

Touchbase

November 2014

Welcome to November's Touchbase



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November sees some major changes and events for DWP.

These include the 3rd Social Justice Conference on the 18 November and the further rollout of the Personal Independent Payment.

Our first article this month is on DWP's appointment of MAXIMUS Health and Human Services Limited to provide health-related assessments, including for the Work Capability Assessment.

We also report on the online services that are making it easier for thousands of social housing tenants to swap homes. Some tenants are moving because of the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and this is giving them, and others, the chance to find homes that are more suited to their needs.

Other topics include a DWP pilot, which for the first time will see Jobcentres supporting some 16-17 year olds, who are not on income-based benefits or in education, employment or training, the launch of a scheme to help people return to work after an illness and a new campaign to deter benefit fraud.

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In this issue...

New health assessment contractor named
MAXIMUS Health and Human Services Limited named as new contractor



Fit for Work to be launched
New support to help reduce sickness absence



Benefit Fraud campaign
New drive to prevent and deter benefit fraud



Social housing tenants on the move
Local housing associations and social landlords join forces



New help for jobless teenagers
Jobcentres pilot extra support for jobless 16-17 year olds



Personal Independence Payment
PIP reassessment rolls out to further postcodes



Three-month benefit limit for EEA jobseekers
Migrants face limits when claiming income-based Jobseeker's Allowance



More support for jobseekers
New steps to make unemployed people more job ready



Other news in brief
A round-up of other news



New contractor for health-related assessments named



DWP has awarded the contract to carry out health-related assessments to MAXIMUS Health and Human Services Limited.

MAXIMUS specialises in delivering health and employment services for governments across the world. It is already a key Work Programme provider in the UK and was recently awarded the contract to deliver the new Fit for Work service for DWP.

The contract will cover a number of assessments including the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), which is currently carried out by Atos. In March this year the Government reached an agreement with Atos to exit its WCA contract early.

The new contract is part of a concerted drive to ensure that people who need an assessment get the best possible service. Since 2010 there have been four independent reviews of the WCA and the Government has implemented the majority of the recommendations.

To make sure that there is a seamless transfer from Atos to MAXIMUS, in March 2015, most of the Atos assessor healthcare professionals will transfer to MAXIMUS, which will also use the existing Atos infrastructure.

A key part of this drive will see MAXIMUS take on a significant number of additional healthcare professionals to undertake assessments and increase the number of specialists, including experts in mental health.

They will also spend more time with people before their assessment to fully explain the process and provide Disability Awareness training for all staff through Disability Rights UK.

To make sure that there is a seamless transfer from Atos to MAXIMUS, in March 2015, most of the Atos assessor healthcare professionals will transfer to MAXIMUS, which will also use the existing Atos infrastructure.

Minister for Disabled People Mark Harper, said:

“We are committed to supporting those people who can get back into work and break the cycle of benefit dependency. Where people can't work, we are clear that we should support them to live independent lives.”

Improvements to the service will include new ways to help customers to complete forms and access sources of independent advice.

 [More information is available in the Written Ministerial Statement.](#)

New support to help reduce sickness absence

Fit for Work – previously known as the Health and Work Service – will be launched in late 2014 to help people back to work after an illness.

Fit for Work

People on sick leave will be helped back to work via an occupational health assessment and a Return to Work Plan, when they have been, or are expected to be, off work for four weeks or more.

Employers, employees and GPs will be able to access advice via a phone line and a website.

Fit for Work will be delivered by Health Management Limited in England and Wales and by the Scottish Government in Scotland.

Fit for Work is a result of the independent review of sickness absence which was done in 2011. This identified a lack of access to occupational health services as one of the issues preventing people from returning to work after an illness.

“Being in work is good for people's wellbeing and can help them to recover. Fit for Work will help employers and their staff to manage sickness absence and aid the return-to-work process.”

A report, ‘Exploring Future GP Referral to Fit for Work’, which was published on 10 October 2014, looked at how GPs might signpost patients to the occupational health assessment. Most of the GPs contacted for the study were supportive of the Fit for Work approach.

Minister for Welfare Reform, Lord Freud, said:

“Being in work is good for people's wellbeing and can help them to recover. Fit for Work will help employers and their staff to manage sickness absence and aid the return-to-work process. GPs will play a vital role in referring patients they think will benefit from it. This research will build on the learning from the pilot to help us understand how GPs will use this service and how we can support them in the future.”

