If you have a water meter you can email customer.services@scottishwater.co.uk or call the helpline: 0800 0778778 to discuss payment options if you are struggling to pay.

Northern Ireland - if you are an older person; have a serious medical condition or disability or need extra help for any other reason, free services may be available to you or anyone in your household. You need to join the NI Water Customer care register. Email: waterline@niwater.com or call Waterline: 03457 440088

Advice on reducing other household bills

If you want to cut your costs, there is some useful advice on the Money Advice Service website. The site includes a range of online tools to assist with budgeting.

There are also tips on how to save money on other household bills including your home phone and broadband, mobile phone, transport costs as well as your grocery shopping.

www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

Free and low-cost food and other day-to-day essentials

- Many local areas now have places offering free or low-cost meals or food from food banks, food clubs, food Co-ops and social supermarkets.
- Some food banks and community organisations are also providing sanitary products, shaving cream, razors, deodorants, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, toilet rolls, washing powder and other essentials.
- Free sanitary towels and tampons may also be available from schools, youth clubs and other community organisations.
- The PDSA provides free pet care for the pets of people in need.
- The people running these organisations are friendly and non-judgmental so don't feel embarrassed at needing help – that is what they are there for. You may need someone to refer you like your local Councillor, GP or another local agency.
- Online coupon sites might be helpful but only if you would buy the products anyway. Check carefully before signing up to deals, especially those that want to send you texts for which you can be charged a premium.

Furniture, electrical appliances, paint, flooring, bicycles and books

The Reuse Network is a national body dedicated to alleviating poverty and tackling climate change. You can find all kinds of affordable household items including beds, furniture and other goods. Find a reuse centre near you at reuse-network.org.uk

Online local community Facebook Groups and Nextdoor might also have furniture or household items that are either low cost or free.

Freegle is a community-led site where you can find just about anything. People who are both environmentally conscious and understanding of others wanting help, prefer to give away usable furniture and other items to someone who needs them rather than sell them or add to landfill. This is also a good place to advertise if you have furniture or other items you no longer have a use for and you can save money on a Council collection or the cost of petrol in going to the tip. You can find your local Freegle site at www.ilovefreegle.org.

Many libraries are now offering more than books, with some lending bags of toys for small children and offering free access to computers and the internet.

Some communities are setting up tool libraries so you can borrow tools and kit for repairs and redecoration at home. If you need paint, check if you have a local community Re-Paint scheme at communityrepaint.org.uk



6. Tackling debts

If you are worried about debts, it is important to tackle them in a certain order.

The Money Advice Service website has information about how to prioritise and work out which debts to pay off first to help you save money and clear your debts faster.

Priority debts are those that carry the most serious consequences if you don't pay them. This might include being visited by bailiffs, receiving a court summons, having your heating or lighting cut off or losing your home.

These are the bills to try and resolve first that count as priority debts if you fall behind with payments.

- Mortgage, rent and any loans secured against your home.
- Council Tax
- Gas and electricity bills
- TV Licence
- Court fines
- Child maintenance
- Income Tax, National Insurance and VAT or money owed to Government.
- Hire purchase agreements, if what you're buying with them is essential.

You can find out more by searching 'how to prioritise your debts' on the Money Advice Service website www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

If you need debt advice urgently

If you're facing a sudden emergency, such as court action, bailiff action, disconnection or eviction for mortgage or rent arrears, you can get free, independent debt advice urgently.

Debt advisors should never judge you or make you feel bad about your situation. They can find ways to manage your debts even if you think you have no spare money and suggest ways to deal with debts that you might not know about

The Money Advice Service

Search 'free debt advice' on the Money Advice Service website at www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

Debt Counselling for Unite Members

The service is regionally based and you can find out more about what facilities are available to you by contacting Unite Credit Union Service central phone line on **0333 0110 450** or by email - info@unitecreditunionservice.co.uk or register here <https://unitecreditunion.co.uk/>

Priority Debts

Mortgage, rent and any loans secured against your home

Call your mortgage provider to explain the situation and discuss the options. Do not cancel your payments before talking to them and agreeing a plan because missed payments will count as arrears.

Section 3 'Reducing your outgoings' outlines some of the options that may be available to you.

If you rent from the Council, a housing association or other social housing provider

Call your housing officer to explain the situation and discuss the options. They should take every step to help you stay in the property including working out an affordable repayment plan.

- You can apply for Universal Credit if you're on a low income, out of work or you cannot work and if you and your partner have £16,000 or less in savings between you. If you can claim Universal Credit, you can opt for your rent to be paid direct to your landlord.
- You may be able to claim a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) from your local council to cover the shortfall in rent. You can only claim a DHP after you have received your first Universal Credit payment.

