

Touchbase

March 2015

Welcome to the March edition

Despite this being the second decade of the 21st century, women are still underrepresented in some industry sectors like engineering and construction. With more than 12 million job openings forecast over the next 10 years, it is crucial that women feel confident to make the most of the opportunities available. The **'Not Just For Boys'** campaign aims to challenge perceptions and inspire women. Find out more in our lead article.

We also bring you information about changes to ESA and JSA benefits; news of the Government's response to Paul Gray's review of PIP; Dr. Litchfield's review of the Work Capability Assessment and a call for mentors to advise people who are setting up their own business.

On 30 March, Parliament will be dissolved until a new government is formed after the General Election on 7 May. During this time there will be no new announcements and we are not currently planning to publish the next Touchbase until after the election.

We are undertaking a review of our communication channels. If you have not already received the DWP communications channel survey by email and would like to take part, please let us know using our email address: corporate.stakeholders@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

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

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It's 'Not Just For Boys'

More than ninety companies are supporting a DWP campaign that is challenging ideas that there are some careers that are not for women.



Women like Lady Geek founder Belinda Parmer, Olympian Perri Shakes-Drayton and Jenny Tinmouth, who is competing in the 2015 British Superbike Championship.

In fact, in the first couple of weeks of the campaign more than 6,000 tweets were posted.

Broadcast and national media have featured the campaign helping to reach more young women and more businesses like Scottish oil who rang the DWP press office asking how they could take part.

You can still get involved. Here is what you can do:

- Nominate someone inspirational on social media using the hashtags #InspiredBy and #notjustforboys
- Have a look at Pinterest to see what others are doing and then join in using the #notjustforboys and #Inspiredby hashtags to show what you are doing to challenge ideas or simply to show your support.

Ahead of International Women's day which took place on 8 March, DWP employment minister Esther McVey launched a campaign called 'Not Just For Boys'. The aim was simple, to inspire women to think about their career options and to challenge the idea that there are some areas such as engineering and construction that are for 'men only'.

Over the next decade, it is estimated that there will be 12 million job opportunities in the UK. Many of these are likely to be in occupations where women are currently underrepresented, such as engineering, IT and science. In the engineering profession for example, currently only 7% of the workforce are female. Although this is an improvement, there is still more to be done.

Since it was launched last month, the campaign has attracted support from a wide range of businesses including: BT, Google, Sodexo UK & Ireland, and Carillion PLC. But perhaps more importantly, women who are leading the way have taken to Twitter in a big way using the hashtag #notjustforboys.



Government responds to the independent review of PIP

Improving communications with claimants of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is just one of the recommendations from an independent review of the benefit that has been accepted by DWP.

Paul Gray was appointed to carry out the first of two independent reviews of PIP required by the 2012 Welfare Reform Act. Findings from the review were published in December 2014 and included 14 recommendations covering:

- Improving the claimant experience, particularly through clearer communications;
- Clarifying and improving the collection of further evidence to support assessments;
- Improving the overall effectiveness of the PIP assessment in delivering the policy intent.

DWP will respond in two stages. The initial response focuses on the review's short-term recommendations, action that DWP is taking to address them and the wider work that is being done to support PIP claimants through the process.

Significant improvements have already been made to claimants' experience of the PIP process, the delivery of the benefit and the length of time it takes to process individual claims.

The department has worked closely with the independent assessment providers, ATOS

and Capita, to quadruple both the number of health professionals and decisions that were made each month during 2014.

DWP continues to work alongside disabled people and their representative organisations, particularly the PIP Implementation Stakeholder Forum Improvement Working Group, to consider its response to Paul Gray's recommendations.

DWP intends to provide a full response to address the medium and long-term recommendations in due course. These require further consideration due to their broad scope and wider implications. This includes the recommendation by the Smith Commission to devolve disability benefits in Scotland.

The Government's response to the PIP independent review is available at GOV.UK

Update on work support for people with a health condition

During March and April, there will be a number of changes and pilots affecting people with a health condition or disability who are claiming benefits.

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) reforms

From 23 March, DWP will deliver three pilots to build understanding about what support works best at different points of the claimant journey. The pilot findings will also inform the development of Universal Credit policy for claimants with health conditions.

