

Touchbase

May 2014

Welcome to the May issue of Touchbase



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The busy spring period continues and in this edition we report on some major changes that have been introduced for claimants and jobseekers.

Our first report is on Help to Work which was introduced from 28 April. The scheme will provide tailored support for people who have been out of work for a long time and will focus on the particular barriers to work which individual claimants might have.

We also give an update on the latest developments for Universal Credit which has now rolled out to ten areas in the North West of England, Scotland and Wales.

Other articles include improvements to the claims process for Personal Independence Payment, changes to DWP's Customer Charter and how claiming Employment and Support Allowance by phone helps claimants. Finally, as credit unions celebrate their 50th anniversary, we look at why they are still as relevant today as they were in 1964.

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In this issue...

Help to Work measures

Extra support to help long-term unemployed back to work



Universal Credit

Universal Credit rolls out to more areas in the North West of England



Personal Independence Payment

DWP is improving the service it gives to PIP claimants



Disability Confident

Business support for Disability Confident continues to grow



New DWP Customer Charter

DWP puts customers at the heart of all it does



Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

ESA claims: quicker and more efficient over the phone



Credit unions

Credit unions celebrate 50 years of community service



Other news in brief

A round-up of other news



Extra support to help long-term unemployed back to work

A new intensive package of measures – called Help to Work – has been introduced to help get claimants who are long-term unemployed into work.

The measures give Jobcentre Plus Advisers/ Work Coaches a new range of options to support claimants who return from the Work Programme, and are amongst the hardest to help, to get off benefits and into work.

They will affect Jobseeker's Allowance claimants and, from July, Universal Credit claimants who are subject to intensive work search requirements.

Jobcentre Plus Advisers/Work Coaches will refer claimants to one of three measures according to their particular barriers to work. Participation is mandatory and there will be help with travel costs for those who need it. Jobseekers who fail to take part could face sanctions that could see them lose their benefits for a period of time.

The Help to Work measures are:

Daily Work Search Reviews

For claimants who would benefit from regular support to look for jobs, including those who need to build their motivation, momentum and engagement. The daily meeting with their Jobcentre Plus Adviser/ Work Coach will include discussing their progress in looking for work, such as the number of job searches, applications they have made, or new activity to improve

their skills. This has been introduced in nearly half of Jobcentres and will be rolled out to all the rest by the end of the year.

Community Work Placements

For claimants whose main barrier to work is a lack of work experience. All will last for up to six months for 30 hours a week and will be backed up by at least four hours of supported job search each week. Placements will be of benefit to the local community with the aim of giving claimants skills and experience to support them into work. In England, Community Work Placements will be part-funded by the European Social Fund. The first claimants will be referred to Community Work Placements from the end of May 2014.

Mandatory Intervention Regime

For jobseekers with multiple or complex barriers to work. Their Jobcentre Plus Adviser/Work Coach will spend more time with them, looking at how to tailor their back to work support. There is now more flexibility to send people on intensive training schemes, ad hoc funding to help with things such as initial travel costs or suitable clothes for a job interview, and work experience opportunities with local organisations. This has been running successfully in Jobcentres since June 2013.



For more information about Help to Work please visit GOV.UK.

Universal Credit expands in the North West

DWP's ministers have set out plans for the next steps of Universal Credit to mark the first anniversary of the new benefit becoming available in Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester, in April 2013.

Universal Credit has a number of elements which have already been rolled out across the country, including the Claimant Commitment, where jobseekers agree what they will do to find work. This is now being used by all 714 Jobcentre Plus offices and 26,300 staff have been trained as Work Coaches.

From June 2014, more Jobcentre Plus offices across the North West of England will gradually take on Universal Credit claims each week until the whole region is fully rolled out.

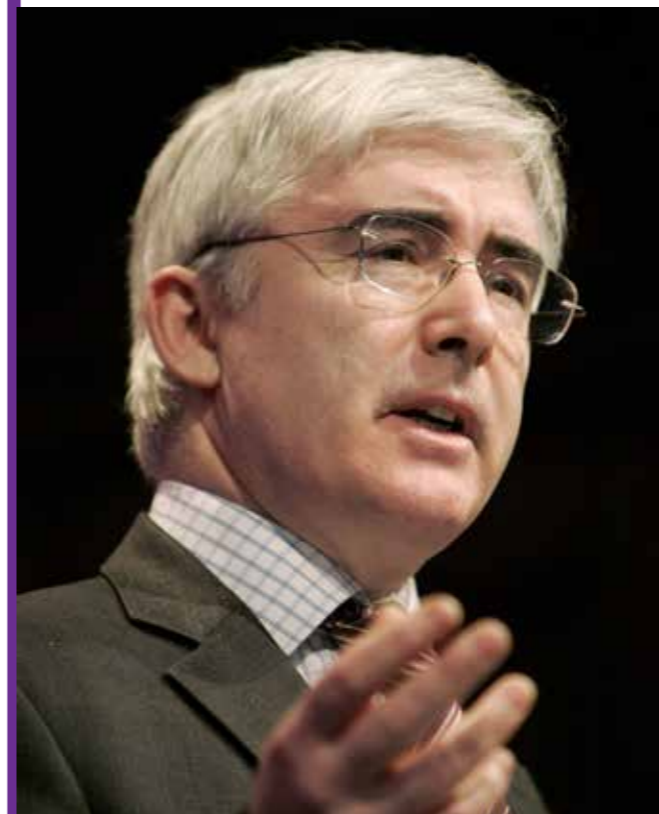
During the summer the new benefit will also become available for new claims from couples in a number of Jobcentre Plus sites that already deliver the full Universal Credit service.