 You can read the report at [‘Exploring Future GP Referral to Fit for Work’.](#)

New drive to prevent and deter benefit fraud

DWP has launched a major advertising campaign aimed at claimants in 47 local authority boroughs across Great Britain.

The campaign aims to challenge and change attitudes and behaviours toward benefit fraud. It will target and encourage claimants to report a change in their circumstances, and will also encourage the wider public to report benefit cheats to the national benefit fraud hotline.

In 25 locations a mix of television, radio and press adverts, posters, direct mail letters and online activity are being used to get the messages across. In the other 22 locations only direct mail will be used.

DWP Minister, Mark Harper, said:

“We’re giving benefit claimants every opportunity to tell us if their circumstances have changed, as the majority do. But those who cheat the system need to know we will use everything in our power to stop them stealing money from hardworking taxpayers, and that they could land themselves in jail when they’re caught.

“What might seem like a white lie can quickly escalate into a serious case of fraud, with the claimant suddenly finding themselves owing thousands of pounds to the taxpayer and risking a prison sentence.”

“Our fraud investigators have new and better methods of detecting benefit cheats so it’s becoming harder to hide and more difficult to escape punishment.”

Fraud investigator, Jane Baker, said:

“What might seem like a white lie can quickly escalate into a serious case of fraud, with the claimant suddenly finding themselves owing thousands of pounds to the taxpayer and risking a prison sentence.

“We’ve seen far too many people taking this road and regretting it later. So our message is – tell us about changes to your circumstances or be prepared for the consequences.”

The campaign highlights the types of fraud that are adding to the estimated £1.1 billion benefit fraud bill (2013/14), including:

- People who fail to tell us a partner has moved in;
- People who do not notify us if there is more money coming in.

Jobcentre Plus partnership managers will be contacting local partners and stakeholders to raise awareness of the campaign and to enlist their support.

 For information visit www.gov.uk/dotherightthing

Thousands of social housing tenants find new homes

Local housing associations and social landlords have joined forces to make it easier for social housing tenants to find a home that is most suited to their needs.

Support is available through the Government’s national website [HomeSwap Direct](#). This signposts tenants to other mutual exchange services including [HomeSwapper](#), [House Exchange](#), [Abritas](#) and [Locata](#).

Innovative “speed dating” events have also been held across the country to allow people wanting to upsize or downsize to swap details and discuss a mutual exchange of their homes.

At a recent event in London, over 800 people came through the doors in one afternoon.

Social home swaps have increased considerably since the Spare Room Subsidy was removed in April 2013 for benefit claimants. This was to help cut the 800,000 spare rooms that were being paid for by Housing Benefit.

It was also aimed at finding new homes for around a quarter of a million families who were living in overcrowded accommodation and another 1.7 million who were on the social housing waiting list in England alone.

[HomeSwap Direct](#) has seen over 18 million searches for social housing since it was launched in October 2011.


Suzanna, from South Yorkshire who successfully downsized, had a good mutual exchange experience with [HomeSwapper](#). “The ending of the Spare Room Subsidy

spurred me on to downsize and make way for a growing family. I now have a smaller house which has decreased my cost of living considerably.

“The house we have now is much better for our needs. The lady I swapped with desperately needed space for her overcrowded family too. Once I had established a plan of action it was easy.”

Government figures to December 2013 show 19,000 people affected by the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy have downsized their homes.

Home swaps can also help other local authority services. For example, helping a tenant to move closer to their family could also reduce the demand on health and social care services.

 More information is available in the [Spare Room Subsidy Advisors Toolkit](#). Tenants can also visit [GOV.UK](#)

Jobcentres pilot new help for jobless teenagers

For the first time Jobcentres are to support some 16-17 year olds who are not on income-based benefits and are not in education, employment or training (NEET).



It is part of a pilot DWP is running in [34 local authority areas](#) across the country and means that, Jobcentres will help 16-17 year olds in these areas to find work.

Since 20 October, Jobcentre Work Coaches in the areas concerned have been working in partnership with local authorities and voluntary and community sector organisations to give extra support to 16-17 year olds.

Jobcentres already work closely with local employers and have extensive experience in supporting people into work and will use this unique labour market expertise and their employer networks to help young people to navigate the wide range of services on offer.

