

Touchbase

February 2015

Welcome to February's Touchbase



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Touchbase Editor

There are a lot of changes on the way for claimants and there will be regular updates about them in Touchbase and other DWP newsletters.

This issue covers some of changes to how DWP works with and supports claimants. One of these is how DWP is changing the way it communicates with claimants in response to Matthew Oakley's independent review of benefit sanctions. The first article is on the progress that has been made so far.

There are also reports on the scheme DWP is piloting to make sure that young jobseekers have the Maths and English skills they need to find work and on new measures to prevent migrants from the European Economic Area from coming to the UK just to claim benefits.

Other articles include an update on waiting times and the further expansion of natural reassessments for Personal Independence Payment.

And finally, it would be great if you could support DWP's #notjustforboys campaign for International Women's Day on 8 March. Leading up to the day, DWP will be encouraging businesses and individuals to tweet about what they are doing to support women into careers such as ICT, Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Manufacturing and construction.

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

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The Oakley Review

DWP has announced the improvements it has made to support the most vulnerable claimants in response to the Oakley Review.



Matthew Oakley

In his independent review of sanctions, published in July 2014, Matthew Oakley acknowledged the important role sanctions play in the benefits system for claimants who do not do enough to look for work, miss appointments or turn down job offers.

But his review made a number of recommendations to help the most vulnerable claimants. This included making it easier for claimants to understand when and why a sanction is being applied.

DWP accepted all the recommendations and has made some improvements since the review. These include:

- Regularly speaking to claimants and stakeholders to understand their experiences of sanctions;
- Engaging with claimants from day one, through the claimant interview and the Claimant Commitment, which informs them about sanctions;

- Making sanctions information more accessible. DWP has worked with claimants and stakeholders to develop a clear English guide to JSA sanctions which is available at GOV.UK;
- Options are being tested to provide easily accessible, preventative messages for claimants, for example using online videos;
- Developing an 'Easy Read' communications guide to sanctions and the Claimant Commitment in partnership with Mencap;
- Exploring how to encourage more people to open important letters;
- Looking at the possibility of using other communications channels such as email;
- Improving the content and design of communications to claimants to make them more engaging and motivating. A number of Universal Credit letters have already been re-designed and JSA letters are now being reviewed.

For more information see [Clear English guide to Jobseekers Allowance. Oakley Review and Government update on response to Oakley Review – December 2014.](#)

Work skills pilots for 18 to 21 year-olds

Up to 15,000 Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimants in four Jobcentre districts, who are aged 18 to 21 and do not have level 2 Maths or English qualifications, will now have to take part in training to improve their skills.

This is one of two pilots to test how JSA claimants who are aged 18 to 21 could increase their chances of finding work by improving their skills and work experience. The requirement for young JSA claimants to improve their Maths and English skills, which began in Kent, Mercia, Devon and Cornwall and Somerset on 25 November, will be extended to the Black Country from March 2015.

The training is being delivered in partnership with further education providers. It will be for 16 hours per week, mainly online and will last for up to six months. Face-to-face support from tutors will be provided for some young people. Those taking part in the scheme will continue to receive their JSA and will be expected to continue looking for jobs.

The pilot will be evaluated in a number of ways to find out whether this policy should be rolled out nationally.

The second pilot, which also began on 25 November, is being run in Kent only. All 18 to 21 year-olds who are still on JSA after six months will need to participate in a work related activity that is most appropriate to them. This could be either skills based or a more work focused activity. For example, traineeships, sector-based work academies or work experience. It will also include both voluntary and mandatory activities.

Pilot 2 will be subject to a separate, qualitative evaluation, although there are links between the two studies which will be addressed in the evaluation for Pilot 1. The pilots were announced in the Government's 2013 Autumn Statement.

The pilot will be evaluated in a number of ways to find out whether this policy should be rolled out nationally.

For more information email youngpeople.pilot@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Government help to get small businesses online

The Government has launched a new campaign for businesses called 'Do More Online'.



Research shows that consumers are using the internet more than ever before to find small local businesses. 57 per cent of those questioned, agree that if they cannot find a business online they are reluctant to deal with it at all.

