

Touchbase

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Backing Young Britain

July saw the launch of *Backing Young Britain*, a national campaign jointly developed by DWP, Business Innovation and Skills and the Department for Children, Schools and Families. It is a rallying call to businesses, charities and government bodies to create more opportunities for young people by committing to at least one of the following initiatives:

- to become a volunteer mentor for school or university leavers to help them find their feet in the jobs market
- provide work experience places, volunteering places or a work trial to help young people learn about work, make contacts and fill their CV
- offer an internship for a graduate
- create a new internship for 18-year-olds and non-graduates to give them a chance to prove themselves
- provide an apprenticeship for 16- to 24-year-olds
- joining a Local Employment Partnership to make sure job vacancies are advertised to local unemployed people
- bid for one of the 100,000 jobs for young people in the Government's Future Jobs Fund.

The campaign launch was attended by young people, business and third sector leaders, and Government Ministers. The young apprentices, school leavers and graduate interns were given the opportunity to discuss their views on how those new to the jobs market could be supported to find jobs, work experience or training, to use their talents and reach their potential.

For information visit:

www.hmg.gov.uk/backingyoungbritain

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Future Jobs Fund

Also announced at the launch were the first 47,000 jobs created by the £1 billion Future Jobs Fund. In all, 117 bidders were given the green light to create new jobs and the first of these are expected to be available from October.

The Future Jobs Fund aims to create 150,000 new jobs and forms a key part of the guaranteed offer of a job, work-focused training or meaningful activity which all 18- to 24-year-olds claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance will be required to take up before reaching the 12 month stage of their claim.

Local authorities and other organisations can continue to bid for funding, with applications assessed on a monthly basis.

For more information and to see the list of successful bidders, go to: www.dwp.gov.uk/futurejobsfund

Extending Pathways to Work to younger customers

Pathways to Work has played a major role in delivering the Government’s welfare reform agenda.

It aims to improve employment opportunities for people with a health condition or disability. Independent research has shown that those taking part were 30% more likely to find and retain a job.

From Autumn 2009, in Jobcentre Plus Pathways districts (40% of all Jobcentre Plus districts) the Pathways conditionality will be extended to those customers aged 18–24 with more than 12 months continuous claim to an incapacity benefit.

These customers will be able to access the full range of Pathways help and support available, including Choices, the Condition Management Programme and in-work support. They will also have to attend work focused interviews with a personal adviser.

It is currently estimated that 28,000 younger customers will benefit from the changes. The mandatory requirement will not apply to those who are PCA (Personal Capability Assessment) exempt.

Social Fund reform – update

In June, we looked at the long-term reforms of the Social Fund. These were first proposed in the 2008 Green Paper, *The Social Fund: a new approach*, carried forward in the Welfare Reform Bill, and remain on track for Royal Assent in November.

We also looked at smaller-scale changes introduced in Spring to help ensure that the cash-limited Social Fund remains targeted on those most in need, and at two other changes being tested. Under these changes, Social Fund customers will be:

- asked to attend an interview to support their request for a crisis loan for living expenses where it is their third such application in a rolling 12-month period
- limited to three crisis loans in any rolling 12-month period, unless the need is as a result of a disaster or circumstances beyond the customer's control.

Crisis loans for living expenses in the period between the date of claim for benefit and the customer's first payday (known as alignment loans) are not counted, nor are applications for these loans.

Findings from pathfinders in the South West and East Midlands (that started in April and June respectively) will continue to be monitored. Findings from a third pathfinder, that started in Glasgow in July, to further test the first of the two changes above will also be monitored.

In a move to support financial inclusion, Social Fund customers who attend an interview to discuss their third application for a crisis loan are also offered a leaflet signposting them to organisations that can provide advice on money management.

In addition, DWP and Jobcentre Plus are working with the Financial Services Authority to look at how best to engage Social Fund customers with the FSA-led Money Guidance pathfinders in the North East and North West. We'll bring you more on this initiative in a future edition of **Touchbase**.

