

Housing Benefit Direct issue 156 February 2015



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Editorial

Welcome to the first HB Direct of 2015. Christmas and New Year seem like a long time ago as we all settle back into the ever changing world of Housing Benefit.

This month's edition brings news of significant developments in Universal Credit. By March we will be delivering Universal Credit to families, singles and couples in 96 live sites. Parents, in particular, benefit from greater support for childcare costs and tailored support.

We have recently announced those local authorities who will form tranche 2 of national Universal Credit roll out. The roll out will take place between May and July 2015.

We are also expanding the number of postcode areas where Personal Independence Payment will replace Disability Living Allowance.

The deadline for start-up funding or opt-in to the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme has now passed; we have included some key facts on the story so far.

I hope you find HB Direct useful and informative but, as ever, please let me know if there are any improvements you'd like to see made.

Happy reading.

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[Distribution enquiries](#)

Universal Credit will be available to families in more areas

On 24 November 2014 we started to take claims for Universal Credit from families in six areas in the North West of England, which were; Birkenhead, Bromborough, Hoylake, Upton, Wallasey and Warrington.

On 26 January 2015 we expanded Universal Credit to families in a further 26 jobcentres across Great Britain, in those sites that went live with Universal Credit up to the end of 2014.

This means that Universal Credit will be available to families for the first time in Ashton-Under-Lyne, Wigan, Oldham, Hyde, Stalybridge, Stretford, Altrincham, Southport, Crosby, Bootle, Preston, Leyland, Prestwich, Bury, Eccles, Worsley, Huyton, Kirkby, St Helen's, Newton-le-Willows, Hammersmith, Bath, Rugby, Shotton, Harrogate and Inverness.

From 2 March 2015 we will then expand to taking claims from families to the remaining live sites that went live up until the end of 2014. So that all of these 96 live sites will be taking claims from single, couples and families.

Expanding Universal Credit to families means that parents receive support for childcare costs under Universal Credit, no matter how many hours they work.

Parents will also benefit from more tailored support from a dedicated work coach and will continue to get support to increase their earnings even when they are in work.

Please note that the national expansion of Universal Credit which will begin in February 2015 will only be for new single claims and will not be taking claims from couple or families.

More information about our families' expansion can be found in the press notice, accessible through the following link –

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/welfare-transformation-comes-to-families-in-more-areas>

National expansion of Universal Credit – tranches one and two

From February 2015, Universal Credit will begin expanding to all the remaining jobcentres and local authorities (LAs) across Great Britain in a series of tranche roll outs.

The national expansion will see these new sites offering Universal Credit to new single claimants who would otherwise have been eligible for Jobseeker's Allowance, including those with existing Housing Benefit (HB) and tax credit claims.

We have recently published the latest planning assumptions for the first two tranches of national roll out that will take place between February and April 2015 and May to July 2015 respectively.

The list of sites planned to go live in tranches one and two can be accessed the following link –

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-national-expansion>

Personal Independence Payment roll out update

As previously announced in HB G1/2015, Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is being further rolled out to working age Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants in additional postcode areas.

Since 26 January 2015, PIP extended to postcode areas:

- G – Glasgow
- NE – Newcastle
- WA – Warrington
- WN – Wigan
- DH – Durham
- SR – Sunderland
- IV – Inverness.

Claimants in these postcodes are being invited to make a claim for PIP where:

- their existing DLA award is fixed term and is coming to an end
- they are approaching their 16th birthday
- we have received information about a change in their care or mobility needs
- someone chooses to claim PIP instead of DLA.

We can now announce that from 23 February 2015 PIP will extend further to AB (Aberdeen), BB (Blackburn), BD (Bradford), DD (Dundee), DN (Doncaster), EX (Exeter), HX (Halifax), KA (Kilmarnock), KY (Kirkcaldy), LS (Leeds), PH (Perth), PL (Plymouth), PO (Portsmouth), PR (Preston), S (Sheffield), SO (Southampton), TS (Cleveland), and WF (Wakefield).

As part of our continuing drive to improve the PIP claims process, we ran a small pilot to look at the effectiveness of the telephone call made to claimants to explain the decision, when there is a disallowance or the decision is to reduce benefit.

Findings from the pilot showed that claimants felt that their notification already provided clear reasons for the decision and that some claimants actually found receiving the call distressing. Therefore, we no longer call the claimant to explain their decision; however, the claimant can still telephone us and request an explanation of their decision, should they wish to.

For further information regarding PIP please email:

pip.liverunningfeedback@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

National Fraud Initiative (NFI) HB Data Matches 2015

Some guidelines have been published for LAs who have, or are about to transfer their responsibility for HB fraud investigations to the Department for Work and Pensions, under the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) Project for dealing with NFI Data Matches which was sent to all LAs on 29 January 2015.

This guidance is available on the Knowledge Hub. To access the Knowledge Hub you will need to register if you are not already a member and then search under “Groups” and request to join the SFIS Communications Hub Group.

<https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/home>.

Any enquiries relating to this should be sent to

sfis.projectimplementation@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) update

The deadline for LAs to apply for start-up funding or to opt-in to FERIS was 30 January 2015. We are pleased to report that FERIS has attracted a high level of interest amongst LAs:

- 360 out of a total of 379 LAs opted-in, equates to 96% of HB caseload
- 315 start-up fund applications; 40 approved and paid
- 10 bid fund applications received; 3 approved and paid
- 45 LAs opted-in only (without applying for any funding)
- 80% of start-up fund applications were received in the last week
- we aim to process applications to payment within 20 working days (if no further information is required)
- LAs asked to provide additional information are encouraged to respond as soon as possible and within one week.

We will shortly be emailing a questionnaire to all LAs to enable us to learn from FERIS implementation and make improvements for 2015/16.

The bid fund closing date is 2 March; further information about how to apply is set out in [HB A17/2014](#) – FERIS Guidance for LAs. Details about FERIS 2015/16 including baselines/thresholds and the maintenance fund application process will be notified to LAs during 2014/15.

FERIS information:

- Circular [HB A3/2015](#) – FERIS Q&A
- FERIS Good Practice Guide – available on the same page as HB A3/2015
- LAs were issued with the excel template which enables baselines to be verified, and progress to be monitored locally

For queries about FERIS email feris.team@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Reminder – Subsidy/Discretionary Housing Payments Deadline 30 April 2015

Subsidy Claims

The deadline for LA submission of the 2014/15 initial final subsidy claim is 30 April 2015. All LAs should take appropriate action to ensure that this deadline is met. Usual subsidy withholding arrangements will apply for any LA which does not meet the deadline and extensions will be granted in exceptional circumstances only. The subsidy-related deadline for referral of cases to the Rent Officer is also 30 April 2015. The deadline for auditor-certified final subsidy claims is 30 November 2015.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) Claims

The deadline for the submission of the 2014/15 DHP final claim is 30 April 2015. Again, LAs should take appropriate action to ensure that this deadline is met.

The deadline of 30 April 2015 for subsidy and DHP claims will help ensure that wider governmental accounting arrangements are satisfied and HM Treasury requirements are met.

Any enquiries should be emailed to: michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov