

# Touchbase

April 2014

## Welcome to the April issue of Touchbase



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Touchbase Editor

It's hard to believe that we are already a third of the way through 2014. As usual, April sees the introduction of a number of new government policies and measures.

In this edition, we report on the progress of the key foundations of Welfare Reform, particularly Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment. There are also reports on the new measures for jobseekers, lone parents and for migrants from the European Economic Area. These all form part of the Government's long-term economic plan.

Other reports include; the announcement of DWP's decision to seek a new contractor to carry out the Work Capability Assessment in place of Atos, updates on improvements to the State Pension Online, more than 50 employers pledging to improve employment outcomes for disabled people, and the great news that over 3 million have now signed up for workplace pensions through automatic enrolment.

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

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# Universal Credit rolls out to another area of Britain

This month sees the rollout of Universal Credit to new jobseekers in Shotton Wales, successfully completing our commitment to extending it to six further sites between October 2013 and spring 2014.

Universal Credit is designed to simplify the benefits system and make work pay. 49-year-old Mark from London is a good example of how it is supporting people back into work.

Mark was made redundant from the printing industry after 30 years. Before getting a job as a delivery driver, he feared he would never work again.

Mark had never used a computer until he made a claim for Universal Credit. However, with the help of his Jobcentre work coach, Nicola, he put together his first CV. He was set up online with an email address and a LinkedIn profile and was registered with Universal Jobmatch.

Nicola identified many transferable skills that he could offer a new employer and this gave him the confidence to apply for jobs.

Mark said: “My advice to anyone who applies for Universal Credit is to take advantage of the support and help that’s offered and the courses available.”

Mark signed up to the Claimant Commitment which gave him a plan so that he could track the steps he had taken and his progress. Nicola encouraged Mark to go along to a presentation by TNT and after a few interviews he landed himself a job delivering mail across London.


Mark added: “The great thing with Universal Credit is that you don’t just get a job and then get cut off; the help will still be there. It used to frighten people that it would take a few months of being totally skint before they’d see any benefit of working, but now you can get a job and build your hours up and still get support under Universal Credit. Only then, once you’re back on your feet, do your benefits stop.”

Mark has now been offered more hours so he no longer needs support from Universal Credit.

We have developed a [video](#) in response to requests from stakeholders and partners for a clear and simple explanation of Universal Credit.

We would like you to link to it on your website or [embed it](#) on your site or blog. You could also tweet it (using #universalcredit) or share it on your Facebook page.

We value your feedback and would be grateful if you could tell us how you have used the video, or what else you would like to see, to help us to shape our future communications. Email us at [universal.creditcomms@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:universal.creditcomms@dwp.gsi.gov.uk).

 **For more information about Universal Credit please see the [Partner Toolkit](#).**

# Personal Independence Payment: learning lessons

DWP is taking steps to speed up the claims for Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which include improving the automated parts of the process and staff guidance.

Other changes include letting claimants know that we have received their claim forms and reviewing the parts of the process that are administered by the assessment providers.

Alongside this, we are working with stakeholders, such as Macmillan Cancer Support, and assessment providers to further improve the fast-tracked PIP claim process for people who are terminally ill. A new, dedicated telephone service for these claimants has now been introduced.

The dedicated number for terminally ill people is the usual number for PIP claims – 0800 917 2222. These claimants should select option one to make a new claim, and then option three. A dedicated team will take the call and complete the claim process.

The claims from terminally ill people that were held up earlier have now been cleared. We are also making significant improvements to clearance times for claims generally, and are working to ensure that we bring them down further.

For people who are not terminally ill, getting a decision on PIP entitlement is taking longer than expected. In some cases, it can take between 21 and 26 weeks.

However, those who are eligible for PIP will be paid their benefit from the date they became entitled and not from when a decision is made.

We are also taking new claims for PIP across Great Britain, alongside the phased introduction of natural reassessment. As reported in [December’s Touchbase](#), DWP is inviting some current Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants to claim PIP if their disability-related needs change, they reach 16 years old, if their existing award ends or if they want to claim PIP voluntarily.

Because the claiming process is taking longer than planned, we are introducing natural reassessment in a more gradual way. Decisions about the further extension of natural reassessment will be informed by the lessons learned in the areas where PIP has been rolled out.

People living in a [reassessment postcode](#) who choose to claim PIP instead of DLA will be advised that their DLA will stop and that their benefit might go down as well as up under PIP.

 **There is advice for support organisations at [PIP Toolkit](#) and for claimants at [GOV.UK](#).**

# New measures for jobseekers and lone parents

New measures will come in for pre-Work Programme Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants and for some lone parents from 28 April 2014 and, from the summer, for those Universal Credit claimants who are subject to intensive work search requirements.

