



Touchbase

February 2014

Welcome to February's Touchbase



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We open this month with news that the number of people in work has now reached 30.15 million. This figure and others from the quarterly ONS statistics are discussed in the first article.

In November's Touchbase we reported on the digital offer for jobseekers and other claimants, and the news that eight in ten claims for Jobseekers Allowance are made online. This month, we build on this with an article describing how benefit advice is now available simply by pressing the red button on your TV remote. There is also an update on the improvements made recently to Carer's Allowance Online, which was launched in October 2013.

Moving from the small screen to the silver screen, we highlight a unique partnership between Jobcentre Plus

and a film production company that has given some young people a chance to work on a short film. This report also includes a look at the variety of opportunities available to jobseekers through schemes like sector-based work academies and the Work Programme.

Other topics this month include the extra services that DWP is providing for terminally ill people who apply for Personal Independence Payment, the enhanced support for young people leaving care and the launch of a Single Fraud investigation Service to tackle all types of benefit fraud.

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All-time high of 30.15m people in work

The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics show that the number of people in work rose by 280,000 in this quarter – the largest quarterly increase since records began. This brings the total number of people in work to 30.15 million.



Unemployment fell by 167,000 over the last three months – the largest quarterly fall since August to October 1997. The unemployment rate now stands at 7.1%. The

number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) in December fell by 24,000 to 1.25 million.

The number of young people in work has also increased by 77,000 in the last three months. Youth unemployment fell 39,000 in the same period and the number of young people claiming JSA fell for the 19th month running.

Employment Minister Esther McVey said:

“Creating jobs and getting people into employment are central to our economic plan to build a stronger, more competitive economy, so it is very encouraging news

that we've seen a record-breaking rise in employment over the last three months – the largest ever.”

The figures also show that:

- The number of people out of work for more than a year fell by 61,000 in the last three months;
- The number of people claiming JSA fell for the 14th month in a row;
- There were nearly 570,000 job vacancies between October and December 2013, an increase of 75,000 from a year earlier;
- Full-time employment went up by 220,000 in the quarter and part-time employment by 59,000. The number of part-time workers who could not find full-time employment fell by 12,000 this month.



Full details of the figures are available from the [Office for National Statistics](#).

Universal Credit on the red button

Millions of people who do not have internet access in their homes can now get information about Universal Credit and finding work through the red button on their TV remote control.

The new Universal Credit information channels have already had more than 30,000 hits since they were launched at the end of October, according to digital content provider, Looking Local.

The new services, being offered by DWP in partnership with Looking Local, have been designed to give the seven million adults, who do not have internet access at home, important information about the new benefit.

The aim is to give the public as much choice as possible over how they receive information from DWP.

Minister for Welfare Reform Lord Freud said:

“As we continue with the rollout of Universal Credit, increasing numbers of people will need to know how it affects them and how to prepare.

“Working with Looking Local, we have ensured as many tools as possible exist for people to find out everything they need to know about the easier to understand and more flexible benefit that is Universal Credit.

“We are also making sure Universal Credit is an opportunity for people to build online skills, so they can look for work and benefit from what the online world offers for 21st century life.”

Sky and Virgin customers who have interactive TV can simply scroll through the menu to the relevant page to view and check a raft of information, including their eligibility for Universal Credit and how they can make a claim.

In a ground-breaking development, Looking Local has also designed the only public sector service interface for a games console. It means that Wii users can now use it to view similar information.

People who use their smartphone to connect to the web can access the information via the new app, My Council, as well as on Facebook even if they do not have an internet connection in their home.

As well as information on Universal Credit, people can also access Universal Job Match and The Money Advice Service through Looking Local.

The Introduction of Universal Credit will also see 6,000 new computers in Jobcentres across the country for claimants to look and apply for jobs online.



To find out more about Looking Local, visit [lookinglocal.gov.uk](#). General information about Universal Credit is available in the [Partner Toolkit](#).

Young people gain film production experience through Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus and production company Signature Pictures have given a group of young people a chance to gain work experience in the film industry.

