

Touchbase

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Working Benefits campaign

Download our new products

DWP has launched a new campaign to promote working benefits, and created a suite of products to help you and your customers.

Our research into awareness and understanding of Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) showed that many customers do not know they could still be entitled to these benefits when they are working and earning. So we have launched the *Working Benefits* campaign to show customers how they can go back to work without losing their benefits.



HB provides customers with the confidence that they will still be able to pay their rent during the challenges of moving into work. There is a range of working benefits and grants for people on low earnings, which can help to make work pay, such as tax credits, help with childcare costs, the Job Grant and travel to interview costs.

Also, since 2 November this year, Child Benefit is disregarded from HB payments. It is estimated that in excess of 200,000 working families could be up to £20 a week better off – another reason to promote going back to work to your customers.

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Adviser workshops

DWP is offering workshops for advisers to help them develop ideas to increase the number of customers going into work and taking up their full entitlement to working benefits. If you are interested in hosting a workshop, please email enquirieshrad@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Download our products

We have produced a desk aid for advisers and a customer leaflet which explains entitlement to HB and CTB when they move into work. You can find these, along with updated information online at www.dwp.gov.uk/workingbenefits

You can also access the benefits adviser (see page 6) to find out about the service and how it can help customers when they're considering their work options. Visit www.direct.gov.uk/benefitsadviser

In and Out of Work

The roll out of In and Out of Work gathered more momentum over the last few months with the majority of areas now operating the new processes.

In and Out of Work means Jobcentre Plus acts as a single point of contact for certain customers who move into and out of employment, and then shares the information with HM Revenue and Customs and local authorities thanks to new IT systems that have been developed.

The new processes have proved popular, not only with staff but with customers too. A recent survey revealed that people had experienced an improvement in the customer service they received, and increased confidence to take up employment in the future, thanks to their benefits and credits being processed more quickly.

Roll out continues with a busy schedule and is still on track to be completed across Great Britain by early 2010.

Further information

www.dwp.gov.uk
(and search for In and Out of Work project)

European Social Fund



European Union
European Social Fund
 Investing in jobs and skills

The European Social Fund (ESF) was set up to improve employment opportunities in the European Union. It aims to help people fulfil their potential by giving them better skills and job prospects, and so raise standards of living.

Priorities

The ESF programme gives unemployed, disadvantaged and low skilled people the training and support they need to get a job and make progress at work. It is designed to focus spending on specific activities and ensure that it reaches those people most in need of help. There are two main priorities in England:

Priority 1 – Extending employment opportunities

Supports projects to tackle the barriers to work faced by unemployed and disadvantaged people.

Priority 2 – Developing a skilled and adaptable workforce

Supports projects to train employees who do not have the basic skills and qualifications needed in the workplace.

Target groups

ESF programmes focus on people who are most likely to face disadvantage or discrimination. Key target groups include:



Nicola Clark is just one of those to have benefited from the ESF programme. Her views on ESF are clear: *“Without the project I would be floundering”*, she said.

- people with disabilities and health conditions
- lone parents
- people aged over 50
- people from ethnic minorities
- people without good qualifications
- young people not in education, employment or training.

A film has been made which tells the stories of four people who have been helped through ESF. It also highlights the progress made in implementing the programme to date, set in the context of the current economic climate. A supporting booklet showcases this progress and ESF achievements.

Further information about the ESF programme, and copies of the film and booklet, are available on www.esf.gov.uk

Backing Young Britain

Top British organisations back young Britain

More than 290 top British organisations, both large and small, have thrown their weight behind *Backing Young Britain* – a national campaign to create new opportunities for thousands of young people during the recession.

In September, a Youth Summit was held at Birmingham City Football Club where the Prime Minister, Work and Pensions Secretary Yvette Cooper and a number of top employers, including Microsoft and Virgin Media, met 250 young people to discuss youth employment.

Employers committed to providing a range of opportunities. Morrisons, for example, pledged new training for every one of its 36,000 employees under the age of 25. Also announced were 5,000 new opportunities, including apprenticeships, from companies such as Centrica, Carillion and Royal Mail.

The Government is determined that young people are not left behind during the recession and are given every opportunity to join the world of work. In addition to the 100,000 new jobs to be created by the



Future Jobs Fund – the first of which came online earlier this month – it is anticipated that 100,000 training and support opportunities will be provided to help young people who have been out of work for approaching a year.

Young people will receive support to move into key employment sectors that have jobs to fill and are expected to grow. These include hospitality, leisure, tourism and retail.

Young people will also get the help they need sooner. From April 2010, 18-24 year olds will be able to take up a new job from the Future Jobs Fund after claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for ten months rather than a year.

Over 250,000 unemployed people have already been helped into jobs through Local Employment Partnerships. More than 25,000 employers have signed up to work with Jobcentre Plus to help unemployed people back to work.