Seventy five per cent of customers say that it is important for small companies to have a website, 27 per cent say firms need to be on Facebook, 20 per cent say Twitter, while 77 per cent would expect to be able to email a company.

The campaign aims to show small businesses and sole traders that doing more online will save them time and money and can be done cheaply, quickly and without IT expertise. It is part of the Business is GREAT initiative, which is being led by

the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, working with Go ON UK, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Growth hubs.

Small business owners and sole traders can access tools, guidance and advice on how to do more with their business online by visiting [Business is GREAT](#) or by calling the Business Support Helpline on 0300 456 3565.

To find out more about the campaign and how you can get involved, e-mail [Do More Online](#) or visit [Business is GREAT / Do More Online](#).

New time limit for all JSA claims from EEA nationals

From 9 February 2015 DWP will begin writing to European Economic Area (EEA) nationals whose existing claim for income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) was made before 1 January 2014.

They will be told that their income-based JSA claim and their right to reside in the UK will be reviewed in three months' time.

This will apply to EEA nationals who have a right to reside status as a 'jobseeker' or 'retained worker'.

Since January 2014, all European Economic Area (EEA) nationals making a claim to income-based JSA have had time-limited access to the benefit.

The new measure means that all EEA nationals who get income-based JSA are treated in the same way, regardless of when they made their claim to benefit.

Starting on 9 February 2015, claimants who are subject to the new measure will get a letter explaining the change and how it will affect them. They will also be provided with information about alternative rights of residence.

One month before their income-based JSA claim is due to stop, the claimant will receive a second letter reminding them about the change and inviting them to attend an assessment interview.

Due to the numbers involved, the letters will be issued as part of a rolling programme over a number of weeks.

One month before their income-based JSA claim is due to stop, the claimant will receive a second letter reminding them about the change and inviting them to attend an assessment interview.

At the interview, they will be given the chance to show that they have a genuine prospect of work or, where appropriate, an alternative right to reside in the UK. Those who have an alternative qualifying right to reside will continue to receive income-based JSA.

If the claimant can provide compelling evidence that they have a genuine prospect of work, a short extension to income-based JSA might be considered. If not, their income-based JSA claim will stop.

DWP staff will seek to support any vulnerable people who might be affected by the change and will draw on specialised help where needed.

For further information visit [GOV.UK](#).

Average waiting for PIP assessment halved

New figures have just been released which show that the average waiting time for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) has more than halved since the summer.

This improvement is due to a range of factors including:

- PIP assessment providers have almost quadrupled the number of health professionals they employ since the start of 2014;
- Providers have more than quadrupled the number of assessments they are completing as they continue to consistently clear more assessments than referrals;
- Providers have more than doubled the number of assessments they cleared in the second half of 2014;
- DWP Operations has doubled the number of people working on PIP;
- DWP's decision makers have increased their productivity and have doubled the number of cases they now clear each day compared to April.

Claimants now have an average wait of 14 weeks for an assessment from the time they return their 'How your disability affects you form' to DWP. DWP will now rollout PIP to working age Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants in an extra 18 postcode areas where the assessment provider has the capacity to handle the increased volume of claims.

From 23 February PIP will be rolled out to working age DLA claimants in the following postcode areas:

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Aberdeen (AB) | Halifax (HX) |
| Blackburn (BB) | Kilmarnock (KA) |
| Bradford (BD) | Kirkcaldy (KY) |
| Dundee (DD) | Leeds (LS) |
| Doncaster (D) | Perth (PH) |
| Exeter (EX) | Plymouth (PL) |
| Portsmouth (PO) | |
| Preston (PR) | |
| Sheffield (S) | |
| Southampton (SO) | |
| Cleveland (TS) | |
| Wakefield (WF) | |

The latest rollout applies to DLA claimants where:

- Their fixed term award is coming to an end;
- Someone is approaching 16;
- DWP receives information about a change in someone's care or mobility needs;
- Someone chooses to claim PIP instead of DLA.