Minister for Welfare Reform Lord Freud said: "Universal Credit is changing lives. We are seeing claimants move smoothly into work, safe in the knowledge that support from Universal Credit remains with them.

"We now have ten sites which are successfully running Universal Credit in England, Scotland and Wales and the next step is to open the new benefit to claimants across the North West – as part of our safe and secure rollout.

"Universal Credit is helping to ensure that work pays and is part of the Government's long-term plan to get more people into work and off benefits."

Universal Credit will benefit the economy by billions of pounds and will help hundreds of thousands of people into work when it is fully rolled out.



For more information take a look at the [Universal Credit](#) pages.

Personal Independence Payment improvements

DWP is improving the service it gives to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claimants.

Customer information has been improved to ensure that it is as clear as possible. It tells claimants what they can expect when they apply for PIP, as well as where they are in the claims process.

Claimants now get a text message to let them know that their 'How your disability affects you' form has been received.

The message explains that they will be contacted by a health professional if they need to attend an assessment and gives an indication of how long the claim might take.

Claimants who call the PIP Enquiry Line will now hear an automated message which tells them how long it might take to process their claim. The aim is to reassure claimants that their claim is being dealt with and to help manage calls to the PIP Enquiry Line.

Claimants also now receive more information with their 'How your disability affects you' form to speed up the time it takes to process their claim. This includes:

- Examples of the types of further evidence they should and should not provide;
- A reminder to return the form as quickly as possible;
- Information on what happens next and how to get help to fill in the 'How your disability affects you' form.

In addition, improvements have been made to the process for PIP claims that are submitted under the special rules for terminally ill people. This includes a new NHS.net email account so that health professionals can use the electronic DS1500 form.

The NHS.net email is currently available only in England and Scotland. An electronic form is due to be developed for Wales and, in the meantime, health professionals there should continue to use the paper DS1500 form.

 Information for support organisations is available at [PIP toolkit](#) and information for claimants at [GOV.UK/PIP](#).

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Business support for Disability Confident continues to grow

The Government's work with the business community to make the most of disabled talent is going from strength to strength.

DWP and its business partners launched the second phase of the Disability Confident campaign in November 2013 with a series of regional events across the country. The events are designed to increase confidence amongst employers to recruit and retain more disabled people of working age.

Partner businesses have also continued their support for the campaign through their own channels and networks, increasing the reach and impact of the Disability Confident campaign.

The [International Media Group \(IMG\)](#) is one example of how the business community is supporting the campaign. The global film production company has produced a series of videos to show what can be achieved when an organisation makes the positive decision to become disability confident.

IMG's journey to becoming disability confident began when one of their producers became disabled after a brain aneurysm. In the first of a series of three videos, sports presenter Hazel Irvine describes the initial steps the company took to make sure that Simon could continue to work. This meant

that IMG could keep the services of a valued employee. You can watch [IMG's video](#) on the Disability Confident campaign YouTube play list.

Hands Free Computing Limited, a specialist technology, training and advice company, is also reaping the rewards of employing from a diverse talent pool. It has a policy of employing people with disabilities and has ensured that its business is totally accessible to customers who have disabilities. It believes that as a result it has created “a really talented, capable and compassionate workforce.”

You can read the company's [case study](#) on the Disability Confident campaign page.

If you have a Disability Confident case study you would like to share please email dwp.disabilityconfident@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

You can support the campaign by sharing the [Disability Confident videos](#) on your social network sites #disabilityconfident and by taking a look at the [Employer Portal](#) and encouraging your employer contacts to use the information and guidance it contains.

“The International Media Group (IMG) is one example of how the business community is supporting the campaign.”

DWP improves its Customer Charter

DWP has revised its Customer Charter to improve the quality of its service by putting customers at the heart of everything it does.

Our customer charter



You told us what is important to you:



Right treatment

We'll listen to you, and treat you fairly and with respect. We'll do our best to help you.



Keeping you informed

We'll deal with you as quickly as we can, and explain what to expect.



