

Touchbase

August 2014

Welcome to August's Touchbase



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It barely seems a year since the Prime Minister David Cameron launched the Disability Confident campaign, but here we are marking its first anniversary.

In this edition we report on how the campaign is helping to make a difference with hundreds of employers already pledging to do all they can to improve job outcomes for disabled people.

We also have an article on the launch of the Health and Work Service, to work with employees, employers and the medical profession to help cut sickness absence, which can be costly both for those concerned and for the economy.

Other reports include the outcome of Matthew Oakley's review of benefit sanctions, how local councils will help claimants to prepare for Universal Credit, and the news that Work Coaches are being given the discretion to give homeless jobseekers a break from signing on so that they can look for a place to live. We also report on DWP's social media campaign #firstjob, which aims to help young people to see the job opportunities and options available to them.

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Communications with claimants to be improved

DWP has welcomed the findings of [Matthew Oakley's review](#) of benefit sanctions for claimants who do not do enough to look for work, miss appointments or turn down job offers.

In his report Mr Oakley acknowledged that sanctions have a vital role to play in the welfare system and made a series of recommendations that will help encourage more claimants to do the right thing.

Ministers have issued a [response to the Oakley Review](#) and have accepted all of Mr Oakley's recommendations. The actions that have been agreed include:

- Setting up a specialist team to audit all claimant communications, including letters, texts and emails, and to transform how claimants on all benefits are given information about their responsibilities and the support on offer. The team will also take on board the latest academic research and innovations in private sector communications;
- Streamlining the robust checks and balances that are already in place to give claimants the chance to provide evidence of why they have not complied with the rules;

- Clarifying guidance and updating the process by which claimants can access hardship payments once they have been sanctioned;
- Working more closely with local authorities to coordinate their approach to delivering Housing Benefit for claimants who have been sanctioned;
- Ensuring that the Claimant Commitment – the contract that claimants sign up to in exchange for their benefits – can be shared with their provider throughout their time on a back-to-work scheme;
- Working with providers, stakeholders and advocates to continuously explore alternative formats for all types of communications with claimants.

Sanctions are applied as a last resort and recent research shows that 72 per cent of claimants say that they are more likely to follow the rules if there is a risk that their benefit could be stopped.

“In his report Mr Oakley acknowledged that sanctions have a vital role to play in the welfare system.”

More information is available at [Matthew Oakley's review](#) and at [Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions guide](#).

Local councils to help claimants prepare for Universal Credit

DWP has announced a series of new trials to help claimants get ready for Universal Credit, along with the 11 partnerships that will deliver local support.



The trials will be run as partnerships between Jobcentres and local authorities across Great Britain. These partnerships will look at the best way to prepare claimants for

the work, help them with online access and digital support and to manage their finances on a monthly basis.

Each trial will be different and will be tailored to local needs. Local authorities will work with third sector organisations, voluntary groups or social landlords to deliver support to claimants.

Minister for Welfare Reform Lord Freud said:

“Through Universal Credit we are empowering people to escape the benefits trap. But we know that for some vulnerable people additional support is needed to help them manage their lives to prepare for the transition into work. That is why we have announced the next steps for trialling local support, delivered in partnership with local authorities to support those with more complex needs.”

The proposed support from local authorities includes:

- Referring claimants from Jobcentres to a hub of local services to support the most vulnerable throughout their journey;
- Setting up a network of mentors and provide coaching to claimants to help them manage their finances online;
- Improving access to debt management advice and local credit unions;
- Supporting access to housing options and drug and alcohol treatment.

The Local Authorities that have been chosen to deliver support are: Derby City, Islington, South Staffordshire, West Lindsey, Argyll and Bute, Dundee City, Blaenau Gwent, Carmarthenshire and joint bids from Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark, Northumberland and South Tyneside and Westminster and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

For more information read [Lord Freud's speech](#) to the Local Government Association or the [initial local support services framework](#).

The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document on Universal Credit and rented housing has been updated and is available [here](#).

This is aimed at both private and social sector landlords and provides current information about Universal Credit and advice on how they can help their tenants to prepare for the move to direct payments.

New service to help cut sickness absence

A new Health and Work Service will be introduced at the end of 2014 to help cut sickness absence and the impact it has on employees, employers and the economy.

