



# Press Release

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## **Citizens Advice Oxfordshire launches a new 'Help to Claim' service to help people applying for Universal Credit**

Today Citizens Advice has launched a new service called "Help to Claim" for those who need help to apply for Universal Credit in Oxfordshire.

Universal Credit (UC) is the fastest growing advice area for Citizens Advice Oxfordshire. People will now be able to get support from the charity to submit their Universal Credit application to get a correct first full payment.

A recent survey by the charity found more than a third of people Citizens Advice has helped struggled to provide the evidence needed to complete their Universal Credit claim. During the projects pilot phase 30% of people applying needed help to set up an email account to start making the claim.

Since its introduction in Oxfordshire in October 2017 local Citizens Advice charities in Oxfordshire have helped **3,439** people with problems relating to Universal Credit, with many relating to payment delays and wrong payments. Nationally, Citizens Advice has helped over 230,000 people with Universal Credit.

Help will be tailored to the individual and available, face-to-face, over the phone on **0800 144 8 444** and online through web chat and advice content on [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk). This may include assistance with the online application form or help with providing evidence like childcare costs.

'Help to Claim' support ranges from checking entitlements, setting up email accounts, working through the online form, preparing people for their identity verification interviews understanding the monthly payments.

This service comes as national Citizens Advice revealed 1 in 2 Universal Credit claimants the charity helped nationally were in rent arrears or fell behind on their mortgage payments during the wait for first payment.

Al Bell, Chief Officer of Citizens Advice Oxford, said:

"Today we're launching a new service specifically for those who need help applying for Universal Credit. Our hope is that by providing in-depth support to make a claim, people will receive the full correct amount that they are entitled to faster, minimising the negative impacts the benefit is having on some of our most vulnerable residents.

Incorrect and delayed payments are placing people at risk of homelessness and causing them to rely on food banks. We often see people who are losing out on up



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to £328/month because of administration errors. Any of us would struggle with a regular hit like that let alone people already on a minimum income.

Please get in touch if you need support or advice with your claim either in-person, via the free phone number **0800 144 8 444** or online by web chat at **[citizensadvice.org.uk](http://citizensadvice.org.uk)**.”

**-Ends-**

## Notes to editors

- Universal Credit is a new benefit that combines 6 benefits into 1, including Jobseekers Allowance and Working Tax Credits. It is currently being rolled out across the UK. It was introduced in Oxfordshire in November 2017. When fully implemented, around 7 million people in England and Wales will be receiving Universal Credit.
- The Help to Claim service will be delivered through the Citizens Advice network across England and Wales. Citizens Advice Scotland will also be delivering the new service in Scotland.
- Citizens Advice will deliver the new service in England and Wales through its network of independent local charities from April 2019 until April 2020.
- You can read more about Citizens Advice’s research into [Universal Credit here](#).
- Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire, Oxford, North Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire and South Vale are all part of the national Citizens Advice charity that exists to provide free, confidential, independent advice to in Oxfordshire.
- Citizens Advice general telephone advice is on **03444 111 444**
- Citizens Advice will deliver Help to Claim in England and Wales through its network of independent local charities from April 2019 until April 2020. Citizens Advice Scotland will also be delivering the new service in Scotland.
- Help is available face-to-face, over the phone 0800 144 8 444 (England) or 08000 241 220 (Wales), and online through webchat and advice content.
- Citizens Advice is made up of the national charity Citizens Advice; the network of independent local Citizens Advice charities across England and Wales; the Citizens Advice consumer service; and the Witness Service.
- Our network of charities offers impartial advice online, over the phone, and in person, for free.
- We helped 2.6 million people face to face, over the phone, by email and webchat in 2017-18. And we had 25 million visits to our website. For full service statistics see our monthly publication Advice trends.
- Citizens Advice service staff are supported by more than 22,000 trained volunteers, working at over 2,500 service outlets across England and Wales.

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