

Experience of a Welfare Benefits Adviser's Initial Universal Credit Interviews in the Universal Credit Digital Service Area(London) www.socialwelfaretraining.co.uk

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I have helped a client claim Universal Credit (UC).

Online form was not too difficult. The client had to create a user name and password as well as give the answer to two security questions.

Once the online form was finished my client was directed to call a number and make an appointment.

At the 1st interview

The worker introduced herself and explained briefly what UC was.

Client asked if her rent could continue being paid direct to her landlord – she was advised yes but only for 3 months and then it is reviewed and the client was encouraged to set up a standing order or direct debit.

This interview was called an **ID verification interview**.

Client produced her passport and her birth certificate. The online form said middle names were optional but they're not your **primary ID** must match what you put on to the online form when you register. My client had to log on at the job centre and insert her middle names before the ID interview could continue.

My client stated her nationality on her online application but this was not picked up at the time of booking the ID verification interview and a 1 hour appointment had been booked but a 2 hour was needed as my client needs to complete the HRT. A second appointment has been made for this.

Client's bank details were checked against what she had put on to the online form but the JC worker can only verify that the information she can see is correct. All she could see was the last 4 digits of the account number and she explained that to client – it's the client's responsibility to put the correct bank details down.

Tenancy agreement was taken and a copy of the bank statement showing how much the client pays by standing order at present.

Once happy with all the ID etc. a Personal Security Number was issued (PSN). Now the next time the client goes to login she will be asked for a few numbers from the 16 digit number. This is an added security measure. If at any time during this claim she should lose this number she will have to repeat the ID verification interview. The JC worker encouraged my client to log in regularly because this system has no phone call access or clerical letter writing service. If the Job centre want to contact her they will do this via her on-line account. There is a field on the online form called a **to do list**. This is where all future appointments will be listed letting the client know where and when the appointment will take place. My client needs to supply a Med 3 from xxxxxx she hopes to collect one today from the CMHT. Once received she has to:

Log on

Go to medical evidence

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Enter the dates the med cert covers
And press enter.

She will then be expected to take it to the job centre where it will be verified taken from her and sent to their assessment centre.

Well that was day one of my experience next appointment is on xxxxxxxxx for HRT and if she passes that (she will) she has her Commitment appointment.

The commitment appointment could be at the JCP or at the HB office depending who is free on the system at the time of booking. As my client needs to complete the HRT she got the JCP office.

I did ask the lady how this was going to work for our more disorganised clients and she shrugged.

I have a few questions I'm going to ask at the commitment interview as I feel the person taking the ID interview was not a decision maker.

[a few days later]

At the Second Interview Commitment Interview

Today I attend my client's second interview which is called the '**Commitment Interview**'.

My client came under the category **Work Preparation Group** meaning at present not looking for work but could be doing some preparation e.g. training courses or voluntary work.

She has been put in this group because, we think, she has not had her work capability assessment – the JCP person registering the claim did not know why. To counter this move the JCP worker typed in that if my client was feeling up to it she would spend 5 hours per week searching for voluntary work opportunities.

The JCP worker explained that she had to write a commitment in the field for the system to move on. Although she put this information in the commitment filed it did not mean my client has to do or prove what has been entered. Once it was clear that my client would not be expected to look for work or prove she was spending 5 hours per week online searching for voluntary work my client had to log-on and accept the commitment.

She logged on and went to **Meeting my Commitments**, she read all the information that had been put in by the JCP worker. There is a field called **Days I am Available** this was blank because my client is claiming for health reasons and cannot work. The next heading was **My Prepare Plan for Work** this is where the JCP worker has listed the 5 hours per week looking for voluntary jobs. Then under that was a bit that said my client would have £10.40 per day deducted if she failed to report a change of circumstances and this would only stop once the change had been notified. I'm not sure about this and the same if you leave a job without good reason???

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My client bought in a med cert but had not entered it on to the system. The JCP worker could not accept the Med Cert until it had been put on the system and she could not put it on the system to save time. My client had to log in again and enter the med cert's dates and then the JCP worker was able to go into her system and verify that she has received the document.

So client has now confirmed commitment.

Now my client has to call UC and ask for an advanced payment – she asked for £700.00 she was assured that this would be in her account in 3 working days – can't see it myself as she has not had her HRT decision yet?
She has to pay off the whole advance payment within 6 months and is paying them back at £150.00 pcm.

Client advised that on the 29th day after the claim was registered she should receive a letter from the medical assessment centre with an assessment date for her Work Capability Assessment. Not sure if this will be an ESA50 form and then the medical? JCP worker no idea either.

She will be expected to attend work focused interview every 3 to 6 months. These appointment dates will be placed in her to do list and she will have to log on and check her record.

Lastly the JCP worker prints out a LCTR1 and enters on the client's UC claim a CTR2. The letter to the client is to remind them to claim Council Tax Reduction or check their current claim. The CTR2 is a note put on the system records so that when the UC processing section have processed the claim they inform Council Tax that UC is in payment.

It's going to be a Joy this one – The UC system account is with you like your online banking you don't just make the claim and it's all over you have to use it for reporting changes in your circumstances and the JCP contacts you via your account.

My client was told that her child care cost would be paid – I advised her they would not as she is not working so I will have to wait and see

I also found out that if a client has no identification they will ask them 5 Biographical questions e.g. Name of last employer or maiden name. Has to be something they can pick out from the information they hold on a client. DOB NI No these are standard so after you have given them all this information then they will ask the Biographical questions.

I asked the JCP worker about client sectioned and unable to leave hospital to attend the interview she said visiting officers may be called upon but she did not know.

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