



Touchbase

December 2013

Welcome to December's Touchbase



Sharrion Llewellyn, Editor

There is still a great deal to report on and business to get through before Christmas.

This month we report on the training and work placements that are available to help young people prepare for, find and stay in work, as employment continues to increase among the general population.

The change to the Spare Room Subsidy size criteria to allow for children with severe disabilities to have a room of their own is covered in detail. We also have an article on a new communications campaign to make people aware of the consequences of benefit fraud.

Other issues include an update on the Personal Independence Payment and the Universal Credit Toolkit.

And Mike Penning, the Minister for Disabled People, marked the 21st International Day of Disabled People by visiting some organisations that support disabled people and highlighting the Disability Confident campaign.

You and your colleagues can [subscribe to Touchbase here](#).



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DWP announcements in the Autumn Statement

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, announced a number of measures in his Autumn statement that will have a direct impact on DWP's policies.

They include:

- A new class of voluntary National Insurance contribution, to be known as Class 3A. This will allow current pensioners and those who reach state pension age before 6 April 2016 to top up their Additional State Pension;
- The Government's belief that future changes to the State Pension age should be based on the principle that people should expect to spend, on average, around a third of their adult life in receipt of the State Pension;
- Further details about how the Welfare Cap – a limit on total welfare benefits expenditure – will operate. This includes how it will be assessed and what action will need to be taken if there is a breach of the cap;
- The intention to run a pilot for skills support and making it mandatory for 18-21 year olds to take up skills provision. There will also be a pilot of support through Jobcentre Plus for 16-17 year olds who are not in education employment or training (NEETs);

- Confirmation that the New Enterprise Allowance will be extended into 2015/16;
- £40 million of additional Discretionary Housing Payment expenditure in both 2014/15 and 2015/16.

A number of previously announced measures were also included in the Autumn Statement including the Help to Work Package, as reported in the [October Touchbase](#), and overseas eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments.



For more information, go to the [Autumn Statement on GOV.UK](#). We will also keep you updated in [Touchbase](#) as the individual changes come into force.

New Spare Room Subsidy laws for disabled children

New legislation is being introduced to change the Spare Room Subsidy size criteria to allow children with a severe disability to have their own room.

In April this year the Government made changes to Housing Benefit to ensure that it covered households for those bedrooms that people actually need. The new regulation, which comes into force from 4 December 2013, means that disabled children can be considered for a room of their own if:

- They are entitled to the highest or middle rate care component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA);
- Their local authority is also satisfied that sharing a bedroom would pose either a risk of physical harm or cause frequent and significant disruption to either the disabled child or the child with whom they would normally be expected to share.

In August 523,000 claimants across the country had their Housing Benefit reduced by an average of £14.50 because they were living in social housing that was too big for their needs.

There has been a steady decline in the number of households affected with a drop of 24,000 between May and August.

There are 2.1 million households on the housing waiting list in Great Britain and 375,000 families who have been living in cramped, overcrowded accommodation in England and Wales alone. But at the same time there were 1 million spare rooms in social housing that were funded by benefits.

The Government is committed to supporting people as they continue to move into work, move into more suitable sized properties, come off Housing Benefit altogether, or look at other ways of adapting to the change.

A recent independent poll by Ipsos MORI revealed that 78% of respondents agreed with the need to take action on under-occupation of social housing.

Comprehensive [guidance](#) has been provided for advisers and decision makers to support them in administering both Housing Benefit and Universal Credit.

The new Regulations will also:

- Provide for an extra bedroom where a joint tenant or their partner needs overnight care or is a qualifying parent or carer;
- Change the definition of a 'young individual' to exclude those who are approved foster carers – in Scotland, approved foster carers or kinship carers. This is to prevent the shared accommodation rate from applying to single claimants under 35 who are approved foster carers.



