

Housing Benefit Direct issue 150 July 2014



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Editorial

I was once told on a presentation skills course never to start anything with an apology. I shall make an exception in this case. We fully appreciate the difficulties you will have experienced as a result of not being able to access ATLAS/LAID and LACI files over the past few weeks and the consequences this could have on your work profiling and performance. We have been working flat out with our supplier to resolve the problems which were initially due to an expired license certificate. We will fully investigate what went wrong and learn any lessons to prevent this happening again.

This month's edition includes an update on the anticipated timetable for the roll-out of ETD/ATLAS merger. The plan is still for 15 LAs to go early with the rest of the country following suit by end this year or the beginning of next. There are still tests to be undertaken to ensure the work can go live but we will keep you informed if there are any changes to this plan.

We recently published information on the use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) which showed, for example, that two thirds of authorities did not spend the full allocation. We include a link to the report for those of you interested in more detail. We are grateful to all local authorities (LAs) who provided data to feed into this report and also wish to thank the majority of you who submitted your subsidy and DHP final claims for 13/14 by 30 April.

Universal Credit continues to be rolled out across the North West. Four more Jobcentres have been offering the benefit since 23 June, and we started to accept claims from couples in a very small number of LAs on 30 June. More details, including links to the press notices are included below.

Finally, this month's edition includes some useful advice which you can share with your customers on renewing their tax credit award online. Leaving it late can lead to tax credits being stopped – half a million people had their credits stopped last year because they didn't renew on time.

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ATLAS / LAID disruption

On Tuesday 10 June 2014, an incident occurred which resulted in all 382 LAs being unable to download the ATLAS/LAID & LACI files. Our suppliers started to investigate the root cause and quickly established that this was due to a license certificate that had expired on all Data Transfer Appliances. We have been working closely with suppliers, Service Delivery and the Major Incident Team to resolve this as quickly as possible.

We have communicated with LAs via Huddle, posting regular updates, information and next steps. The fix to the Data Transfer Appliance required one-to-one communication between our suppliers and LA technicians to run a script to update the certificate. Initially it was expected that this task would be completed by the end of the week, but added unrelated incidents were encountered that stretched timescales.

At the end of 27 June there were 6 sites with ongoing issues and our suppliers are working closely with these sites. We understand that all other sites are up and running and able to download all files

We thank you for your collaboration and support during this difficult time. We sincerely apologise for the delays that have been experienced and appreciate that this may have had a business impact. We need to understand why this incident occurred and put steps in place to ensure that it does not occur again. Once all LAs are back up and running, we will be working with our suppliers to identify lessons learned.

If you have any queries please e-mail the Local Authority Support Team la-sst.hdd@dpw.gsi.gov.uk

ETD/ATLAS Merger update

We notified you in issue 145 of Housing Benefit (HB) Direct that there would be a delay in the progress of the ETD/ATLAS merger. Following extensive discussions with our and LA IT suppliers a revised schedule has been agreed which will allow the merger to take place, in phases, from October 2014.

The first phase is an early go-live, with the 15 LAs that were identified at the beginning of this year. All 15 have confirmed that the revised schedule is achievable.

There are still some final details to be agreed in respect of the national roll-out, and it is expected that this will be by the end of 2014 or early 2015. Details, once finalised, will be notified as soon as possible. Please be assured that we are taking account of business as usual, such as end of year action and uprating activity, when determining the national go-live date.

If you have any questions please feel free to email them to: lads.deliveryteam@dpw.gsi.gov.uk

Universal Credit expansion across north west England

Universal Credit, which is already available in 10 areas across England, Scotland and Wales, continued with its roll-out across the north west of England from Monday 23 June 2014. Universal Credit will roll-out to Jobcentres in the north west until the whole region is covered. In total 90 Jobcentres, or 1 in 8 Jobcentres in Britain, will offer the service once the north west expansion has been completed.

Claimants will benefit from better work incentives under Universal Credit. People are able to move in and out of work more smoothly, and Universal Credit gives Jobcentres instant access to HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) earnings data so they can make sure people are receiving the right amount of support to progress in work.

Since 23 June, 4 more Jobcentres have been offering the new benefit:

- Hyde
- Stalybridge
- Stretford
- Altrincham

On 30 June Universal Credit opened its doors to couples, as the new service begins to accept joint claims in Hammersmith, Inverness, Rugby, Bath and Harrogate.

For more information about the roll-out take a look at the [press notice](#) or to see the press notice about the new service for couples visit [GOV.UK](#)

Tax credits customers - don't delay and renew online

This year, claimants may now be able to renew their tax credits online at [GOV.UK](#) (they must have received Declaration Form TC603D) and unlike the Tax Credit Helpline, this new service is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There's only one month left so please help by advising claimants not to leave it too late - last year half a million people had their tax credits stopped because they didn't renew on time.

If claimants do need to renew by phone they need to make sure that they do this as soon as they can. Last year HMRC answered over 8 million tax credits calls during the renewals season and it can take much longer to reach an advisor towards the 31 July deadline. In the two days approaching last year's deadline, the Tax Credit Helpline received 2.5 million call attempts from customers wanting to renew their claim. For the best chance of getting through quickly; call 0345 300 3900 between 8.30am and 10.30am or 2.15pm to 4pm; avoiding Mondays and Fridays.

Subsidy and DHP Final Claims

In issue 145 of HB Direct sent out in February, we issued a reminder regarding the deadline of 30 April 2014 for submission of HB initial final subsidy claims and DHP final claims. This deadline reflects wider governmental accounting and HM Treasury requirements. Once again, the vast majority of LAs succeeded in submitting their claims by the deadline, thereby enabling the department to comply with these requirements. We recognise and are extremely grateful for your considerable efforts in this regard.

Any enquiries should be e-mailed to: michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Use of DHPs 2013/14

On Tuesday 24 June we published information concerning LAs use of DHPs in 2013/14. This includes the amounts spent by LAs on DHPs and, for those LAs that supplied data, the total amounts of awards made and for what purpose.

Last year £180 million was made available to LAs in DHP funding (£20 million of which was part of a reserve fund that LAs could bid for). At the end of the year 240 LAs from across England, Wales and Scotland underspent against their government allocation. There was a total of £13,285,430 unallocated funding. This was in addition to the £7.1 million that remained unallocated from the reserve fund.

In Great Britain as a whole 66.6% of LAs spent 100% or less than their government contribution.

The full report can be found can be found using this [link](#)

We would like to thank LAs for all of your help in collating this information.