

Touchbase

May 2011

Welcome to your monthly e-zine!

In this issue we have an article on the independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), carried out by Professor Malcolm Harrington, and the recommendations he made for improving the WCA, all of which were accepted – see page 2.

Also on page 2, we look at volunteering whilst on benefit and try to dispel some of the myths.

Over the next year, some of the work processed by the Disability and Carers Service is moving to different offices – see page 4 for details. The 17th of April 2011 marked 500 days to the Paralympic Games – see page 6 for more.

In other news we have notice of a consultation exercise on State Pension Reform and details of the Government's response to the DLA consultation exercise.

Touchbase is available on the DWP Adviser and Intermediaries website. We hope you find this useful, and value your feedback and suggestions for improvements. Email me if you have any suggestions for future articles.



To provide feedback on the e-zine email paula.young@dpw.gsi.gov.uk

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Improving the Work Capability Assessment



It is in everyone's interest that we get the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) right, and that it is seen as a positive first step towards work. That is why the Government is committed to reviewing and improving the WCA, and ensuring that it is fair and accurate.

The Department has fully endorsed the first Independent Review of the WCA by the independent reviewer, Professor Malcolm Harrington, and all of his recommendations will be put in place by the summer. The planned improvements include:

- Much greater personalising of the process, making it more empathetic and less mechanistic
- Introducing 'mental, cognitive and intellectual champions' into Atos assessment centres to improve the assessment of these functions
- Empowering decision-makers in Jobcentre Plus to make considered accurate decisions.

These changes build on improvements to the technical descriptors introduced in March. These expand the Support Group to cover more people with communication problems and severe mental health conditions, and individuals awaiting or in-between some chemotherapy courses. They also help to simplify the language of the descriptors, to ensure fair, consistent and transparent application.

We will continue to review and improve the WCA, and to make changes as necessary. Professor Harrington has been reappointed to conduct a second Independent Review. He will take forward the work identified in his first Review, including looking in more detail at the assessment of mental health and other fluctuating conditions.



For more information visit the [DWP website](#)

Volunteering whilst on benefit



Image: Thinkstock/Getty

Dispelling some myths

Jobcentre Plus recognises that volunteering can be a positive experience for many unemployed people – it helps build confidence, offers valuable work experience and enables people to make a contribution to the wider community. In recognition of this Jobcentre Plus launched Work Together in October 2010 to promote the value of volunteering with its customers and improve the way it signposts them to opportunities.

It's important though that people get accurate information on the impact of volunteering on their benefits and that some of the more common misconceptions which can be a barrier to volunteering are dispelled.

Perhaps the most common misunderstanding is that people cannot volunteer for more than 16 hours a week

– the so called '16 hour rule'. In fact, people can volunteer for as many hours as they wish, as long as they continue to meet the basic benefit rules. This means for example, that people on Jobseeker's Allowance will still need to be looking for paid work, be free to go to a job interview at 48 hours notice and start work within a week.

Another common misunderstanding concerns the impact of expenses paid to unemployed volunteers. The key rule here is that whilst volunteers must not be paid for volunteering, 'out of pocket' expenses e.g. for food and travel, do not affect their benefit. Any money received on top of this will usually count as earnings and taken into account when assessing benefit.



For more information visit [Directgov website](#)

Budget announcements to get Britain working

The Chancellor of The Exchequer announced in his recent budget statement additional funding to get Britain working. An additional £20m has been made available to provide further support during 2011/12 and 2012/13. This new money enables us to extend the scope of the range of provisions available to unemployed people prior to them joining the Work Programme, including:

Work Experience

- Work Experience will now be available to a wider group of young people. Placements are currently available to 18 to 21 year old Jobseekers Allowance claimants – eligibility is being extended to include 22-24 year olds who face similar challenges to finding employment.
- The national roll-out of up to 100,000 Work Experience placements for 18 to 24 year olds over the next two years (to March 2013).
- The upper time limit for Work Experience will be extended from eight weeks to 12 weeks to allow for a structured and direct route into an apprenticeship. Later this year, young people who have spent up to eight weeks in a Work Experience opportunity will be able to have their placement extended by up to four weeks where an employer makes an offer to take them onto an apprenticeship.

Work Clubs and Enterprise Clubs

- Further funding to provide 400 Work Clubs and Enterprise Clubs.

New Enterprise Allowance

- The New Enterprise Allowance was trail-blazed from January 2011 in Merseyside. We will begin to roll out the full New Enterprise Allowance into selected areas from April, and nationally in August. The Government is investing around £80 million in this initiative.