The longer someone is off sick from work, the harder it is for them to get back to work. Research suggests that long-term worklessness is damaging to people's health, social and financial well-being. Sickness absence currently costs employees £4 billion a year in lost earnings.

The Health and Work Service will offer employees, GPs and employers supportive occupational health assessments and general health and work advice to support people with a health condition to stay in and/or return to work.

This will help to prevent sickness absence turning into long-term welfare dependency and reduce the cost to the business community.

There will be two elements to the Health and Work Service:

- **Assessment** – once an employee has reached, or is expected to reach, four weeks of sickness absence their GP will refer them for an assessment by an occupational health professional who will look at all the issues that might be preventing them from returning to work;
- **Advice** – all employers, employees and GPs will be able to get advice over the phone and/or from a website.

Employees will need to give their consent before they are referred for an assessment by the Health and Work Service. Employees who are referred will get a return to work plan which will include recommendations to help them back to work more quickly and information on how to get the appropriate support. The plan will be shared with their GP and employer.

Health Management Limited has been appointed to deliver the Service in England and Wales. In Scotland, the same service will be delivered by the Scottish Government on behalf of DWP.

Health and Work Service is expected to deliver:

- A 20 – 40 per cent cut in the length of sickness absence for employees who are seen by the Health and Work Service assessment service;
- Net savings to employers of £65-80 million each year;
- A £30-60 million cut in the amount that out-of-work benefits costs the Government each year;
- Increased Government income from tax and National Insurance contributions of £100-£215 million a year.

 More information is available at GOV.UK.

Homeless jobseekers allowed time to find a place to live

DWP has changed the domestic emergency rules for homeless Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants to allow them more time to look for a place to live.

These changes are in response to concerns from the voluntary and community sectors that sanctions are being unfairly imposed on some JSA claimants because there is a lack of understanding of how homelessness can affect their ability to find work.

As a result, on 21 July, DWP amended the regulations for the existing JSA domestic emergency provisions to allow some recently homeless claimants time out from the job seeking conditions – called easement – so they can focus on finding a place to live.

Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches now have the discretion to decide whether a claimant is experiencing a domestic emergency. If they decide that it is an emergency then they must allow claimants some “easement” from their job seeking requirements.

“In practice, the new rules may be applied to any claimants who have recently become homeless and whose homelessness is their main barrier to finding and retaining a job.”

It is anticipated that those who have recently become homeless and are sleeping rough or are in direct access hostels, are most likely to benefit from the changes but it will depend on their individual circumstances.

Work Coaches can also decide whether to apply easement to other recently homeless claimants if their individual circumstances can be considered as a domestic emergency. For example, if someone is leaving care or is in a hostel similar to a direct access hostel.

In practice, the new rules may be applied to any claimants who have recently become homeless and are facing a domestic emergency where homelessness is their main barrier to finding and keeping a job. In these cases Work Coaches can treat claimants as meeting the “job seeking conditions” for periods of longer than one week. There is also no limit on the number of occasions easement can be allowed.

This change is in line with the approach that was introduced in the Universal Credit pathfinder sites in April 2014.

 For further information contact kerry.fern@dwp.gsi.gov.uk or visit GOV.UK.

Disability Confident campaign – one year on

Since it was launched a year ago the Disability Confident campaign has reached over 1,100 employers and received hundreds of pledges from organisations committed to improving employment outcomes for disabled people.

To mark the first anniversary of the [campaign](#), DWP has launched two portals that provide information and guidance on how to support disabled talent:

- The [Young Person's Portal](#) – this gives young people, and those who work with them, the information they need to help them get the job they want;
- An updated [Employer's Portal](#) – this includes new information on impairments, recruitment practices and disability law.

On 18 July, partners, stakeholders and employers also provided supportive communications about the anniversary and the campaign. They used their own networks to increase the communications reach and impact on social media. As a result the hashtag #disabilityconfident delivered a cumulative social media reach of over 19.1 million.

DWP is continuing to build on the success so far by launching a toolkit to help Members of Parliament (MPs) hold Disability Confident events for employers and job-ready disabled people in their own constituencies.

These events will build on cross-government work with business communities by making the most of the unique connections MPs have with their constituencies, to offer more opportunities for disabled people and people with health conditions.

