



HM Prison &
Probation Service



Assisted Prison Visits Scheme

Visitor Guide

Help with the cost of prison visits if you
are on a low income

July 2017

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Assisted Prison Visits Scheme

The Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS) provides a contribution towards prison visit costs for close relatives, partners or sole visitors. The visitor must be on a low income.

Help is provided for English, Welsh and Scottish prisons. Limited help is available for Channel Island prisons.

Different rules apply to Northern Ireland prisons (ask at the prison you are visiting for information).

The minimum age to apply for help from the APVS is 18 years (16 years when visiting a prison in Scotland). Eligible children are included on the claim.

Claims are processed by the Assisted Prison Visits Unit in Birmingham, part of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service.

To get help you must be listed on both the visitor and low income list below:

Visitor:

-) Husband, Wife or Civil Partner
-) Partner - living as a couple before the prisoner went into prison
-) Parent or Grand-parent (includes step-parent or adoptive parent)
-) Brother or Sister (includes half-sibling or step-sibling)
-) Son or Daughter (includes step or adoptive)
-) Next of Kin (as noted by the prisoner in prison records)
-) Sole Visitor (only Social visitor in the four weeks before a visit claimed)
-) Escort to a qualifying adult or child (see Escort Section)

Low income:

-) Income Support
-) Income - based Job Seekers Allowance
-) Employment and Support Allowance (Income related)
-) Universal Credit*

-) Working Tax Credits (with Disability or Child Tax)*
-) Child Tax Credits*
-) Pension Credit
-) Hold HC2 or HC3 Certificate

* An income limit applies to Universal Credit and Tax Credits (see Payment Rates Section)

If someone else claims benefits for you, make your claim online and AVPU will contact you for further details if required. If you are taking a qualifying child on behalf of a parent who is on low income, see Escort Section.

Apply online at <http://www.gov.uk/helpwithprisonvisits>

The online application process allows you to upload your income details, receipts and visit confirmation. Payment is made into your bank account or cashed at a Post Office.

Key Facts

How do I claim?

Most visitors claim their costs back after the visit, you must claim within 28 days of the visit. You can apply for a payment in advance if you cannot afford to pay yourself.

The quickest and easiest way to claim is online at:

<http://www.gov.uk/helpwithprisonvisits>

Email:

To apply online you will need to have an email address. For advice on how to get an email address contact us. The benefits of adding an email address are that we can contact you direct if there are issues and for rail tickets, we can send them by email. If you don't have an email address please contact us and we can send you a paper application.

What is paid?

The scheme provides help for one visit every two weeks.

The maximum number of assisted visits is 26 in any 12 month period.

A contribution is made towards travel costs, a light refreshment allowance for longer journeys and in limited cases a contribution towards overnight costs.

Money is paid towards petrol costs or the cheapest method of public transport for the journey to the prison. If you choose to use a more expensive way of travelling to the prison, for example a peak time train, the extra costs will not be refunded.

A light refreshment allowance is paid if you are away from home for over 5 hours and expenditure incurred.

Please keep receipts. Checks are carried out frequently.

How am I paid?

Payment can be made into your bank account or by a payment voucher which you exchange at a Post Office. For an advance claim, train tickets can be sent to you before you go on the visit. Tickets are sent after you book the visit.

Uploading

The new quick and easy online claim process relies on uploading documents and receipts – request the upload guide document online at “contact us” on the website or email APVU at the address below. Your claim will take much longer if you post things in.

You must get a confirmation of visit form stamped at the prison and keep all receipts.

You can get a confirmation of visit form at:

<https://gov.uk/government/publications/assisted-prison-visits-form>

or email:

<mailto:assisted.prison.visits@noms.gsi.gov.uk>

or write to:

Assisted Prison Visits Unit (APVU)
PO Box 2152
Birmingham
B15 1SD

Details

Income

Income Support, Income based Job Seeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related)

We check receipt of these benefits with the Department for Work and Pensions.

We may contact you for further details.

Universal Credit

If you get Universal Credit include the current award notice with your first claim and attach a new award notice every four months after that.

The total monthly household income limit is below £1,250.

Working and Child Tax Credits

If you get Working and Child Tax Credits include the current award notice with your first claim and when a new or amended award notice is issued.

The yearly gross household income limit is below £17,474 per annum.

Pension Credit

If you get Pension Credit include the current award notice with your first claim and when a new or amended award notice is issued.

Health Certificate 2 or 3

If you hold a Health Certificate 2 or 3 include the certificate with the first claim and when a new or amended certificate is issued.

