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## Northumberland Nurse Took £21,000 in Benefits by Pretending to Be Single Mum

July 21, 2025

— Categories: *Crime*



A nurse from Northumberland has been fined after fraudulently claiming over £21,000 in Universal Credit by falsely stating she was a single parent. Louise Brown, 33, from Shilbottle, admitted to failing to disclose that she was living with her partner while receiving payments from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Between November 2019 and November 2022, Brown claimed Universal Credit, a social security payment designed to support those on low incomes or out of work. She told the DWP she was a lone parent raising two children, which gave her additional financial support.

However, the court heard she was in fact living with her partner for much of this period, which would have affected her eligibility for the payments.

Brown's deception allowed her to receive a total of £21,289 unlawfully. While she has already repaid more than £12,000 of this sum, the remaining amount was recovered through legal proceedings. At Newcastle Magistrates' Court, she pleaded guilty to dishonestly failing to disclose information to gain benefits unlawfully.

## Personal Circumstances

The prosecution, led by Holly Clegg, outlined how Brown had deliberately withheld her cohabitation status to continue receiving payments meant for single parents. Brown's defence, presented by Janice Hall, explained the complexity of her situation. Hall stated that Brown had been in a long-term relationship spanning about 13 years, which had broken down temporarily before the couple reconciled. During the period of the benefit claims, Brown was studying to become a nurse, and her partner increasingly spent nights at her home.

Despite the offence, the court was told Brown has since qualified as a nurse and has been working in the profession for approximately three years. The defence emphasised her remorse and her efforts to make restitution by repaying a significant portion of the money.

The district judge handed down a fine of £1,575 and ordered Brown to pay £713 in court costs. The ruling reflects the seriousness of benefit fraud, which the government and courts continue to address firmly.

Benefit fraud cases such as this damage public confidence in welfare systems designed to assist those genuinely in need. While many recipients legitimately depend on Universal Credit, fraudulent claims undermine the scheme and divert funds away from vulnerable individuals.

The Department for Work and Pensions defines Universal Credit as a payment to help with living costs for people on low incomes or out of work. Claimants are required to report any changes in their circumstances, including cohabitation status, to ensure correct payments are made.

Though she has expressed regret and taken steps to repay the money, the legal consequences have been significant. This case also highlights the importance of honesty in benefit claims. Those who receive public funds must declare all relevant information, including their living arrangements. Failure to do so can lead to prosecution and penalties, as demonstrated by this case from Northumberland.