The changes will help claimants to prepare for and enter work as soon as possible. Claimants who fail to comply with any mandatory requirement may be subject to sanctions and their benefit could be affected.

## Day One conditionality

Day One conditionality will be phased in between 28 April and October 2014. It will require claimants to show that they are taking positive steps to find work from day one of their claim.

People who claim via JSA Online will be asked to set up an email address, prepare a suitable CV and to register on Universal Jobmatch. Jobseekers who do not claim online will be helped to complete these requirements by their work coach.

“The changes will help claimants to prepare for and enter work as soon as possible. Claimants who fail to comply with any mandatory requirement may be subject to sanctions and their benefit could be affected.”

## Mandatory English language requirement for claimants in England

Claimants in England, who are found to have English speaking and listening skills below Entry Level 2 at their initial work search interview, will undergo an assessment and, where appropriate, will be mandated to attend training to improve their English language skills. This will be introduced in Scotland and Wales at a later date.

## Quarterly Work Search Interviews

Claimants will be required to attend a 20 minute Interview every 13 weeks to review the previous quarter's activities, their skills and their Jobseeker's Agreement/Claimant Commitment as well as to widen the scope of their work search.

## Weekly Work Search Reviews

Weekly work search reviews will also be phased in between 28 April and October 2014 for 50 per cent of claimants.

Work coaches will decide which claimants would benefit from an extra weekly face-to-face review at points in their claim when it would be most beneficial.

The new requirements were agreed in the 2013 Spending Review as part of the Government's Welfare Reform. They increase what claimants are required to do in exchange for benefits.



## Lone Parent Conditionality to be increased

An increase in the Lone Parent Conditionality, which will be introduced from 28 April 2014, is another of the measures that were agreed as part of the 2013 Spending Review.

It means that some parents will be required to begin preparing for work in a number of ways.

## Changes to Work-focused interviews

Lone parents, who are entitled to Income Support solely on the basis of being a lone parent and whose youngest child is at least one, will be given flexible work-focused interviews. The frequency and length of their interviews will be determined by advisers, which will allow support to be more tailored to meet the individual needs of lone parents.

## Work-Related Activity

Work-Related Activity (WRA), which will be mandatory, will also be introduced for certain lone parents whose youngest child is aged three or four and who are in receipt of the following benefits:

- Income Support – solely on the basis of being a lone parent;
- Old-style Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) – those in the Work-Related Activity Group;
- Universal Credit or new-style ESA if they are a responsible carer – they will be placed on the work preparation regime.

The activities will be flexible and will be tailored to the individual. They must also be reasonable and take a parent's circumstances into account. WRA cannot be used to require claimants to apply for or take up work.

Travel and childcare costs will be met for mandatory activities.

For more information about all the new measures please email: [DWP.PARTNERSHIPS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK](mailto:DWP.PARTNERSHIPS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK)

# New Housing Benefit measures for migrants

Measures to remove access to Housing Benefit for jobseekers from the European Economic Area were introduced on 1 April 2014.

Previously, once [European Economic Area \(EEA\)](#) jobseekers had satisfied the three months residency requirement, they would have been able to claim income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). This, in turn, would have given them access to Housing Benefit.

However, since 1 April 2014, EEA jobseekers are unable to access Housing Benefit, even if they are entitled to income-based JSA. This will apply to any new Housing Benefit claim made by EEA nationals after this date.

If an EEA national has a right to reside in the UK on any other basis, for example as a retained worker, their access to Housing Benefit will be unaffected by this new measure.

“Jobseekers from the EEA who were entitled to both Housing Benefit and income-based JSA on 31 March 2014 are not affected by the new rules, unless their status changes or there is a break in their entitlement to either of these benefits.”

UK nationals and nationals from the Common Travel Area – the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland – will still be able to access Housing Benefit in the normal way once they have shown that they are or can be treated as habitually resident.

Jobseekers from the EEA who were entitled to both Housing Benefit and income-based JSA on 31 March 2014 are not affected by the new rules, unless their status changes or there is a break in their entitlement to either of these benefits.

Local Authorities are responsible for awarding and paying Housing Benefit. If an EEA national is not entitled to Housing Benefit, each authority is responsible for advising that claimant about any other assistance that might be available in their area.

The new Housing Benefit measure is part of the Government's wider reforms of migrants' access to benefits which seeks to ensure that only those who will be actively contributing to the economy through work, are encouraged to come to the UK.

 More details about Housing Benefit are available at [GOV.UK](#).

# Government seeks new contractor for Work Capability Assessment

The Government is seeking a new provider to replace Atos for the delivery of Work Capability Assessments (WCA).