Backing Young Britain helps employers benefit from the enthusiasm and potential of young people. Giving a young person their first break can help an organisation to address skills gaps, access a range of government support, build a workforce for the future and send a positive message to the local community.

Further information

www.hmg.gov.uk/backingyoungbritain

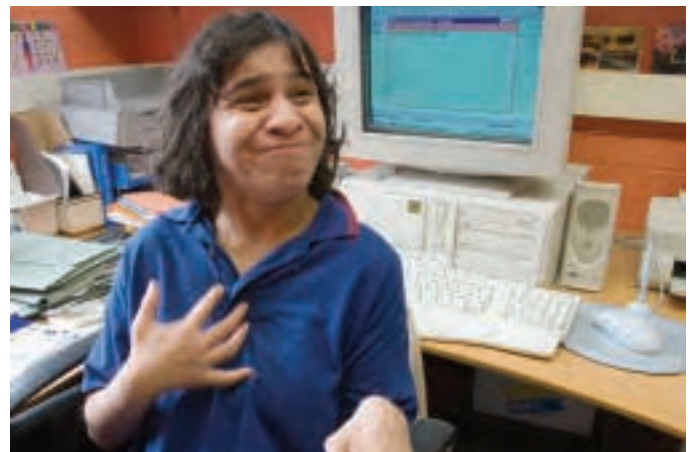
A flying start for the Future Jobs Fund

To date, the Future Jobs Fund has resulted in DWP agreeing funding to create around 60,000 jobs. This represents 40% of the total number of jobs that the fund is targeted with creating – after just three rounds of bidding.

Monday, 5 October was a key date, as it saw more than 150 people start in new jobs created by the Future Jobs Fund, in places such as Barnsley, Brighton and Lincoln. So far, these jobs include those for clerical workers, care assistants and property maintenance workers. Hundreds more people have since started jobs created by the fund, and thousands more are expected in the coming months.

These are just some of the successful bidders and examples of the wide range of jobs they have created:

- Dumfries & Galloway Council – money advice assistants, youth workers, receptionists and leisure assistants
- Blackpool Council – independent living advisers, day centre support assistants, community health champions, arts inclusion workers and heritage projects assistants
- Swansea Council for Voluntary Service – jobs in retail, childcare, recycling and social care
- Swindon Borough Council – conservation, administration, community radio assistants and jobs in highways mapping
- Leeds City Council – youth and health workers, 'green doctors' (helping people to become more energy efficient), construction and refurbishment, web designers, research assistants and support workers.



The Future Jobs Fund is keen to encourage organisations to submit bids to create jobs that have community benefits. To find out more, visit www.dwp.gov.uk/futurejobsfund or contact Malcolm Tyler on 020 7449 5658, malcolm.tyler@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Improving our service

for jobseekers with mental health conditions

In early 2009, the Government outlined plans to improve support for people who have mild to moderate mental health conditions. In particular, people who move from Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or incapacity benefits (IB) to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA).

Recommended measures

- To introduce mental health co-ordinators in each Jobcentre Plus district. Their aim will be to build practical links between local health and employment services, provide Jobcentre advisers with information on sources of help for customers and raise awareness, and increase knowledge, of mental health issues.
- To ensure that advisers are aware of the support available in their area so they can signpost new jobseekers entering JSA from ESA/IB to specific health-related advice.
- To incorporate simple, self-help health and well-being messages and advice for newly unemployed people in the *Find your way Back to Work* campaign.

- To commission research to understand:
 - the level of psychological distress amongst new JSA customers
 - the factors that may make it harder for people with mental health problems to find a job, and
 - how we can provide better support for JSA customers with mental health problems.

Who will benefit?

People joining JSA after becoming unemployed, as well as people moving from ESA/IB who feel that their mental health condition may affect their opportunities to find work.

When will district mental health co-ordinators be in place?

Mental health co-ordinators started to be in post from October 2009.

The benefits adviser

The benefits adviser, launched in April 2008, provides online advice on entitlement to 28 DWP benefits, pensions and credits, and how to claim them. It also has links to jobsearch and State Pension forecasts.

The service has now been enhanced to allow customers to obtain an estimate of the amount of benefit they may be awarded. In addition, customers will be able to enter potential new circumstances to see how this

would affect their benefits, for example if they would be financially better off in work. The service will make it clear that financial information given is an estimate only.

The service was developed using continuous customer feedback and with input from various advisory groups. Since it was launched, the service has received more than 1 million visitors.

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

More online changes for DWP

New, significant changes to our online service are on the way for customers and employers.

In the September edition of **Touchbase**, we reported changes to our online service for people of pension age, and the closure of The Pension Service website. Since 1 October, information for citizens about pensions, retirement and later life can be found on **www.direct.gov.uk** and pensions information for employers on **www.businesslink.gov.uk**

A similar change is now taking place for jobseekers and those in receipt of working age benefits.

