

NEWSouthern England Group



Department for
Work and Pensions

Update 2

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Welcome to our second edition of NEWS newsletter.

This month has seen the announcement of the closure of a number of our benefit processing centres and contact centres across the country. I am very keen to make sure that you are all aware of the background and the impact of this within the Southern Group. I am pleased to confirm these closures will not adversely impact the service we provide our customers and our offices providing face to face services are unaffected by this announcement. I will continue to keep you informed as these plans are implemented over the next 12 months.

We have also seen announcements about the extension of Work Experience to 16/17year olds and a £3m fund to support the delivery of services to disabled people.

This month we will also see the introduction of the Work Programme and I have included a progress report.

I will continue to keep you informed of all the key changes affecting the way in which we deliver our service and I hope you find the content of this newsletter helpful, feel free to send your comments and suggestions for future editions.

Lynda Jones
Southern England Group Senior Partnerships Manager

Jobcentre Plus transformation

The Government has set out an ambitious programme of reform and transformation for the support offered to people out of work. The introduction of Universal Credit and Work Programme will provide significant challenges and opportunities for Jobcentre Plus. We will become a leaner organisation which delivers a more flexible service making the most of customer preference for the telephone and internet.

Achieving this involves making better use of our estate, to ensure we are getting best value for money. Following discussions with our staff and their representatives to determine what criteria should be used, it was announced on 13 May 2011 that we are to close a number of our contact centres and benefit processing centres. Of the 22 sites affected three offices are in Southern England Group. They are Exeter and Totton Benefit Centres and Yeovil Maternity Allowance Delivery Centre. We anticipate that the sites will start to close early next year and that staff will be offered alternative employment at a different location.

These closures will not affect the service we offer. Customers do not have direct contact with our benefit processing sites – benefit enquiries are dealt with in our contact centre network. Our contact centre network is virtual, meaning that calls are routed to the next available agent no matter where they are in the country.

Government announces £3m extra for disabled people's organisation

On 11 May 2011, the Government announced an extra £3m for disabled people's grassroots organisations to better deliver services disabled people really need.

Minister for Disabled People, Maria Miller said:

"Disabled people should have choice and independence in how they live their lives. Organisations run by, and for, disabled people play a vital role in making sure they have their voices heard at every level.

Grassroots organisations are the experts in their local communities. That is why we are investing £3million to help these organisations play an even greater role in shaping the decisions that will affect their lives".

As part of the scheme, user-led organisations will be able to bid for a share of money for specific projects that will make a significant difference to their development and sustainability. The fund will be discretionary and User-led organisations will have a say in how it will be administered and the criteria for receiving a grant will be.

User-led organisations will be able to bid for the extra money from July 2011.

The rationalisation of offices can be completed without impacting on the service we offer to customers. The announcement does not affect the services offered to face to face customers in Jobcentres. These will remain central to our operation, and the Government's reforms will transform and strengthen the support people receive to get back to work.

To read the full briefing go to [DWP newsroom web site](#) using the link below

[£3m extra for disabled people's organisations](#)

Welfare Reform Update

There are **three major elements** to the Government's plans for changes to the welfare and welfare to work systems .

Universal Credit :

DWP will be responsible for organising the delivery of Universal Credit. It has now been decided that this will be best delivered using existing resources and deploying the best operational units within Jobcentre Plus and HMRC, to begin the transition to Universal Credit from October 2013.

Incapacity Benefit Reassessment:

An IT system upgrade has been introduced from 23 May which should enable Jobcentre Plus to save time and money when reassessing the 1.5 million Incapacity Benefit (IB) customers within the laid down timescales. Currently, 11,000 letters per week are being issued to customers to start the reassessment process.

Work Programme

Updates will be provided as information is received see **Get Britain Working**.

Get Britain Working Update

Get Britain Working includes a number of measures to support Jobcentre Plus customers, including the Work Programme.

The Work Programme

DWP are still working with all the **preferred bidders** to finalise the contracts.

Jobcentre Plus is continuing to engage with all the preferred bidders including those across the Southern Group to establish a close working relationship, to ensure they have a full understanding of the local labour market and to develop the appropriate processes for referring customers. An event was held in Swindon on 3 May which gave the preferred bidders who will be working in the Southern Group an opportunity to meet the Southern Group Director and to network with all the Jobcentre Plus District Managers and their senior managers.

