

# Housing Benefit Direct issue 157 March 2015



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## Editorial

Welcome to this month's edition of HB Direct. February and March are always busy months in the world of revenues and benefits so I really appreciate you taking time out to read this.

As you will see, there is no shortage of activity in DWP too and so this is a bit of a bumper edition. We have a number of articles on Universal Credit which is really starting to gather pace now with more Jobcentre Plus areas starting to cover claims for families (in existing Universal Credit sites) and the on-going national, phased extension to single people. Links are provided which show which areas are going live when. This month saw the publication of some encouraging research on the impact of Universal Credit. Universal Credit claimants are doing more jobsearch activity, finding work quicker and earning more than comparable claimants on Jobseeker's Allowance.

We also have a selection of articles relating to data sharing. You may already be aware that we are working to replace Data Transport Appliances with a secure cloud based message hub. For LAs to access files, a Transport Layer Security level of 1.2 is required. Please check your level and if you are interested in being an early adopter, please let us know.

We have been working with early adopter sites to test the merger of ETD and ATLAS and are now reasonably confident that the issues we have encountered have been fixed which will enable go-live in 30 March. We will keep you informed and ensure the updated ATLAS Awareness Pack is with you in advance.

The Local Authority Data Sharing Delivery team is also working on further commissions for the Payment Deductions Programme which aims to automate the transfer of Housing Benefit debt under Universal Credit and the 'new State Pension' which brings in pension arrangements based on individual qualification and will impact on anyone reaching State Pension Age on or after 16 April 2016. We are keen to work closely with you to impact these requirements and firm up the High Level Business Requirements.

Finally, I would like to thank all the LAs who have opted into the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme. We have had a fantastic response with 378 of the 379 LAs eligible to participate opting in. We are working through the start-up bids as quickly as we can and have agreed with the Local Authority Associations Steering Group that we will aim to get the guidance on the Maintenance Fund out on 16 March balancing the need to progress on this quickly with the desire to avoid burdening you in your busiest time.

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## Universal Credit – families expansion

From 24 November 2014 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) started taking claims from families in six sites in the North West of England; Birkenhead, Bromborough, Hoylake, Upton, Wallasey covering the Wirral local authority (LA) area and Warrington.

Following this successful pilot DWP extended to a further 26 jobcentre areas from 26 January 2015; including Hammersmith, Rugby, Harrogate, Bath, Inverness, Shotton and 20 in the North West of England.

Meaning that for the first time parents will be able to claim back 70 per cent of childcare costs no matter how many hours they work. Providing more generous support with childcare costs will help parents to get back into work.

All the remaining sites that went live by Christmas 2014 will start to take claims from families from 2 March 2015. This will mean that from 2 March 2015 DWP will be offering Universal Credit to singles, couples and families in 96 jobcentre areas across 45 LAs in England, Scotland and Wales.

Please note that the expansion to families is only in those sites that went live up until the end of 2014. No sites that are going live as part of 2015/16 national rollout will take claims for couples and/or families.

More information on the [expansion to families](#), and the [current live sites](#) and which claimant groups they cater to is available on GOV.UK.

## Universal Credit national expansion

In autumn 2014 DWP announced that from February 2015 Universal Credit would begin to expand to all remaining jobcentres and LAs in a controlled way for new claims from single people, who would otherwise have claimed Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), including those with existing Housing Benefit (HB) and Tax Credit claims.

Following the successful rollout of Universal Credit in the North West of England, we will use a similar tranche based approach for national expansion.

On 16 February 2015 the first jobcentre areas of national expansion went live with Universal Credit, as part of the first tranche of rollout scheduled to take place between February and April 2015.

Once Tranche One is complete in April 2015, Universal Credit will be live in 1 in 3 jobcentres across Great Britain.

As part of the commencement of national expansion we have also published the go-live dates for those jobcentre areas and LAs that will rollout as part of Tranche One (February – April 2015) and Tranche Two (May – July 2015) along with the latest planning assumptions for Tranche Three (September – November 2015) and Tranche Four (December 2015 – April 2016).

All four tranches of [national expansion](#) can be accessed on GOV.UK.

## Universal Credit at Work – spring 2015

The introduction of Universal Credit is the biggest welfare reform change in a generation and we are already seeing the positive effects that Universal Credit is having.

On 16 February 2015 we published research from the first 6,000 Universal Credit cases that shows, compared to JSA, claimants are doing more jobsearch activity, finding work quicker, staying in work longer and earning more.

The research shows that, over a 4 month period, claimants are:

- 13 per cent more likely to have been in work than those on JSA
- earning more money

Similar to previous findings, the report also confirms that new Universal Credit claimants in the expanded sites are more likely than JSA claimants to:

- believe the benefit system is encouraging them to find work
- take any job they are able to do
- spend more time looking for work.