The Jobcentre Plus website will close in March 2010 and our online services will move to new locations. Most of the content from that site has moved already, with the rest to follow shortly.

- All information for jobseekers, including help with interview techniques, preparing job applications and CVs, and our online job search, is available **now** at **www.direct.gov.uk/employment**
- Information about benefits – including an online application service for contributions-based Jobseeker's Allowance, and the benefits adviser service (see page 6) – is available **now** at **www.direct.gov.uk/money**

- Information about our services for employers will be available at **www.businesslink.gov.uk/employing people** from January 2010, with e-services such as Employer Direct Online and Job Warehouse available by March 2010.
- Corporate and policy information about Jobcentre Plus will be available on **www.dwp.gov.uk/about-dwp**

Over the coming months, we will start to update all our web-references wherever they appear. In some cases this will take some time (for example, some telephone directories will not be updated for 18 months). However, anyone visiting the site after March 2010 will be signposted to the correct place.

These changes will make it easier for citizens and businesses to access our services.

The vast majority of public/government information and services that they need will be available on just two websites: **www.businesslink.gov.uk** and **www.direct.gov.uk**

Easing the path to State Pension

From next year, we plan to introduce a new, automatic process of moving existing customers from a working age benefit to a pension age benefit.

We can process most State Pension claims from our existing customers using information we already hold, so most of them will not need to contact us to move off working age benefits onto State Pension.

We hope that, once the new process is in place, over half of all State Pension claims can be managed without a customer needing to contact us at all. This will mean a big cost saving for our department and a better service for most customers.



The way we communicate with customers approaching pension age will also change. From that time, instead of sending customers a general letter, we will send them one that relates more directly to their personal circumstances. As a result, they should be better informed, and find it easier to access our services.

Improving customer letters

Every year, we send out more than 130 million letters to customers. We also handle around 2 million calls from people who have been confused by something written in a letter that we have sent them. The new letters for State Pension customers will be amongst the first to be produced by our new IT system. This will make it much easier for us to amend and update our letters quickly, in response to changing customer needs, and to personalise them. We will be improving all our letters on a rolling programme throughout 2010 and beyond. Clearer letters will mean fewer delays, less confusion and improved outcomes for customers.

State Pension changes

DWP has begun to tell customers about the changes to the pensions system.

Our first goal is to help people approaching the State Pension age identify whether they are affected by the State Pensions changes from April 2010, and to provide simple steps for any action they may need to take. This will help to ensure that people don't miss out on money for their future.

Here is a summary of our communications activity so far.

- In April, we began a phased mailing to all women affected by the gradual equalisation in State Pension age. This will be completed in January 2012.
- We have launched the *State Pension Profiler* tool on www.direct.gov.uk/pensions. This allows people to input information about their personal circumstances to find out how the changes may affect them and what they need to consider next.
- We have placed articles and advertorials in a wide range of local and national media.
- Carers UK are producing a booklet which contains initial information on the new Carer's Credit, available for Carers' Rights Day events in early December.
- We have also produced a leaflet – *Workplace pensions are changing* – which outlines how the changes will affect employers from 2012. This can be downloaded from www.dwp.gov.uk/pensionsreform (follow the links to Workplace Pensions Reform).

Information and tools for advisers

- Our *State Pensions Reform briefing pack* will be of interest to anyone advising people on issues affecting their planning for retirement, savings, or benefits in later life. Containing top-level information and more detailed fact sheets, it can be found at www.dwp.gov.uk/adviser
- We have begun to work with voluntary and community organisations to provide them with tools and messages for their own websites and newsletters.

If you would like to find out about working in partnership with DWP to help communicate these changes to your customers, visit www.dwp.gov.uk/pensionsreform

Next steps

From early 2010, we will be broadening our efforts to tell a wider audience about the changes in April, so people know where to find more information, and why it is important to start planning and saving for the future.

New ways to help pensioners out of poverty

Pension Service staff have been out and about in their local communities spreading the word about Pension Credit. They are targeting vulnerable pensioners who may not be aware they are entitled to claim it.

Pension Credit provides some people over the age of 60 with extra cash and can also provide access to help with Council Tax and fuel bills. However, we estimate that, for a number of reasons, up to 1.8 million of our customers are failing to claim it.

Over the past five years, millions have responded to our Pension Credit advertising campaigns but there are still many more people we need to reach. So, we are widening our campaign and holding events in places that pensioners often visit in their everyday lives: such as markets, hospital cafes, libraries, clubs and bingo halls. We aim to talk to customers directly, as well as their friends and family who can also help us to spread the word.



Angela Eagle, Minister of State, and Margery Scott at the campaign launch.