Full details of the [Housing Benefit and Universal Credit \(Size Criteria\) amendments are available on \[legislation.gov.uk\]\(http://legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Sector-based work academies

The number of people in work has increased by 378,000 in the past year and the Government wants to ensure that young people can also benefit from the upturn in the jobs market.

Employers and claimants can take full advantage of the training and work experience opportunities available, such as sector-based work academies, work experience and the wage incentive, to help more young people into work.

The Minister of State for Employment, Esther McVey, has launched a series of short videos on sector-based work academies, aimed at employers and young jobseekers, to highlight the range of opportunities available.

The first two videos, on sector-based work academies were launched by the Minister with the help of sector-based work academy provider, Progress to Excellence, and some of the young people who feature in the videos.

Sector-based work academies are flexible and are designed to help both employers and jobseekers. They provide:

- Employers with a chance to try out a potential employee in the work place while remaining in control of their own recruitment;
- An opportunity to find the right person for the job and to influence the pre-employment training they receive;

- An easier way to fill repeat vacancies by using sector-based work academies participants, with quick and easy access to a wide pool of candidates;
- A cost effective way to recruit – participants stay on benefits during the training and work placement, for which they receive a qualification, and their travel, child care and replacement care costs are covered.

Sector-based work academies can last up to six weeks and have three key parts:

- Pre-employment training funded through the skills system;
- A work experience placement with a host employer;
- A guaranteed job interview for the jobseeker who completes the training and work experience placement.

One of the videos is aimed at employers and the other at jobseekers. The Government has also produced a sector-based work academies guide for employers.

Minister of State for Employment Esther McVey's visit to Progress to Excellence



Sector-based work academies case study – Melissa Gavin

Melissa Gavin has landed her dream job – thanks to the success of her sector-based work academy placement.

Melissa, 24, was also delighted at gaining her Certificate in Principles of Care as it was the first time she had ever completed an educational or work-based assignment.

She is now a support worker with domiciliary agency Heron Care after successfully completing the sector-based work academy programme.

“It’s the best thing I have ever done. I got so much satisfaction out of it – and I now have a proper career as well.”

Melissa was devastated after being made redundant from her job at KFC and did not believe that she would ever achieve her dream to work in a care environment.

She said: “I’ve got a brother with Down’s Syndrome and I’ve always helped to look after him. But I never thought I would be able to get a proper job as a carer.

“I didn’t do very well at school and never completed anything. I didn’t think I was capable of it and no one ever encouraged me. But from the day I started the programme, something just clicked.

“It’s the best thing I have ever done. I got so much satisfaction out of it – and I now have a proper career as well.”

DWP celebrates International Day of Disabled People

The Minister for Disabled People, Mike Penning, celebrated International Day of Disabled People by visiting some organisations that are supporting disabled people to live fulfilling lives.



Minister for Disabled People, Mike Penning with Barry Williams from ASDA

The Minister visited Leeds Mind to hear about their work and dropped in on a peer support session at a Disabled People's User Led Organisation (DPULO). The DPULO is supported through a government-funded programme to strengthen grassroots disability organisations.

He also visited Remploy, which provides specialist employment support for disabled and disadvantaged people, and ASDA's headquarters. ASDA has worked with Remploy to offer careers to over 1000 disabled people and people with health conditions.

The Minister also used the day to highlight the government's [Disability Confident campaign](#) that was launched in July by Prime Minister David Cameron, as reported in the [August Touchbase](#).

This campaign challenges negative behaviours and attitudes among employers to help reduce the employment gap, while also raising disabled people's employment aspirations.

The first of seven regional events, hosted by KPMG in Birmingham, has been held to give employers a chance to share good practice

and to increase their confidence about employing disabled people. Another six will be held across the country in the New Year.

The [Disability Action Alliance](#) and the [Money Advice Service](#) (MAS) have also worked together on a new MAS life-events page that provides financial information for those who become ill or disabled.

Mike Penning, Minister for Disabled People, said:

"Employment figures for disabled people are going in the right direction. But we know there is more we need to do to make sure we make the most of disabled people's talent in the workplace."

"I am also delighted that the Disability Action Alliance and Money Advice Service have worked together to develop a vital new resource to provide expert support for people who become ill or disabled.

"Real and lasting change can only be delivered through partnerships that bring government, disabled people's organisations and others together."

DWP has also published the second edition of [Aspire 2](#), an online magazine aimed at inspiring young disabled people to get involved with disability issues. It includes articles by Mike Penning, Channel 4 presenter Alex Brooker and Paralympian Louise Hunt.

Visit the [Disability Action Alliance](#) site to find out how members celebrated the day.

Communications campaign launched to help fight benefit fraud

A communications campaign has been launched by DWP to help change the attitudes and behaviours of claimants and the general public towards benefit fraud.

This first phase of the campaign will focus on encouraging Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support claimants to report any change in their circumstances such as finding a job, and the wider public to report instances of suspected benefit fraud.

Jobcentre Plus partnership managers will be contacting local partners and stakeholders in the pilot areas to raise awareness of the campaign and enlist their support.

Your organisation can support this campaign by:

A pilot campaign will run during January and February 2014 in these areas:

- Southwark
- Blackburn
- Hounslow
- Blackpool
- Cardiff
- Epping Forest

- Helping to explain the details of any communications that your customers may see or receive such as a letter which asks them to let us know if their circumstances have changed;
- Encouraging your customers to report any change of circumstances;
- Encouraging your customers to contact us if they are not sure what they need to tell us about;
- Signposting people to [GOV.UK](#) for more information or encouraging them to talk to Jobcentre Plus.

The results of the pilot will help to inform a longer term, more sustained campaign of activity throughout 2014/15.



More information on what happens if someone is suspected of [benefit fraud](#) can be found on [GOV.UK](#).

Controlled rollout of Personal Independence Payment continues

Existing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants living in areas where Personal Independence Payment (PIP) has started to replace DLA will have their claim reviewed if DWP receives information that their care or mobility needs have changed.

As reported in [November's Touchbase](#), DWP has started to reassess some DLA claimants who live in Wales, West Midlands, East Midlands and East Anglia for entitlement to PIP.

In these areas DWP will use third party information about someone's care or mobility needs as a trigger for reassessment and as an opportunity to start the PIP process.

Claimants, whose care and mobility needs might have changed, are being reassessed now to avoid them being reviewed against existing DLA rules and then against PIP assessment criteria at a later date.

This will also bring these claimants into a regular cycle of reviews, which is a feature of PIP. Reviewing a claimant's entitlement will also ensure that the correct award is in place.

This approach is similar to the one that was taken for DLA. Where we receive information to suggest that an award of DLA may be incorrect, but no fraud is suspected, we will review the case and make sure that the award continues at the correct rate under the Right Payment Programme (RPP).

When someone's award for DLA is reviewed under RPP it could go up or down or it could stay the same.

RPP will continue to apply in areas where PIP reassessment has yet to start and for claimants who are not eligible to claim PIP; young people under 16 and people who were aged 65 or over on 8 April 2013.



More information about PIP can be found in the [PIP toolkit for support organisations](#), including a [PIP postcode map](#), and on [GOV.UK](#).

Universal Credit guide for advisers has been improved

DWP has improved the [Universal Credit partner toolkit](#) in response to feedback from users so it better meets the needs of our partner organisations.

The guides have been redesigned and a new product has been added that provides the key pieces of information that people will need when making a Universal Credit claim.

The toolkit provides information, products and tools to help DWP's partner organisations understand the new service and explain it to their customers. This includes guides to specific aspects of Universal Credit and how it might affect different customer groups, such as parents or the self-employed.

There are also illustrations showing how the claim process works and how Universal Credit helps to make work pay, as well as video stories from claimants who have benefited from the changes that Universal Credit will bring.