A consultation exercise on wider reform of the Social Fund is planned for late 2009.

Touchbase – *tell us what you think!*

We are in the process of reviewing **Touchbase** magazine and would like to know what you think about it. If you would like to take part in the review, please email paula.young@dwp.gsi.gov.uk or telephone 0113 232 7092. We welcome comments and feedback about **Touchbase** at any time.

The value of volunteering

DWP has long recognised the value of volunteering for customers and staff. It can be a rewarding experience for the individual, and of benefit to the local community. Volunteering can offer people an opportunity to gain work experience and skills, keep them in touch with the labour market, and provide that extra something to enhance their CV or help them stand out at a job interview.

DWP recently introduced a new volunteering scheme as part of a wider offer of support to jobseekers during the economic downturn. It's available to those customers who have been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for six months, and aims to match them with a volunteering placement to help develop their skills for work.

Jobcentre Plus personal advisers discuss volunteering with customers and, if they choose to take this up, refer them to an organisation who will find them a placement.

In total, we have the capacity to broker 40,000 placements by March 2011.

Jobcentre Plus has a history of working with volunteering organisations to place unemployed people into voluntary opportunities. It is currently looking at ways of breaking down some of the barriers which can prevent unemployed people from

doing voluntary work. Many people don't realise that jobseekers are allowed to do unlimited volunteering work while claiming benefits, providing they remain available for and actively seeking work.

We're taking steps to make the guidance on volunteering clearer; updating customer leaflets and generally raising the profile of volunteering with staff and customers alike.

Community 5000

Our Community 5000 volunteering initiative for staff continues to go from strength to strength. The Department aims to give 5,000 staff days each year to voluntary and community organisations who work with, and support, our customers. It has been a great opportunity to get to know our customers as individuals, and to learn more about their lives and the difficulties they face. To find out how to become a Community 5000 partner, email community.5000@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Work Choice

– specialist disability employment provision

Following the consultation paper, *Helping people achieve their full potential: Improving Specialist Disability Employment Services*, and a wide-ranging series of consultation events, DWP is pressing ahead with a new programme to replace **WORKSTEP**, Work Preparation and the Job Introduction Scheme.



What is it?

Work Choice was announced in the White Paper, *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*, published in December 2008. It consists of a single, modular programme based on effective needs assessment and individual tailored packages of provision for those disabled people with the most complex barriers to gaining or retaining work.

The new arrangements will provide better support for people with learning disabilities, and/or learning difficulties and mental health conditions, than those in place now, because they will be less prescriptive and more flexible. Work Choice will target support where it is required, and move away from the rigidity of a 'one size fits all' approach.

Who will benefit?

The new provision will reflect the differing needs of those people:

- with disabilities, but with little or no need for in-work support
- who need short/medium-term supported employment before they progress into open employment
- who require long-term support and who may never progress into unsupported employment.

The new programme intends to develop specialist provision. It will not replace mainstream support where this is appropriate for customers for whom disability is not a critical barrier to work. If mainstream support is considered and used effectively, specialist support can then be offered to those who will benefit most.

When will it come into force?

The procurement process for the new provision began in March 2009. Contracts will be awarded in April 2010 and delivery will commence in October 2010.

Jobseeker's Allowance online

This summer, DWP launched a service on the Directgov website that enables customers to claim Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) online.

Those customers eligible for contribution based JSA can now choose to claim online. Next year, the online service will be extended to people eligible for income based JSA.

Customers can access the service by visiting www.direct.gov.uk

Once a customer has submitted their claim, a Jobcentre Plus customer service agent will telephone them to arrange a New Jobseeker's Interview.

The JSA online claims service is part of our commitment to making it easier for customers to access our services. It provides customers with a greater choice of options when contacting us, making use of a channel that many are familiar with, and offering them more convenience and control over how they interact with us.

We will ensure the IT systems and procedures are embedded into the Department before we actively market the service, which we will do from November 2009 onwards. We would advise stakeholders to wait until the official marketing starts before they encourage our customers to use it.

