

Creative approaches to raise awareness of the health and social impacts of Universal Credit

Ashley and UC Creatives <https://www.uccreatives.co.uk/>

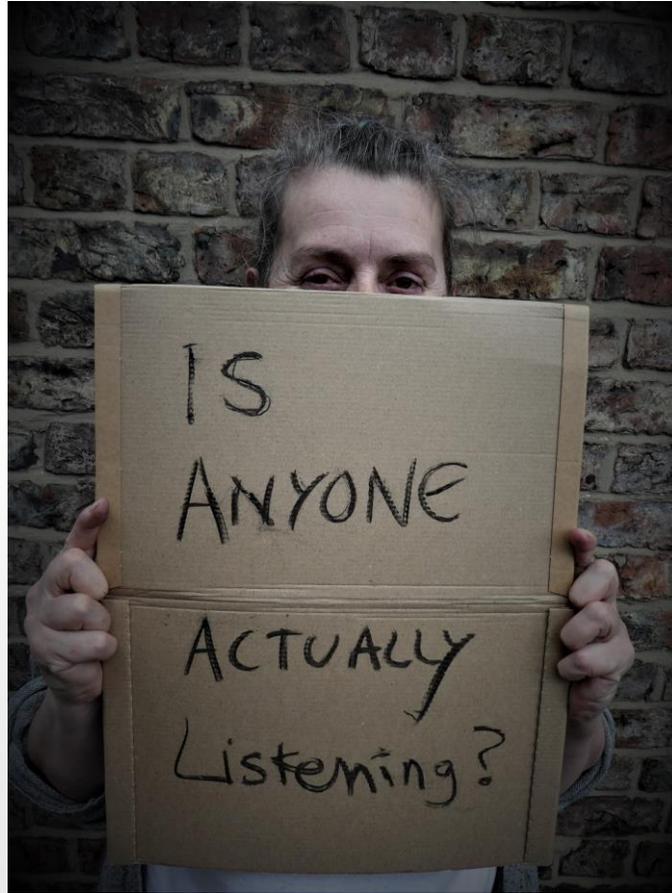
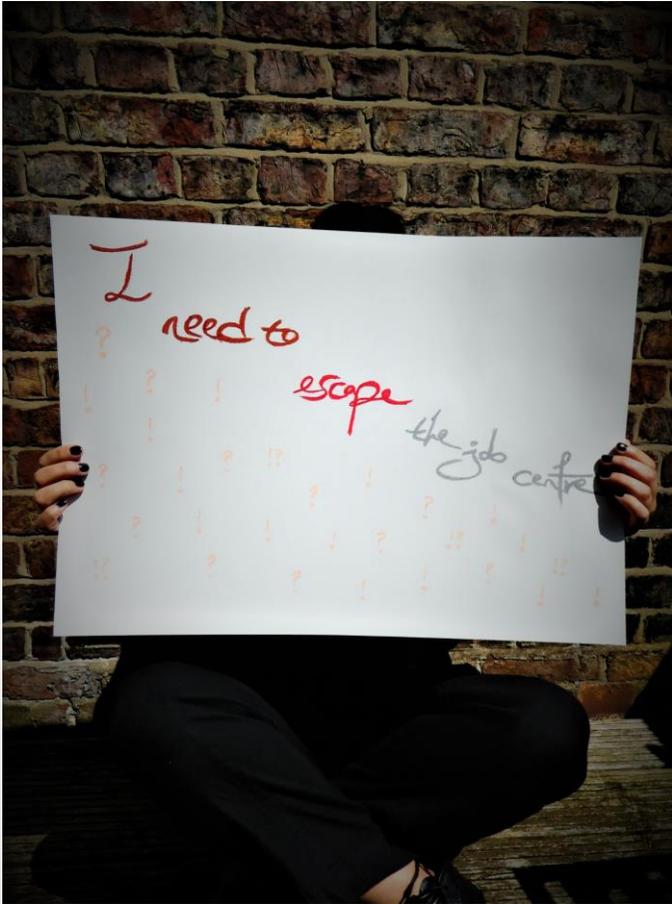
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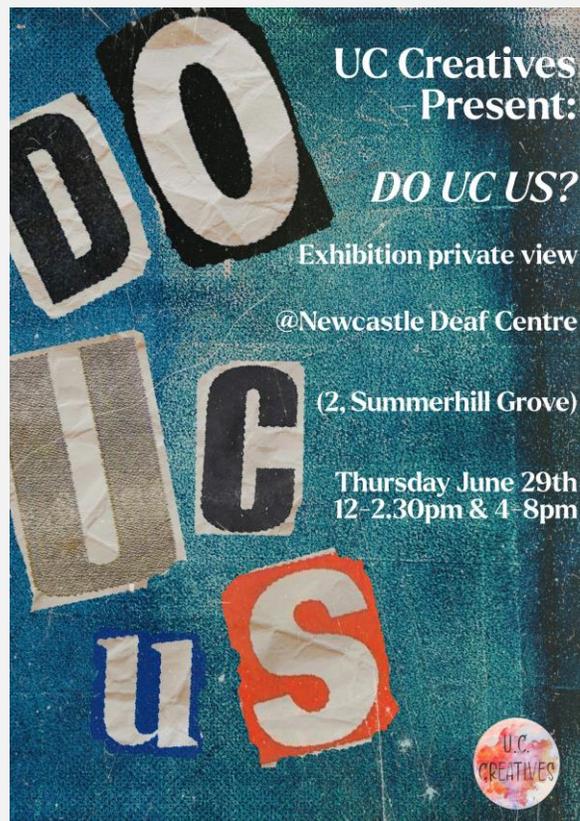
21st January 2026





