

## Editorial

Welcome to the May issue of Housing Benefit (HB) Direct. I hope you were able to make the most of the extra public holidays over Easter and the early Spring bank holiday yesterday to rest and unwind after what has been a very busy period.

I was pleased to see in the recently published [Housing Benefit Speed of Processing statistics](#), covering the period October to December 2013, that performance is continuing to be maintained and I would like to thank you all for your continued efforts in a challenging environment. For those of you who haven't seen the latest report, the key findings are

- the average time taken to process new HB claims for quarter 3 of 2013/14 is 22 calendar days compared with 23 calendar days in quarter 3 of 2012/13
- the average time taken to process change of circumstances to HB claims for quarter 3 of 2013/14 is 12 calendar days which is the same processing time as quarter 3 of 2012/13.

In this edition, we have a transition update about the Public Services Network. As you know, compliance with the Code of Connection is crucial for your continued access to DWP data and we seem to be on track for 100% compliance and migration by the end of May thanks to some good joint working between local and central government. We have a few articles from our Universal Credit colleagues this month; North West expansion and details of the local authorities (LAs) included, followed by a good news story and finishing with a reminder that the deadline for submitting your bids to trialling linked to the Local Support Services is 13 June.

As promised in the last issue of HB Direct we have now published a refreshed version of the [Data Sharing Guide](#) which replaces the previous 2010 version of the guide. For those of you who read the April issue of the HB General Information Bulletin you will see that we've repeated an item about Direct Earnings Attachments in the newsletter. We don't usually like to repeat items but we're trying to capture as wide an LA audience as possible to make sure we target the right people.

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## Universal Credit expands in the North West

On 29 April, Ministers set out plans for the next steps of Universal Credit, marking the anniversary of the new benefit first becoming available in April 2013 in Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester. 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 jobcentres.

From June 2014, more jobcentres across the North West of England will gradually come online each week until the whole region is covered. During the summer the new benefit will also be made available for new claims from couples in a number of jobcentres that already deliver the full Universal Credit, expanding to all the current live sites over time.

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 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 bring billions of benefits to the economy when fully rolled out – helping hundreds of thousands of people into work.

Full details of the first jobcentres outside the Pathfinder areas to start offering Universal Credit in the North West of England and the timetable for the expansion will be announced shortly. We are currently in discussion with the following 12 LAs to be at the forefront of this next stage of expansion

- Salford City Council
- Wirral Borough Council
- Preston City Council
- St Helens Borough Council
- Cheshire East Council
- Cheshire West and Chester Council
- Trafford Borough Council
- Bolton Borough Council
- Bury Borough Council
- South Ribble Borough Council
- Sefton Borough Council
- Knowsley Borough Council

We continue to work closely with the 4 existing Universal Credit LAs: Wigan; Warrington; Tameside and Oldham.

For more information take a look at the [Partner Toolkit](#).

## Universal Credit supporting people back to work

Universal Credit is designed to simplify the benefits system and make work pay. Mark, a 49-year-old man from London is a good example of how it is supporting people back into work.

Mark was made redundant from the printing industry after 30 years. Before getting a job as a delivery driver, he feared he would never work again.

Mark had never used a computer until he made a claim for Universal Credit. However, with the help of his jobcentre Work Coach, Nicola, he put together his first CV.

He was set up online with an email address and a LinkedIn profile and was registered with Universal Jobmatch.

Nicola identified many transferable skills that he could offer a new employer and this gave him the confidence to apply for jobs.

Mark said:

“My advice to anyone who applies for Universal Credit is to take advantage of the support and help that’s offered and the courses available.”

Mark signed up to the Claimant Commitment which gave him a plan so that he could track the steps he had taken and his progress.

Nicola encouraged Mark to go along to a presentation by TNT and after a few interviews he landed himself a job delivering mail across London.

Mark added:

“The great thing with Universal Credit is that you don’t just get a job and then get cut off; the help will still be there. It used to frighten people that it would take a few months of being totally skint before

they’d see any benefit of working, but now you can get a job and build your hours up and still get support under Universal Credit. Only then, once you’re back on your feet, do your benefits stop.”

Mark has now been offered more hours so he no longer needs support from Universal Credit.

We have developed a [video](#) in response to requests from stakeholders and partners for a clear and simple explanation of Universal Credit.

We value your feedback and would be grateful if you could tell us how you have used the video, or what else you would like to see, to help us to shape our future communications. Email us at [universal.creditcomms@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:universal.creditcomms@dwp.gsi.gov.uk).

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

## Local Support Services Framework (LSSF)

A prospectus and expression of interest form for trialling linked to the LSSF work was issued to all LAs on 24 April 2014, and a series of information webinars took place on 28 April and 1 May.

A briefing event for LAs who wish to submit a bid for trialling will take place in London on 28 May. The closing date for bids will be 13 June.

## Public Services Network (PSN) – transition update

As you will be aware a Cabinet Office (CO) led project is in the process of migrating the current secure connectivity of the GSi Convergence Framework (which covers GSI, GCSX, GSX, GSE) services, over to PSN.

DWP Housing Delivery Division (HDD) along with our IT colleagues are actively engaged with the CO to support a smooth transition that maintains access to all DWP services throughout the transition period and beyond.

As of the 28 April 2014, **249** sites (including LAs and county councils) have been successfully migrated to the new PSN infrastructure and are currently using it. CO are leading the rolling programme to migrate the remainder by the end of May 2014, which we in DWP are supporting.

If you are aware that we have not contacted your PSN lead yet to support the DWP activities, please let us know by emailing the following address and one of the team will get in contact with your site.

[hdd-psn.businessimpactingteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:hdd-psn.businessimpactingteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

Successful migration to the PSN network is crucial for LAs as PSN will be the only way of securing continued access to DWP data.

General advice and support around PSN is available by visiting the [PSN webpage](#) or by emailing the [PSN mailbox](#).

## Direct Earnings Attachments – payments to LA bank accounts

Now that a number of LAs are using Direct Earnings Attachments (DEAs) some employers are paying the DEA into a DWP bank account rather than the account of the specified LA. At this stage we are collating data on the scale of this problem but we have to do a number of refunds for payments that should not have been sent to us.

In order to minimise this problem we have taken a number of initial steps. One is to make it even clearer in our [Employer Guides](#) published on GOV.UK who payments should be made to depending on who has initiated the DEA and that they must refer to the letter from the LA to make a payment to the correct account. Secondly, I would like to ask that you do all you can within your own letters to make it clear who payments should be made to and to emphasise the difference in payment requirements between an LA DEA and a DWP DEA.

DWP are also sending a further communication for employers following full implementation of the DEA process and this shall also make reference to ensuring they pay the correct authority.

### Queries

If you need any help with legislation/policy queries regarding DEAs or any other Housing Benefit (HB) recovery issues please email [hbandctb.overpayments@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:hbandctb.overpayments@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)