Further information

www.direct.gov.uk

New online services for older people

About retirement and later life

From the end of this month, people looking online for information on retirement and later life will be able to find everything they need on Directgov, in a new area about pensions and retirement planning – www.direct.gov.uk/pensions

Information about disability and Attendance Allowance is already available on Directgov, along with all other government information and services. So this change will mean that customers and their representatives get a much more joined-up online service from government. Retirement information relating to businesses will move to www.businesslink.gov.uk

DWP's existing website for pension age customers (www.thepensionservice.gov.uk) will close at the end of September.

New DWP website

We launched our new-look DWP website at the end of June. Apart from the new design, you'll see we have moved all our customer information on benefits and pensions to Directgov. We are making this clear to users through lots of prominent Directgov signposting around the site.

You will still find detailed benefits guidance (technical guides) on the new DWP site, along with consultations, claim forms and selected internal guidance. News for advisers and back copies of **Touchbase** will continue to be posted in the Advisers area of the website.

These changes reflect the new focus for our website – which is information about DWP and its pre-legislative programme, along with specialist information for partners.

Do let us know what you think of the site, and its information for advisers, by emailing internet.website@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Pensions reform

In previous editions of Touchbase, we've explained major changes to the State Pension system from April 2010. This month we look more closely at two of the changes that will come into effect.

Adult Dependency Increase

A person may get an Adult Dependency Increase (ADI) to their State Pension for their wife or husband, or someone who looks after their children, if they are considered to be financially dependent on that person. The increase is currently £57.05 per week.

People already entitled to an ADI on 5 April 2010 will be able to keep it until they no longer meet the qualifying conditions or until 5 April 2020, whichever comes first.

A person will not be entitled to an ADI if they claim either the ADI or their State Pension on or after 6 April 2010, even if they reach State Pension age before that date.

State Pension based on partner's contributions

From 6 April 2010, married men and female civil partners who:

- have reached State Pension age
- qualify for less than 60% full basic State Pension based on their own National Insurance contributions, **and**

- have a wife or civil partner born on or after 6 April 1950 who has reached State Pension age

may be able to claim a reduced basic State Pension (called a Category B pension) based on their wife or partner's National Insurance contributions.

The earliest a male civil partner will be entitled to a Category B pension is 6 April 2015 (the date a man born on 6 April 1950 reaches pensionable age).

Married women already have this entitlement, providing their husband has:

- reached State Pension age, **and**
- has claimed his State Pension.

From 6 April 2010, eligible women will be able to start claiming this straight away rather than waiting for their husband to start claiming his State Pension.

Further information

Visit www.direct.gov.uk and follow the links to pensions and retirement planning

Making tax easier for new pensioners

The mysteries of tax are becoming a little clearer for people newly in receipt of a private pension.

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) has produced a short and simple guide to tax and pensions for pension providers, to give to their customers.

Ten thousand people around retirement age took part in research into making tax more understandable for new pensioners, which was carried out by HMRC in partnership with industry. The simple factsheet, produced as a result, showed the big benefits that a small product can bring.

Peoples' tax affairs can change when they retire, so it was no surprise for HMRC to find that almost half had questions about tax. However, HMRC was surprised to find that a short factsheet could provide answers to three out of four of their questions. The key to this success, say the staff involved, was to find out what pensioners were already contacting HMRC about, then focus on some key messages, using plain English.



With such a simple factsheet, pensioners felt more confident and in control. Almost 70% felt they were more likely to get their tax affairs right with its help – meaning a less anxious time as they move into retirement.

And 75% of those surveyed said they felt more positive about HMRC because of this help.

But what about those questions the fact sheet did not answer? Well, it also contains their web address for more detailed information online, so if people don't want to ring HMRC they can find out more from their website, at a time to suit them.

HMRC hopes that pension providers will make use of the leaflet to help their customers. Meanwhile they will continue to look for other ways to communicate better with customers – and make tax even less of a mystery.

Building a society for all ages

More of us are living longer than ever before. Life expectancy has been growing steadily for over half a century and the UK has now reached a point where there are more people over State Pension age than children.