As everyone is different, the support they get will be tailored to them. The pilot will not duplicate what local authorities are already offering but will add to it through the labour market experience and employer links that Jobcentres have.

The aim is to get young people engaged with education, work and training at an early stage so they can avoid the potentially damaging effects of becoming NEETs or long-term unemployed in later life.

Employment Minister Esther McVey said:

“JobcentrePlus Work Coaches have a huge amount of expertise, experience and local labour market knowledge, getting hundreds of people into work every day.

“This shouldn’t be limited to over 18s. So, together with local authorities and charities, we are changing that to ensure that every single young person gets the help they need so they can benefit from the economic security of a regular pay packet.”

Local authorities will still legally be responsible for supporting 16-17 year olds into education, under the Raising the Participation Age legislation.

PIP reassessment rolls out to further postcodes

From 17 November Personal Independence Payment (PIP) reassessments will be rolled out to some Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants in Yorkshire and the North West of England.

The rollout will be in postcodes CH (Chester), HD (Huddersfield), L (Liverpool) and M (Manchester) and will apply where:

- A DLA claimant’s fixed term award is coming to an end;
- A young person is approaching 16;
- DWP receives information about a change in someone’s care or mobility needs;
- Someone chooses to claim PIP instead of DLA.

DWP has taken a controlled approach to the introduction of PIP, including the reassessment of some existing DLA claimants, to make sure that lessons are learnt at each stage.

PIP has been rolled out to these new postcodes because the assessment provider for those areas has sufficient local capacity to handle the increased volume of claims.

DWP has improved the Personal Independent Payment (PIP) claims process in a number of ways to speed up payments to those who are entitled to the benefit.

The gradual rollout of PIP in this way ensures that there is a continued focus on reducing delays and improving the service for claimants. DWP will continue to carefully monitor the progress of the rollout before making any decisions on extending the reassessments further.

The majority of existing DLA claimants who have a lifetime or indefinite award will not be affected until October 2015 at the earliest. The exceptions are if DWP receives information about a change in their condition that would affect their rate of payment, or if they reach the age of 16.

DWP has improved the PIP claims process in a number of ways to speed up payments to those who are entitled to the benefit.

This includes:

- Assessment providers Atos Healthcare and Capita Health and Wellbeing employing more health professionals and administrative staff and opening more assessment centres;
- New guidance to support assessment providers to increase the proportion of cases that are assessed from paper evidence, reduce the length of assessments and ensure that DWP’s decision makers are given quality advice.

 Further information about PIP is available at GOV.UK

Three-month benefit limit for EEA jobseekers

From 10 November 2014, migrants from European Economic Area (EEA) – who have a right to live in the UK as jobseekers – will face a shorter time limit when they make a new claim for income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA).

They will now have to show that they have a genuine prospect of work 91 days after the start of their claim for income-based JSA or their benefit will stop.

Since January 2014, EEA migrants can only reside in the UK as jobseekers or retained workers for six months unless they have compelling evidence that they have a genuine prospect of work.

EEA jobseekers must have been living in the UK, or the Common Travel to Work area, for three months to be eligible to claim income-based JSA. They will only be entitled to get income-based JSA for 91 days unless they have compelling evidence of a genuine prospect of work.

From 10 November 2014, EEA jobseekers, who make a new claim for income-based JSA, will be told about the three month time limit, the need to provide compelling evidence that they have a genuine prospect of work and how this will affect them.

From 10 November 2014, EEA jobseekers who make a new claim for income-based JSA will be told about the 91-day limit, that they need to provide compelling evidence that they have a genuine prospect of work and how this will affect them.

Claimants can be notified of the conditions in a number of ways including:

- A decision letter at the start of their claim;
- A claimant factsheet;
- A reminder letter when they are invited to an assessment of whether they have a genuine prospect of work.

At the assessment interview, the claimant will be given the chance to show they have a genuine prospect of work.

A short extension to income-based JSA can be considered if compelling evidence is provided by the claimant. Where no compelling evidence is provided, their JSA claim will stop after 91 days.



More information on these measures is available at GOV.UK

More support for jobseekers

Jobseekers are getting extra support to look for work and, where needed, to improve their language skills.