Our campaign is currently rolling out across the North East – one of the areas with low take-up rates. Further roll outs are planned for the North West from January 2010.

Can you help us to spread the word? One-third of pensioners in poverty could be lifted out of poverty if they claimed all of the income-related benefits to which they are entitled.

Customers can apply for Pension Credit by calling **0800 99 1234** (textphone **0800 169 0133**). Lines are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 8pm, and 9am to 1pm on Saturday.

Further information

www.direct.gov.uk/pensions

PDCS staff move to Jobcentre Plus

We are approaching half way in the transfer of over 1,000 PDCS staff, from centres in Stockport, Wembley and Manchester, into Jobcentre Plus.

These transfers will provide the extra staff we need in Jobcentre Plus to deal with the impact of the economic downturn.

When we brought together The Pension Service and Disability and Carers Service to form the Pension, Disability and Carers Service, and modernised their services for customers, we reduced our operating costs by employing fewer people and occupying fewer centres.

The transfers, which will be completed by March 2010, will not affect PDCS customers.

Older People's Day 2009

The best yet!

UK's Older People's Day on 1 October 2009 was the most successful yet, with around 100,000 people taking part in more than 1,000 local events across the country.

The theme for the day was 'bringing generations together', which highlighted that intergenerational working is one way to start to tackle stereotypes, create a positive view of later life and promote mutual understanding between generations.

Many of the events that took place built on this theme, including 'skill swaps'. These events enabled younger people to teach older people how to get the most out of technology, and older people to teach younger people skills such as knitting and baking. Other events to mark the day ranged from theatre projects and tea dances, to fitness and healthy eating classes.

A key element of the day was the "Age, Snapped" photographic exhibition, run in conjunction with the London College of



Georgia Morris, school's competition winner, with her granddad, in front of her winning photograph

Communication. It showcased photographs taken by secondary school children of the inspirational people in their lives. It also showed images that challenge stereotypes of older people, and highlighted pioneering projects that encourage people from different generations to interact and form new bonds.

For more information visit www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/ageing-society/full-of-life

You can view the "Age, Snapped" exhibition online at www.flickr.com/photos/age_snapped

DWP Forum update

The DWP Welsh Forum will be held in Cardiff on 21 January 2010.

The DWP North and Midlands Forum will be held in Manchester during April/May 2010.

If you would like to be added to our database to be notified of future events, or wish to receive a report of these meetings, please email DWPCorporateCustomerAffairs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Child Maintenance Options

One year on

Thousands of parents have benefited from impartial child maintenance information and support over the past year, through the Child Maintenance Options service.

The service was set up as part of wide-reaching changes under the new Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission – a non-departmental public body which operates at arms length from government and has taken over responsibility for the Child Support Agency (CSA).

The changes mean that parents claiming benefits are no longer tied to using the CSA and can come to an arrangement between themselves. Because this gives separating parents a number of choices, the Options service was launched to help them find the most appropriate solution for their circumstances.

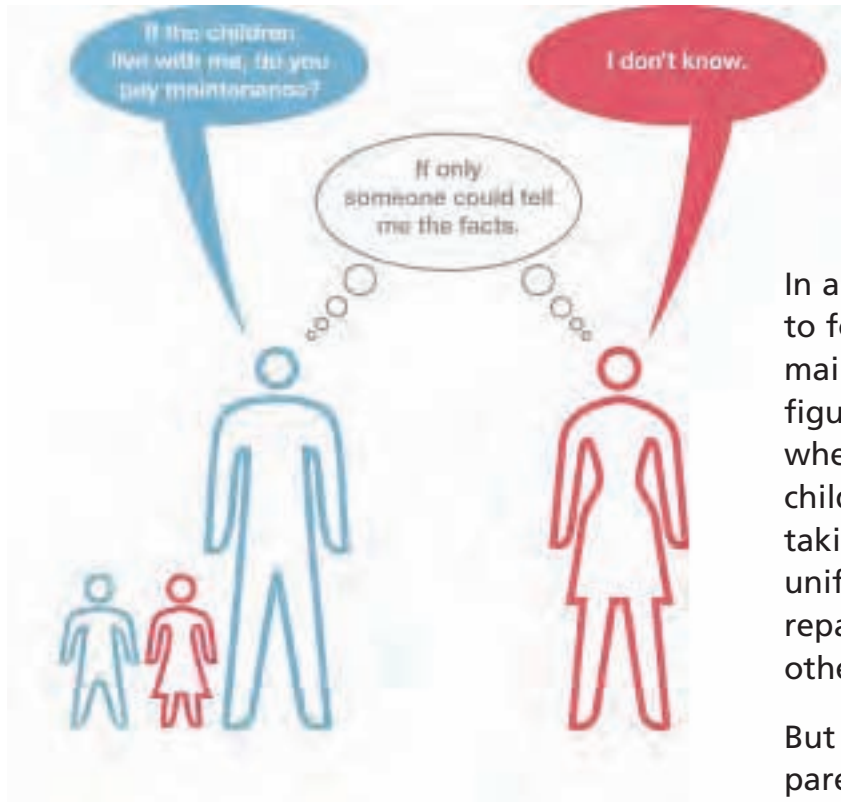
The service was piloted from July last year and launched to all parents across Great Britain in October 2008. One year on and the benefits are clear to see, with almost 100,000 calls made to the service and 181,000 outbound calls to parents.