- **Trialling a Claimant Commitment for ESA claimants** will take place in the East Anglia district. Work Coaches will offer on-going support and agree an ESA Claimant Commitment with the claimant, focusing on individual work related requirements. Where appropriate, this will include work preparation activities that will help the individual return to, or move into work.
- **More Intensive Support** increases the frequency and intensity of tailored support that Work Coaches provide to claimants in the six months after

completing the Work Programme. More Intensive Support will be delivered in three districts - East and South East Scotland, Kent and West Yorkshire.

- **Voluntary Early Intervention** offers employment-related support to new ESA claimants waiting for a Work Capability Assessment. The support will take account of the claimant's specific needs to help keep them closer to returning or moving into employment. This pilot will be delivered in four districts - Glasgow, Lanarkshire and East Dunbartonshire; Black Country; Birmingham and Solihull; and South East Wales. The pilot will be evaluated in a number of ways to find out whether this policy should be rolled out nationally.

Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) extended periods of sickness

From 30 March, new legislation will be introduced nationally affecting JSA claimants with health conditions.

This will apply to those whose condition is expected to last less than thirteen weeks and those who have had two previous periods of sickness.

Changes will mean that individuals can volunteer to remain on JSA for any further period of sickness, rather claiming ESA.

Work search activities during this period will be agreed between the claimant and the Work Coach based on the claimant's circumstances.

Repeat claims to Employment and Support Allowance changes



New rules affecting repeat claims for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) will be brought in from 30 March.

The changes mean that claimants who have been found to be capable of doing some work following a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) will not be paid the ESA assessment rate for a repeat claim, unless they have developed a new condition or an existing condition has significantly worsened.

People can currently make another claim for ESA after only six months even where there has been no change in their health condition, and be paid ESA again. The changes will remove the reference to 'six months' and remove entitlement to an ESA payment pending an appeal decision if the claimant has received two consecutive decisions that they 'do not have limited capability for work'.

Where someone makes a repeat claim without a change in their condition, Decision Makers will be able to reconsider the evidence from the previous WCA when deciding whether to disallow the claim or to refer them for another WCA.

If following a mandatory reconsideration the DWP Decision Maker upholds the original decision, there is a right of appeal.

People who have had their ESA claim turned down should claim Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit as appropriate. This is to make sure that they get the right advice and support from Jobcentre Plus advisers or Work Coaches.

This change does not prevent someone from making another claim for ESA. It also does not prevent someone whose condition has significantly worsened or who has developed a new condition, from being entitled to ESA during the assessment phase.

Update on work support for people with a health condition

ESA to JSA transition

Mandatory reconsideration went live for Personal Independence Payment and Universal Credit in April 2013. For all other DWP benefits it went live in October 2013.

If people receive a decision with which they disagree, they must request that DWP conducts a 'mandatory reconsideration' (a review of the decision) before claimants can lodge an appeal.

When mandatory reconsiderations were introduced the objectives were to:

- Enable disputes to be resolved as early as possible;
- Give people further opportunity to provide any additional evidence;
- Ensure that there was access to justice.

DWP aims to get the decision right first time, but where there is a dispute it is important that the situation is resolved quickly.

There have been concerns that the new process was taking too long and causing some claimants hardship. However, a data study published on GOV.UK shows that the average time to clear an ESA mandatory reconsideration is 13 days. Mandatory reconsideration enables decisions to be reviewed quickly; avoiding lengthy delays associated with an appeal. Nevertheless following a request by stakeholders the department is looking at the idea of

introducing a mandatory reconsideration clearance time target (starting with ESA) to provide claimants with a clear expectation of how long the process should take.

To address concerns regarding former ESA claimants' experiences of JSA after being found fit for work, comprehensive guidance has been issued to Jobcentre Plus staff to ensure they are fully aware of how JSA conditionality can be modified for claimants with health conditions.

Key facts for advisors

- JSA claimants with health conditions can restrict their availability for work as long as the restrictions are reasonable in light of their condition;
- Where a person imposes acceptable restrictions because of a health condition, they do not have to be available for at least 16 hours per week;
- There are no time limits associated with this, as long as the restrictions continue to be reasonable;
- Where claimants impose acceptable restrictions because of their health condition, they do not have to show that they have reasonable prospects of getting a job. However, they must show that all the restrictions are reasonable and are connected with their condition.

Jobseeker's Allowance – changes for income-based claimants

From 27 April, all claimants in receipt of income-based Jobseeker's Allowance will require an 'Annual Verification' to confirm their details.



Annual Verification will help income-based Jobseeker's Allowance claimants provide DWP with up-to-date information about their circumstances to ensure that they receive the correct amount of benefit.