Service Academies

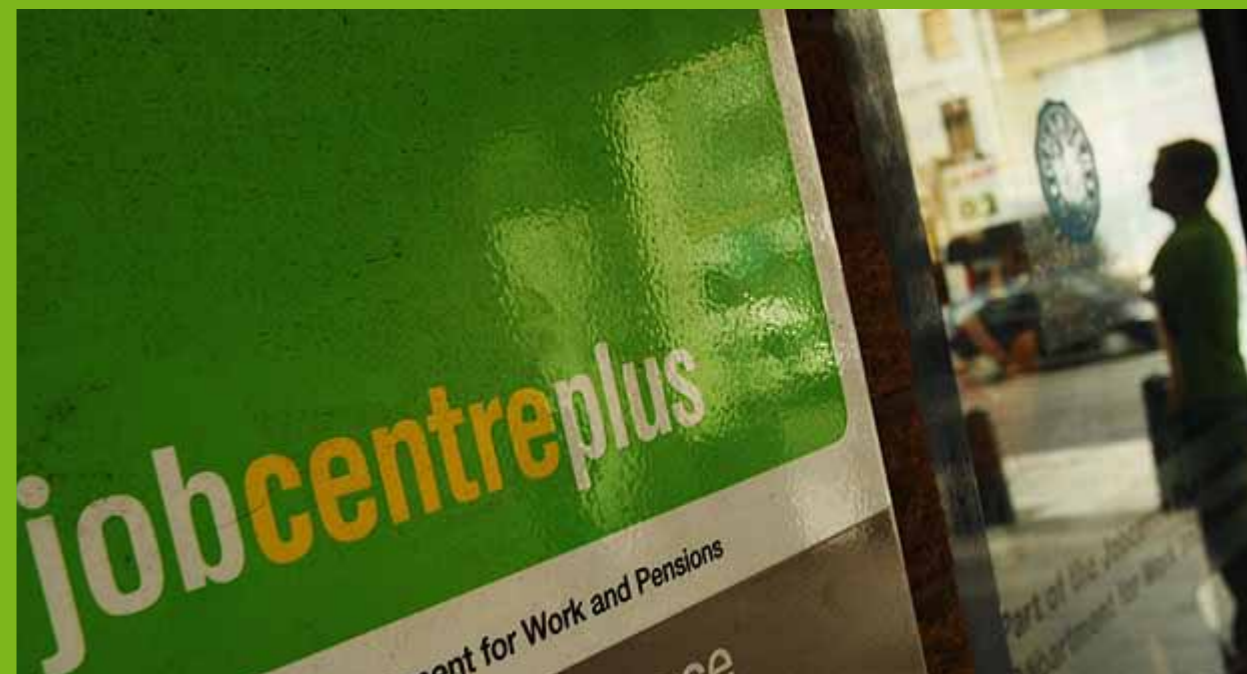
- An additional 30,000 pre-employment training and work placements will be available through Service Academies over the next two years (to be launched later this year). Service Academies were originally intended to offer 20,000 places.

Whilst we will no longer be targeting specific geographical areas, Jobcentre Plus District Managers have some choice over which measures will be offered in their area, based on customer and local labour market characteristics. Therefore, not all measures will necessarily be available everywhere.



For more information, including how to get involved, visit [Get Britain Working](#).

New enterprise allowance begins rollout



Following the launch of the New Enterprise Allowance (NEA) trailblazer in Merseyside in January, Jobcentre Plus are now working with St Helens Chamber to deliver mentoring support for Jobseekers Allowance customers referred to the NEA. East Lancashire Moneyline is delivering the NEA Loans Service in Merseyside.

The next stage of the NEA roll-out began in April and the Department has invited applications from interested organisations wishing to apply for funding to help deliver the mentoring support element of NEA in the following Jobcentre Plus Districts:

- Birmingham and Solihull

- Black Country
- Durham and Tees Valley
- Mercia
- Merseyside
- Northumberland, Tyne and Wear
- South Yorkshire
- Devon & Cornwall
- Nottinghamshire, Lincoln & Rutland
- Cumbria & Lancashire

Further rollout details and opportunities to help deliver the mentoring support element of the NEA in June and nationally from autumn will be available on the DWP internet site.