An effective child maintenance arrangement – reliable support that helps towards a child's upbringing – makes a big difference to a child's wellbeing and the quality of family relationships. But setting up a workable arrangement that both parents are happy with can prove difficult.

The Options service can help parents take a closer look at all the choices available, highlighting the key issues they may need to think about. It can also help weigh up the advantages and drawbacks of each option, as parents can make a private agreement if they can agree on how to provide child maintenance for their child without involving the courts or the CSA.

A call to Options can help:

- work out the amount of regular maintenance that would be payable if the parents went through the CSA
- talk through the options for putting in place a child maintenance arrangement privately



- offer practical information on subjects linked to child maintenance, such as housing, work and money.

Parents who live apart often need to deal with difficult practical things like money, childcare and feelings of stress and anger. The people at Options can offer information and put parents in touch with specialist organisations that can help. Relate, Citizens Advice, Shelterline and Women's Aid are just some of the groups the service works with.

To make things easier for separating parents, the Options service also provides information on making a private arrangement – including a useful form – that may mean parents don't need to go through the CSA at all. Research shows that these arrangements tend to succeed because both parents work together to agree what is best for the child.

In a private agreement, parents don't have to follow a strict formula to work out child maintenance. They can agree on a weekly figure or include payments 'in kind'. This is where both parents may share care of the child, or one parent pays for things like taking the child on holiday, buying school uniforms and clothes, food, fees or home repairs – rather than paying money to the other parent.

But sometimes it just isn't possible for parents to come to a private arrangement. They may not be speaking to each other or there may be a lack of trust, preferring for the CSA to oversee a statutory arrangement.

No matter what the circumstances are, the Options service can help with child maintenance issues and other related separation worries. Friends and family, who may be helping a parent through a break-up, can contact the service for information too.

The freephone information line **0800 988 0988** is open 8am to 8pm from Monday to Friday and from 9am to 4pm on Saturday. (Calls to 0800 numbers are free from BT landlines but other companies, mobile rates and calls from abroad may vary.)



Winter Fuel Payments

Once again, the Government is making Winter Fuel Payments to help older people with their heating costs during the winter months.

Pensions Minister, Angela Eagle said: "We don't want any older people to be afraid to turn up their heating in winter. Real help with fuel bills is available and we want to ensure everyone gets what they are entitled to."

People aged 60 or over, on or before 27 September 2009, who qualify, should receive a payment of up to £250 per household. Households with someone aged 80 or over could get up to £400.

Winter Fuel Payments are made automatically to more than 12 million people. People who have received a Winter Fuel Payment before and whose circumstances have not changed should receive their payments automatically.



All customers who are newly eligible for a Winter Fuel Payment and who have sent in their correctly completed claim form before 25 September 2009, should receive their payment before Christmas 2009.

We started to send out payments in November and will continue throughout December, up to Christmas. So, some people will get their payment before others. If someone has not got their payment by Christmas, they should call the office that pays their benefit or State Pension.

All claims for this year's payments must be received on or before 30 March 2010.

Anyone who thinks they may be eligible can call the Winter Fuel Helpline on **0845 915 15 15** for a claim form, or visit **www.direct.gov.uk/winterfuel** for further information.

Child Trust Fund

£250 to celebrate turning 7

Children born on or after 1 September 2002 who were awarded Child Benefit will have already received a £250 voucher to start their Child Trust Fund.

Shortly after they turn 7, they will receive a further £250, paid directly into their account. As with the first payment, the money is invested in the account of their parents' choice until their child turns 18.

Children in families on lower incomes will receive an additional £250.

Parents, family and friends can also contribute to a Child Trust Fund account, up to a total of £1,200 tax free per year.

Research by HM Revenue & Customs has shown that 5 and 6 year-olds – the same children who will be among the first to benefit from the extra £250 – have got the saving habit already.

An impressive 65% of today's Child Trust Fund children save some or all of their pocket money!

Further information

www.childtrustfund.gov.uk

Child Trust Fund helpline 0845 302 1470



The Glasgow Macmillan Benefits Service

In Glasgow, more than 3,000 people are diagnosed with cancer each year. They – along with cancer sufferers around the country – face changes to their financial situation, brought about by a drop in income and increase in living expenses, which only add to their distress.

