

Young people's views on Universal Credit in North East England

Study summary for young people

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What is Universal Credit?

Universal Credit (often called 'UC') is money provided by the government to support people and families to pay for housing, food and bills.

Why we're doing this research?

Researchers and policymakers don't yet know what children and young people think about Universal Credit.

What did we want to find out?

We talked to young people to learn about what they think about Universal Credit, and how it affects families and households in the North East.

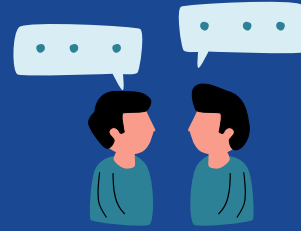
We wanted to help politicians understand the views of young people living in our region so we can help to improve Universal Credit.

Research is the detailed study of a subject to discover new information or reach a new understanding



Who did we speak with?

Forty-one young people aged between 12-16 years and living in the North East took part in our research.



How did young people take part in the research?



A one-to-one interview with a researcher with a guardian present (face-to-face or online) with two UC activities



Small group chat with two researchers and up to five other young people (face-to-face or online) with two UC activities



Face-to-face workshop with three researchers plus four UC-related games

Some things our participants said about UC

"Universal Credit, hmmm to me that sounds like, erm, has that got something to do with paying taxes? Because if it's universal then everyone must do it"

[Face-to-face interview with guardian present, Newcastle]

"Just call it benefits not Universal Credit"

[Face-to-face workshop, Durham]

"The more kids you have, you should get a little bit more, because you need to provide more, you need to buy more of everything"

[Face-to-face focus group, Newcastle]

"You need to go to the dole and if you don't go, it gets stopped"

[Face-to-face focus group, Newcastle]

"If you can like get outside income or money that can really assist in helping the children to get a better life and enjoy their life and not being stuck in a household which is always stressed out because they don't have enough money"

[Face-to-face focus group, Newcastle]

"They [UC claimant] might work, but they might be on minimum wage, or like a low paid job, like they need to work to provide for their family, but like it's not a very good job, like they've just got that job to be able to provide"

[Face-to-face paired interview, Newcastle]

"If you have to take any job possible, like what happens if you like physically can't do it because there's something wrong with you

Or if like that job doesn't equip your needs"

[Face-to-face paired interview, Newcastle]

"Well, if they're [government] going to stop your money, you're not going to be able to afford to go to the interview"

[Face-to-face focus group, Newcastle]

"They're [government] not doing enough to help you, they can do so much more to help people who are struggling financially and stuff like that, they can do so much more, but they're choosing not to"

[Face-to-face focus group, Newcastle]

What we found

A 'sanction' is where UC payments are reduced for a set period if a person is judged to have failed to do what they have agreed in their UC 'Claimant Commitment' (and without good reason)

01 | *Universal Credit*



- Many different understandings of UC, most familiar with the term *benefits*.
- UC rules and sanctions described as unfair, particularly for single parent families, carers, people with disabilities, large families and people paid minimum wage.
- Potential for abuses of the UC system were acknowledged.
- UC rules were important, so long as such rules were fair for everyone by accounting for differences in individual needs.

02 | *Money and health*



- Essential items required for a young person to live a normal and healthy life were identified as access to education, nutritious food, safe housing and neighbourhoods, and supportive family and friends.
- Every person has a right to a basic standard of living to be healthy, though it was uncertain what that threshold would be for different young people.

Reflections

1. What are your thoughts on each of our main findings?
2. Do you agree or disagree with our interpretation? Would you change anything?
3. Would you add anything else?

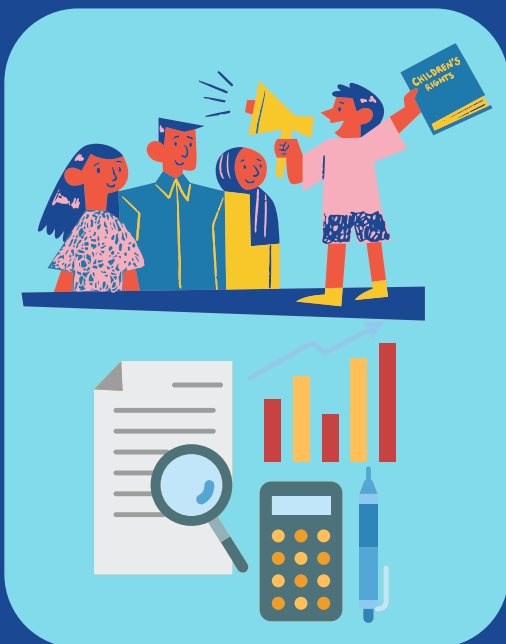
What we found

An economy is the system according to which the money, industry and trade of a country or region are organised. Philosopher Adam Smith said "economics is a science of wealth"

03 | *Perceived impacts of poverty on young people*



- Young people's lives, particularly health, were viewed as negatively affected by economic hardship as they struggle to meet their essential needs and are excluded socially and at school.
- Young people's awareness and understanding of the impact of economic hardship increased with age and young people know when their caregivers are struggling financially.



04 | *Improvements*

- Community-based youth clubs and personal, social, health education lessons in school were suggested as settings to help young people better understand UC, the social security system, their rights, and acquire practical financial knowledge and skills that can be applied in everyday life.

Reflections

1. What are your thoughts on each of our main findings?
2. Do you agree or disagree with our interpretation? Would you change anything?
3. Would you add anything else?

