

Press release: Next phase in rollout of Universal Credit confirmed

The next stage of the rollout of Universal Credit to all claimants starts on Wednesday 4 October 2017.

Universal Credit is available in all jobcentres across the country to new single jobseekers and the government has been rolling out the [Universal Credit full service](#) to all new claimants, including families and people who cannot work.

In July, Universal Credit full service was successfully introduced to 29 jobcentres across the country, making a total of 101 jobcentres with Universal Credit full service. In October we will introduce it to a further 45 jobcentres across the country.

The [commencement order confirming those plans](#) was published today (2 October 2017).

Universal Credit replaces the complex old system of 6 main out-of-work benefits with one simple monthly payment and is paid the same way many working people are.

The expansion is in line with the planned, gradual, safe rollout of Universal Credit.

As a percentage of the total expected caseload on Universal Credit, the number of households claiming Universal Credit is expected to increase from 8% in September to 13% in March 2018.

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Press release: Minister Field reaffirms UK commitment to Afghanistan during visit to Kabul.

Minister Field expressed the UK's continued support for the Afghan government, highlighting the excellent progress made on reforming the security sector, addressing anti-corruption and making progress on elections. The Minister stressed the need to focus on political solutions as the key to bringing a more peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

He also met with Attorney General Farid Hamidi to discuss the progress made by the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre (ACJC). The ACJC was set up in 2016 with UK funding and technical support, and since its formation, has successfully prosecuted a number of senior Afghan officials, highlighting the move towards ending impunity for corruption in Afghanistan.

The Minister also met with Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Karzai to discuss regional affairs and prospects for peace.

Minister for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field said:

The UK is committed to continuing its support for Afghanistan, and we continue to work closely with the Afghan Government as it seeks to overcome the legacy of over 40 years of conflict.

We work in close partnership with the government, and will continue to provide military, political and developmental assistance as this amazing country moves ever closer to becoming a more prosperous and stable state that provides real opportunities for the Afghan people.

The UK's combat mission to Afghanistan ended in 2014 but we continue to work closely with NATO on Afghanistan in a number of areas. As the framework nation for the Afghan National Army Officer Academy (ANAOA), the UK has helped to train over 2,500 cadets, intended to be the next generation of military leaders.

By working closely together on corruption, a policy priority shared by both the UK and Afghanistan, our technical assistance is helping to increase accountability and support the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre (ACJC). The first trial took place at the ACJC in November.

All the latest news is available on the Foreign Office page of the gov.uk website at: www.gov.uk/fco

Follow Minister Mark Field on Twitter @MarkFieldUK

News story: A quicker process for removing Form A restrictions

Today we have updated the [electronic Document Registration Service \(e-DRS\)](#) which business customers use to send and receive applications to update the register via [the portal](#), our online channel for transactions.

The update to the service will help to speed up the process for removing

default Form A restrictions which protect multiple owners' interests in a property. Find full details of what these restrictions are, what they do, and the circumstances under which we enter them in [section 2 of Practice guide 24: private trusts of land](#).

When customers lodge documents via the portal, they need to tell us the type of registration they are performing, such as registering a new lease or submitting a document to support an application. Customers will now see a new option 'Removal of default Form A restriction (JP1)' in the 'types of registration' list. When customers use this option to remove a default Form A restriction we can remove the restriction much quicker. This is one of the ways customers can help us improve our overall speed of service.

Form A restrictions are entered in the register when a customer lodges an application where more than one person or company, or a person and a company, is being registered as the owner of a registered estate; and the customer has not given us evidence to support how the joint owners will hold the land or property.

When the Form A restriction is entered in the register, we send the customer an automated stock letter to inform them we have done this. If the customer returns this stock letter to us we can remove the restriction immediately if they send it within 30 days and we have not received an intervening application for the same title.

To return our stock letter via the portal and remove the restriction quicker, customers can simply 'check' the new radio button in e-DRS, enter the 'LR reference' we provide in our stock letter and upload the document.

In May 2017, we added 'JP Cancellation of Default Form A restriction' to the drop-down 'document type' list within e-DRS. We have now removed this option from the list and changed it to a radio button list because customers told us they often overlooked the option on the drop-down list.

[News story: £10 billion new funding for Help to Buy Equity Loan](#)

The government will invest a further £10 billion in the Help to Buy Equity Loan, due to the popularity of the scheme across the country.

More than 130,000 completions have already taken place by people using the equity loan, which helps people buy a new build home with only a 5% deposit.

The new funding means that the [Help to Buy Equity Loan](#) could help around 135,000 more people to buy homes by 2021. This would bring the total number of households across England that would be supported through the scheme since

it began in 2013 to around 360,000.

Some 81% of home purchases using the [equity loan scheme](#) have been made by first-time buyers, helping the total number of first-time buyers to increase by 70% between 2010 and 2016.

The new funding expands the government's commitment to help people make their dream of owning a home a reality. The Chancellor has been clear that support for buyers must be matched with support for building so that, over the longer term, housing becomes more affordable. This means land must be made available in the right places to build the homes we need. The government will therefore consult [at Budget](#) on an ambitious package of planning reforms, building on the [Housing White Paper](#).

These commitments build on the package of further measures announced by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Further Information

The Equity Loan scheme launched in April 2013 and funding has been committed until 2021. It works by the government providing an equity loan of up to 20% which is repaid when the home is sold, or after 25 years, whichever comes first.

Potential homeowners using the programme are subject to the normal affordability assessments undertaken by mortgage lenders. No interest or repayments are due during the first 5 years of the loan.

The Help to Buy: Equity Loan can be used to purchase a new build property up to the value of £600,000, with a maximum equity loan of £120,000 (20%). In London, applicants are able to claim an equity loan up to 40% of the purchase price.

The housing announcements follows the most recent Help to Buy statistics which showed that [over 320,000 completions have taken place using one or more of the Help to Buy schemes](#), including over 275,000 first-time buyer households. Over 1 million Help to Buy: ISAs have now been opened by first-time buyers, offering government bonuses of up to £3,000 towards the cost of a first home.

Since 2010, the government has delivered over 300,000 affordable homes, and more than double the amount of council housing has been built in the seven years since 2010 than in the 13 years before it.

[News story: Northern transport gets](#)

further funding from government

The Government today backed transport improvements across the Northern Powerhouse with £400 million of extra funding.

More than £100m will go towards local road schemes to bust congestion pinch-points and speed up journeys, while an extra £300m will help push forward plans for Northern Powerhouse Rail to bolster links between Northern towns and cities with more frequent and faster services.

Ministers are already investing record amounts to strengthen transport links in the North. This local road funding, from the £23 billion National Productivity and Investment Fund (NPIF), will go towards 13 priority schemes in the North West, 10 in Yorkshire and the Humber and 10 across the North East. These have been proposed by local leaders who know their areas best and illustrated how this investment will be of the greatest benefit to local people to improve journeys and help support jobs.

The extra £300 million will go towards ensuring HS2 infrastructure can accommodate future Northern Powerhouse Rail and Midlands Connect services. Future-proofing will make it easier and less disruptive to build Northern Powerhouse Rail in the future. This will enable faster services between the Northern cities of Liverpool and Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and York, as well as on towards the East Midlands and London. It will also enable services between Liverpool and Leeds to pass via Manchester Piccadilly station.

Further Information

The Government has already backed the North with record investment in transport. By 2020 it will have spent more than £13 billion on improving and modernising transport links across the Northern Powerhouse. It has also spent more than £3.3 billion for local investment priorities through the Local Growth Fund.

In addition, Ministers have agreed historic devolution deals with four areas across the North (Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley, and Sheffield City Region). This May, the people of Greater Manchester, Tees Valley and Liverpool City Region elected powerful mayors for the first time who will receive a combined £2.25 billion of additional government funding for local priorities.