In response, a new partnership between Glasgow City Council, Community Health Care Partnerships, The Pension Service and Macmillan has, in less than one year, secured £3.1 million in benefits for 1,060 Glasgow citizens diagnosed with cancer.

The service also provides hardship grants for cancer patients – more than £1.6 million was awarded in Scotland last year. Extra support has been provided by Glasgow City Council's Revenue & Benefits Section and by The Pension Service who carries out home visits for the over 60s.

The partnership not only supports people affected by cancer but their carers and family members, too.

Following this success, the pilot is being rolled out throughout the rest of the country.

Further information

Glasgow Macmillan Benefits Service
0141 420 8123

E: macmillanbenefitsservice@glasgow.gov.uk

www.macmillan.org.uk/Home.aspx

New Roadmap to equality

The Office for Disability Issues (ODI) leads on the Government's commitment to achieve disability equality by 2025. The ODI works together with government departments to make sure disabled people are considered in all policies.

On the International Day of Disabled People (3 December), the ODI launches an engaging publication called *Roadmap 2025*.

The Roadmap defines the vision of disability equality, as identified in co-production with disabled people. It outlines what the Government has already achieved and its plans for the future – the first time that this has been published.

Tim Cooper, Director of the ODI, says: "Nearly one in five of the UK population is disabled or has a long-term health condition. At the moment, disabled people are not being treated equally in all areas of life and do not necessarily have the same opportunities and choices as non-disabled people.



Tim Cooper, Director of the ODI

"We're committed to changing this and the Government has set out its vision to achieve disability equality by 2025. The ODI plays a key role in co-ordinating the work of government departments and we're delighted to launch the Roadmap, which sets out how everyone will work together to one common goal: disability equality."

The Roadmap is based around 14 themes, which disabled people have identified as the factors that will make the biggest impact on their lives. These include access to education and training, employment, and having a good standard of living.

The publication explains each of the different themes and encourages readers to join in the discussion on disability equality. An accompanying poster shows how the different themes link together.

Copies of the booklet and poster (including alternative formats) are being distributed to government departments, disabled people's organisations and charities.

More help for carers

A National Audit Office report states that one in four carers want to combine paid work with their caring responsibilities.

As part of the national carers strategy, *Carers at the heart of 21st century families and communities*, Jobcentre Plus is committed to improve the support and advice available to carers who wish to re-enter the labour market.

Each Jobcentre Plus district has a new Care Partnership Manager in post. They will develop partnerships with key stakeholders involved in providing services for carers in their area.

Their role is to work with local authorities, the National Health Service, and voluntary and private sector carer specialists to help develop support services that will improve the prospects of carers combining caring with paid work.

Care Partnership Managers will act as champions for care issues within Jobcentre Plus, making sure that advisers have up-to-

date information about local carer services, and the right knowledge and skills to provide effective support.

Between October 2009 and June 2010, Jobcentre Plus will provide specialist training for 2,500 advisers who work with carers.

From December 2009, Jobcentre Plus will extend access to employment support to all carers who are not already eligible and not working full time who want help to find paid employment.

From the same date, Jobcentre Plus will be able to fund replacement care where a carer needs it to participate in return to work activities agreed with their adviser.

Further information

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk and follow the links to Customers > Disabled People and Carers

www.dh.gov.uk

Are your customers paying for benefits advice?

A growing number of organisations and individuals, often known as freelance benefits advisers, are charging people for help that is provided free by The Pension Service, Jobcentre Plus, the Disability and Carers Service, and many welfare rights organisations.

DWP's fully trained staff offer a wide range of help and advice and can often take claims over the telephone, complete or help with forms and give estimates of how much benefit customers will get. Customers can also get up-to-date guidance from the Directgov website: www.direct.gov.uk



2010 has been designated European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The UK's national programme of activity will put the objectives for the year into practice by:

- **raising awareness** of the causes and consequences of poverty and social exclusion, and of UK and European strategies and policies to tackle these issues
- **promoting and facilitating the engagement** of a range of stakeholders who have a role to play in tackling poverty and social exclusion, including business and trades unions, voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises, people experiencing poverty and the organisations that represent them
- **ensuring a lasting legacy** by sharing good practice and knowledge, and facilitating dialogue between stakeholders.

The programme will have a mix of activity at both national and local level to highlight the key aspects of the UK anti-poverty strategy, which are:

- child poverty
- working age poverty and social exclusion
- severe multiple deprivation and those who are most at risk of social exclusion
- older people and poverty/social exclusion.

Organisations who deal with these issues on a daily basis will be involved to help DWP deliver the programme during the year.