What should happen now? Recommendations

Socio-economic is a way of describing people based on their income, education and type of job they work



Policy is a law, regulation, set of principles or course of action designed by government that we all must follow

Discrimination is where a person or people treat you unfairly because of who you are



Prejudice is when a person or people unfairly influences someone or something against you so that an unreasonable opinion or decision is the result



Central government is made up of lots of departments, such as Health and Social Care, Education, Transport, Housing, Communities & Local Government

01 | *Central government*

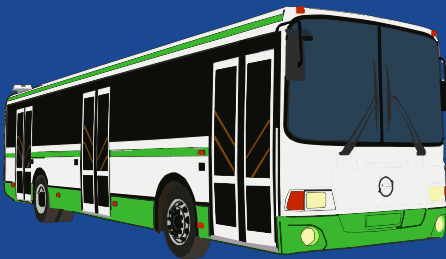
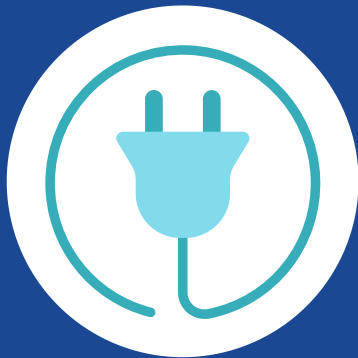
- Urgent review of UC sanctions, particularly any impacts on children and young people's health.
- Urgent review of the Equality Act 2010 to establish legal protections for people who are subjected to prejudicial and discriminatory behaviour on the basis of socio-economic hardship.
- Urgent funding to increase capacity for Citizens Advice, legal aid and local welfare rights advice services to increase awareness and knowledge of how the social security system works in schools and communities.
- Equality impact assessment of UC for those with protected characteristics such as a disability.
- Funding to establish community-led approaches to involving children and young people in future social security policymaking.

Reflections

1. What are your thoughts on our recommendations on Universal Credit?
2. Do you agree or disagree with our recommendations? Would you change anything?
3. Would you add anything else?

The Equality Act 2010 protects you from prejudice and discrimination in society by people in places like schools, universities, businesses, and health and care services

Local authorities are councils that look after specific areas and are responsible for things like parks, housing services, public transport, social care, libraries, and public works like streets and signage



02 | *Local authorities*

- Targeted financial support for food, energy and housing costs for those facing the worst financial hardship.
- Investment to improve access to safe housing, legal advice and employment opportunities in economically underserved areas.
- Free access to public transport for children and young people.
- Free access to extra-curricular activities for children and young people.
- Fund and celebrate the work of community youth groups who continue to enable access to resources and opportunities for children and young people.
- Increase awareness of opportunities for children and young people to engage in politics at local and national levels through local youth advocacy groups.

Reflections

1. What are your thoughts on our recommendations on housing and neighbourhoods?
2. Do you agree or disagree with our recommendations? Would you change anything?
3. Would you add anything else?



03| *Schools, colleges & universities*



- Dedicated lessons on UC and the social security system delivered by local Citizens Advice services in secondary schools.
- Practical financial knowledge and skills for young people required in the real world.
- Dedicated lessons on the legal rights and entitlements of children.
- Dedicated lessons on preparing nutritious meals on a limited budget.
- Increase school staff awareness of the signs and impacts of economic hardship on children's educational, health and life opportunities.
- Offer universally free school meals or food bursaries in schools, colleges and universities to all children and young people to mitigate the effects of food insecurity.
- Remove all financial barriers preventing children and young people living on a low-income from participating in enriching activities.

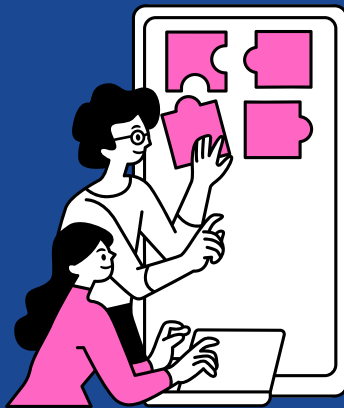
Reflections

1. What are your thoughts on our recommendations for schools?
2. Do you agree or disagree with our recommendations? Would you change anything?
3. Would you add anything else?

Stigma is a set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something such as mental health or poverty



04| *Future research with young people*



- Due to the stigmatisation of poverty and potential sensitivities around speaking about the effects of poverty, be flexible and offer potential participants a choice from a range of different methods.
- Co-design with young advisors activities that promote engagement through interaction, play and knowledge, and pilot with young people first.
- Include questions on methodological feasibility and acceptability in topic guides.
- When including activities, ensure there is a direct link to the research topic, with a clear aim, instructions and rules which are explained verbally and are available in written form for quick reference.
- Display visual prompts throughout data collection rather than text-based alone.
- Include space on activity worksheets for open-ended responses.

Reflections

1. What are your thoughts on our recommendations for future research?
2. Do you agree or disagree with our recommendations? Would you change anything?
3. Would you add anything else?

Thank you for reading our study summary

Please tell us what you think!

We would really welcome young people's help on making sense of our findings and recommendations. Please get in touch with us if you would like to contribute your feedback to our study. This can be written, face-to-face, online or over the telephone. It will last up to 30 minutes with a researcher to discuss your views and ideas on our findings and recommendations. We'll send you a £25 Love2Shop voucher as a thank you for your time.

Further information

For information about the Universal Credit study alongside children and young people, contact the research team on 0743678483 or by email:

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