Improving the quality of life for older people has long been a priority – and policies such as the widespread reforms of the pension system and the introduction of the Equality Bill have all contributed to the significant progress made in recent years.

We now need to address the challenges and make the most of the opportunities presented by this demographic change.

The Government's strategy, *Building a Society for all Ages* outlines a series of proposals to help us to prepare. Key elements include helping people to plan earlier for their longer lives, and making sure that services suit people's needs. It also brings forward a review of the Default Retirement Age, which had been due to start in 2011, in response to the changing economic landscape.

The new proposals include:

- **50+ self-employment** – to help the increasing numbers of people who want to take advantage of their longer lives and keep working

- the **Active at 60** package and **all-in-one cards** which will provide people with greater opportunities to stay active and involved in their later life
- **digital inclusion projects** which enable different generations to keep in touch with one another
- a **Grandparents Summit**, in the autumn, to explore what more we can do to address the needs of changing family structures
- an **interactive one-stop-shop** to help people in mid-life to plan ahead and make decisions on financial, health, careers and other issues
- a **Good Place to Grow Old** programme with a national agreement to promote the importance of ageing issues at a local level, and an **innovative service delivery fund** to test new approaches to delivering services for older people
- the **UK Advisory Forum on Ageing** which advises ministers on the additional steps that Government and partners can take to improve well-being and independence in later life.

The Government plans to work with all sectors of society in order that everyone can take advantage of the opportunities presented by longer, healthier and happier lives.

Office of the Public Guardian

The Office of the Public Guardian (OPG) supports and promotes decision making for those who lack capacity or would like to plan for their future, within the framework of the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

The OPG and Public Guardian are commissioning research to understand the impact of the Mental Capacity Act on society. The research is part of their commitment to continuous service improvement, and their pledge to put the customer at the heart of their business. Understanding how the Act is perceived and used in practice will give the OPG a better idea of how to improve their support services.

There will be two key pieces of research: one will look at the wider impact of the Mental Capacity Act and the other at decision making in complex cases.

Wider impact of the Act

This research will explore the extent of, and gaps in, awareness of the Act and Code of Practice among a variety of stakeholder groups and the public. It will also look at good and bad practical examples of how awareness and interpretation of the Act has influenced decision making on behalf of those who may lack capacity.

Feedback from the research will help the OPG to:

- explore understanding and generate ideas to help fulfil the needs of those who lack capacity
- draw conclusions and provide baseline indicators in order to measure change and success in the future
- help identify areas for improvement to ensure stakeholders receive the best possible service available.

The research is scheduled to begin this autumn. OPG should receive the report at the end of April 2010 and, following the evaluation, publish their findings by the end of 2010.

The research into decision making in complex cases will follow at a later date.

Maximising family incomes

to help tackle child poverty

An estimated 400,000 children are living in poverty because their families are not claiming the benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled.



Living in poverty doesn't just mean having a low income; it affects the everyday experiences of families and communities. At this time of economic uncertainty, it is vital that everyone plays their part in helping poor and vulnerable families to take up their entitlements

Maximising families' incomes can contribute to tackling child poverty, and also related issues such as social exclusion, health inequalities and worklessness – problems faced by many disadvantaged families.

The Take Up Taskforce was set up to advise on the role of local services in increasing take up of benefits and tax credits to help tackle child poverty. Its findings are published in *Take Up the Challenge* – see www.dcsf.gov.uk/ecm/childpoverty

There are many examples of how professional people, including GPs, health visitors, midwives, teachers, Children's Centre staff, and housing officers, have all helped families to escape the poverty trap.

Could you help, too?

You don't need to have detailed knowledge about the benefits and tax credits that parents may be able to claim. There are many online resources you can use to find out the basic facts, as well as the best sources of information and advice, and existing support services, to which parents should be signposted.

Further information

www.childpovertytoolkit.org.uk/Quids-for-Kids

www.parentsguidetomoney.fsa.gov.uk

www.turn2us.org.uk

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

New entitlement for miners

In July 2009, osteoarthritis of the knee in miners – Prescribed Disease A14 – was added to the list of diseases for which Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit can be paid.