In August, we issued Calls for Proposals to cover:

- regional activities in each Devolved Administration and Government Office region
- a programme for each of the key themes of the strategy, which will involve grassroots organisations across the country and showcase existing initiatives and strategies as well as sharing good practice
- technical support to provide an effective communications link between all those involved, to enable the sharing of good practice and development of a lasting legacy.

Following evaluation of the proposals, the final programme will be submitted to the European Commission by mid December.

How you can get involved:

- tell your stakeholders about the Year
- tell us about initiatives, policies, projects and services that have been successful in tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Social fund

In September, we looked at the pathfinders testing proposals for change to the social fund procedures. Following these pathfinders, new rules were introduced from 30 October.

All customers seeking a crisis loan for living expenses are now advised of their current level of debt. Customers must also now attend an interview to support a request for a crisis loan for living expenses where it is their third or subsequent such application in a rolling 12-month period. This excludes loans for the period up to their first benefit payment (alignment loans).

This helps the customer to make an informed choice about taking on further debt, and allows them to discuss the causes of their recurring need for support and to find out about agencies that provide money management advice.

The interview will normally be held at the customer's usual Jobcentre. Exceptionally, it can be conducted by 'phone if the customer cannot reasonably be expected to attend in person.

Further information

www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform

Payments to people who take part in consultations

In October, we changed the benefit rules covering the way we treat payments to people who are consulted, or otherwise involved, by public bodies over the way their services are designed and delivered. This can involve people taking part in workshops, meetings, seminars and inspections.

Their shared experience of using a particular service helps others to make improvements to it. In particular, to make it more responsive to local needs.

The organisations that tend to consult in this way include local authorities, NHS Trusts, Primary Care Trusts, Patient Forums and others involved in the delivery of social care.

We are changing the rules in two ways:

- anyone paid for their 'service user involvement' who also receives expenses will have those expenses completely disregarded for benefit purposes
- service users will not be covered by the notional income rules. This means they can choose to accept payment at a level which will not affect their benefit or ask the organisation to donate their payments to charity.

The changes, which will apply where there is a legal requirement for the involvement or consultation, will make it easier for people to take part in consultations without undue impact on their benefits.

Further information

Frank Spiers on 0207 449 5252

E: frank.spiers@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

The Saving Gateway



Regular savings. Rewarded

From 2010, there will be a new government supported cash savings account called the *Saving Gateway*. It's for people of working age who are on lower incomes and aims to kick-start a savings habit and promote financial inclusion.

Account holders can save up to £25 a month for two years, and the Government will contribute 50p for each pound saved when the account matures.

Accounts will be available from providers such as banks, building societies, credit unions and through the Post Office.

People who are eligible for, or getting, certain benefits or tax credits will be invited to join the scheme.

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) are running the scheme, in partnership with HM Treasury. HMRC, aided by DWP and their Financial Inclusion Champions, is getting in touch with a range of intermediaries who will have a key role in providing advice on the Saving Gateway.

What can you do to help?

There are two important roles:

Supporting savers: many people who will be opening accounts will not have had a savings account before. They may need some support with, for example:

- deciding whether Saving Gateway is right for them
- opening their account, and
- using their account.

They may also need help at the end of the account's two-year lifespan, to decide what to do next with their money.

Signposting to savers: organisations can signpost potential savers to sources of information about Saving Gateway.

If you are interested in providing advice on the Saving Gateway, or wish to subscribe to the Saving Gateway newsletter, please contact Anne Nicholson at anne.nicholson@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk

We'll bring you more information about Saving Gateway accounts in the next edition of **Touchbase**.

Taxback

Are your customers getting interest on their bank or building society account?

If so, they may have paid tax they didn't need to pay and might be due some money back. That's because banks and building societies usually take 20% tax off any interest before it is paid (so you only get 80p of every £1 of interest earned).

Every year, you are allowed to have a certain amount of money coming in before you need to pay tax – your 'tax free allowance' or 'personal allowance'. These are:

Age on 5 April 2009	Annual tax-free allowance
Under 65	£6,035
65 to 74	£9,030
75 or over	£9,180

If a person's annual income is below their annual tax free allowance, and their bank or

building society has been taking tax off their interest, they may be entitled to claim it back. All they need to do is complete a repayment claim form (R40) and return it to this Freepost address:

Freepost RSCS-LYHX-HUCC
HMRC, Saxon House, 1 Causeway Lane
Leicester LE1 4AA

Anyone who has paid too much tax on interest in the past can claim back any tax overpaid in the last five years. They must complete a separate form R40 for each year that they are claiming. They can stop tax being taken off their interest in the future by completing form R85, available from their bank or building society.

Further information

www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxback
 Helpline 0845 366 7850

It pays to work with us

October saw the launch of *It pays to work with us*, a national campaign aimed at making employers more aware of Jobcentre Plus and its services. This support for businesses is even more important when economic recovery is essential and the recruitment of talented employees vital.