Claimants who already have an annual check on their housing costs, capital and occupational pension entitlement, will find these are now combined with their Annual Verification check.

The Annual Verification letter will be sent to all claimants automatically, after they have been in receipt of income-based Jobseeker's Allowance for more than 12 months.

The claimant will have 28 days to complete their response, sign a strengthened declaration updating or confirming their circumstances and return the letter to DWP. This will help to ensure that people are aware of their responsibilities, the consequences of failing to fully declare their circumstances and will reiterate that overpayments are recoverable.

If the Annual Verification letter is not returned after 28 days, a reminder letter will be sent to the claimant allowing them a further 14 days to return their letter before the case is considered for suspension.

Under this process, claimants are allowed considerable time to reply before any further action is considered. However, evidence suggests that the vast majority of claimants will return the Annual Verification letter on time.

Could you be a business mentor to a budding entrepreneur?

More than 60,000 new start-up businesses have been created with help from the New Enterprise Allowance scheme (NEA) and mentors played a pivotal role in each one.



Tracie, from [Peisley Originals](#) set up her own fashion business with help from the New Enterprise Allowance and her mentor played a crucial role.

“My mentor’s belief in me and my products, and his willingness to understand that they were fundamentally linked was like a green light to be aspirational.”

Match-making

The NEA programme is managed by a number of local providers across the UK who will match mentors with appropriate start-up businesses.

Advice from a successful experienced business mentor can be invaluable to a start-up business. Sharing your expertise and time could really help to support people to make a success of their business idea.

Find out more about the [New Enterprise Allowance](#) and contacts for your local [NEA providers](#).

Are you an experienced business person? Could you share your knowledge and skills to inspire, guide and motivate others on their journey to self-employment? Then you could become a mentor.

Mentoring can provide a truly rewarding opportunity to help people who are looking to set up a new business.

A mentor provides support during an 8 week period when the business plan is being developed (sometimes extended to 12 weeks in exceptional cases). Face-to-face mentoring is required as part of this voluntary role and you can also provide mentoring support from the comfort of your home using email or Skype.

Government responds to the fifth Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment

DWP has accepted the majority of the recommendations from the fifth Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA).

The final review, which was carried out by Dr. Paul Litchfield, was published in November 2014. Dr. Litchfield looked at the changes that had been made to the WCA in response to the first four reviews. Although he made some recommendations for further improvements, Dr. Litchfield said:

“My counsel would be to let the current WCA have a period of stability – it is by no means perfect but there is no better replacement that can be pulled off the shelf.”

Dr Litchfield made 28 recommendations and 26 have been accepted. These relate to a range of issues including:

- An increase in the number of people being placed in the Support Group, especially younger people;
- The need to ensure that communications are as good as they can be especially for more vulnerable claimants;
- Better support for claimants with learning disabilities.

One of the recommendations from the fourth independent review was that DWP should make it clear that evidence from care

professionals such as community psychiatric nurses, support workers and carers can prove extremely useful when deciding whether someone is entitled to Employment and Support Allowance. This is particularly the case if someone has a mental health condition.

As a result DWP has improved the ESA50 questionnaire, which people complete when they claim ESA. DWP sought the views of disability organisations to help inform these changes. The revised ESA50 questionnaire will be issued from March.

The Government’s response to the fifth independent review is available at [GOV.UK](#). Dr. Litchfield’s independent review is also available at [GOV.UK](#).

News in brief...

DLA claimants age 65 years or over transfer to Pensions Directorate in DWP

From Wednesday 25 February, contact numbers for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants whose date of birth is on or before 8 April 1948 have changed as follows:

For those born on or before 8 April 1948

Telephone: 0345 605 6055
Telephone: 0845 605 6055
Textphone: 0345 604 5312

For those born on or after 9 April 1948

Telephone: 0345 712 3456
Telephone: 0845 712 3456
Textphone: 0345 722 4433

All lines are open from Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm

The introduction of 0345 and 0845 numbers will help claimants to make an informed choice in order to minimise their call costs. The 0345 number will in general reduce the cost when dialled from a mobile phone, whilst the 0845 number will generally reduce the cost of a call from a landline.

[Find out more about call charges](#)

New WCA provider appointed

From March 2015, a new provider began delivering health related assessments including Work Capability Assessments, on behalf DWP.

The new provider is the 'Centre for Health and Disability Assessments' and the service they provide is called is the 'Health Assessment Advisory Service'. Centre for Health and Disability Assessments is operated by MAXIMUS.