Two Supervised Jobsearch Pilots were launched in October. As part of Supervised Jobsearch, claimants will have to attend the premises of a local provider for 35 hours per week.

They will be required to jobsearch and apply for jobs, with support and supervision, for 13 weeks. Attendance will be mandatory and failure to participate without good reason may lead to a benefit sanction.

The only exception is where there are agreed restrictions on someone's availability.

One pilot will test Supervised Jobsearch on unemployed claimants who have been out of work for over two years. These are claimants who remain on benefit after leaving the Work Programme and receiving intensive support from Jobcentres.

The other pilot will be targeted at claimants who Jobcentre Work Coaches believe would benefit from this level of support earlier in their claim before going onto the Work Programme.

The pilots are being part-funded by the European Social Fund under DWP's co-financing agreements.



European Union
European Social Fund
Investing in jobs and skills

And from 27 November everyone claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in Scotland and Wales will be screened for English speaking and listening skills. From spring 2015 it will be extended to Universal Credit claimants who are subject to intensive work search requirements.

English language requirements already apply in England.

In Scotland claimants will be screened to identify those with English speaking and listening skills below Access 3 or Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework level 3. In Wales, this will be Entry Level 2.

In Wales the policy will not mandate people to speak Welsh but will give them the option to improve their spoken Welsh or English in certain circumstances. This is usually where they are below Entry Level 2 in both English and Welsh and the absence of Welsh language skills, as opposed to English, is the main barrier to work.

If claimants fall below the requirements they will be mandated to have a full assessment by a provider and, where appropriate, mandated to attend English or Welsh language training. The aim is to improve their chances of getting into work. Claimants will have to attend for up to 16 hours a week, for between seven and 20 weeks.



Further information can be found in DWP's [Welfare Reform Toolkit](#).

Other news in brief...

Digital chat on self-employment

DWP and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) have joined forces to run two "Starting in Business" webinars for jobseekers who are thinking of setting up their own business.

The interactive webinars will provide would-be entrepreneurs with advice on:

- The New Enterprise Allowance;
- The Support and financial assistance available;
- How to register as self-employed with HMRC;
- The importance of keeping records;
- Benefits and self-employment;
- Where to get further help and guidance.

Participants will also be able to ask questions during the webinars. The information is aimed at customers in Scotland, England and Wales.

Anyone with an interest in unemployment and self-employment can take part and can register now to attend the webinars in November and December.

The first event will be on 13 November 2014 from 2pm – 3pm. People can register at <https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/440245414>

To register for the webinar on 9 December 2014 between 11am and 12pm, go to <https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/498194814>

Social Justice Action in November

Sainsbury's and the Confederation of British Industry are among the big names that have signed up to attend the Social Justice Conference on 18 November.

It is the first time that businesses will join charities and voluntary groups to discuss a range of subjects including the potential for social investment to deliver innovative solutions and how to encourage business to look beyond traditional sources of recruitment.

The 3rd annual Social Justice Conference will be held at Park Crescent Conference Centre in Great Portland Street in London and people can register by going to the [Social Justice: Transforming Lives website](#).

Also in November, DWP is supporting the Timewise search to find the UK's most flexible employer. The aim is to encourage employers to take a more flexible approach to recruitment. The competition closes on 24 November.

Throughout November we will feature articles on our website from Responsible Business, Working Chance and others exploring how businesses, charities and other groups are collaborating in Building Futures for vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

For the latest information on all of the above visit the [Social Justice: Transforming Lives website](#).

Accessible Britain awards launched

Nominations are now open for the Accessible Britain Challenge Awards that were announced by the Minister for Disabled People Mark Harper earlier this year.

The awards are intended to publicly recognise organisations, including councils, other service providers and businesses that are making an outstanding contribution towards creating accessible and inclusive communities.

There are four award categories:

- Improved Mobility;
- Innovative Use of Buildings, Spaces and Places;
- Safer Neighbourhoods;
- Inclusive Social Activities.

Nominations need to be made by individual disabled people or disabled people's groups. This is to make sure that nominations come from people who have first-hand experience of services and have benefitted from improvements or innovation in local projects, services or social activities.

People can make their nominations by going to [Accessible Britain](#) where they can download further details, guidance and an entry form. Alternative formats are available on request.

Nominations will close at midnight on Friday 19 December 2014.