The wide range of services and money saving options for employers include:

- an efficient recruitment service to help them find the right person for the job

- Work trials – a risk-free way to try out a potential employee for up to 30 days
- £1,000 cash incentive to recruit an eligible jobseeker (can be combined with up to £1,500 towards the cost of in-work training)
- bespoke recruitment advice and support through Local Employment Partnerships
- help with writing job adverts and finding the right candidates
- sector specific training
- support for those employers going through redundancies.

DWP Customer Charter

In August, we launched our new Customer Charter, which sets out the service our customers can expect when they deal with us – whether they are claiming working age benefits, notifying a change of circumstance or applying for a caring allowance.

It is based on extensive research, conducted with a wide cross-section of customers and intermediaries, which identified the four areas that had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction. These are:

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

We then developed the Charter – with input from customers, representative groups and over 2,000 staff – to make it as real and practical as possible.

We introduced it to staff in July, so they had time to get to know the Charter principles and to think about how they could use it in their own areas to identify and drive customer improvements.

These principles are now firmly embedded in the way we train new staff and in our performance management process, which has been an important step forward in building a sharper customer focus. However, just as important has been the enthusiasm our staff have shown in looking at the barriers, challenges and opportunities to customer satisfaction.

Here are just some of the things they said:

“The customer is at the heart of what we do and the Charter will help keep that in focus.”

“The Charter puts our business on a professional footing.”

But will our customers notice a difference? Well, visitors to any DWP building will see the Customer Charter prominently displayed. They can also find out more about it on the DWP and Directgov websites, and from new leaflets containing better information about what to do if they are unhappy with our service.

One Jobcentre Plus office used the Charter to survey customers to help them really understand what they liked, and disliked, about the service they received and then used the responses to make meaningful service improvements.

Similar initiatives are happening around the country, helping us to make both local and national changes for the better.

Working together *...to make lives better*

The Pension, Disability and Carers Service delivers pensions, benefits and forecasts to approximately 15 million customers. Each year, we make payments of around £90 billion to older people, those with a disability, children and carers. Our customers – particularly the most vulnerable – often have complex and wide-ranging needs, which are met through the combined efforts of a variety of organisations.

Our vision for partnership working and external relations places our customers at the forefront of everything we do. ***We believe that, by working even closer with others, we can deliver more benefits and more services, more effectively, for our customers, when they need us most.***

We recognise the important role our partners and stakeholders play in helping us to join up our services with other agencies, and to deliver our Public Service Agreements and key policy objectives. Their contributions provide the insight and expert knowledge that guide our strategies and help us to improve our services for customers.

In our new Strategy for Partnerships and External Relations we describe our objectives, priorities and high level delivery plan and outline how we propose to deliver our Agencies' vision of *Working together to make lives better*. Read the strategy at www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/pdcs-partnerships-strategy.pdf

Further information

Kim Archer, Head of Partnerships and Relationship Development

E: kim.archer@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Professionalism in Decision Making and Appeals

The Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) recently launched a cross-government report describing how the partnership between a government agency and a university is helping to improve skills in the public sector.

Thinking Critically, Higher skills for better public services explains how, in partnership with the University of Chester, PDCS has pioneered a flexible programme of work-based learning and skills development.

Professionalism in Decision Making and Appeals (PIDMA) is helping 1,300 disability benefit decision makers to achieve professional accreditation with Higher Education awards.

Kim Archer, Head of Partnerships and Relationship Development at PDCS says:

“Millions of disabled people rely on us to get it right first time. PIDMA gives reassurance that our staff are professional, meet the standards required and deploy well-developed critical skills in their work.”

Copies of the report and summary are available at www.hefce.ac.uk (search for “Thinking critically”).

Further information

Pauline Thompson, Head of PIDMA, on 01253 338818



The Publicity Register

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

It is also mailed free of charge to anyone who joins the Publicity Register. The Publicity Register is a mailing list of advisers, intermediaries and other professionals who want to receive **Touchbase** and other relevant information about government services.

When to contact the Publicity Register

Contact the Publicity Register to:

- change your address or contact details
- obtain your own copies of **Touchbase**
- cancel your copy of **Touchbase**.

Join the Publicity Register by making contact using any of the methods below:

Online: www.dwp.gov.uk/adviser/publicity-register

Letter: The Publicity Register
Freepost Plus RRUU-HSKS-ZEYT
LBM House
Atlantic Street
Altrincham
WA14 5FY

Email: publicityregister@coi.gov.uk

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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Although every effort has been made to ensure that the contents of this newsletter are correct, it gives general guidance only and should not be treated as a complete and authoritative statement of the law. Wherever this may be important to you, you should always check details with your social security or Jobcentre Plus office, or pension centre.

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