The change from Atos Healthcare to Centre for Health and Disability Assessments will not affect people's benefit payments or any appointments they have. Atos Healthcare's contract to deliver assessments, including the Work Capability Assessments ceased at the end of February.

Personal Independence Payment claims will continue to be delivered by Atos Healthcare and Capita.

Fit for Work update

The Fit for Work advice service is designed to support people who have a health condition and are in work, and those who are currently on sick leave, return to work. Free, expert and impartial advice is provided by a team of occupational health professionals.

The Fit for Work advice service went live at the end of 2014 and from 9 March 2015, GP referrals to the advice service commenced in Sheffield and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health board area of Wales. Fit for Work advice will be available nationwide by autumn 2015.

Employers in areas where GPs can already refer their patients for Fit for Work advice may start to receive Return to Work Plans. These provide recommendations and evidence of sickness, replacing the need for a fit note.

All employers nationally will be able to refer their employees to Fit for Work from autumn 2015, once GP referrals have been fully rolled out.

For more information, including where the service is live and rolling out soon in England and Wales, visit www.fitforwork.org

For more information on Fit for Work Scotland, visit www.fitforworkscotland.scot

New online help for jobseekers

DWP has launched a new online resource for jobseekers and is asking local authority partners for help to promote it.

Featuring a range of helpful hints, tips and videos and updated every working day, [The Daily Jobseeker](#) provides a live library of content to help people find work. The site features advice from employers and recruiters and includes information about Universal Credit and the ways it can help people get back to work more quickly.

DWP is asking all local authorities, advisors and partners to include a link to 'The Daily Jobseeker' on their websites and in social media posts to help reach people looking for work.

Digital materials are available to help integrate the site into local authorities' own employment and skills communications. For more information please contact james.marriott@dwp.gsi.gov.uk.

News in brief continued

News from HMRC - Changes to prevent tax credits overpayments

From April, HMRC will introduce a change to help reduce tax credit overpayments, by stopping payments to customers who have already received their full annual entitlement.

This will affect claimants who, following a change in their circumstances, are heading towards an overpayment within the year. People who are most likely to be affected include those whose income has increased, meaning that their tax credit payments would be reduced. Their payments will either be stopped or reduced to help ensure that over the year, they are paid the right amount. This will prevent building up overpayments that claimants will then need to pay back after the end of the year.

Customers with greatest financial need should contact the Tax Credit Office. Contact information is available at <https://www.gov.uk/contact-the-tax-credit-office>

News from BIS - Time's running out for businesses to claim Growth Vouchers

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is encouraging small businesses to apply for a Growth Voucher before time runs out.

Growth Vouchers worth up to £2,000 help companies find and pay for professional advice. The closing date for applications is 31 March, with businesses able to redeem their vouchers for three months from the voucher issue date.

Growth Vouchers are redeemed through a marketplace developed and run by small business network Enterprise Nation. This allows business owners to select the right adviser to address their specific business needs. Advisers are paid directly by the small businesses who can then claim up to £2,000 back from the government.

Strategic business advice is available on the following topics:

- Finance and cash flow;
- Recruiting and developing staff;
- Improving leadership and management skills;
- Marketing, attracting and keeping customers;
- Making the most of digital technology.

If you would like to apply for a Growth Voucher for your business, please visit <http://www.greatbusiness.gov.uk/growthvouchers/> for further information.

ERSA Employability Awards 2015

The 2015 Employability Awards have been launched by Employment Related Services Association (ERSA). There are ten categories designed to showcase the work being done by individuals, charities, and other organisations to help people return to work and rebuild their lives.

ERSA welcomes applications from those working to support jobseekers into employment, whether housing associations, local authorities, Jobcentre Plus offices, charities, social enterprises colleges or private sector providers.

For more information and an award entry form, visit [ERSA](#).

Awards:

- **Innovation Award**, sponsored by APM
- **Youth Employment Award**, sponsored by Ingeus
- **Disability Employment Award**, sponsored by Shaw Trust
- **Large Employer of the Year Award**, sponsored by Avanta
- **Small or Medium Employer of the Year Award**, sponsored by Campbell Page
- **Supply Chain Partner of the Year**, sponsored by Intraining
- **Advisor of the Year Award**, sponsored by Alderwood
- **Employability Learner of the Year Award**, sponsored by Institute of Employability Professionals
- **Significant Achievement Award**, sponsored by Affinity Sutton
- **Lifetime Achievement Award**, sponsored by Serco