The contribution shown on the HC3 certificate for travel to receive NHS treatment is deducted from the assisted prison visit payment.

Prison establishments

All prison establishments (includes Young Offenders Institutions) in England, Wales and Scotland are covered by the scheme.

Qualifying visitors living in England, Wales or Scotland can apply for assistance to visit a prisoner held in a Northern Ireland prison.

Qualifying visitors living in England, Wales or Scotland can apply for assistance to visit a prisoner held in Guernsey prison. Assistance is given for one visit every 6 months by a maximum of 3 qualifying adults and qualifying children per visit. One visit will be assisted where the prisoner is serving a sentence of 6 months or less

On sentence a UK citizen can request a transfer back to a UK prison. Guernsey Prison operates a policy of repatriation for all those sentenced to 5 years and above.

Qualifying visitors living in England, Wales or Scotland can apply for assistance to visit a prisoner held in Jersey prison. The same two conditions for visiting Guernsey prison apply.

Residents of Northern Ireland can get details of the Northern Ireland Prison Visits Scheme from the prison visited or APVU, the NI scheme has different rules.

Entitlement

Assistance is normally given towards a visit every two weeks and up to 26 assisted visits per 12 month period.

Assisted visits can be saved up to allow two or more consecutive visits to take place during one return journey. A contribution towards an overnight stay will be considered.

Each visiting day will count towards the annual allowance.

An assisted prison visit can be used to meet, at the establishment, a prisoner who is released on temporary licence. The confirmation of a visit form must be date stamped at the prison.

Each return journey will count towards the annual allowance and payment of expenses will be restricted to the cost of a normal visit.

The prison governor may authorise additional visits if it is considered necessary for resettlement purposes or the welfare of the prisoner or you. Payment will not count towards the annual allowance.

Some prisons may refuse to allow visits to take place if you arrive late. In these cases you will not normally qualify for an assisted prison visit.

Assistance will normally be authorised if you travel to the prison and the visit is cancelled for operational reasons or the prisoner has been transferred to another prison.

The confirmation of a visit form must be date stamped and if possible a reason stated for the cancellation. Payment will not count towards annual allowance.

When to apply for assisted prison visits

You should make a claim within 28 days of making the visit. An advance payment can be claimed towards a visit.

You should go by the cheapest method of travel available, using off peak trains where possible. APVU will issue rail tickets for the cheapest journey possible.

If travelling by rail you will need to put the visit date, stations and train times for your journey on the claim, allowing time to get to the prison. It is very important that you inform APVU if your visit date changes before you get the tickets.

Call:

0300 063 2100 for online application issues

09.00 to 17.00, Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays)

or email:

assisted.prison.visits@noms.gsi.gov.uk for all other issues or queries

If the tickets you receive are for the wrong date you should return them to APVU with a covering letter. You will also need to make a new claim if you want to go on a different date. APVU may ask you to pay for tickets that have been issued if you do not tell them about changed or cancelled visits.

Tickets will be posted to you or you will be sent a collection code to collect the tickets at a collection machine at the station. The ticket collection machine will require you to insert a debit or credit card to confirm your identity (you will not be charged for the tickets).

If you cancel or do not visit within 7 days of the planned visit, all monies and the rail warrant / tickets, must be returned to AVPU. Send a cheque / postal order payable to "APVU".

Proof of expenditure

Public transport, car hire, car park, bridge/tunnel tolls and overnight accommodation costs will only be reimbursed where receipts and/or used tickets are included with the claim.

You will be paid for the cheapest method of public transport available, even if your receipts show a higher cost (if this happens you will be notified by email).

Confirmation of visits

It is essential to get a Confirmation of a Visit form completed at the prison, your payment will be delayed if you do not have one. This is submitted with your claim.

If you are requesting an advance, the confirmation form is either uploaded online or posted to APVU after the visit.

Travel

You can go by car, motor cycle or public transport. You will be paid for the cheapest method of public transport available for the journey you are making.

Ensure you obtain receipts and upload / include all used receipts and tickets with your claim.

Car / Motorbike

A fixed rate per mile is paid. The distance of the return journey (normally the shortest route) is calculated using a computerised journey planner.

Receipted car parking charges will be reimbursed for visits to those establishments where car parking is not provided or restricted.

Unavoidable bridge and tunnel tolls will be reimbursed where a receipt is enclosed.

