

Touchbase

January 2015

Welcome to January's Touchbase



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Happy New Year! It's our first edition of Touchbase for 2015 and we are starting with reports on two new measures to help people return to, or stay in work when they fall ill.

The Fit for Work service will provide support for workers, employers and GPs when someone is off sick from work for four weeks or more. We know that research shows that the longer someone is off sick, the harder it is for them to get back to work. So the aim is to help people get back to work as soon as possible.

In other news, an extra £12 million is being invested to help people with mental health conditions to return to work. Again, there is evidence that mental issues can be costly, not only to individuals, but also to health services and businesses.

You can also read about the contribution both the New Enterprise Allowance and the Work Programme are making to the fall in unemployment, an update on Personal Independence Payment and new guidance on the changes to the State Pension that will come into force from April 2016.

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

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Fit for Work goes live

The Fit for Work advice service which offers expert and impartial work-related health advice, is now live.

[Fit for Work](#) is for anyone who needs free and impartial advice, including employers, GPs and employees. It is designed to support people in work with health conditions and to help with sickness absence.

Research suggests that being out of work for long periods of time is damaging to people's health and their social and financial well-being and that the longer someone is off sick, the harder it is for them to get back to work.

Advice is available over the phone as well as via the [Fit for Work](#) website.

Employees will soon be able to benefit from referrals to a health professional when they have been off sick for four weeks or more while employers could start to receive Return to Work Plans which will act as fit notes.

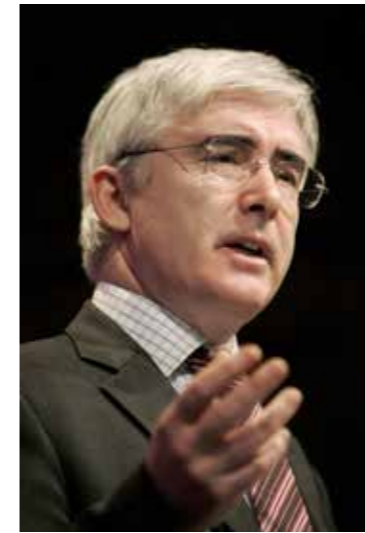
Fit for Work is intended to complement, not replace, existing occupational health provision. It should be particularly beneficial to smaller businesses that have not previously had access to occupational health advice.

There will be a phased rollout of the referral service over a period of months before Fit for Work is available nationwide. There will be more details of the rollout early in 2015 but people can [sign up](#) now to receive updates or get prepared by reading the [guidance](#).

Fit for Work, which was known as the Health and Work Service, is being delivered in England and Wales by Health Management Ltd and in Scotland by the Scottish Government via NHS Scotland. In Scotland the service is called [Fit for Work Scotland](#).

Work is good for your mental health

The Government has announced that a further £12 million is being invested to support people with mental health conditions return to work.



Nearly half (46 per cent) of people claiming Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) have mental health conditions. Mental ill-health is estimated to cost taxpayers and businesses £105 billion a year in health and police services, welfare benefits and sickness absence.

Minister for Welfare Reform Lord Freud said: "We want people with mental health conditions to have the same opportunities in the world or work as everyone else and not simply be written off as often happened in the past."

"That is why we are trialing different types of support to improve employment and health outcomes for people with common mental health problems."

The four pilot areas are Blackpool, Greater Manchester, North East Combined Authority and West London Alliance. All four pilots were previously announced as part of the [Growth Deals agreements](#) in July and will measure the impact of integrated services for 5,000 people.

The £12 million investment includes £6 million from the Department for Communities and Local Government and £6 million match-funding from the pilot areas.

A new cross-government [Mental Health Taskforce](#) has also been set up to look at the help people need to get back into work and how to improve crisis care and mental health services for young people..

Four pilot areas will use the funding to test whether better coordination of mental health and employment services could help thousands of people find and stay in work as well as to improve their mental health. Each of the pilots will test a number of different approaches, including:

- Key workers and individual support packages to help claimants create bespoke action plans and coordinate existing local support services;
- Support for new employees to make sure they can stay in work and cope with anxiety and other on-going problems;
- Training employment advisers to identify mental health problems and GPs to recognise the importance of work in improving mental health.



Visit [Fit for Work](#) to find out what is available.