Universal Credit

2018
“Insidious
brutality”

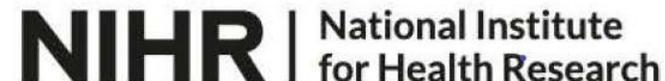


2023
“Psychological
torture”

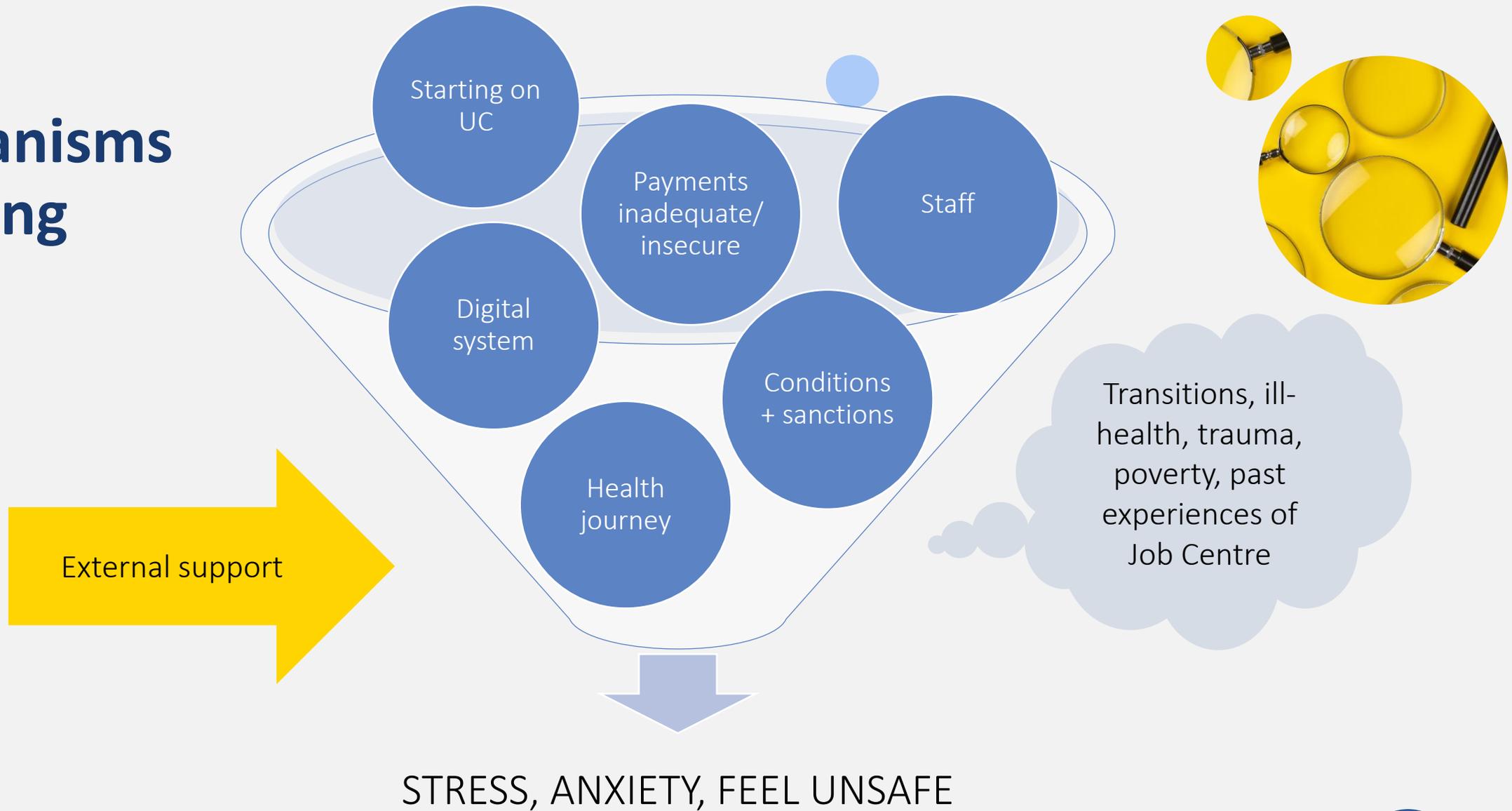
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FUNDED BY