Claimants who apply for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) have to undergo a WCA to see how their illness or disability might affect their ability to work.

The WCAs have been carried out solely by Atos since 2008 but it has now been mutually agreed that the company will exit from the contract to deliver WCA before it was due to end in August 2015.

Mike Penning, Minister for Disabled People said:

“The previous Government appointed Atos as the sole provider for carrying out Work Capability Assessments and since then we have carried out several independent reviews and made significant improvements to the assessment.

“We are seeking a new provider to replace Atos, with the view to increasing the number of assessments and reducing waiting times.

“I am pleased to confirm that Atos will not receive a single penny of compensation from the taxpayer for the early termination of their contract, quite the contrary, Atos has made a substantial financial settlement to the Department.”

The fifth and final review of WCA has been announced and will again be carried out by Dr Paul Litchfield who led the fourth review. Dr Litchfield is Chief Medical Officer and Director of Health, Safety and Wellbeing for BT.

His field of expertise includes mental illness and the impact it can have on work prospects. He has played a key role in highlighting the economic impact of chronic diseases, as a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council.

After the [fourth review](#) of WCA, Dr Litchfield concluded that good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations from previous reviews. He also recommended that DWP should simplify the WCA process and improve decision-making, as well as the knowledge of mental health among decision makers and healthcare professionals.

A formal [government response](#) to the fourth review was published on 27 March. Dr Litchfield will present the findings of the fifth review to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions before the end of 2014.

 Please visit [GOV.UK](#) for more information about the [WCA independent reviews](#) and for the [latest ESA statistics](#).

# Employers pledge to champion disabled talent

More and more organisations are recognising that recruiting and promoting disabled people is a smart business decision.



- Gloucestershire County Council, DWP's first local authority partner, which has committed to leading by example and is developing a strategy that will lead to a workforce which is representative of the people it serves; and
- Global financial group Barclays Plc, which has made a commitment to "...continue to expand on our Global Disability Agenda to reach our ultimate goal of becoming the 'most accessible bank' and will continue to encourage the expansion of our REACH Colleagues Network globally, to ensure all employees have a voice."

DWP has worked with partners from private and voluntary organisations to host successful Disability Confident events in six regions across the country. Recently events have been held in:

- Glasgow on 4 March;
- Leeds on 12 March;
- Manchester on 19 March;
- London on 25 March.

Over 50 organisations are now showing their commitment to improving employment outcomes for disabled people with pledges to champion their talents.

They include:

- Recruitment organisation [Equal Approach](#), which has pledged to champion disabled executives to employers and to create a platform to demonstrate the key skills and talents of disabled people at a senior level;

Barclays is also expanding its pioneering [AFTER](#) programme which works with the Ministry of Defence to provide placements and develop the workplace skills of injured British Armed Forces personnel to help them to make the transition into civilian employment.

To make a pledge to champion disabled talent or if you have a Disability Confident case study you would like to share, we would love to hear from you so please email [Disability Confident](#)

Please support the Disability Confident campaign; share the [Disability Confident videos](#) on your social network sites and take a look at the [Employer Portal](#) and encourage your employer contacts to use the information and guidance it contains.

# Automatic enrolment reaches three million

Over 3 million workers have begun saving into a workplace pension scheme as a result of automatic enrolment.



The 3 millionth worker enrolled is employed by West Ham United, whose Vice Chairman Karren Brady backed the rollout of the new workplace pension scheme.

The first workers were automatically enrolled into pension schemes in 2012 starting with the largest employers. The duties will extend to the smallest firms and new employers by 2018.

The policy was introduced to address chronic under-saving with millions not putting aside enough for retirement, and only one in three private sector employees paying into a workplace pension.

This month's automatic enrolment registration report shows that more than 10,000 employers of all types from charities to supermarkets, hospitals to football clubs have now automatically enrolled their workers.

Thousands of medium sized employers will follow them over the next six months.

Pensions Minister, Steve Webb, said: "Before automatic enrolment, pension saving in this country was at its lowest ebb with too few people having the opportunity to save into a workplace pension. We have restored fairness by ensuring pensions are no longer the preserve of the few."

During 2014, tens of thousands of employers will reach their staging date. Eventually up to 1.3 million employers would have automatically enrolled up to 11 million eligible workers into a work-based pension scheme.

 More details on the [automatic enrolment](#) figures can be viewed on [The Pensions Regulator's website](#).



# State Pension Online has been improved

DWP has made improvements to the State Pension Online following feedback from the public. As a result two significant changes have been made to the online claims process.

The first change is that customers will be given better information and prompts when they use the [Claim your State Pension online](#) page on the GOV.UK website.