What is in the Welfare Reform Bill ?

Information on what is included in the Welfare Bill can be found on the following link: [Welfare Reform Bill](#)

Where can I find out more about Universal Credit ?

For the latest briefing notes go to the following link.

[Universal Credit briefing notes DWP](#)

How will the reassessment affect Customers?

For the latest information about IB reassessment as well as the latest stakeholders information pack go to

[Incapacity Benefit – reassessing claims - DWP](#)

The following providers have been selected as preferred bidders in the Southern Group :

A4E
Maximus
Avanta
G4S
Prospects
Working Links
JHP
Rehab - Jobfit

Get Britain Working

Update contd

Work Experience

Work Experience is one of the additional support measures that Jobcentre Plus can use to help individuals into work prior to them becoming eligible for referral to the Work Programme.

This offer was first launched in January 2011 for 18 – 21 year olds. In April, under a Budget announcement this was extended to young people 18-24, with an additional 80,000 placements to be available for young people to March 2013 making 100,000 placements in total.

The Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister further announced on 12 May 2011 that the Work Experience programme will also be available to those 16/17 year old recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance.

The Departments for Work and Pensions and Business Innovation and Skills expect these extensions to be deliverable later this year once the required amendments to regulations are made.

Sector – based work academies

These are one of the Get Britain Working measures and part of the wider Jobcentre Plus Employer Offer (England only) . They will be driven by sector demand to meet the requirements of our customers and employers. Sector-based academies will last for a maximum of 6 weeks and consist of three elements :

- pre-employment training;
- a work experience placement; and
- a guaranteed job interview.

The pre-employment training element will be delivered by Further Education Colleges and other Skills Funding Agency contracted training organisations.

The eligibility criteria will be kept simple to 18+ customers claiming Jobseekers Allowance of Employment Support Allowance (work related activity group) and who are close to the labour market.

These sector- based work academies are scheduled to go live in **August 2011** and currently Jobcentre Plus are working with employers to determine the most appropriate offer to meet local needs.

Supporting the young into work

The Government will invest £60 million over the next three years to support the most vulnerable young people in finding work .
On 12 May the Prime Minister committed to :

- Increase the capacity of Jobcentre Plus to support the 5,000 most disadvantaged 16 to 17 year olds claiming Jobseeker's Allowance on grounds of hardship.
- Give these claimants access to the Work Experience and Work Clubs under the Get Britain Working measures.
- Provide more early access Work Programme places to vulnerable 18 year olds who are likely to be struggling to make the transition from education to work.
- A new £10 million per annum Innovation Fund to give delivery organisations, in particular the voluntary and community sector, a real chance to develop innovative solutions to help disadvantaged people, particularly young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) .

The announcement also referred to existing plans for Jobcentre Plus to deliver from August this year the 50,000 pre employment training and work experience places through sector-based work academies as mentioned earlier.

Other News in Brief

Disability Living Allowance Reform

In December 2010 – DWP published "Disability Living Allowance reform", a formal public consultation on proposed reforms to Disability Living Allowance. This document set out the Government's plans to replace Disability Living Allowance with a new cash benefit, called Personal Independence Payment. It will be introduced from 2013/14.

In February 2011 consultation closed. More than 5,000 individual responses and over 500 responses from disability organisations were received.

The Government published its response to the DLA reform public consultation on 4 April 2011.

In May 2011, an initial draft of proposals for the Personal Independence Payment assessment criteria were published together with an explanatory technical note which outlines plans for refinement and testing of the initial draft criteria. **DWP is keen to hear views from disabled people and their organisations on this initial draft between now and 1 August 2011.**

Useful websites

Right click on link and select "open hyperlink"

The DWP website contains general information about the government's welfare reform agenda.

[Direct Gov website](#)

[DWP Adviser](#)

[Welfare Reform Bill 2011 - DWP](#)

Direct Gov contains information about all Jobcentre Plus services and future changes.

The DWP monthly electronic newsletter Touch base e-zine is available – to access right click on the link below and select open hyperlink

[Keeping in Touch](#)

Tell us what you think

If you have any comments regarding this update or indeed would like to raise any issues please contact:

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Please note if you do not wish to receive this update or you would like it forwarded to an alternative address , please us know.

Link to DWP Personal Independence Briefing notes and Consultation webpage

[Personal Independence Payment](#)