Mechanisms affecting health



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Co-producing theatre

Evidence & Policy • vol XX • no XX • 1–10 • © Policy Press 2023

Print ISSN 1744-2648 • Online ISSN 1744-2656 • <https://doi.org/10.1332/17442648Y2023D000000003>

Accepted for publication 25 September 2023 • First published online XX XXXX XXXX

practice

**'We don't make best use of art in public health':
lessons learned from co-producing a theatre
performance to stimulate debate about
Universal Credit**

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Cap-a-Pie, UK



Credit theatre production: *“Brilliant, angry, urgent work”*

- *“Extremely powerful and incredibly important”*
- *“I had tears in my eyes watching this”*
- *“Heart breaking, but very realistic”*
- *“Lyrical, hard hitting, honest writing”*
- *“Beautifully written and acted”*
- *“Speaking truth to power is all we can do and this play was a great example”*
- *“How do we fight negative perceptions of benefit claimants? How do we continue to show the need for a supportive welfare system?”*

Credit – Cap-a-Pie Theatre



cap a pie
drama learning thinking

About Shows



dit

UC CREATIVES

**Using creative arts to
express ourselves &
raise public
awareness of the
realities of Universal
Credit**

**View our 'DO UC US?' exhibition @
www.uccreatives.co.uk**



DO

UC

US

1. To enable people on UC to express themselves with dignity in respected spaces

2. To pilot creative arts as a means of engaging participants & the public

Our aims

3. To learn from co-producing a project and exhibition about UC & mental health

4. To influence public, policy makers and practitioners through creative arts



Phases of our process

1. Build relationships & co-produce the project

Oct 2022-Jan 2023
(+ pre-funding)

2. Deliver creative workshops and coproduce the exhibition

Feb 2023 - June 2023

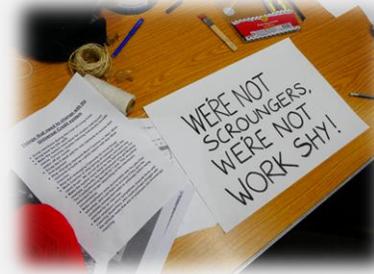
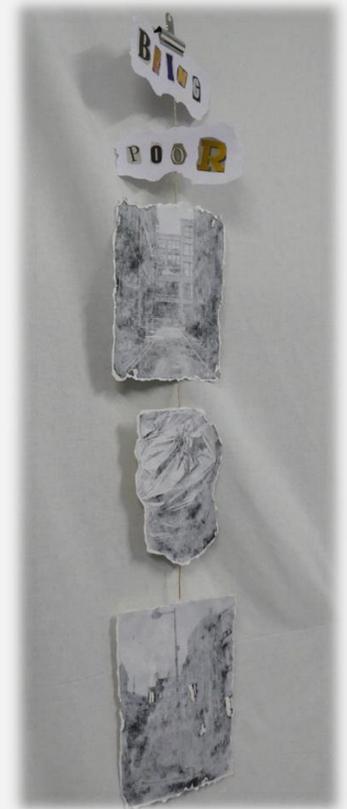
3. Tour the exhibition (in-person and online) and engage audiences