For more information visit the [DWP website](#)

Movement of work within Pension Disability and Carers Service

Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance

Some of the work we process within the Disability and Carers Service is going to move to different offices this year. As some customer representative groups will be affected, we would like to share the following details:

Glasgow Attendance Allowance Claims to be processed in Preston

Attendance Allowance (AA) New Claims from Glasgow Disability Benefits Centre (DBC), which includes Strathclyde postal districts, Essex and Suffolk area, will be moving to the AA unit in Preston. This will be done in two phases.

- **Phase 1** – 9 May – AA new claims from Strathclyde area, postcodes effected are G, HS, KA, ML and PA, received at Glasgow DBC will be redirected to the AA Unit in Preston
- **Phase 2** – 23 May – AA new claims from Essex and Suffolk area, postcodes effected are CB8 – CB11, CM (except CM20 & CM 21), CO, EN9,IG7, IG9 & IG10, IP (except IP 25 & IP 26), NR32 & NR33, RM15 – RM20 and SS, received at Glasgow DBC will be redirected to the AA Unit in Preston

Customer representative groups affected by any of these changes do not need to do anything different. Two weeks before each phase of work, migrating Preston Office Centre Business return envelopes will be issued with any new claim packs that are requested.



Edinburgh DLA New Claims to be processed at Glasgow DBC

With the AA new claims work moving away from Glasgow DBC, they will now take on the remaining DLA new claims for the rest of Scotland. When Edinburgh DBC closed, this work moved to DCPU at Warbreck House. Postcodes affected are AB, DD, DG, EH, FK, IV, KW, KY, PH,TD and ZE.

This will be completed in two phases.

- **Phase 1** – 6 June – All DLA New claims and any disputes received from this date for the surnames A-KHA will be re-

directed to Glasgow DBC

- **Phase 2** – 20 June – All DLA new claims and any disputes received from this date for the surnames KHB-ZZZ will be re-directed to Glasgow DBC

Customer representative groups affected by any of these changes do not need to do anything different. Three weeks before each phase of work, migrating Preston Office Centre Business return envelopes will be issued with any new claim packs that are requested.

Care of vulnerable older people in Manchester



Image: Thinkstock/Getty

Combining to Care is working on an initiative to help vulnerable older people in the Greater Manchester area get the services they need.

A training package has been designed which includes an aide-memoire. It brings together the best practice vulnerability guidance from the Combining to Care partner organisations, to help front line staff identify indicators of potential vulnerability, so that support can be offered to those who need it.

So far, training has been very well received with almost 100% of delegates believing it will help them identify vulnerable customers better. Indications are training will be cascaded to many hundreds of frontline Combining to Care staff in Greater Manchester over the coming months.

“The training package brings together the best practice vulnerability guidance from the Combining to Care partner organisations”



If you would like to know more about Combining to Care please contact Lesleyjane Clifford via email: lesleyjane.clifford@thepensionservice.gsi.gov.uk

Can employees be forced to retire?

Many people want greater control over their later working lives including how and when to stop working. More than one in six people who are alive today are expected live to be 100.

Why should people be stopped from working just because they have reached a particular age? Individuals should be able to retire when it is right for them to do so.

From 6 April 2011, employers cannot issue notifications of retirement date using the Default Retirement Age.

An employer can only make people retire using the Default Retirement Age if they:

- have reached the age of 65 by 30 September 2011, and were notified of the retirement date before 6 April 2011
- have reached the employer's retirement age by 30 September 2011, (if this is higher than 65), and were notified of the retirement date before 6 April 2011

If an employer did not notify the employee of their retirement date before 6 April, they may still be able to decide at what age their employees retire. But they will have to justify this decision at an Employment Tribunal if questioned.



Image: Thinkstock/Getty



For further information visit: [Age Positive - Age isn't an issue on the Businesslink website](#), [Working past State Pension age on the Directgov website](#) and the [ACAS website](#)

The [Directgov Extending Working Life widget](#) signposts to information and services on Directgov that offer practical advice and support to help people plan effectively and confidently for their future. You can easily download the widget to your website. Just follow the instructions.

Government launches London 2012: A Legacy for Disabled People



Image: London 2012

Sunday 17 April, marked 500 days to the Paralympic Games, and the launch of the London 2012: Legacy for Disabled People.

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games will be an extraordinary sporting and cultural event with a global audience of billions. It will showcase the UK at its best and demonstrate to the world that the UK is committed to equality.

Disabled people have a fundamental role in every aspect of the Games, from planning to construction and staging, as employers, employees, volunteers and world class athletes.

The Games' legacy gives us an opportunity to make a lasting difference for over 10 million disabled people in the UK as well as to the disabled people visiting in 2012.