If you are renting privately

Talk to your landlord, explain why you're going to be late with the rent and ask for some extra time whilst you sort out your finances. If you are applying for Universal Credit let them know it will take 5 weeks to come through. Your landlord should take every step to help you stay in the property including working out an affordable repayment plan. Make a note of the conversation.

- You can apply for Universal Credit if you're on a low income, out of work or you cannot work and if you and your partner have £16,000 or less in savings between you.



- You may be able to claim a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) from your local council to cover the shortfall in rent. You can only claim a DHP after you have received your first Universal Credit payment.
- If you are living in a 'buy-to-let' property, then the landlord may be able to apply for payment holiday from their mortgage.

TV Licence

If you owe money to TV licensing it counts as a priority debt. Contact them and tell them you are struggling to pay.

- Although paying the annual amount in one lump is the cheapest option, there are options to pay much smaller amounts more frequently via a payment card or direct debit. This may help in the short term to avoid getting into debt.

Gas and electricity bills

Owing money to a gas or electricity company counts as a priority debt so you need to act if you are falling behind with your bills.

- See if you can switch to a cheaper deal. Go to the USwitch website www.uswitch.com to use the calculator or call them on 0800 6888 557. You should be able to switch if you've been in debt to your supplier for less than 28 days. If you've been in debt for longer than that, you'll need to repay the debt before you can switch to a different company. If you've been told you can't switch suppliers due to your debt, ask how much you owe. Households owing £500 or less per fuel on prepayment meters must be allowed to switch, according to Ofgem's Debt Assignment Protocol.
- If you want to stay with your current supplier, ask them if you are on the lowest available tariff and what help they can offer you to repay any amounts outstanding over time or to reduce your bills.
- Check if you are eligible for a government grant or scheme such as the Warm Home Discount. Your electricity supplier decides who can get the Warm Home discount - check with your supplier to see if you're eligible and how to apply.
- If you're facing the prospect of being disconnected, your energy supplier may suggest that you switch to a prepayment meter, which will ensure you don't fall further behind in debt to them. Check the USwitch website to find the best pre-payment meter plan.

Non-priority Debts

- Non-priority debts include things like store cards and credit cards, overdrafts, personal loans, payday loans, catalogue or in-store credit debts.
- You can find advice on paying off non-priority debts on the Money Advice Service website. Search 'how to prioritise your debts' at www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

Don't struggle with debts – particularly if you're facing an emergency, such as losing your home or going to court. If you need more support or don't know where to start paying off debts you're not alone.

You can contact an adviser in a way that's best for you – online, over the phone or face-to-face.

Search 'free debt advice' on the Money Advice Service website at www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

7. Borrowing Money

If you are thinking of borrowing money because you are in debt, get some free debt advice first – see Section 6 on Tackling Debts for information and contacts.

Budgeting Loans – England, Scotland and Wales

You may be eligible for a Budgeting Loan if you've been on certain benefits for 6 months. You only have to pay back the amount you borrow, and repayments are taken automatically from your benefits.

A Budgeting Loan can help pay for various things like furniture or household items (for example, washing machines or other 'white goods'), clothes or footwear, rent in advance, maintenance, improvements or security for your home or repaying other loans – check here for the full list: Budgeting Loans - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

The lowest amount you can borrow is £100. You could get up to:

- £348 if you're single
- £464 if you have a partner
- £812 if you or your partner claim Child Benefit

Before taking out a Budgeting Loan, you may want to check if there are organisations in your area that can help you for free, whether there are grants available or if your Council can help you.

Budgeting Loans – Northern Ireland

If you live in Northern Ireland, go to Budgeting Loans in Northern Ireland.

Unite Credit Union

Access to affordable finance if you need to borrow small amounts to buy household appliances or just to cover essential living expenses.

A credit union is not-for-profit co-operative that aims to provide affordable financial services for members and their families.

The service is regionally based and you can find out more about what facilities are available to you by contacting Unite Credit Union Service central phone line on 0333 0110 450 or by email.



8. Further advice, information and online tools

- Citizens Advice Bureau - www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- Money Advice Service - www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk
- Turn2Us - www.turn2us.org.uk
- Unite Credit Union, Member Benefits - unitetheunion.org
- Unite Financial Advice | Gain Financial Peace of Mind - unitetheunion.org
- Unite Community Membership Benefits - unitetheunion.org
- UK Government - www.gov.uk
- Northern Ireland Government - www.nidirect.gov.uk
- Scottish Government - www.gov.scot
- Welsh Government – www.gov.wales

9. How to get involved in Unite Community

Unite Community membership is for people who are not in paid work, the unemployed, retired, disabled or students.