July 2023 onwards



UC CREATIVES

- Participatory creative arts project in collaboration with St Vincent de Paul's Society (SVP), public partners, and an artistic curator
 - Core team: Steph Morris, PJ Atkinson, Lisa Holden, Megan Nottingham (SVP), Jacques Verkade, Suzanne Moffatt, Mandy Cheetham
- 9 participants on UC
- Workshops in photography, poetry, mixed media & drama
- Co-produced exhibition 'DO UC US?'



MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit



Comments from UC Creatives workshop participants 16th May 2023

- Provided a sense of purpose

It's given us the space, a platform to express how the system is affecting us

It's done wonders for my mental health

- Hope / optimism for (policy) change

I hope it'll touch someone somewhere

- Challenge ignorance

I hope the university will see the benefit of making itself accessible to people

What I've got out of this has been huge actually.

You have no idea the extra dimension it's added to my life, that sense of self-worth that's started to come back

Participant with long term health condition

We should be really proud of what we've done. For me it's a step forward...I'd like to think I've given something back

Participant / co-facilitator with long term health condition

Instead of having to make an excuse for my creative skills, feeling I needed to hide that away, I've just been able to be myself...I can actually start to see there's a way out of Universal Credit.

Participant / co-facilitator with long term health condition

MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit





**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE

Workshop with DWP policy makers
hosted by Northumbria University
11th September 2025

UC Creatives was very impressive

*UC Creatives work was new to me
and thought-provoking.*

*UC Creatives powerful work
presenting their experiences*

(DWP participants)

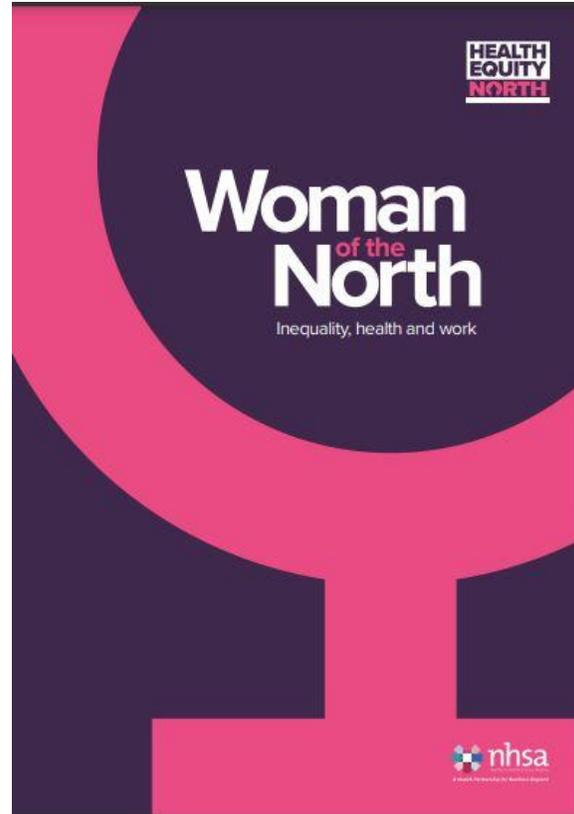
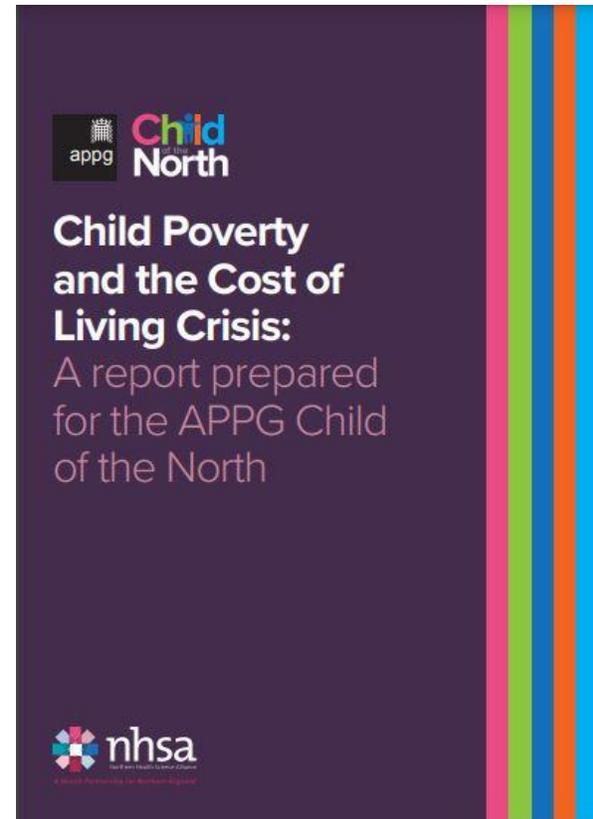
*I felt a really strong sense of
comradeship amongst us
which is great too!*
(UC Creatives team)

