

NEWSouthern England Group

jobcentreplus

Department for
Work and Pensions

Update 6

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Welcome to the SIXTH edition of NEWS.

I am delighted to be given this opportunity to write this foreword in this last edition of 2011.

This year has seen many changes and challenges for our department - from major changes to our organisational structure to the introduction of the Work Programme and the Get Britain Working measures.

The successful delivery of all these changes has relied heavily on the collaboration between ourselves and I would like to **thank you** all for working with us to provide support to so many customers experiencing difficult times.

I am very much looking forward to meeting the challenges next year will bring, many of which are referenced in this update.

I would particularly like to highlight my personal commitment to ensuring we do not fail our young people. We must not fail any of our customers and high standards of customer service will be a continued priority for me and for my team. Our focus on delivering digital services is just one example of our commitment to meet customer need and I would ask for your help in encouraging and supporting take up.

I am always heartened by the amazing good news stories I hear and see through our joint working. **Together** I know we will meet all our future challenges and without your support this would not be possible.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a happy and peaceful Christmas.

Paul Williams
Work Services Director
Southern England Group
December 2011

Welfare Reform Update

Progress of the Welfare Reform Bill

The Welfare Reform Bill, introduced in the Commons on 16 February 2011 completed its Commons stages on 15 June 2011 and has now completed its Committee Stages in the Lords on 28 November 2011. **Report stage is scheduled to start on 12 December 2011.**

Summary of the Bill

Besides introducing Universal Credit and related measures, the Bill makes other significant changes to the benefits system.

Key areas include :

- Introducing Personal Independence Payments to replace the current Disability Living Allowance.
- Restricting Housing Benefit entitlement for social housing tenants whose accommodation is larger than they need.
- Up-rating Local Housing Allowance rates by the Consumer Price Index .
- Amending the forthcoming statutory child maintenance scheme.
- Limiting the payment of contributory Employment and Support Allowance to a 12-month period.
- Caps the total amount of benefit that can be claimed.

Disability Living Allowance Reform

The Government published a consultation paper in December 2010 which announced that, from 2013-14, Disability Living Allowance will be replaced by a new non-means-tested benefit for extra costs. This will be called the **Personal Independence Payment**. This will contribute to the extra costs of overcoming the challenges faced by some disabled people to enable them to lead full and active independent lives.

Personal Independence Payment will include two components:

- a 'Mobility' component based on the individual's ability to get around; and
- a 'Daily Living' component based on their ability to carry out everyday activities.

The Bill **also introduces** a new individualised and objective assessment to identify those who face the greatest challenges and ensure the award continues to reflect claimants' needs.

What is in the Welfare Reform Bill ?

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

Welfare Reform Update - continued

Disability Living Allowance Reform – continued

Following the publication in May 2011 of the initial draft of proposals for the Personal Independence Payment assessment criteria, the Department asked for views from disabled people and their organisations on the initial draft. Subsequently a **second draft** of the assessment criteria was published on 14 November. This is significantly different from the initial proposals and most of the changes that have been made are a direct result of the feedback received. There is expected to be another discussion about this second draft with disabled people and their organisations once there are firmer views on the proposed weightings and entitlement thresholds. *In the meantime, the department would welcome any comments on the changes made.*

Fraud and Error

The Bill introduces measures which support the Governments proposals to stamp out fraud in the benefits and Tax Credit system. The measures include tougher sanctions for people who commit fraud including:

- A minimum penalty of £350 for benefit fraud, as an alternative to prosecution, or 50 per cent of the amount overpaid whichever is the greater, up to a maximum of £2,000 in addition to the current loss of benefit sanction for a four week period and the requirement to repay any overpayment;
- Increasing the period that people convicted of fraud will lose their benefit, alongside the punishment that is handed out by the courts and an immediate three years loss of benefit for a serious offence of organised benefit fraud; and
- A £50 civil penalty for people who fail to take reasonable care of their claim and knowingly let a change in circumstance run on and incur an overpayment.

The Bill also takes powers to enable the creation of a **new single, integrated fraud investigation service** which will bring together fraud investigators from across Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Department for Work and Pensions and local authorities to catch more people who commit benefit fraud and ensure that anyone accused of benefit or Tax Credit fraud is treated in a similar way.

Details about the proposed Personal Independence Payment assessment criteria and how to make comment on the proposals can be found on the DWP website:

[Personal Independence Payment](#)

Welfare Reform

Update - continued

Housing Benefit

- The Bill takes powers to restrict the increase in Local Housing Allowance rates to the Consumer Prices Index. This will enable greater control over the growth of Housing Benefit in the private rented sector and ensure future support for claimants will be kept at a more reasonable and realistic level.
- The Bill also introduces measures to ensure that Housing Benefit for working-age tenants in the social rented sector takes account of whether the property is a reasonable size for its occupants.