Easy access

We'll make sure you can contact us in ways that are simple and easy to understand.



Getting it right

We want you to have confidence in our decisions. If the outcome is not what you hoped for, we'll explain why and advise you what you can do next.

We will also:

- Protect your personal information (our 'Information charter' tells you how).
- Investigate all reports of fraud, to protect public money.

In return, we need you to:

- Give us correct information at the right time.
- Tell us when something changes.
- Be on time for any appointments.
- Treat our staff with respect.

To find out more, visit www.gov.uk and search 'dwpcharter'

- **Right treatment** – how DWP's staff should treat customers and whether they are following the correct processes;
- **Keeping people informed** – dealing with requests the first time, if possible, and keeping customers updated on how queries are progressing;
- **Getting it right** – making the correct decisions and providing clear and well explained information. Also, saying sorry and putting things right when mistakes have been made;
- **Easy access** – making more services available online, publishing information about benefits on GOV.UK and explaining the different ways in which people can contact DWP.

The revised Charter will be displayed in prominent positions in all DWP offices so that customers can see it.

Angela Macdonald, DWP's Operational Excellence Director, said:

"We are committed to delivering an excellent customer service as a priority. The revised Customer Charter provides the framework against which we will measure customer service improvements in order to drive up the quality of our service. It sets out the level of service customers can expect from us, and what we expect in return, in a clear and straightforward way."



You can view the new [Customer Charter](#) on GOV.UK.

ESA claims: quicker and more efficient over the phone

Jobcentre Plus is encouraging Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants, where possible, to make their claims over the phone in order to receive a quicker and more efficient service.

The ESA claim lines – 0800 055 6688, Text phone 0800 023 4888 and the Welsh Language line 0800 012 1888 – are free from land lines. There are also some mobile phone operators who do not charge for these calls.

Making ESA claims over the phone has many advantages, including:

- **Being able to speak to someone in person**, who will go through the application form, fill in the claimant's details on the form, give advice and answer any questions that might arise;
- **Reducing delays** as claimants will be told there and then, if extra evidence is needed in order to process a claim;
- **Getting a chance to check** if the information on the completed application is accurate, as a copy of the form will be sent to the claimant;
- **Being kept up-to-date** on the progress of a claim by the adviser, usually through text messages, which will avoid claimants having to make further contact themselves;
- **Being told how to contact** the Department and what the next stage of the ESA claim process will be.



Further details on how to claim ESA can be found at [GOV.UK](#).

Credit unions celebrate 50 years of community service

It is 50 years since the first credit unions were set up in Wimbledon and Hornsey and they remain as relevant today as they were in 1964.

Credit unions offer affordable loans, while encouraging people to save. They are a safe alternative to expensive payday loans, doorstep lenders or loan sharks.

The Government is concerned that people on lower incomes sometimes have to repay £80 or more in interest for every £100 they borrow. So it is investing up to £38million to support credit unions to expand and become financially self-sustainable.

There are currently around 380 credit unions in England, Scotland and Wales, with over 1 million people using them but this is only 2 per cent of their potential market. That is why in May 2013, the Government signed a contract with the Association of British Credit Unions Limited (ABCUL) to increase credit union membership to at least 2 million by April 2019.

To coincide with the 50th anniversary of credit unions Jobcentre Plus is providing space in its Dovercourt office, in Harwich, for a credit union which will serve anyone who lives, works or studies in Tendring.

The new initiative is a joint venture between Colchester Credit Union, Tendring District Council, Jobcentre Plus and Colne Housing. It also has the backing of the Citizen's Advice Bureau and housing association partners.

Mark Fisher, DWP's Director of Social Justice, said: "This is a brilliant opportunity to work in partnership and offer the community a great resource within the Jobcentre Plus network. I know that staff are keen to help as many people as possible through our services."

Members need to meet the "Common Bond" criteria set by individual credit unions in order to join. This could include living or working in a certain area or working for a particular employer.



To find out more or to join a credit union visit [Find Your Credit Union](#).

"This is a brilliant opportunity to work in partnership and offer the community a great resource within the Jobcentre Plus network."

Other news in brief...

Temporary measures to Support Mortgage Interest extended

Temporary measures to help home owners who lose their jobs will be extended until the end of March 2016.

The measures, which were originally introduced in January 2009, shortened the waiting time before claimants can get Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI) to 13 weeks and increased the higher capital limit to £200,000.

The support protects working-age claimants against repossession by providing SMI sooner and for a higher capital limit. It should allow lenders time to find alternative solutions to repossession and reduce the risk of mortgage arrears building up.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, announced the two-year extension in the Budget in March 2014.

More information on SMI is available on [GOV.UK](#).

Public Meeting by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council

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.

To book your place and for further information please email: iiac@dwp.gsi.gov.uk or you can also visit the [IIAC](#) website.