

Written evidence from Name Withheld (UCU0080)

I have so far had a terrible experience with Universal Credit. I was working in a marketing agency when I was made redundant in the middle of December. I went through the process online and set up an appointment at the job centre. I was told that due to the 6 week waiting period I would likely not receive any form of payment until 1<sup>st</sup> February. The 1<sup>st</sup> February came around and I received no payment, I chased up UC about this who told me that as my last pay check from my former employer was at the end of December I had earned too much and would not be entitled to any living costs until March.

I was told I had to attend a group session for a stock taker company called Orridge, this is one of the most depressing and degrading ordeals I have been through. All claimants were rounded up put in a room with the atmosphere resembling that of a slave market. After sitting through a presentation on the minimum wage, zero-hour contract sporadic work I explained that the role was not for me and I did therefore not want to submit an application. However, I did not realise that it is actually mandatory to take this work, whether you want it or not, if you do not take the work you face receiving no money for 90 days (if you have been successful enough to actually receive a payment in the first place of course)

I called several times throughout February to check that I would receive payment on 1<sup>st</sup> March, and was consistently told that I would. However once again I never received payment nor an explanation why. Once again I had to call up UC to find the problem, however no one appeared to be able to help and said they would call me back another day. I then received a text saying that I needed to give them my bank details, despite already submitting these in December. I called up UC and gave my details over the phone and I was told I would receive the payment later that day. A few hours later I received a text telling me that I would receive a payment of only £5.32. Again, another flaw in the system had meant that I would receive the wrong payment for the wrong amount.

In my initial UC application I expressed my interest in receiving housing benefits and brought my tenancy agreement with me to my first appointment to be scanned and submitted as evidence. I called UC several times throughout January to check that everything was okay and if I would need to give them anything else as evidence, I was constantly assured that the housing was being processed but would be made a priority with my rent date coming up. 1 day before my rent day I received a text telling me that I needed to submit a copy of my tenancy agreement as proof, despite already submitting it 6 weeks before, it appeared this copy had been lost. I was told I had to take it in to be scanned again, which I did. Again I was told it was still being processed but 4 weeks later I was told that it wasn't enough evidence and they would need proof from my estate agent of my rent. UC sent a letter to my estate agent asking for the evidence however left no mention of where the evidence was to be sent or submitted, which caused even further delay. Now 12 weeks after first making my application to UC I have never received help with housing.

Luckily I managed to find myself a new role which I began on 6/3/17 and will no longer have to rely on UC, however I am viscerally aware that I am one of the lucky ones. It is terrifying to think that the support system has been completely destroyed, had I not had the financial support of my friends and family, it would not have been long till I was made homeless, and that is very scary. In theory UC works, however at this point it is so disorganised and so poorly managed that it is causing a huge amount of stress and worry for people already in a vulnerable situation.

*March 2017*