*I was so overwhelmed when you each
spoke, you were brilliant, brought
tears to my eyes!!*

*I really enjoyed the table discussions
and felt so grateful to be included as
an equal member of the discussion.*

(UC Creatives team)

Windows of opportunity



Emma Tominey Andy Baxter Mandy Cheetham Maria Marimpi Steph Morris Luke Munford Ruth Patrick Sophie Wickham October 30th, 2024

We can't tackle the mental health crisis without reforming social security

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/we-cant-tackle-the-mental-health-crisis-without-reforming-social-security/>

Acknowledgements

Massive thanks to the whole organising and facilitation team, partners and funders:

PJ Atkinson
Lisa Holden
Suzanne Moffatt
Jacques Verkade
Megan Nottingham
Mandy Cheetham
Steph Morris



UC CREATIVES group: Mel, Ash, Evette, and 4 others who remain anonymous

Cap-a-Pie theatre company & SVP Newcastle Deaf Centre



Growing body of evidence on impacts of UC

Effects on mental health of a UK welfare reform, Universal Credit: a longitudinal controlled study

Sophie Wickham, Lee Bentley, Tanith Rose, Margaret Whitehead, David Taylor-Robinson, Ben Barr

Summary

Background Universal Credit, a welfare benefit reform in the UK, began to replace six existing benefit schemes in April, 2013, starting with the income-based Job Seekers Allowance. We aimed to determine the effects on mental



Lancet Public Health 2020; 5: e157-64

See Comment page e131



Open access

Research

BMJ Open Impact of Universal Credit in North East England: a qualitative study of claimants and support staff

Public health

Protocol

Evaluation of the mental health impacts of Universal Credit: protocol for a mixed methods study

[Peter Craig](#)¹, [Benjamin Barr](#)², [Andrew J Baxter](#)¹, [Heather Brown](#)³, [Mandy Cheetham](#)^{4, 5}, [Marcia Gibson](#)¹, [Srinivasa Vittal Katikireddi](#)¹, [Suzanne Moffatt](#)³, [Steph Morris](#)³, [Luke Aaron Munford](#)⁶, [Matteo Richiardi](#)⁷, [Matt Sutton](#)⁶, [David Taylor-Robinson](#)², [Sophie Wickham](#)², [Huasheng Xiang](#)³, [Clare Bamba](#)³

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Open access | | Other | First published online July 14, 2022

Exploring the mental health effects of Universal Credit: a journey

[M Cheetham](#) , [PJ Atkinson](#), [...], and [P Craig](#) [View all authors and affiliations](#)

[Volume 142, Issue 4](#) | <https://doi.org/10.1177/17579139221103178>

NEW STUDY TO EXAMINE IMPACT OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Published 12th April 2021

A new study led by the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit will be the first to comprehensively evaluate the impacts and costs of Universal Credit (UC) on mental health and health inequalities.

The study is funded by the [National Institute for Health Research](#)

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