Thirteen work experience candidates were chosen through interviews to work on the production of Signature Pictures' short film 'Belle'. The film's London premiere in January was attended by the Minister for Employment, Esther McVey.

Jobcentre Plus now hopes that other producers and directors will sign up and work with some of the talented young people looking for experience on a film set.

One of the participants, Guy Larsen, has since found work. He said:

"I am no longer on Jobseekers Allowance; I have been offered a contract at Google, making films for one of their largest YouTube channels and I want to make more films in the future," he said.

The Minister for Employment Esther McVey said:

"This project demonstrates the breadth of exciting opportunities work experience can bring. I am delighted that we can open doors for young people in a tough industry; where it's important to start at the bottom and work your way up."

A growing number of people are receiving support to help them into work through the Youth Contract. DWP has now launched some videos on YouTube showing how sector-based work academies, work experience and wage incentives are providing more opportunities for young people, whilst helping companies to fill their vacancies more effectively.

The videos provide:

- More information for employers and young people on combining sector-based training and work experience, with a guarantee of a job interview;
- An explanation of how the wage incentive can give employers financial help towards employing a young person, aged 18 to 24 year old;
- More information for both employers and young people on how businesses can provide a positive experience of the working world.



Employers can also find out more about employing jobseekers by reading the Government's sector-based academy guide for employers or visiting Jobcentre Plus help for recruiters or Youth Contract.

Simon Weston backs Disability Confident campaign

DWP's first regional Disability Confident event of 2014 was attended by 200 businessmen and women, public sector organisations, politicians and community leaders.

The event, at the Steam Museum in Swindon, was opened by the Minister for Disabled People Mike Penning with support from regional organisations SEQOL and Pluss. Falklands War veteran Simon Weston OBE was the guest of honour.

The event was part of the Disability Confident campaign and was designed to increase confidence among local employers to recruit and retain more of the 200,000 or so disabled people of working age in the Wiltshire region who are currently not in work.

As reported in the August Touchbase, the campaign was launched by the Prime Minister last July at the Disability Employment conference and is backed by major businesses like Easyjet, Barclays, Asda and Honda.

Minister of State for Disabled People Mike Penning said:

"Although the employment rates for disabled people have increased gradually over the years, we know that all too often the talents of disabled people in the workforce are left untapped. One in five of us have a disability and doing more to employ disabled people and provide services for them could help businesses tap into the £80bn purple pound."



Falklands War veteran and businessman Simon Weston said:

"What I want employers to take away from this conference is that disabled people can be some of your best employees. We're some of the most determined workers, who go the extra mile to secure results. To overlook the skills and talents of people because they have a physical or mental disability could ultimately cost you money."

This was the second of seven regional events which will be taking place throughout the country over the coming months. The employers that attended the Swindon event included Nationwide, Royal Mail, Airbus, British Airways, Wiltshire Police and local authorities.



To find out more or to be involved in the campaign please email [Disability Confident](mailto:DisabilityConfident@wiltshire.gov.uk).

Extra support for terminally ill people who claim PIP

DWP is improving the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claims process for people who are terminally ill with a new, separate, fast-track claims process for these claimants.

A number of steps have already been taken to make the process better and to clear any cases that may have been held up including:

- Providing a single postal address for the DS1500 forms for PIP claims;
- Reviewing outstanding cases in order to identify why some have been held up and resolving them on a case by case basis;
- Providing assessment providers with extra guidance in order to reduce the number of calls made to health professionals to query prognosis or the date when the claimant became terminally ill;
- Giving assessment providers new guidance so they can carry out clinical assessments, based on the balance of probabilities, in instances where they have been unable to verify whether the claimant is terminally ill.

In addition, later this month we are planning to introduce a dedicated telephone claim service for terminally ill people wanting to claim PIP.

Claimants will still call the usual PIP claims number - 0800 917 2222 - but if they select option one, to make a new claim, and then option three from the recorded message, their call will be routed to a dedicated team so they can complete the claim process.

