



UNIVERSITY *of York*

# The introduction of universal credit in Northern Ireland

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w/ Ruth Patrick

Social rights, citizenship and the welfare state

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I wish to  
confess!



# Universal credit in Northern Ireland

## The story so far...

- Background to universal credit
- From welfare reform to welfare changes
- Mitigating the impact of reform
- What do we know about universal credit in Northern Ireland?
- What next for the project?

# Universal credit

## Background

- Jobseeker's allowance
- Employment and support allowance
- Income support
- Housing benefit
- Working tax credit
- Child tax credit

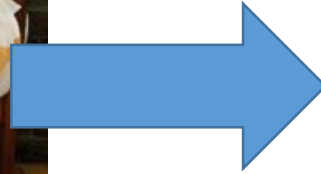


The logo for Universal Credit, consisting of the letters 'U' and 'C' in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The letters are stylized with a slight 3D effect, appearing to be made of overlapping bands.

*Universal  
Credit*

# Universal credit

## Background

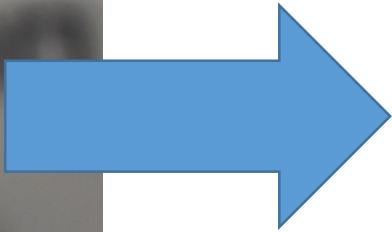
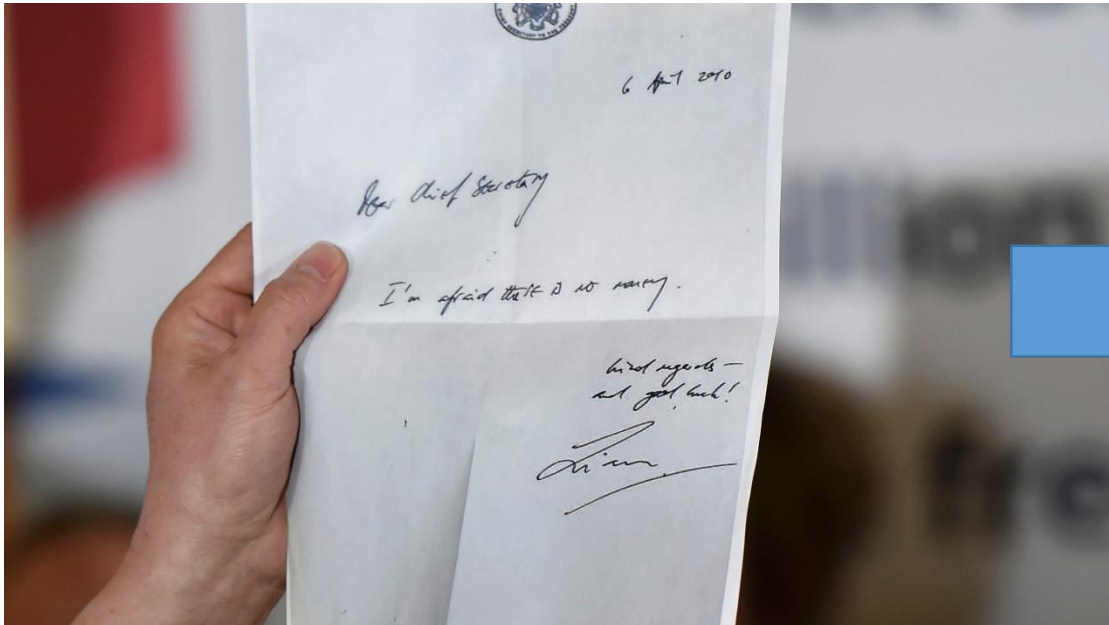


“Sleeping off a life on benefits”



# Universal credit

## Background



# From welfare reform to welfare changes

## Northern Ireland in crisis?

- Social security a devolved matter
- Parity convention – same benefits as GB
- Post-2012:
  - Parties united in concern about coalition agenda
  - Lack of agreement on NI's ability to do things differently
  - Difficulty agreeing NI-specific set of reforms



# From welfare reform to welfare changes

## Northern Ireland in crisis?

- Some general opposition to austerity
- Lack of a coherent NI ideology of social citizenship
- Impact of reform greater than GB:
  - High levels of disability
  - High levels of economic inactivity
  - High levels of under-occupancy (58%)
  - £650 per capita economic loss
  - £470 in GB, £530 in north of England