We campaign for a fair social security system that allows people to live in dignity. We campaign to protect our public services, such as the NHS.

Unite Community costs 55p per week and we have active community branches all across the UK where you can meet people that want to change things for the better.

Why not join today. To find out more watch our short video www.unitetheunion.org/community Where Community members say what Unite Community means to them.

Email: community@unitetheunion.org





10. Appendix One – Redundancy Rights

Losing your job through redundancy is a shock both emotionally and financially.

Here are a few things you should know about redundancy and your rights before you consider what you may be entitled to from the Benefits system.

You do have redundancy rights if:

- You're legally classed as an employee (seek specific employment advice if not sure),
- You've worked continuously for your employer for at least two years before they make you redundant.
- You have the same redundancy rights during the Covid-19 crisis as you would in normal times.

Redundancy Check list:

- You have the right to challenge your redundancy if you think you have lost your job unfairly. Talk to your Trade Union representative if you feel you may have been unfairly dismissed from your job.
- Check how much statutory redundancy pay you are entitled to.
- Know your rights to a minimum period of notice and time off to look for another job.

Redundancy Pay

- You may be entitled to Statutory Redundancy Pay – a lump sum to compensate for the loss of your job; this is the minimum required by law. Some employers offer more generous redundancy packages.
- Your final pay packet is likely to include other payments as well as redundancy pay. The following payments will be due to you under your contract of employment (rather than being paid compensation for losing your job). They will be taxable in the same way as your normal pay.
 - **Wages owing and bonus payments** – tax and national insurance will be deducted as usual from these payments before you get them.
 - **Pay in lieu of notice** – if your employer does not want you to work out your notice period, you will be offered a lump sum instead. This is called pay in lieu of notice (PILON).
 - This is subject to your employment contract entitling you to this payment or it is normal practice where you work (this money is taxable).
 - **Holiday pay owing** – your employer may ask you to take some holiday during your redundancy notice period. Generally, you only have to do this if your employment contract says you must. Otherwise it is up to you. You may decide the money is more useful if you are about to become unemployed. If your employer does try to force you to use your holidays and there is no contractual term allowing this, seek advice.

Statutory Redundancy Pay

You are entitled to redundancy pay as long as you have worked continuously for your employer for at least two years. The amount of money you get depends on how long you have continuously worked for your employer, how old you are and how much you are paid.

By law you are entitled to the following from your employer:

- Aged 17 to 21 - half a week's pay for each full year worked,
- Aged 22 to 40 - one week's pay for each full year worked from the age of 22 and half a week's pay for each full year before that
- Aged 41 or over - One and a half weeks' pay for each full year worked from age 41 – one week's pay for each full year you worked when you were between 22 and 40 and half a week's pay for each full year worked when you were between 17 and 21.

You must be informed by your employer in writing how your redundancy pay has been worked out. The Gov.UK site redundancy calculator is a useful tool for calculating your redundancy pay.

Redundancy Pay is calculated up to a maximum of 20 years' service and pay up to a maximum weekly amount of £538.00. The maximum statutory redundancy pay you can get is £16,140 in total.

Furlough and Redundancy Pay

If you have been on furlough during the Covid-19 Pandemic, your redundancy pay must be worked out using your full normal pay.

If your employer has gone out of business and is unable to pay you redundancy pay and other payments, an application will have to be made to the Government's Redundancy Payments Service (RPS) for all monies owed to you.





Statutory Notice of Redundancy

The minimum period of statutory notice that should be given is as follows:

If you have been Employed	The minimum notice you should be given is	Example
At least one month up to two years.	One week.	If you have been employed 18 months, you should be given at least one week's notice.
Over two years up to 12 years	One week's notice for each year worked	If you have been employed five years, you should be given at least five weeks' notice.
More than 12 years.	12 weeks' notice.	If you have been employed 20 years, you should be given at least 12 weeks' notice.

You should always check your contract of employment to see whether you have a right to contractual notice that is more generous than the statutory minimum set out above.

- **Time off to look for work or training** - You are entitled to time off to search for work or undergo training, provided you have worked continuously for your employer for at least two years.
- **Garden Leave** – Your employer may ask you to serve out your redundancy notice period away from work – this is called 'garden leave'. In this situation your employer could call you back to work if you are needed. During this period, you receive your normal salary – but are not allowed to start a job with a new employer.



Acknowledgements

With thanks to Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centres for allowing us to use information from their 'Guide to Claiming Benefits and Credits Following Redundancy'

This guide has been produced by Campaign Collective for Unite Community.

Unite the union
128 Theobald's Road
London, WC1X 8TN

www.unitetheunion.org