We would like to encourage claimants and their representatives to send a DS1500 form in support of their PIP claim as soon as possible, as this will help us to process the claim rapidly.

However, we have made enhancements to the questions that the dedicated team will ask if a claimant or their representative is unable to send in a DS1500 form. This will help us to gather extra information so that we can progress the claim.



Further information about PIP and the Special Rules for terminally ill people can be found in the [PIP Toolkit](#).

“Later this month we are planning to introduce a dedicated telephone claim service for terminally ill people wanting to claim PIP.”

Tracking Outcomes for Care Leavers

A cross-government strategy to support young care leavers as they take their first steps into adult life has got off to a very good start.

One of the measures outlined in the strategy, and reported in [November's Touchbase](#), was the setting up of a care leaver 'marker'. The marker is to ensure that employment support for care leavers is better tracked and improved.

DWP wrote to 205 Directors of Children's Services across England, Scotland and Wales requesting that they ask their care leaving teams to encourage young people to notify Jobcentre Plus when they leave care. This will ensure that these young people get the help and support they need to find a job, build a career and fulfil their potential.

In just six weeks, more than 60 leaving care teams have asked for their Jobcentre Plus external partnership manager's details and many are already considering how they can support the implementation of the advance claims process for care leavers. Over 600 care leavers have now been recorded on the Jobcentre Plus system.

When someone leaves care, Jobcentre Plus staff can be notified either by leaving care teams or by the young person. This can be verbal or in writing. Ideally, this should be done before or when care leavers have their first face-to-face meeting with their Jobcentre Plus advisers so that they can be identified as potentially needing extra support to look for work.

The strategy reflects the Government's recognition that young care leavers do not have the same support networks as other young people which can lead to them missing out on help to get into work.

“In just six weeks, more than 60 leaving care teams have asked for their Jobcentre Plus external partnership manager's details and many are already considering how they can support the implementation of the advanced claims process for care leavers.”



More information is available from fpd.correspondence@dwpgsi.gov.uk or the [Cross-government care Leaver strategy](#).

Update on the Removal of Spare Room Subsidy

DWP has improved its toolkit for housing advisers to help ensure that claimants affected by the Housing Benefit changes in April 2013 understand what it means for them.

The changes to the toolkit have been made to support the introduction of additional funding for Discretionary Housing Payments in both 2014/15 and 2015/16, as announced in the Autumn Statement and highlighted in [December's Touchbase](#), and in response to feedback from claimants.

Advisers and other intermediaries play a key role in supporting claimants through the Housing Benefit changes.

You can help by:

Signposting claimants from your websites or other communications to the improved Housing Benefit content at [GOV.UK](#) or directly to the relevant [factsheets](#);

Customising the core material from the [factsheets](#) for your own communications. For example, you can add local contact details, local housing contacts or other advice that is appropriate for your area;

Using the editorial content in the toolkit, including the suggested advertising material, in whatever way you might find useful;

Linking from the content in your social media channels to the [factsheets](#) or the information at [GOV.UK](#) or to any Housing Benefit content that you have tailored for your own site.

You can find all these materials in the [support information toolkit](#).



If you have any questions or require any further information please contact [Housing Benefit Enquiries](#).

Single Fraud Investigation Service announced

The Government has announced the launch of a single fraud investigation service (SFIS), to tackle all welfare benefit fraud.

The announcement confirms that SFIS will form a single organisation within DWP covering all welfare benefit fraud. It is part of the Government's action to cut fraud, error and debt in the tax and benefits systems.

The Government is investing an extra £140 million to deliver savings of over £2.3 billion by cutting the amount of money that is lost through fraud, error and debt. The SFIS will make it easier to identify and tackle these issues.

A joint working group will be set up to look at the current ways of working, data sharing as well as new legislation to make it easier to work jointly and to support fraud investigations for non-welfare benefits. An SFIS project steering committee, made up of key partners, including cross-government and local authority representatives, will also be set up to oversee the delivery of the new service.