If you are interested in supporting a local MP led Disability Confident event please [contact us](#).

To tell us how you are making a difference to the employment outcomes for disabled people email dwp.disabilityconfident@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

You can follow what is happening on social media by using hashtag #disabilityconfident and also share the [Disability Confident videos](#) on your social network sites.



Celebrities show their support for young jobseekers

The Government wants young people to recognise that, while their first job might not be their dream job, it could be a stepping stone to something else.



The work skills, knowledge and practical experience they gain will also be useful throughout their working lives.

One way in which DWP is helping young people to see the job opportunities and options that are available to them is through a social media campaign, #firstjob.

DWP has had a great response to the campaign with a number of celebrities taking to Twitter to share their first job experiences.

Did you know, for example, that Lenny Henry started out as an apprentice welder? Or that Olly Murs had two paper rounds? Or that Falklands hero Simon Weston used to be a metal fabricator? This involves the cutting and bending of metal to build structures.

Over the last month, the social media activity for this campaign has peaked at over 4,000

#firstjob mentions on Twitter as people have got behind the campaign.

However, celebrities are not the only ones who have been sharing their experiences. Our partners, Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches, stakeholders, employers and recruitment agencies have also been lending their support, telling us about their early work experiences and sharing tips on how to get and progress in a job.

If you want to get involved, we would really like to hear from you. Contact us through Twitter or Instagram @DWPgovuk using hashtag #firstjob to tell us about your early work experiences and tips for finding a job.

Further information on helping young people into work is also available at GOV.UK.

Other news in brief...

Bidding open for Youth Engagement Fund

If you have an innovative idea that could help improve young people's prospects of employment, there is a chance to bid for funding from the Government's Youth Engagement Fund.

The Youth Engagement Fund is a £16 million payment by results fund that aims to help disadvantaged young people aged 14 to 17. The funding will be provided through Social Impact Bonds.

We are looking for innovative proposals that will help stop young people from becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and will help to improve their prospects of employment.

It is jointly funded by the Cabinet Office, Department of Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Justice.

You can find out more at [Youth Engagement Fund: prospectus](#).

The deadline for applications is 18 August.

August dedicated to Partnership and Innovation

During August the Social Justice: Transforming Lives website will feature articles and blogs from organisations who have taken a different approach to supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

Contributors include Rushcliffe and Leicester councils on the role of partnerships in delivering local services, Rideout on using the arts to unlock talent in offenders to help them rebuild their lives after prison and a Kenyan horticultural programme that has lessons for the UK.

You will also find regular updates from across Government.

Find out more at [Social Justice: Transforming Lives](#).

Keep up to date via @socjusticegov and join the debate via our [DWP Social Justice LinkedIn group](#).

Government highlights benefits of remaining a United Kingdom

The Government has published its final 'In the Know' pack ahead of the Scottish referendum, covering jobs, welfare and pensions.

Key points made in the [pack](#), include:

- UK employment is at record levels, with over 2.58 million people in Scotland in work;
- UK savers are protected by a guarantee covering deposits of up to £85,000 in any UK bank or building society. The State Pension is the same across the UK while the UK's Pension Protection Fund protects over 11 million people in eligible occupational pension schemes;
- The welfare system has evolved to provide support where and when people need it most. For example, the UK Government spent £17.7 billion on benefits, pensions and tax credits in Scotland in 2012/13;
- Leaving the UK would mean stepping away from our pooled resources, and an independent Scotland would have to set up a new welfare system, supported by a smaller economy.

The '[In the Know](#)' series is designed to help voters make an informed decision ahead of the Scottish independence referendum in September 2014 along with the more in-depth [Scotland Analysis papers](#).

First business champion for older workers appointed

Economist, policy expert and consumer campaigner Dr Ros Altmann CBE has been appointed by the Government as its Business Champion for Older Workers.

The appointment marks the latest step in the Government's drive to support over-50s in the UK labour market.

Dr Altmann – a former director-general of Saga and independent expert on later life issues – will be making the case for older workers within the business community as well as challenging outdated perceptions.

The move follows the Government's publication of the [Fuller Working Lives - A Framework For Action](#) in June. This sets out the benefits to individuals, business and the economy of people aged over 50 staying in work.