Any miner or ex-miner with osteoarthritis of the knee who has worked underground for 10 years, before 1986, may be entitled. Time spent working underground from 1986 onwards may still count in certain circumstances, depending on the type of work done and whether it was carried out in a non-mechanized mine. If a person

satisfies the occupational criteria they will be asked to undergo a medical examination.

Claims should be made using the claim pack BI 100PD, in the normal way. Customers do not have to pay to make a claim, and do not need to use a solicitor, who may charge for their services.

Further information

For further information, customers should contact the Jobcentre Plus IIDB Delivery Centre that covers the area in which they live.

East and West Midlands
0845 608 8779

London and South East
0845 608 8913

(Due to a re-organisation in this region, which is almost complete, customers in London and the South East will be advised which office will deal with their claim.)

North East
0845 600 1587

North West and East of England
0845 603 1358

Scotland
0845 608 8967

**Yorkshire and The Humber,
South West and Wales**
0845 758 5433

Textphone users can call
01977 464144.

Improved textphone service

DWP is replacing its old textphones in favour of new technology which allows customers with textphones to communicate with us directly through our computer network.

The new technology, called Texbox, means we can continue to provide telephone services to speech and hearing impaired customers that equal those provided to voice callers, both now and in the future. It will make it easier for these customers to access our services, and help us to deliver better results for them.

We tested the Texbox system for three months in our DLA/AA helpline offices in Blackpool. One of the main advantages is that textphone callers will be able to get through, and lines will not be blocked by voice callers dialing the wrong number. Our agents will be able to answer the calls directly from their PCs, and have immediate access to computer records, which will help to speed up answers to enquiries.

The trial was evaluated by customers, staff and managers, all of whom supported the modernisation of our existing service.

The new Texbox service is scheduled to roll out later this year, so customers who contact us via textphone should soon notice an improvement in services.

New grant for mums-to-be

Every month around 65,000 women across the UK celebrate the birth of a new child.



A new one-off, tax-free payment of £190 – called the Health in Pregnancy Grant – was introduced in April. It will help women to stay fit and healthy, and meet some of the extra costs they face, during their pregnancy.

Nearly every mum-to-be who sees a midwife or GP will get the new grant. While most pregnant women seek health advice, it is hoped the grant will encourage the small number of pregnant women who do not seek health advice, to do so.

It is easy to make a claim. The mum-to-be can ask for a claim form from their midwife at their first antenatal appointment after the 25th week of pregnancy. All they need to do is return the completed form to HM Revenue & Customs within 31 days and HMRC will pay the money directly into their bank or building society account. It is entirely up to the mum-to-be to decide how the money is spent.

Further information

www.hmrc.gov.uk/podcasts

Resident labour market test

The UK Border Agency has introduced a change in the recruitment responsibilities of employers which will make skilled UK vacancies more readily available to UK workers.

What has changed?

Since 31 March, businesses can only recruit skilled, non-EEA migrants from abroad if, having advertised their vacancy in Jobcentre Plus and one other specified medium, they are unable to find a suitable resident to fill the post.

What must employers do?

They must advertise the job in Jobcentre Plus and by one other method permitted under the relevant code of practice specific to their occupation. The job advert must include the job title, job description and location; an indication of the salary package or range, and the terms on offer; and the skills, qualifications and experience needed.

Any other requirements?

All jobs must be advertised at the appropriate rate of pay for that job in the UK to make sure there has been a genuine attempt to fill the vacancy with a resident worker. When hired, migrants must be paid at least the rate advertised.

For how long must the job be advertised?

If the salary is £40k or less, the job must be advertised for a minimum of two weeks, and for one week if the salary is over £40k. The period of advertising must start from the date that the advertisement first appears.

Should a resident labour market test be completed for all vacancies?