In addition, DWP's current fraud, error and compliance services will be brought together into a new Fraud and Error Service and the SFIS will become part of this.

The SFIS will be phased in between October 2014 and March 2016.

There will be extensive communications and engagement with our key stakeholders and partners over the coming months and regular updates will be posted on the [Knowledge Hub](#), together with some frequently asked questions.

You will need to register to access the [Knowledge Hub](#) if you are not already a member. Once registered, search under "Groups" and request to join the SFIS Communications Hub Group.



If you have specific questions, please do not post them on the [Knowledge Hub](#). Instead, you should send them directly to [Single Fraud Investigation queries](#).

Other news in brief...

Support for Very Long Term Unemployed trailblazer

Results from a trailblazer project for the very long term unemployed show that those who received a work placement of community benefit or intensive support from Jobcentre Plus were more likely to find work.

Over a twenty-one month period, participants on those schemes spent less time on benefit and more time in work compared to other jobseekers.

The success of the trailblazer means that these policies will be rolled out nationally from April as part of the Help to Work scheme that was announced in October and reported in [Touchbase](#).

Under Help to Work there will be a Mandatory Intervention Regime, which will be run by Jobcentre Plus, and a six-month Community Work Placement which claimants will have to do for 30 hours a week.

The full report is available at [GOV.UK](#)

Social Justice case studies and vox pops

Following on from the success of the Social Justice Conference 2013, DWP has published seven video case studies that were produced for the event as well as a vox pops of delegates that was filmed on the day.

The case studies highlight some of the work DWP is doing to help vulnerable and disadvantaged people in society while the vox pops give an insight into what some of the delegates thought of the conference.

We hope you enjoy them and please feel free to leave any comments and share the videos with colleagues, partner organisations and your stakeholders.

You can view both the case studies and the vox pops on [YouTube](#).

Macmillan Cancer Support

Macmillan Cancer Support produces a range of information resources to help anyone affected by cancer manage work-related issues. This includes information for carers and employers, as well as for people living with cancer.

All of these resources are available as printed booklets and on the [Macmillan website](#). You can also order copies of this material at [Be.macmillan](#).

The booklets include:

- Work and cancer: a guide for people living with cancer;
- Work it out: essential questions to ask about work and cancer;
- Self-employment and cancer;

There are also guides for carers. More than 100,000 people of working age are diagnosed with cancer each year.

Small disability groups given access to a wealth of useful data

Small disability groups could boost their chances of getting funding and improve their services thanks to new government help to tap into a goldmine of data.

The Office for Disability Issues, part of DWP, has produced '[Making Disability Data work for you: A Community Data Toolkit](#)' which provides disability groups, and other grassroots organisations, with information to help them find, analyse and interpret data which is already in the public domain.

It will help groups to make sense of what can often be complicated statistical information in order to build a business case to pitch for work, or to help improve the services they provide for their clients.

The data has been divided into eight main themes:

- Disability;
- Education;
- Employment;
- Income;
- Health and wellbeing;
- Transport;
- Housing;
- Other disability data.

The [Community Data Toolkit](#) is accessible and has been brought to life with a series of case studies and scenarios. It was created with the help of grassroots organisations, including Merton Centre for Independent Living and Cambridge Alliance for Independent Living.

A second part of the toolkit is currently being prepared which aims to help organisations collect their own data when the information they need is not readily available from existing sources. This document will be available later in the year.

Improvements to Carer's Allowance Online

New features have been added to Carer's Allowance Online since it was launched in October last year.

A new option has been added so carers can now notify the Carer's Allowance Unit of changes in their circumstances. Enhancements to the Service such as making the helpdesk number and feedback option more prominent have also been introduced as a response to customer feedback.

The Service is flexible and is available 24/7 and can be accessed through smartphones and tablets. More people are using the service at weekends and during the weekend of 28/29 December 2013, over 500 customers visited the site.

Early feedback from customers and staff has been positive with over 40% of carers now making their claim online. Details about eligibility for Carer's Allowance and how to apply are available at [GOV.UK](#).