The latest addition highlights the [key pieces of information](#) that people will need with them when making their online claim, such as their landlord's contact details.

“Having the necessary information ready will help to make the claim process better.”

Claims for Universal Credit need to be made in one go. If there is no activity for 20 minutes when someone is completing the online form the claim will be timed out. Having the necessary information ready will help to make the claim process better.

Partner organisations can use the products in the toolkit however they wish, including posting them online or using the information in their own channels.

The toolkit also includes links to products that have been developed by partner organisations such as the [Money Advice Service](#). If you own, or are aware of, online materials that you think will enhance the Universal Credit partner toolkit please [email](#) us with the information.

Please tell us how you are using the toolkit and how it could be further improved by emailing [UC Partner Toolkit](#).

We will continue to add new products to the [Universal Credit partner toolkit](#) over the coming months, as well as improving the existing ones, and will let you know about any changes we make.

Independent Review of benefit sanctions

An independent review has been launched of the benefit sanctions that are imposed when claimants fail to take part in mandatory back-to-work schemes.

The review is being led by Matthew Oakley at the request of Iain Duncan Smith, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Matthew is a member of the Social Security Advisory Committee and a former head of Economics and Social Policy at the Policy Exchange.

It will look at Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) sanctions for mandatory schemes, such as the Work Programme, but specifically sanctions validated by the Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013.

To inform the review, Matthew is currently collecting evidence on the whole sanctions process including sanction decisions and appeals and hardship applications from groups that represent claimants.

Matthew would like to know if:

- The information that is given to claimants about sanctions and the consequences if they fail to attend mandatory work schemes is clear and easy to understand;
- The sanctions process works smoothly and if claimants are being kept informed in an understandable fashion;
- People understand why they were given sanctions and what they could

do next if they are unhappy with the decision or are in need of financial support.

A call for information was issued on 11 November 2013 and will run until 10 January 2014. Matthew would like to hear from people who have been affected by the sanctions including:

- Claimants who have been on mandatory employment programmes and had sanctions imposed;
- Partner organisations who represent claimants who have been affected by the process;
- Jobcentre Plus advisers, managers and decision makers;
- Organisations and individuals delivering mandatory back-to-work schemes on behalf of the Government.

Please email your comments to [Sanctions Review](#) or post them to Independent Review of Sanctions Review Team, 1st Floor, Caxton House, 6-12 Tothill Street, London, SW1H 9NA.



More information about the independent review of JSA sanctions as well as a flyer for claimants can be found at [GOV.UK](#).

Other news in brief..

Online Habitual Residence Test launched

An electronic Habitual Residence Test (e-HRT) has been launched by DWP.

The online version includes an enhanced question to help DWP to consistently gather information from migrants about their circumstances.

The process for conducting the Habitual Residence Test will remain the same and customers will still need to provide evidence to support their benefit claim as they do now. The new tool will make the capture and sharing of this information within DWP more efficient and will contribute to more accurate decision making.

Updated welfare reform communications toolkit

The welfare reform communications toolkit has been updated and is available on [GOV.UK](#). The toolkit helps explain why and how DWP is changing the welfare system. If you have any questions about the toolkit, please contact the [Strategic Engagement and Partnership team](#).

Social Justice toolkit launched

DWP and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI) have launched a Social Justice Toolkit.

The toolkit makes it easier for people to make quality, evidence-based decisions. It allows users to find up-to-date figures on the social justice indicators for any local authority. The indicators are designed to measure progress across a range of areas including supporting families, keeping young people on track and the importance of work.

Users can also compare the figures to the results from other local authorities and to regional and national averages.

The toolkit was developed through consultation with local authorities and partners and brings together over 30 indicators identified in the [Social Justice Outcomes Framework](#).

The [Social Justice toolkit](#) will be updated on a regular basis to make sure that it is using the latest data possible.