The requirement applies to the vast majority of skilled jobs in the UK – those which are filled under Tier 2 of the Points Based System. An employer does not have to complete a resident labour market test if the job is an intra-company transfer or is listed on the shortage occupation list. Or in a small minority of other cases where an exemption applies, for example a job in the creative sector, where the code of practice states that advertising is not required because the migrant will be making an additional contribution to the UK labour market.

Further information

For information on the resident labour market test, including the codes of practice for each employment sector, visit

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/employers

National minimum wage

Legislation covering the national minimum wage came into force in April 1999. It laid down a worker's right to be paid a minimum hourly rate for each hour spent performing their contractual duties.

Most workers over school-leaving age, who are working legally in the UK, are entitled to the national minimum wage, with only a few exemptions. Among those exempt are apprentices, (providing that certain conditions are met and only for a limited period) and those who are genuinely self-employed. Most other workers, regardless of the number of hours they work, are entitled to the minimum wage.

Since the introduction of the national minimum wage, Compliance teams within HM Revenue & Customs (who police the legislation throughout the UK) have recovered over £33m in arrears of pay for workers. All arrears recovered, subject to tax and National Insurance deductions, are paid directly to the workers.

In April 2009, the law was changed and new financial penalties were introduced for employers found to be paying workers below the national minimum wage after 6 April 2009. The penalties range from £100



to £5,000. Unlimited criminal fines can also be levied for those employers who are deliberately not paying their workers the correct amount.

The current hourly rates will increase on 1 October 2009:

Workers aged 22 years and above
From £5.73 to £5.80

Workers aged 18 to 21 years inclusive
From £4.77 to £4.83

Workers under 18 but above compulsory school leaving age
From £3.53 to £3.57

The treatment of tips for national minimum wage purposes will also change from 1 October 2009. Employers will no longer be able to include these in the calculation of a worker's hourly rate of pay.

Further information

www.businesslink.gov.uk

Pay and Work Rights helpline 0800 917 2368
(Textphone 0800 121 4042)

Disclosure of information to representatives

DWP is committed to working with customers' representatives, and to providing them with the right information to enable them to advise their clients. At the same time, we must guard against the wrongful disclosure of information.

We hold some of the largest databases in Europe and are a target for bogus callers. Every day, we receive calls from people claiming to be customers, friends of customers, and even representatives, attempting to obtain information about our customers for their own gain.

We have a duty to protect customer information, which we take very seriously as there can be grave consequences for customers should their information be given to a bogus caller.

It is very important that our staff are vigilant and do not disclose information incorrectly. If you call one of our offices or helplines to ask for information about your client, you should expect to be asked if you have their written authority for the release

of that information. Or, if your client is there, to confirm that he or she is happy for us to give the information to you.



If neither of these applies, staff should seek to establish that you have the 'implicit consent' of our customer to make enquiries on their behalf. To establish implicit consent, you can expect our staff to ask you questions to find out what you already

know about our customer's circumstances and their benefit claims. Your knowledge of their benefit history, together with the questions you ask us, should enable them to decide whether your enquiries are consistent with the role of a representative.

When we speak directly to a customer, we ask security questions to establish that the person we are talking to is who they say they are. When we talk to representatives, we know that they will not routinely have the sort of personal information needed to answer security questions, so the implicit consent questions take the place of security questions.

The process of establishing implicit consent is not easy as it is not a mechanical process. It requires experience and judgement from staff – and there are grey areas.

If in doubt, staff must refuse to disclose information without proper written authority. Sometimes the issue can be clouded, on both sides, by previous bad experiences. We know that there have been problems in the past and ask for your understanding of the conflicting priorities our staff face.

If you feel you are unreasonably denied access to the information you need to help your client, ask to speak to a team leader or manager.

If you have continuing problems, please try to resolve them at local level first – your Jobcentre Plus External Relations Manager, Pensions Liaison Manager or, in the Disability & Carers Service, Customer Service Manager can help.

Finally, if you have an ongoing problem you cannot resolve through these channels, please contact roger.pugh@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Provider referrals and payments

The Department for Work and Pensions has developed a provider referrals and payments system to replace the existing paper-based process, which is time-consuming, costly to administer and prone to error and delay.