The majority of existing DLA claimants who have a lifetime or indefinite award will not be affected until October 2015 at the earliest, unless DWP receives information about a change in their condition that would affect their rate of payment or if they reach the age of 16.

 **Further information about PIP is available at GOV.UK.**

Employers make pledges to disabled jobseekers

A number of prestigious companies came together at an event to share good practice and to encourage other employers to become Disability Confident.

The event, 'Making it your Business', held in the Houses of Parliament on 28 January, was one of a series being held to help break down the barriers that can prevent disabled people getting and staying in work.

Mark Harper, Minister for Disabled People, hosted the event which was attended by organisations, including Barclays Bank, Fujitsu and Sainsbury's. They shared what they are doing to become Disability Confident, encouraging other employers to make a pledge to 'do one thing' this year to promote disability employment.

Some of the pledges to create employment opportunities for disabled people included:

- Supporting employees' mental health by piloting an emotional resilience programme – David Blackwell, Head of Wellbeing and Inclusion at Fujitsu;
- Making their national apprenticeships scheme truly Disability Confident – Simon Hailes, Director of External Communications at Barclays.

Minister for Disabled People Mark Harper said: "There are now a quarter of a million more disabled people in work in Britain this



Minister for Disabled People with Dave Blackwell and Clark Vasey from Fujitsu

year compared to last and the disability employment rate has increased by 2.5% - the largest year-on-year increase in a decade.

"Events such as these allow us to engage with businesses right across the country to share positive messages and encourage greater numbers of employers to become Disability Confident."

The next Disability Confident event will be a roundtable discussion in conjunction with the Chartered Institute of Public Relations on 12 February.

 **For more information visit [Disability Confident campaign](http://DisabilityConfident.org.uk).**

Other news in brief...

Business minded jobseekers encouraged to join the conversation

DWP and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) have announced the first "Starting in Business" webinar of 2015.

The webinar will take place at 1pm on 24 February and is aimed at jobseekers who are thinking about setting up their own business.

The interactive webinars will provide would-be entrepreneurs with advice on:

- The New Enterprise Allowance;
- The support and financial assistance available;
- How to register as self-employed with HMRC;
- The importance of keeping records;
- Benefits and self-employment;
- Where to get further help and guidance.

Participants in Scotland, England and Wales will be able to ask questions during the webinars.

Anyone with an interest in unemployment and self-employment can register now to attend the webinar at <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/1740686699776456193>

Ombudsman calls for feedback to develop service charter

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's office is asking for feedback from the organisations it investigates to help it to develop a service charter.

The new service charter will give people a clear understanding about what they can expect from the Ombudsman Service and what is involved in an investigation.

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman investigates around 4,000 complaints a year from individuals about UK government departments and other public organisations, including DWP. Its adjudications are independent and provide a final chance for people's complaints to be looked at.

A website has been set up to capture views and opinions through an online survey. The site will also provide regular updates with all the developments surrounding the service charter.

Visit: www.ombudsmanservicecharter.org.uk to get involved.

The consultation on the draft service charter will be in the spring and it will be finalised in the autumn.

State Pension Online information on YouTube

DWP has launched a YouTube [video](#) on how to claim State Pension Online following feedback from customers.

The video (link) takes viewers through the claims process from receiving the letter inviting them to make a claim through to submitting it online.

It tells people what information they will need before they start their claim and what will happen at each stage of the process.

The digital team would like people's feedback on the video. Comments should be sent to digitalservicesdivision.communicationsgateway@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

More support for troubled families

An extra £10 million is being invested by the Government in order to support some of the hardest to help families in England back to work.

This joint initiative by DWP and the Department for Communities and Local Government will increase the number of welfare to work specialists who are seconded from Jobcentres to work with the local authority teams to support troubled families – from 150 to over 300.

The [Troubled Families programme](#) has already helped over 8,000 people from troubled families to hold down a job for three months or more, six times more than in the previous year.

The extra money will be used to help a further 400,000 families and to tackle a wider range of problems such as mental health, debt and domestic violence.

More information is available at [GOV.UK](#).