Sixty thousand reasons to celebrate

More than 450 new businesses have been set up every week over the past year thanks to the New Enterprise Allowance (NEA).



The latest NEA figures show that Government scheme has now helped 60,000 jobseekers, lone parents and people on sickness benefits to set up their own business and come off benefits.

NEA offers budding entrepreneurs, who are on benefit, financial and mentoring support to help turn their business ideas into a reality. Over 4,000 young people, 11,000 disabled people and more than 14,000 over-50s have been helped to turn their hobbies into businesses.

Minister for Employment, Esther McVey said: "Small businesses are what make this country great – with their hard work, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit they are fuelling Britain's recovery. They are also providing a significant share of new vacancies, contributing to the record number of people who now have jobs."

People on the scheme get expert help and advice from a business mentor who will help

them to develop their business idea and write a business plan. If the business plan is approved, they are eligible for financial support payable through a weekly allowance over 26 weeks and up to a total of £1,274.

Participants can also access a loan through the [start-up loan scheme](#) offered by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. Once a business is up and running, mentors continue to give entrepreneurs on-going support during the early months of trading.

The [New Enterprise Allowance](#) is available to:

- People over 18 who are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance;
- Lone parents on Income Support;
- People on Employment and Support Allowance in the work-related activity group;
- Dependent partners of Jobseekers Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance claimants are now also eligible for NEA support.



The full NEA statistics are at GOV.UK

State Pension changes explained

DWP has published new guidance on the changes to the State Pension that will take effect from April 2016.

The [State Pension Toolkit](#) will help organisations and employers to explain the changes to their staff and the public when the current State Pension is replaced by the new simpler system from April 2016.

The new State Pension is designed to give people greater clarity about what they will get from the State in retirement and will affect everyone who reaches State Pension age on or after 6 April 2016.

To ensure that people receive the right information, DWP has provided a toolkit. This brings together simple and downloadable information on all aspects of the State Pension changes.

It includes:

- Seven factsheets;
- [Two videos](#);

- Six infographics and photo case studies;
- A [State Pension explained](#) guide;
- Guidance for employers and trustees on the end of [contracting out](#).

DWP is encouraging organisations such as trade bodies, charities, private sector firms and the media to download and use this information to help them to explain the changes to their customers or employees.

The [State Pension Toolkit](#) will be regularly updated with new products. In the coming weeks DWP will be adding a factsheet covering derived and inherited State Pension and an explanation of the terminology we use.

DWP would like your feedback on the products in the toolkit. Comments and requests for future content should be sent to nicholas.denton@dwp.gsi.gov.uk



PIP extends further to England and Scotland

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is being further rolled out to working age Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants in more postcode areas.

From 26 January 2015, PIP will be extended to the following postcode areas:

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

Claimants in these postcodes will be 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;
- DWP has received information about a change in their care or mobility needs;
- Someone chooses to claim PIP instead of DLA.

This follows on from the rollout in November 2014 when PIP was extended to a number of postcode areas including Manchester (M), Liverpool (L), Chester (CH) and Huddersfield (HD).

As part of the on-going drive to improve the PIP process, DWP carried out a small pilot to test the effectiveness of phone calls to claimants whose claims had been disallowed or whose benefit had been reduced.

The pilot showed that most claimants had already received and understood the written

notification before being called by DWP and that some of them did not need or want further explanation of the decision.

As a result DWP is now leaving it to claimants to get in touch if they need further information.

The first [independent review](#) of PIP, carried out by Paul Gray, was published on 17 December 2014. This explored how PIP is operating and the effectiveness of the assessment and made a series of recommendations based on the information that was gathered throughout the review.

These focus on three main areas:

- Improving the experience for claimants;
- Clarifying and improving the collection of further evidence;
- The overall effectiveness of the assessment.

The Government has welcomed the review and will publish a detailed response in due course.

The latest set of experimental [official statistics on PIP](#), up to October 2014, was also published on 17 December 2014 which included detailed breakdowns of people's medical conditions for the first time.

 **For further information visit the PIP Toolkit at [GOV.UK](#)**

Number of long-term unemployed falling

New figures show that the Work Programme has helped to bring the number of long-term unemployed people down to a five-year low.