Proposals to time limit Employment Support Allowance (ESA)

In NEWS edition 4, we explained that from 19 September for four weeks, we would be sending letters to all customers currently receiving contribution-based ESA in the Work Related Activity Group to forewarn them of the proposals to time limit ESA. Around 115,000 letters were issued to help prepare people for the proposed changes. We received fewer enquires following this mailshot than anticipated, and call volumes remain low, but activity is still ongoing to answer any claimant queries resulting from this notification. Although the early notification has now ended, we continue to advise any claimants making a new claim.

The proposed time limit is part of the Welfare Reform Bill currently progressing through Parliament. If it becomes law, the time limit will not apply to people with no, or limited, means of supporting themselves, and those most severely affected by their medical conditions. Any time spent in the Support Group will not count towards the 12 months. Those who are affected by the 12 month time limit may be able to receive income-related ESA.

Claimants living abroad and receiving contribution-based ESA will also be affected by this proposed change. However, unlike people living in the UK, they will not be able to claim income-related ESA if their contribution-based ESA ends.

Get Britain Working Update

Get Britain Working – Employer pledge

An on-line pledge for employers to show their support for one or more of the measures set up to help get Britain working, has been launched on the Business Link website.

To get Britain working, we need to harness a wide range of talent, helping to develop dynamic and diverse workforces, as well as ideas and good practice about how to achieve that. This requires the help of businesses, from sole traders to the largest global companies. Employers who pledge their support will be contacted by their local Jobcentre Plus offices to discuss this further.

Encouraging Entrepreneurs – ‘My New Business’

A new online service to help people setting up their own business was launched as part of Global Entrepreneurship Week which ran from 14 to 18 November.

‘My New Business’ has a range of advice and support for people who want to set up their own business. This includes

- Access to online information and guidance;
- A range of about 250 interactive online tools, including training, tutorials, workshops and case studies;
- A personalised homepage facility to manage information about people’s businesses.

Youth contract announcement

On 1 December 2012, the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg announced a package of support for unemployed young people starting from April 2012. The ‘Youth Contract’ builds upon the support already available through both Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme.

The package worth almost £1 billion over three years includes a number of key elements:

Cash payments to encourage employers to recruit young people.

There will be 160,000 job subsidies available worth up to £2,275 each for businesses who take on an 18-24 year-old from the Work Programme.

Pledge your support here.

[We need your help to get Britain working \(Business Link website\)](#)

For more information go to Business Link website

[‘My New Business’](#)

For information about the Youth Contract go to the DWP website

[Youth Contract](#)

Get Britain Working

Update continued

Youth Contract - continued

This is more than enough to cover an employer's National Insurance contributions for a year and exceeds the recommendations by the CBI in their recent report on youth employment.

An extra 250,000 Work Experience places over the next three years, taking the total to at least 100,000 a year.

This will come with an offer of a Work Experience place for every 18 to 24 year-old who wants one, before they enter the Work Programme.

Figures show that the Work Experience scheme is proving effective, with half of under-25 year-olds coming off benefits within three months.

At least 20,000 extra incentive payments worth £1500 each for employers to take on young people as apprentices, taking the total number of payments available to 40,000 next year.

Extra support through Jobcentre Plus in the form of weekly, rather than fortnightly, signing-on meetings, more time to talk to an adviser and a National Careers Service interview.

Digital December

With the internet playing an increasing role in more and more people's lives, it's crucial that we help our customers to take advantage of the many benefits of going online. Digital December is a month of activity dedicated to supporting DWP staff and customers in making the most of the web.

Understanding DWP's digital services

There are a number of services that DWP provides online including :

JSA Online

People can use JSA Online to apply for:

- JSA – contribution based
- JSA – income based
- JSA – rapid reclaim (if they have claimed JSA in the previous 26 weeks)

To **apply online**, people must be:

- Aged 18 years or over, and below state pension age
In Great Britain
- Available for, capable and actively seeking work
- Working less than 16 hours per week on average.

Links to DWP digital services

[JSA online](#)

How to access JSA online video

[Video: Jobseeker's Allowance - apply online](#)

Digital December - continued

JSA Online is accessed through the **Directgov website**. The online process replicates the information gather process undertaken by Customer Service Agents by telephone.

Once the customer has completed their application, they will either receive a SMS text message with details of their Work-focused Interview (WFI), or they will be called back to arrange this.

What are the benefits of using JSA Online?

- The service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Customers can answer all questions themselves at their convenience.
- They can save the application part-way through and return to it later
- They will become more familiar with the many and varied services we offer through Directgov:
 - Looking for jobs (jobsearch)
 - Advice on becoming self-employed
 - Finding out about volunteering whilst unemployed
 - Finding local childcare
 - Help and Advice when applying for jobs (writing a C.V, attending interviews, writing letters and completing application forms, planning job hunting etc).
- Less phone calls received in our Contact Centres giving more time to answer enquiry lines etc
- Customers will get used to using online services, and as we introduce more options, they will be more receptive to using the full range of online services.
- All our new services, including Universal Credit will be automated as far as possible and will be designed with digital as the preferred contact route. We need to start supporting and encouraging our customers now to use our digital channels.