For example, if a customer has not yet registered with the Government Gateway – which they need to do in order to make an online claim – they will be given information on how to register, a link to the gateway and told what to do next.

In the past, if a customer had problems with their Government Gateway registration, they would have had to abandon their online claim and do it over the phone instead. They are now advised to telephone our DWP

helpdesk where they will receive help to continue with their registration online. These changes make the process even easier for customers but also provide extra support when people need it. User testing of the new page has been positive with people saying that they like the clear, simple start to the process.

State Pension Online is available to people living in England, Wales and Scotland. It is secure and available at a time that is convenient for the customer.

 **State Pension Online application is available on the GOV.UK site.**

## Other news in brief..

### New Children and Families Act

A new Children and Families Act has been given royal assent. It will provide greater protection to vulnerable children, a new system to help children with special educational needs and disabilities, better support for children whose parents are separating and help for parents to help balance work and family life.

The Act also makes vital changes to the adoption system so that more children who need loving homes can be placed faster.

Children in care could also be given the choice to stay with their foster families until their 21st birthday.

In addition, it makes it easier for families to access more flexible childcare, and gives young carers greater support.

More information on the Act is available in the [overview of the Children and Families Act](#), via the video on '[Children and Families Bill: a look back](#)' and in the [full Act](#).

### Government helps more than 40,000 people to start own business

More than 40,000 people have moved from claiming benefits to running their own business thanks to New Enterprise Allowance (NEA).

The Government scheme, which was launched in 2011, helps unemployed people turn their dreams of becoming their own boss into a reality by providing expert mentoring and financial support to help them get their business off the ground.

The NEA is open to people on Jobseeker's Allowance, lone parents and people on sickness benefits who want to start up a business. New businesses that have been set up through NEA include weight loss coaching, a vegan restaurant, a bespoke wedding service and a building firm.

In the last year around 2,000 people a month have used NEA support to come off benefits and become their own boss. Among them are 9,260 people aged 50 and over, 2,910 young people and 7,420 disabled people.

More information is available at [New Enterprise Allowance](#) on GOV. UK.



## The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council Public Meeting

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The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC) is holding a public meeting in Edinburgh to give people, including those with a professional interest in occupational diseases, a chance to find out more about its work.

The Council provides independent scientific advice to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on matters relating to the Industrial Injuries Scheme.

The sessions will:

- Outline the Council's role in advising ministers;
- Provide information on some of their recent reviews;
- Provide an opportunity to contribute views and ideas about occupational health issues.

The meeting will be on 19 June at the Edinburgh Capital Hotel, 187 Clermiston Road, Edinburgh, EH12 6UG. The deadline for reserving a place is Friday 30 May 2014.

For further information please email: [iiac@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:iiac@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) or you can also visit the [IIAC](#) website.

## Social Justice Month

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April is Social Justice Month and to mark this the Government will be showcasing some of the work being done to transform lives.

A key challenge in delivering its Social Justice commitments, which are laid out in [Social Justice: Transforming lives](#), is to ensure that central and local government work together with others to tackle disadvantage.

Partnership lies at the heart of delivering Social Justice so this month will see eight government departments link up to explore what more we can do, separately and together to turn lives around.

To see examples of how partnerships are already making a difference, visit [Social Justice case studies](#) on GOV.UK.

## Changes to DWP postal addresses

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DWP is modernising its mailing system which includes changes to how it receives and processes post from the public.

DWP now has a new automated system with the capacity to open, scan and index the post. As a result, post for most of DWP's offices is now managed within two new mail units in Kidderminster and Telford.

A list of the offices that have a new address is included within Annex A of this document [postal-address](#). These have a Wolverhampton postal address.

There is also a new address for the Independent Case Examiner:  
PO Box 209, Bootle, L20 7W

All external partners, including local authorities, should now use the new Business Reply Envelopes as this reduces the delivery time. These can be obtained in the usual way.

For further information email [DWP Infrastructure Modernisation Programme](#).

## Asbestos victims to get £123,000 in compensation

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Victims of the fatal asbestos-induced cancer mesothelioma who cannot trace a liable employer or an employers' liability insurer will soon be able to apply for compensation packages worth an average of £123,000.

The Government has increased this from the initial £115,000 that was debated in the House of Commons in January after making savings in the administration costs of the scheme.

Around 3,500 victims of the aggressive cancer or their families can apply for compensation from April with payments of around £123,000 being made from July 2014 as part of a £380 million package.

Over 300 people each year struggle to find the relevant party to sue over after contracting Mesothelioma, which is asbestos-related and often takes 40 to 50 years for symptoms to appear.

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