The [Work Programme](#) has helped 368,000 people who were long-term unemployed into lasting work including nearly 22,000 people with a health condition or disability.

In total, industry figures show that almost 640,000 people have started a job thanks to the Work Programme. This has contributed to a large fall in the number of long-term unemployed people, which is now at its lowest since 2009.

Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith said:

“This government’s welfare reforms are designed to ensure that everyone who is able to work gets the support, the skills, and opportunities to do so. And the latest record jobs figures suggest that it is working.

“Long-term unemployment fell by almost 200,000 over the last year – and many of these people, who are now looking forward to a better more secure future with the security of a regular wage, will have been supported into a job by the Work Programme.”

More than 348,000 participants have remained in a job for more than six months, while 130,000 claimants have spent 18 months or longer in work.

Previous schemes did not support disabled people enough, so the Work Programme focuses on giving some of the hardest to help people, two years of support and offers providers higher prices for working with these claimants.

Work Programme providers are paid the majority of their money when someone has stayed in work for six months, or three months for some claimants who are the hardest to help.

There are now 30.8 million people in work with an employment rate of 73 per cent. The number of people claiming the main unemployment benefit – Jobseeker’s Allowance – is down by nearly a third compared to this time last year.

 **For more information on the figures see the full [Work Programme](#) statistics.**

Other news in brief...

National rollout of Universal Credit



Universal Credit will be rolled out to all Jobcentres and local authorities across the country from February 2015.

The national expansion will only apply to new claims from single jobseekers. This marks a significant acceleration of one of the Government's biggest reforms. Universal Credit brings together six benefits and tax credits into one.

The details of the local authorities and Jobcentres that will begin delivering Universal Credit between February and April 2015 can be found at GOV.UK.

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

Social enterprise sector in the spotlight

This month the Social Justice website looks at the growth of social investment and the rise of the social enterprise sector.

Business and charity sector contributors including the CBI, Ingeus, Porchlight and the UK's first social supermarket explore whether social investment can really help to change lives.

Visit [Social Justice: Transforming lives](#) for the latest social justice news.

Seven-year extension for Post Office accounts

The Government has signed a new £250 million contract with the Post Office to protect the accounts of pensioners and benefit claimants.

It means that the Post Office Card Account will remain available until at least November 2021. The service was previously due to be withdrawn in March 2015.

The Post Office Card Account provides simple banking services for people without a traditional bank current account, to ensure they can receive the benefits, tax credits, state pensions or war pension to which they are entitled. Around 2.5 million people currently hold one.

People with a Post Office Card Account can withdraw money or check their balance at any of the Post Office's 11,500 branches or by using one of a network of around 2,500 Post Office ATMs across the UK.

For more information see [Post Office Card Account](#).

Five million workers are in

The number of people who have been automatically enrolled in a workplace pension has now reached five million – more than half the eligible workers.

Pensions Minister Steve Webb has also announced that a new system will be launched in autumn 2016 which will see small pension pots automatically follow workers as they move from job to job.

According to the latest figures from the Pensions Regulator around 43,000 employers of all types, from charities to supermarkets and hospitals to football clubs, have now automatically enrolled their workers.

For more information see [Helping people save more for their retirement through workplace pensions](#) and [Pensions and ageing society](#) or the visit the [The Pensions Regulator website](#).

Support for organ donation scheme

Users of the Carers Allowance Digital Service now have the option of also signing up for the NHS Organ Donation programme when they log on to make a claim for Carer's Allowance.

A link to the [Organ Donor Register](#) appears at the end of the [Carer's Allowance Online](#) screens which takes users on to the registration website.

The link has been introduced in support of the organ donation scheme and users are being asked to give their feedback on the addition of the link. Comments should be sent to carole.wingfield@dpw.gsi.gov.uk

Free grants from British Gas

People who are facing hardship could be eligible for a free grant from the British Gas Energy Trust.

This is a charitable trust covering England, Scotland and Wales that provides free grants to clear gas and electric debts, pay outstanding funeral expenses and to purchase white goods.

It is free to apply and recipients do not have to repay it.

The trust is open to everyone, regardless of who their energy supplier is, so people do not need to be with British Gas to apply.

Further information can be found on the website [British Gas Energy Trust](#).