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## **KINSHIP CARERS AND UNIVERSAL CREDIT: STEERING AROUND THE NEW BEAR TRAPS**

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This autumn, the government introduced some new and stricter rules for those claiming Universal Credit, that will disproportionately affect kinship carers compared to registered foster carers. These new rules mean that Universal Credit claimants will need to spend even more time on job-related activities.

Kinship carers who claim Universal Credit will have to sign a 'Claimant Commitment', agreeing to spend a certain amount of time looking for, or actually being in, work. The claimant is then allocated a 'work coach', who will not only check that they are keeping to their commitment, but also, in theory, help them to find suitable work. This is called 'work-related activity' or 'work conditionality'. The amount of time the carer will need to spend looking for work depends on the age of any child in their care. The younger the child, the less time needs to be spent on work-related activities. If the child qualifies for Disability Living Allowance, then the time they need to spend is significantly reduced and can even be reduced to zero. For the first 12 months that the kinship carer looks after the child, they do not need to spend any time on work-related activity.

Because of the history of the children who are being looked after by kinship carers, having often suffered abuse or neglect, they may have additional needs other than those which are disability-related. They often need significantly more attention than a non-looked-after child of a similar age and this impacts the carer's ability to work or look for work.

The work coach should adjust the level of work-related activity if the child has extra care needs. This is the case even if the child *does not* qualify for disability benefits. It is therefore important for the carer to explain to the work coach the additional needs of the child and how this impacts their ability to look for work. Obviously, all children have care needs. These, of course, depend on the age of the child. So, the carer needs to explain how their child's care needs differ from a child of a similar age.

For example, the child may be significantly behind in their schoolwork, which means that the kinship carer has to spend more time with homework, or they

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