The new system, which goes live in Autumn 2009, marks the start of a change in the way we work with prime providers who supply

employment support, and similar services, to Jobcentre Plus customers.

It will provide a modern, more cost-effective, accurate and secure referral system and enable both Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers and providers to focus on their core function of helping people to move into work.

DWP equality schemes

On 30 June, we published our *Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes Annual Progress Report 2009*. The report provides an update on our work to promote equality and diversity for customers and staff over the past year, and on the action plans we published in our revised *Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes 2008-11*.

Jobcentre Plus and The Pension, Disability and Carers Service published their equality schemes, alongside their Annual Reports and Accounts, in July.

Over the past 12 months we have taken a number of key steps towards our goal of ensuring we reflect the diversity of our customers, and treat people fairly. These include:

- Jonathan Shaw, Minister for Disabled People, ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People in June
- increasing the percentage of ethnic minority, disabled and female staff in senior management grades, and setting ourselves challenging representation targets to ensure we continue to improve our performance in this area
- introducing significant reforms giving customers quicker access to their benefits, improving the efficiency of our services, and sharing information appropriately to ensure customers don't have to repeatedly tell us the same information.

We also acknowledge and thank all our partners for their continued help and support to further the equality agenda.

DWP launches its Customer Charter

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has launched its Customer Charter, setting out the service customers can expect when they deal with any part of our Department.

The Charter is based on the results of research into what good customer service really means. It was developed in consultation with more than 2,000 staff and numerous customers and intermediaries.

The research confirmed that the elements that have the greatest impact on customer satisfaction with our services are:

- right treatment
- right result
- on time, and
- easy access.

Our Customer Charter sets out the commitments we have made in each of these areas (as well as what we expect from our customers). We will display these commitments on posters in all our customer-facing offices.

We are also reviewing our leaflets on customer standards and customer complaints to reflect the charter.

You can find a copy of our Customer Charter at www.direct.gov.uk

Look out for more details about our Customer Charter in the December edition of Touchbase.

DCS Customer Service Survey 2008

Findings from the Customer Service Survey 2008 show that the Disability and Carers Service (DCS) is living up to its commitment to treat customers with respect while providing an accessible, accurate and timely service.

The headline results show that:

- customer satisfaction remains high
- most customers are advocates of the service
- DCS respects and listens to its customers.

The attitude of the majority of DCS customers remains positive. Of those surveyed, 78% are satisfied with the overall service they receive. Around half (49%) said they are *very satisfied* – similar to the 2007 results.

Other key details from the survey were:

- three in five (61%) would speak highly of the service, and one in five (21%) would do so without being asked – both findings are unchanged from 2007



- the elements of our Customer Promise/Vision Statement that customers are most likely to say are being met, are:

DCS uses clear, written and spoken English (69% agree)

DCS recognises them as individuals and treats them with respect (63% agree)

DCS also performed most strongly in these areas in 2007

DCS is a service that can be trusted (59% agree).

The fieldwork was conducted between 29 September and 5 December 2008 by survey consultants Ipsos MORI. To view their full report visit: www.dwp.gov.uk and follow the links to Disability and Carers Service > How we are improving our service > Customer Service Survey.

The annual customer service survey will soon be replaced by a Quarterly Satisfaction Monitor for all customers of the Pensions, Disability and Carers Service – see our website www.dwp.gov.uk for further information.



The Publicity Register

Touchbase is published on the DWP website: www.dwp.gov.uk/advisers

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Obtaining leaflets and posters

The online catalogue of DWP products www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/catalogue-of-information gives details of how to order leaflets and posters. These cannot be obtained from the Publicity Register or DWP Corporate Customer Affairs.

Comments about Touchbase

(not distribution queries)

The **Touchbase** editorial board is always pleased to receive comments about the style and content of **Touchbase**. We want to ensure it meets your needs. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please contact:

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The information given in **Touchbase** is correct at the time of going to press. For the latest information visit www.dwp.gov.uk or www.direct.gov.uk