

Assisted Prison Visits Scheme: getting help with travel costs

If you are receiving benefits or are on a low income, you may be eligible to claim help with travel expenses when visiting a prison from the **Assisted Prison Visits Unit (APVU)**.

Am I eligible?

You are eligible to claim if you are:

- A close relative of the person you wish to visit, i.e. **wife, husband, civil partner, partner, mother, father, grandparent, son, daughter, brother or sister, adoptive/step/half brother/ sister, step-child or step-parent**, or you are their **sole visitor**, i.e. the **only** person who is visiting them. If you claim as a sole visitor, the APVU will confirm with the prison that the person has not been visited by anyone else in the four weeks prior to your visit.
- In receipt of **Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance Income related, Income-Based Job Seekers Allowance, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit with a disability element or Child Tax Credit, Pension Credit** or hold a **Health Benefits Certificate**. You must send in your Health Benefits Certificate or tax/pension credit award notice the first time that you claim. Note: if someone else is claiming for you enter their details on the claim form

If you are eligible it will **NOT** affect your usual benefits.

What if I am a prisoner's unmarried partner?

Partners who were living with the prisoner, as a couple, in an established relationship

immediately prior to imprisonment are eligible.

We weren't living together, but we have children together

If that case, you may qualify for help by acting as an escort to the child(ren). You should send in proof that the prisoner is the parent of the child(ren) with your first application form. This can include a birth certificate or medical card or child benefit award or any official letter that confirms the child's surname is the same as the prisoner's. If not, you should contact your local Register Office for advice on adding the father's details to the birth certificate. Original documentation from the Register to confirm the record has been amended must be sent to the APVU.

I need help to make the visit

If you are aged under 18 or over 75 or in receipt of Disability Living Allowance or have a medical condition which makes traveling difficult you may qualify for the travel expenses of a companion to be paid.

How do I claim?

The first time you claim, you will have to fill in a fairly detailed form giving information about yourself and the person you want to visit. APVU forms can be obtained from the **Offenders' Families Helpline – 0808 808 2003**. They are also available at the prison, the prison visitors' centre, other prisoners' family support organisations, or ring APVU on **0121 626 2206** for a form.

You will not have to fill this form in every time you claim. APVU will send you a shorter repeat claim form with your girocheque to use for subsequent visits.

What can I claim?

You can claim for one visit every 14 days up to a maximum of 26 a year. Claims must be made within 28 days of the date of the first visit.

Can I claim before my visit?

You can claim for payment for up to 2 visits before you travel. If you are travelling by train you will normally be sent a travel warrant to exchange for tickets at the station when you leave.

If you need to apply before you visit, allow three to four weeks for the APVU to process your claim and send you the girocheque in time. You must send all receipts/tickets and a confirmation of visit voucher to the APVU within 28 days of the visit taking place even if it is your last visit. Use the prepaid envelope that they send you (the confirmation of visit voucher is sent to you by APVU. It must be completed at the prison).

APVU will pay for travel to and from the prison by public transport or private motor vehicle. They will not pay for taxis unless the fare is less than the public transport alternative.

If you are away from home for five hours or more, you can also claim a set meal allowance. Overnight allowances may be paid at the discretion of the APVU. Before incurring any expenditure check with the APVU to confirm they will contribute to an overnight stay.

APVU will contribute towards the cost of childminding if it is not appropriate for the children to visit, but the child minder must be registered with the local authority. Also included is breakfast/after school clubs run by the local authority

Full details of expenses covered by the scheme are given in the booklet that accompanies the claim form.

Can I claim for any extra visits?

Extra visits where you **do not** need a Visiting Order will be covered. This may include a special family day, children's day or where you are involved in a case conference or sentence planning. Include a short note with your application to tell the APVU or write 'special visit' on the form.

Further information

If there is anything else you need to know about the scheme you can write to the APVU at:

Assisted Prison Visits Unit, PO Box 2152, Birmingham, B15 1BR.

Or email at: assisted.

prison.visits@noms.gsi.gov.uk

The APVU customer helpline **0845 300 1423** is available between 10.15 to 11.45 a.m. Monday to Friday. Ask for the caseworker who deals with the prison you are visiting.

If you have a textphone for people with hearing difficulties, please phone **0845 304 0800**.

Information is also available from the APVU on audio cassette and CD, in Braille, in Welsh and in a range of foreign languages.

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