Directgov - jobsearch to search through hundreds of thousands of vacancies. Searches can be refined by location, salary, hours, etc. Customers with smart phones can use the **Jobcentre Plus app** to look for work.

Jobseekers can go to Directgov **for advice about jobs and careers** including information and help about all aspects of work and looking for work, from creating an effective CV to accessing training and childcare.

Links to DWP digital services

Learn about the new app on Directgov website

[Jobcentre Plus app](#)

[Jobseekers : Directgov – Employment](#)

Digital December - continued

Benefits adviser allows customers and partner organisations to check for benefit eligibility and potential entitlement. It is a useful tool which allows anyone to enter details about their circumstances to find out which benefits they might be entitled to. They can also enter financial information to get an estimate of how much those benefits might be, or can conduct their own better off calculations.

Note : It is essential that when using the tool that all questions are answered accurately and that all the Household Income questions are answered in full, particularly the questions for income in the current year (to date) and the last tax year (total). Failure to do so will result in inaccurate Working and Child Tax Credit estimates which could affect financial decisions.

Information about benefits can be found on the Directgov benefits pages. These include a beginner's guide to benefits as well as information structured around customers' circumstances e.g. looking for work, bringing up children, ill or injured, bereavement.

UK residents approaching retirement age can use **State Pension online** to make their claim over the internet.

Any employer can get **advice about employment and recruitment** through the Business Link website.

Employers who have vacancies they would like to advertise on our jobs database can upload these themselves using our **Employer Direct online** service).

The DWP corporate site holds **information for partner and stakeholder organisations** about working with DWP, as well as content on policy.

Introducing Benefit Integrity Centres

DWP has set up a number of Benefit Integrity Centres (BIC) with the specific aim of ensuring that claimants are receiving the correct amount of money .

This is part of a wider programme to review almost one million cases each year, in response to the priority the Government is placing on getting and keeping benefit claims right .

BIC sites are contacting claimants by telephone and post to carry out full case reviews on claims for Income Support (IS), Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Incapacity Benefit (IB). They are also contacting claimants by text to remind them of the need to return forms and to notify changes of circumstances within laid down timescales.

Links

[The benefit adviser](#)

Video

[The Benefits Adviser tool](#)

[Information about benefits](#)

[State Pension online](#)

[Employment & skills | Business Link](#)

A recent article in Touchbase was designed to help advice organisations help answer a number of basic questions.

[Touchbase Nov11](#)

Other News In Brief

Cross government action on gangs and serious youth violence

The Home Office and DWP are jointly leading a cross-government programme of action to deal with gang culture and serious youth violence. A report 'Ending gang and serious youth violence' has now been published, which sets out the key principles that must be applied locally to tackle Britain's gang problem.

For DWP this means:

- Providing assistance for young people, by making sure there is an alternative, mainstream lifestyle available – through improving skills and back to work support.
- Focusing the second phase of the Innovation Fund on vulnerable young people.
- Further support for ex-offenders by referring prison leavers directly to the Work Programme.

Pre Work Programme and Get Britain Working Official Statistics

DWP has now published official statistics on Pre- Work Programme employment support, including Get Britain Working measures up to and including August 2011.

Future publication content and dates will be announced on the UK Statistics Authority's Publication Hub for Official Statistics.

Bereavement Benefits Public Consultation: review of bereavement benefits

A public consultation will launch on 12 December 2011, until 5 March 2012, to seek views on proposals to simplify the payment system and contribution conditions. This may prompt questions from claimants, customers and the public. The consultation paper will also be published on the ***consultation page*** the DWP website.

Link to:

[Ending gang and serious youth violence report](#)

Link to :

[Pre-Work Programme Support and Get Britain Working](#)

Other News In Brief - continued

Improved access to careers advice

Unemployed people will be given better access to careers advice, starting with a trial programme that will significantly boost the number of careers advisers providing services through the Next Step service

The trial, which will take place in 22 Jobcentre Plus locations across England, will also help shape the new National Careers Service, which starts in April 2012.

The programme will give Jobcentre Plus claimants full-time access to careers advice through the Next Step service and provide better, more flexible support to help jobseekers gain the skills they need to find work.

The new support is part of a wider skills support programme for unemployed people that launched in August 2011.

Exeter Benefits Centre changes

In the last newsletter we reported that the Benefit Centre in Exeter will be closing next year and preparations are underway to transfer their work to alternative sites . **Please note** the Jobseekers Allowance work currently undertaken in Exeter will now move to Cosham Benefit Centre from **9 January 2012** and not **30 January 2012** .

Useful websites

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

The DWP website contains general information about the Government's Welfare Reform Agenda.

[Direct Gov website](#)

[DWP Adviser](#)

[Welfare Reform Bill 2011 - DWP](#)

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