The 2012 Legacy for Disabled People

aims to transform perceptions of disabled people, particularly their economic contribution to society; support opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity; and promote community engagement through the Games.

The Office for Disability Issues has worked with disabled people, disabled people's organisations, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and a range of other organisations to develop opportunities available to disabled people as part of the legacy.

We want to ensure that there is a legacy for disabled people from the Games that this country can be proud of.

Visit **London 2012: A legacy for disabled people** on the Office for Disability Issues website to find out more and read the Government's narrative. An Easy Read version is also available.

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council



On Thursday 23 June, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council will be holding its 10th Public Meeting in Westminster, London, between 1.00pm and 4.45pm.

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC) is a scientific advisory body that provides independent advice to the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Social Development in Northern Ireland, on the prescription of industrial diseases, administration of industrial injuries benefits and on matters relating to the Industrial injuries disablement benefit scheme.

Who should attend:

Members of the public and people with a professional interest in occupational diseases who would like the opportunity to learn about the work of the Council.

This meeting will:

- Describe the process of prescribing occupational diseases for the

purposes of industrial injuries disablement benefit

- Seek public opinion about new issues of concern in occupational health
- Provide an opportunity to contribute views and ideas about issues that IIAC should look at and on IIAC's future programme.

A meeting agenda will be finalised nearer the date.

Please note – individual cases or claims cannot be discussed at the meeting.

If you would like to attend, please contact: Zarina Hajee, IIAC Secretariat:



020 7449 5619



iiac@dwp.gsi.gov.uk



The Council's work can be found on the [IIAC website](#)

Other news in brief...

DWP Annual Forum

The DWP Annual Forum will take place in London Wednesday 6 July. The Forum is aimed at all advisers, intermediaries and other professionals that work with our customers. It aims to provide information about DWP and its Agencies, to consult on new initiatives, and to hear your feedback about how we are doing. If you have attended previously, you will automatically receive an invitation. If you have not attended before, and would like to attend please let us know at corporate.stakeholders@dwp.gsi.gov.uk. If you would like to view reports of previous forums please visit [DWP Adviser website - Forum Reports](#)

A message for partner organisations and medical professionals - Change to the way you order DLA, AA and CA business reply envelopes for Wales area

Please note a change to the contact details at Wales DBC for business reply envelopes for DLA and AA claims. The new contact is Liz Pritchard who can be contacted on 029 20586448.

Changes to Housing Benefit Share Accommodation Rate

The shared accommodation rate (SAR) will be extended to single people aged up to 35. The change has been brought forward from April to January 2012. This is to ensure that single people aged 25 to 34 reaching the end of their transitional protection period for the changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates will experience a single reduction in

their Housing Benefit, rather than two in quick succession. The amendments to legislation are due to be laid in Parliament in July. For more information on the changes visit [DWP Adviser and Intermediaries website](#)

National Insurance credit changes consultation

In [November 2010 Touchbase](#), reference was made to the National Insurance (NI) credits changes consultation. Following this consultation, from 6 April 2011, specified adults between age 16 and State Pension age may be able to get a new NI credit if they care for a child under 12. Applications can be made from 6 April 2012 for the 2011/12 tax year. DWP and HMRC will provide more information later this year. Also, awards of NI credits for the tax year in which people reach age 16 and the two following tax years – Starting Credits – will end with effect from 6 April 2010. For further details visit the website. [The National Insurance Contributions Credits \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2011](#)

DLA consultation – Government response published

This consultation sought views on the Government's proposals to replace DLA with a new benefit – Personal Independence Payment (PIP). The PIP will continue to be a non-means tested, extra costs benefit paid to people who are in and out of work. The Government published its response to this consultation on 4 April 2011, on the DWP website. [Disability Living Allowance reform](#)

State Pension Reform Green Paper – closing date 24 June 2011

The State Pension Reform Green Paper 'A State Pension for the 21st Century' was published on 4 April. The consultation paper sets out options on how the State Pension can be made more simple and straightforward for future pensioners. The Green Paper can be found at: www.dwp.gov.uk/state-pension-21st-century. The Government is encouraging all interested parties to respond to the consultation. The proposals set out in the Green Paper represent a massive reform of the state pensions system and it is vital that the Government hears the views of as many people, groups and organisations as possible. The consultation closes 24 June 2011.

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If so, send your details, including name, organisation and email address to corporate.stakeholders@dwp.gsi.gov.uk You will then receive an email, with a weblink, when each edition is published on the DWP Adviser and Intermediaries website.

