

DWP Stakeholder Bulletin – December 2013

Welcome to the December 2013 issue of the DWP Stakeholder Bulletin.

Contents

Autumn Statement	1
Universal Credit milestone	1
Universal Credit Update and Trialling plan	2
Disability and Health Employment Strategy	2
Housing Credit element of Pension Credit	2
Access to Work extended	3
Health and Work Service	3
Marriage (Same Sex Couples)	3
DWP consultations	4

Autumn Statement

Announcements that affect DWP include:

- The intention to introduce a new class of voluntary National Insurance contribution, (Class 3A)
- Changes to State Pension age based on the principle that people should expect to spend, on average, up to one third of their adult life in receipt of State Pension
- Further details about how the Welfare Cap will operate
- The intention to run a pilot for skills support and provision for 18-21 year olds, plus a pilot of support for 16-17 year old NEETs (not in education, employment or training) through Job Centre Plus
- Extension of the New Enterprise Allowance into 2015/16
- Additional Discretionary Housing Payment expenditure in both 2014/15 and 2015/16

For more information, go to the [Autumn Statement on GOV.UK](#)^{web}

Universal Credit milestone

On 5 December 2013 another important milestone in the delivery of Universal Credit was reached, with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announcing plans for future roll-out.

A [Written Ministerial Statement](#) sets out the details of the next stage of implementation. As it makes clear, the Government's priority has been, and continues to be the safe and secure delivery of Universal Credit.

For information on Universal Credit, please visit the [Partner Toolkit](#).

Universal Credit Update and Trialling plan

The Universal Credit Local Support Services Update and Trialling Plan was [published](#) on 6 December 2013.

Produced in collaboration with Local Authority Associations representing England, Scotland and Wales, it refocuses the local support services work following the [announcements](#) about the next stages of delivery.

It describes the strategy to trial aspects of the [Framework](#) (published in February 2013), such as the finance model and early work on partnership development. It also updates on key points of progress and lessons learned from the Universal Credit Pathfinder and Local Authority-led Pilots.

An updated Framework is planned for autumn 2014, to inform Local Authority budgeting timetables for 2015/16.

Disability and Health Employment Strategy

On Tuesday 17 December, the Government published 'The disability and health employment strategy: the discussion so far'. This continues the discussion about how we can work together to help more people with disabilities and health conditions to move into, remain in and progress in work.

Employment rates for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions are much lower than for non-disabled people. The Government is working to narrow this gap, but we cannot do this alone.

We are working with disabled people and people with health conditions and employers, as well as local authorities, employment support providers and other stakeholders to understand more about the barriers to employment and to develop options for the future.

Read our [proposals](#) and join the discussion dhes.comment@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Housing Credit element of Pension Credit

As part of the Budget 2013, the Chancellor announced that introduction of the new single-tier pension will be brought forward from 2017 to 2016. The Pensions Bill which will deliver this reform is now making its way through Parliament.

As a result of this change in implementation date, plans to deliver the housing credit element of Pension Credit have been put on hold. This will enable DWP to focus resources on successful delivery of the single-tier pension for new pensioners from April 2016. Current arrangements of rental support for pensioners via the Housing Benefit scheme will therefore need to remain in place until at least the financial year 2017/18.

Access to Work extended

[Access to Work](#) has been extended to help more disabled people into work. In a move designed to give disabled people the same opportunities as non-disabled people, £2m has been set aside to help them take up placements as they prepare to start out on their chosen career path.

Until now, Access to Work has only offered this support to disabled people who engage in work experience placements that have been organised through Jobcentre Plus. Although it is expected that it will mainly benefit younger adults, the latest development is open to everybody who has a disability and needs extra support in taking up a work experience placement.

Health and Work Service

With more than 130 million working days a year lost to sickness absence, the Government commissioned [The Health at Work – independent review of sickness absence](#) to look at ways of reducing costs and getting people back to work. Some of the [accepted recommendations](#) are:

- Abolition of the Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) Percentage Threshold Scheme (PTS) and the associated SSP record-keeping requirements from 6 April 2014
- Reinvesting PTS money to fund the introduction of a Health and Work Service (HWS)

[HWS](#) will:

- Give GPs access to work-related health support for their patients
- Support employers to better manage sickness absence and reduce sick-pay costs
- Provide expert advice to employees on sickness absence to assist their return to work and be less likely to go on to claim health-related benefits

Marriage (Same Sex Couples)

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 received Royal Assent on 17 July 2013 and on 10 December, the Government announced when the measures in the Act will be implemented.

- Same sex couples will be able to give notice on 13 March 2014 and marriages (following notice) can take place on 29 March 2014.
- Civil partners in England and Wales will be able to convert their partnership into a marriage, if they wish. The aim is to do this by December 2014
- Individuals will be able to change their legal gender without having to end their marriage first. The aim is to do this by December 2014

DWP consultations

All current live DWP consultations and the latest published consultation responses are available on the [consultation pages](#) of GOV.UK.

If you have a comment or feedback about this bulletin, please email the [Strategic Engagement and Partnerships team](#).

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