

What is a Benefit Sanction?

Some benefits may be stopped or reduced if you don't do what you agreed to do in your **claimant commitment**, or if you miss appointments or meetings. This is called a **benefit sanction**.

If you don't have a claimant commitment, your responsibilities will be listed in your Jobseeker's agreement, action plan or appointment letter.

Benefits are most often sanctioned if:

- you're not doing enough to look for work or increase your working hours;
- you're late for appointments or interviews;
- you don't turn up to a meeting at the Jobcentre; and
- you don't take part in an employment or training scheme.

Make sure you're not sanctioned because you miss a phone call from the DWP. They may call from a withheld number or from **0800 023 2635**.

Why not save **0800 023 2635** on your phone, so you know it's the DWP calling.

How to avoid being sanctioned

- Make sure that you understand your Claimant Commitment and other work-related responsibilities. If you're not sure, ask your Job Coach to explain them.
- Make sure your Claimant Commitment reflects your circumstances. For example, have you noted any health problems or caring responsibilities?
- Avoid doing or not doing things that break your Claimant Commitment.
- Be organised and keep records of your dealings with the Jobcentre and everything you do to meet the terms of your Claimant Commitment.

What to do if you are sanctioned

Make sure you keep signing on, applying for jobs, turning up to meetings or anything else noted in your journal. If you don't, you could be sanctioned for longer.

Keep in touch with your local Job Centre and tell them about any issues. You are far less likely to be sanctioned if you keep in touch.

Contact us – we may be able to help with food or utilities.

How to deal with a sanction

If you are sanctioned and lose your benefit, there are still things you can do.

If you feel you have been sanctioned unfairly, you can challenge it.

- Ask your work coach for the reasons you were sanctioned and the dates that apply.
- Gather any supporting evidence you have.
- If you don't agree, you can ask that the benefit office looks at the decision again. This is called a **Mandatory Reconsideration**. We can help with that.
- Contact your Housing Officer or call our Customer First Centre on **0800 011 3447**.

If the Mandatory Reconsideration is unsuccessful, our Welfare Benefits Advisers can help you appeal to the Independent Tribunal Service.

It is important to challenge any sanction you feel is unfair. This will help keep any future sanction periods lower.

How to manage while your benefits are sanctioned

1. Work out how much of your income will be cut.
2. List your income and outgoings. How much do you need to cover the basics?
3. Is there any way of cutting your spending?
4. It's important to try to keep up with essential payments. These include your rent and gas and electricity bills.

Other sources of help

- Scottish Welfare Crisis Grant
- DWP Hardship payment
- Foodbanks.