Once fully rolled out, Universal Credit will boost the economy by £7 billion every year. You can read the [full report](#) here.

## New online help for job seekers

DWP has launched a new online resource for job seekers and is asking LA partners to help promote it.

Featuring a range of helpful hints, tips and videos and updated every working day, [the Daily Job Seeker](#) is an ever growing library of content to help people find work.

From hints on creating an eye-catching CV to top tips on getting into specific sectors that are recruiting now, the blog-style site features advice directly from employers and recruiters. It also includes information about Universal Credit and the ways it can help people get back to work more quickly.

An online advertising campaign to showcase the site; with a focus on areas where Universal Credit is live or about to go live, was launched in February. However, the site is relevant to job seekers all over the country, regardless of whether they claim Universal Credit or not.

DWP is asking all local partners and stakeholders to include a link to [the Daily Job Seeker](#) on their own websites and in social media posts that might reach people looking for work.

Digital materials are available to help integrate the site into your own employment and skills communications, and to highlight the kinds of content job seekers can expect. For more information on these or the site in general please contact [james.marriott@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:james.marriott@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Data Transport Appliance Replacement

DWP has reviewed the options for replacing the current Data Transport Appliance (DTA) server, which is used to securely transmit DWP benefit and HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) Tax credit data to all LAs.

We undertook a proof of concept last year and we are now into the procurement stage. The original concept was to successfully prove DWP's decision to implement a cloud based message-hub solution, which would sit within the Public Services Network. The message-hub will be introduced through a phased approach up until the end of autumn 2015 and this will be managed centrally by the LA Data Sharing Delivery (LADS) team.

LAs will access their designated files on the message-hub using a secure web browser session. Files can be downloaded and uploaded manually or automatically, using Open Standard File Transfer Protocol (FTP). Each LA should have a minimum of one desk top machine set up which will be able to access the message-hub securely via the web browser.

The required protocol is Transport Layer Security (TLS) 1.2. It is imperative that the designated desk top to be used has the appropriate security protocol. Some LAs may already be on TLS 1.2. You can confirm your current TLS status by visiting <https://www.howssmyssl.com>. All LAs will need to have at least one designated desktop on the TLS 1.2 version by the beginning of July 2015 and LADS will require confirmation from all LAs by the end of July 2015 by email that this has been achieved.

Current plans suggest that the procurement process will not be completed until May 2015, with the development, planning and implementation process completed by August 2015. However, as we are planning to transfer LAs to the message-hub solution via a phased approach, we are looking for at least 20 LAs to participate in an early adopters exercise. If any LA would be interested in volunteering, please contact us by 31 March 2015 via the email address below.

For any other queries about the DTAs / message hub replacement please contact Sabby Riordan or Mark Browne via email on [lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## ETD/ATLAS Merger – Update

The national rollout of the Electronic Transfer of Data/Automated Transfer to LA Systems (ETD/ATLAS) has been delayed until 30 March 2015. This extended period has allowed us to work with our suppliers to resolve all of the problems identified following the implementation into the 10 early adopter sites.

The final major fixes for identified problems were implemented during February, and early indications are that these have all been successful. This means that we can confidently move forward to national rollout.

We will be incorporating more information in a further revision to the ATLAS Awareness Pack which will be issued in the next few weeks. We will keep this open to ensure we capture any last minute issues that you need to be aware of, but it will be with you before national rollout takes place. Any queries please contact [lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Payment Deduction Programme (PDP)

The recovery of debt from welfare is currently undertaken separately by DWP, HMRC and LAs.

The Payment Deduction Programme (PDP) is part of Fraud, Error and Debt and has been commissioned by Universal Credit to ensure existing benefit debts and loans are migrated to Universal Credit when a claim to Universal Credit is made.

PDP has the responsibility for debt migration for Tax Credits, HB, DWP Social Fund, DWP Third Party Payments and DWP Legacy Overpayments (JSA/Employment and Support Allowance /Income Support).

A clerical debt migration process is in place but only very low volumes of HB debts have been migrated. Extended Live Service in 2015 will increase the number of HB debts that will be migrated but numbers are still expected to be low. The migration process will remain clerical and there are no plans to introduce any automation to migrate debts in Live Service.

All claimants on Universal Credit Live Service will be 'switched' to Universal Credit Digital Service but no date has been set for this to happen (assumption it will be towards the end of the rollout in 2018/19).

PDP produced a High Level Business Requirement (HLBR) product with end to end 'to be' processes and are now planning to hold Detailed Business Requirement (DBR) workshops in March. These will involve a selection of LA's and LA suppliers to look at the requirements for the automated interface that is required to transfer the recovery of HB debt from LAs to Universal Credit and return monies/details of deductions made. The working assumption is that the automated HB debt migration process will be delivered in **April 2016**.