The cost of a “Park and Ride” bus service will be met where used tickets or a receipt is enclosed. The mileage claim should be from home to the Park and Ride, not the prison.

Bus / Coach

Check if you can make the journey by bus or coach before considering going by train. Regular bus users can apply for the reimbursement of a discount travel card.

However, we must be satisfied that the cost of the card will be recovered through lower fares when visiting a prison establishment. Ask the bus operator for details of any local schemes.

Rail / Underground

Look for the cheapest train for your journey to the prison, check standard off-peak first.

You will be paid for the cheapest rail fare available, APVU will limit your payment if you choose to use a more expensive train.

Light Refreshment Allowance

If you need to buy food or drink on the day of your visit and are away from home for more than 5 hours you may get a light refreshment allowance. APVU reserve the right to ask for receipts and may do so up to six months after the journey. No receipts will require APVU to recover the money paid.

Overnight Accommodation

If you need to leave home before 6am or arrive home after 12am (midnight) you may qualify for an overnight allowance (before 7 and after 10pm if you are taking children under 3).

The cost of travel between accommodation address and establishment is payable but subject to a maximum published rate.

You must get approval from APVU before incurring expenses.

Regular checks are carried out to validate claimed overnight accommodation costs.

Taxi

The reimbursement of the taxi fares for journeys to bus stops or railway stations will only be considered where the walking distance exceeds 20 minutes in one direction or you are aged 75 years or over.

Taxi journeys should wherever possible be booked through a taxi office.

Checks are regularly carried out with the taxi operator to validate claimed taxi fares.

Taxi receipts should include the following details:

-) Date of journey
-) Name, address and telephone number of taxi company
-) Name / signature of driver
-) Details of journey
-) Fare paid

Community bus or similar

Payment will be restricted to the actual fare charged or if cheaper, the cost of the same journey by public transport.

Car hire

You can arrange car hire from a private company.

Reimbursement of a hire car plus the petrol allowance must not exceed the cost of the same journey by public transport.

However, we do take into account the number of assisted visitors travelling with you and any savings in fares, light refreshment allowance etc.

Air travel

Please contact APVU

Visits to a prison on the Isle of Wight

Car parking charges at the mainland port are refundable. Your mileage claim should be between home and car park.

The cost of taking a car on the ferry will only be met if you are unable to use a bus on the Isle of Wight due to a medical condition.

Foot passengers are restricted to the cheapest ferry to get to the visit.

The cost of the return journey by bus from the port to the prison is refundable.

Escort to an adult

If you qualify for help and are over 75 you can claim for an adult to escort you to the visit, put the adult's costs on your claim.

If you qualify for help but are too ill to travel alone you may get help for an adult to escort you on the visit. You will need your doctor or medical professional to state in writing: 'this patient cannot make the prison visit without the help of an escort', the letter must also say if the condition is temporary or permanent. If you are unable to get to train stations on public transport the letter must state: 'this patient cannot use public transport to get to train stations'. If the condition is temporary a new letter is required every four months.

Escort to a child

If you are the prisoner's spouse or partner and are on a low income you may decide to ask someone else to take your children on the visit as an escort. In this case the escort will not be able to claim online, they should download an application form or contact APVU for a form.

The parent must write to us to authorise the escort by providing information, as shown below, and evidence to confirm the prisoner is the mother/father of the child/ children being escorted to the prison:

-) Parent's name, address and National Insurance number
-) Name and date of birth of the child/children being escorted to the prison and their relationship to the prisoner.
-) Details of the parent's income. If the parent is in receipt of Income Support or Income - based job Seeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance (income related) we may need to contact the local office that issued the award. To give your permission, state the name and address of the local office.

-) Name, prison number and location of mother/ father in prison. Name and address of escort.

Unless you withdraw permission by writing to us, we will assume the named escort is authorised to take your child/children on all claimed assisted prison visits.

One of the following is acceptable proof of parentage by confirming the surname of the child/children is the same as the prisoner's.

-) Original short birth certificate; or
-) Original long birth certificate; or
-) Original medical card; or
-) Child Benefit award notice; or
-) Official letter e.g. from a school, health centre etc.

If you are unable to send proof to confirm the prisoner is the father you should contact your local Register Office for advice on adding the father's details to the birth record. Original documentation from the Register Office to confirm the birth record has been amended must be sent to us.

If you do not qualify as a spouse or partner but are looking after the prisoner's child/ children you may be able to claim assistance as an escort. You must meet the qualifying rules on income. Proof of parentage to confirm the prisoner is the mother or father of the escorted child/children must be sent with the application form. See above.

General

Independent advice, information and support to anyone with a relative or friend in prison (with the exception of assisted prison visit casework enquires) can be obtained from:

Offenders' Families Helpline (for prisons in England & Wales)

Tel no: 0808 8082003 (calls are free)

Website: www.offendersfamilieshelpline.org

Information and support may be available locally from the National Probation Service, Youth Offending team, Social Services and Citizens Advice Bureau.

Lost or stolen payments and rail tickets issued by APVU

Report any loss or theft of a payment, rail tickets to the Police.

Contact us to confirm the following details: circumstances of the loss or theft, date reported to the police, crime reference number, name of the Police Officer who dealt with you and address of the police station.

This guide to the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme does not include all the rules of the scheme.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information given is correct at the time of publishing. The rules and payment rates in this booklet are subject to change, your claim will be assessed using the rules and rates applicable at the time of processing.

Standards of service

We aim to provide the best possible service:

-) We will be helpful, polite, and treat you fairly and with respect
-) Your application will normally be assessed within 1 week of receipt
-) Your enquires will normally be answered in full within 5 working days of receipt or an acknowledgement will be issued if we require further information

What we expect from you

- Give us the correct information at the right time
- Tell us when something changes
- Treat our staff with respect

APVU reserve the right to limit your use of the scheme if you make a false claim or misuse the service.

Equal opportunities statement

The Assisted Prison Visits Unit is committed to treating staff and customers in an open, courteous and respectful manner and anyone who contacts us will be dealt with without prejudice.

Complaints procedure

If you are not satisfied with our service or wish to make a complaint please write to:

Assisted Prison Visits Unit (APVU)

PO Box 2152

Birmingham

B15 1SD

Or email: assisted.prison.visits@noms.gsi.gov.uk

(Between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday, except Bank Holidays)

We will carry out a full investigation and you will receive a telephone or written reply within 5 working days of receipt or a progress report if the investigation takes longer.

We will do our best to put the matter right, give an explanation and, where appropriate, issue an apology. Should you feel the response is unsatisfactory you can write in the first instance to:

Head of Assisted Prison Visits Unit

PO Box 2152

Birmingham

B15 1SD

(for prisons in England & Wales)

or

Directorate of Partnerships and Commissioning

Scottish Prison Service

Calton House

5 Redheughs Rigg

Edinburgh

EH12 9HW

(for prisons in Scotland)

If you still feel your complaint has not been dealt with satisfactorily, contact your local Member of Parliament and ask that they raise the matter with the Minister of State responsible for Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (for prisons in England & Wales) or the Minister of State responsible for the Prison Service in Scotland (for prisons in Scotland).

You can also complain to the Parliamentary Ombudsman who will investigate complaints from members of the public about the way they have been treated by government departments and / or their executive agencies. Further information can be obtained from:

Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman

Helpline: 0845 015 4033

Fax: 020 7217 4160

Website: www.ombudsman.org.uk

Data protection

The Ministry of Justice (Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service) uses and retains the personal data of Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS) customers for the purposes of the provision of expenses from the scheme. Assistance from the APVS can only be granted by supplying the prescribed information in order to allow the assessment of claims and any necessary checks to be undertaken.

You have the right to request details of the personal information we hold about you, and subsequently request that we correct any personal information if it is found to be inaccurate or out of date.

We will not share your information with other organisations unless it is required for the prevention or detection of crime; apprehension, prosecution or management of prisoners; prevention of terrorism; National Security; or we are required to do so by law.

For more information please contact the Information Access Representative at the:

Assisted Prison Visits Unit

PO Box 2152

Birmingham

B15 1SD

Or see our Privacy Policy on our website at

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/global/privacy/index.htm>

Payment rates and income limits

Car Mileage Allowance

13p per mile

Light Refreshment Allowance

Over 5 hours £2.55

Over 10 hours £5.10

Children must be 1 or over to get LRA

Overnight Allowances

London and the South East:

Adult £34 per night (maximum) Child £17 per night (maximum)

Elsewhere:

Adult £28 per night (maximum) Child £14 per night (maximum)

Adult includes children 14 and over

Children aged between 3 and 13

The maximum cost payable for a single journey between the prison and the accommodation address is £10

Car Hire

£40 per day (inclusive) plus 13 pence per mile

Tax Credit

Annual household income limit £17,474

Universal Credit

Monthly total household income limit is £1,250

Rates correct at 1 July 2017