# From welfare reform to welfare changes

## Northern Ireland in crisis?

- Welfare Reform Bill fails to pass final stage
- Social security powers returned to Westminster
- 2012 and 2016 reforms replicated
- £585m earmarked for mitigating measures – working group to recommend
- UC Regulations made May 2016
- Implementation from Sep 2017 – completed for new claimants by end 2018



# Mitigating the impact of reform

## Universal credit payment arrangements

	Northern Ireland	Scotland	England/Wales
Payment cycle	Fortnightly (default)	Fortnightly on request	Monthly (default)
Housing costs	To landlord (default)	To landlord on request	To claimant (default)
Joint claims	Choice of single or split payment	Single payment (default)	Single payment (default)

# Mitigating the impact of reform

## Supplementary payments

Loss mitigated	Duration	
Social sector size criteria	Ongoing	<i>Supplementary payments to end 31 March 2020</i>
Benefit cap	Ongoing	
Loss of disability premium	Max one year	
Loss of carer premium	Max one year	
Contributory ESA eligibility limited to 12 months	Max one year	

# Mitigating the impact of reform

## Claimant activation

- Maximum higher level sanction 18 months (36 months in GB)
- Referral to advice line when sanction imposed
- Leaflet on avoiding sanctions published
- Lower sanctioning rate – 3x to 5x as high in GB

### To avoid a sanction:

- go to meetings on time with your Adviser/Work Coach and take part in interviews (such as Work Focussed Interviews) – if for any reason you can't attend contact your Adviser/Work Coach as soon as possible as they may be able to re-arrange
- remain available for work and agree to do the things that you have agreed in your Jobseeker's Agreement
- apply for suitable jobs your Adviser/Work Coach tells you about
- do everything your Adviser/Work Coach tells you to do to find work, such as attending a training course or updating your CV or completing a job search

# Universal credit in Northern Ireland

## What do we know?

- 77% of legacy benefit claimants aware of UC
- Only 10% know a great deal or a fair amount
- 20% say not easy to manage claim
- 78% agree 'I would be better off in work or working extra hours'
- 10% had not received a clear explanation of benefit conditions
- Supplementary payments – awareness of existence, receipt and end date varies
- 52% say not enough jobs to apply for
  - *Department for Communities, 2019*

# Universal credit in Northern Ireland

## What do we know?

- Assembly has met for one day since Jan 2017
- Supplementary payments require affirmative resolution
- 32,777 claimants get SSSC supp. payment
  - 129 lost eligibility by Jun 2018
  - Average arrears rose from £48 to £174 by Nov 2018
  - 45% of waiting list single people – 18% of stock one-bedroom
- 1,580 claimants get benefit cap supp. payment – average £48/wk
  - 84% lone parents, rest couples with children
- ‘Cliff edge’ looming
  - *NI Housing Executive, 2018; Advice NI/Housing Rights/Law Centre NI, 2018*

# Universal credit in Northern Ireland

## What next?

- The voice of experts by experience
- Participatory research with UC claimants
- Individual interviews, then workshops
- Does UC live up to its own aims?
- Does it enable claimants to live with dignity?
- What is the contribution of the NI mitigations?

# Universal credit in Northern Ireland

What next?





## Key references

Advice NI, Housing Rights and Law Centre NI, 'Welfare reform: mitigations on a cliff edge' (Belfast: Advice NI, Housing Rights and Law Centre NI, 2018)

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M Simpson, 'Developing constitutional principles through firefighting: social security parity in Northern Ireland' (2015) 22(1) Journal of Social Security Law 31

M Simpson, 'Renegotiating social citizenship in the age of devolution' (2017) 44(4) Journal of Law and Society 646

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Gráinne McKeever, Ann Marie Gray, Peter Dwyer

Project Advisory Group members

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Advice NI, Housing Rights and Law Centre NI, 'Welfare reform: mitigations on a cliff edge' (Belfast: Advice NI, Housing Rights and Law Centre NI, 2018) Analytical Services Unit, Welfare reform (NI) claimant baseline surveys (Belfast: DfC/NISRA, 2019)

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