LADS will continue to work closely with PDP and will keep you updated as things progress. Any queries please contact [lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## new State Pension

The Pensions White Paper 'Single tier pension: a simple foundation for saving' that was published in January 2013, sets out the changes that will be introduced in April 2016 as a result of the introduction of the new State Pension (nSP) and will have an impact on people who reach State Pension age (SPA) on or after 6 April 2016.

The name was changed from single tier to "new State Pension" in July 2014.

The nSP will be based on individual qualification, ending inheritance of and derived rights to a spouse's or civil partner's pension. There will however, be some transitional arrangements made in order to protect certain groups.

The LADS Delivery team are currently looking at the impact this will have on the transfer of data to LA's and will be working with LA's and IT suppliers to ensure that the changes to processes that need to be in place to transfer DWP customer data to LAs for nSP are in place by October 2015. We are looking to start the ATLAS design work around the middle of April 2015 with design and test later in the year.

LADS will continue to update you as this work progresses. Any queries please contact [lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Secondment Opportunity: DWP Housing Policy Division

Housing Policy Division (HPD) has an on-going programme of bringing HB experts from LAs into work alongside policy teams on secondment. We are looking to recruit a number of LA employees onto the programme over the coming months.

HPD's role is to provide policy advice to Ministers on support for housing costs within the benefit system. DWP is currently undertaking a huge programme of welfare reform. Working with LAs, who are one of our major stakeholders, continues to feature heavily and for this reason we value the expertise and knowledge of HB that LA HB experts can bring to the team. These secondment opportunities will in turn provide an opportunity to gain an insight and experience of policy development and workings of central government.

Successful candidates can expect to learn about how Ministers and officials develop policy options, how the consultation process works and how agreement is reached across government. The successful candidates will be expected to use and develop a wide range of skills to analyse, develop, compare, explain and defend policy options. In addition there will be work relating to liaison with stakeholders, particularly LAs.

### Personal requirements

- good understanding of HB procedures and regulations
- good drafting and communication skills
- ability to build and maintain effective working relationships with LAs and other stakeholders
- ability to work with people at different levels in the organisation and to work as part of a team to achieve results.

The posts are being offered for 6 months initially but this will be reviewed at the end of the period and could be extended for up to a maximum of two years. The posts are full time and based in Caxton House in Westminster or Quarry House in Leeds. We do not want to deter candidates from outside of London applying, and therefore will consider some remote working where this fits in with the business need. In addition we are able to offer some help with travel expenses if additional costs are incurred.

We would like the successful candidates to be able to start early in the new financial year. If you are interested in applying, and are at S01/S02/PO1/PO2 level or equivalent, (roughly equates to civil service HEO grade) please check with your LA that you can be released and then send your CV by email to [michelle.hougham@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:michelle.hougham@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) by **15 March 2015**.

Interviews will be held during week commencing 23 March. If you would like to have a chat about this opportunity you can contact Michelle Hougham on 0207 449 5325 or Beverley Walsh on 0113 2327608.

## Secondment Opportunities: DWP Housing Delivery LA Data Sharing Programme

There are secondment opportunities for talented individuals who want to come and work on the LADS Programme as part of the Delivery Team. This is a key role within Housing Delivery Division to ensure that LAs receive appropriate data from other systems.

The LADS programme is now firmly established and has a wide portfolio of data sharing demands from major programmes and projects.

A major forthcoming piece of work is to share Universal Credit data with LAs from November 2015 to help with the administration of local Council Tax Reduction (LCTR) schemes. This would be very beneficial to LAs but **without LA secondees we may not be able to deliver this key piece of work.**

For this and other work we need people with a good working knowledge of some or all of: debt data; benefits data; and rent data from LAs. Knowledge of the existing data sharing arrangements would be desirable and current experience of dealing with HB and LCTR scheme systems would be an advantage.

Essential / desirable skills:

- experience of working in a project environment
- recent HB knowledge/experience
- good communication skills and the ability to understand complex issues
- good team working and the ability to work collaboratively and productively
- enthusiasm and commitment.

At least part of the working week will need to be in Leeds, although we will consider people who can be based in London or Blackpool/Preston. There will be an expectation to be available to travel to some meetings and workshops in relation to your role.

Posts are available immediately and are offered for an initial period of six months. Successful applicants will retain current terms and conditions and be reimbursed salary and work-related expenses through current arrangements. Some assistance with travelling to work may be available subject to individual circumstances and budgetary constraints.

If you are interested in this career development opportunity please check with your LA that you can be released and then submit your CV to [lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) by 17 March 2015. If you would like to know more or discuss your suitability before applying please feel free to speak to **Paddy Wild on 0113 2327327** or **Jo Wood on 0113 2327634**.