

# Touchbase

## November 2011

### Welcome to your monthly e-zine!

Welcome to the November edition of Touchbase e-zine. In this edition we take a look at sector-based work academies, one of the new initiatives introduced to get Britain working – see page 2 for further details and who to contact.

Also on page 2, we have an article about the enhanced support for young people, which has only been available to people aged 18 and over.

We take a closer look at Benefit Integrity Centres, with a question and answer article, which will hopefully help to answer questions that you may receive about the new process – see page 3.

From 31 October, changes apply to lone parents receiving Income Support with a youngest child aged four and over. We have further details of these changes on page 5.

On page 6 we have an article highlighting research findings, commissioned by Turn2us, as the country's six million carers prepare for winter. We also provide information about how to get the help that is available as winter approaches.

As usual, we have a round up of other DWP news in brief on page 7.

We hope you find this e-zine useful, and we value your feedback and suggestions for improvements. Please email me at the address below if you have any suggestions for articles we could include in future editions.

Remember, you and your colleagues can register for an e-alert when each edition of Touchbase is published on the [DWP Adviser and intermediaries](http://www.dwp.gov.uk) website. If you would like to receive an e-alert, please send your details, including name, organisation and email address to [corporate.stakeholders@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:corporate.stakeholders@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)



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# Sector-based work academies

August 2011 saw the launch of sector-based work academies in England (a similar initiative is currently being discussed with the Devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales). They are part of a number of new initiatives introduced by the Government to get Britain working.

Sector-based work academies can last up to six weeks and have three key components:

- Pre-employment training designed to give people the skills to work in a demand sector
- Work experience placements which are of benefit to both individuals and business
- A guaranteed job interview.

Sector-based work academies are flexible and can be tailored to meet business needs. They are targeted towards people who are motivated and ready to work but would benefit from a short, sharp training intervention and work experience placement to help them into a job. Sector-based work academies are open to recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment & Support Allowance (work-related activity group).

In England, the training element of sector-based work academies will be delivered primarily by colleges and training providers that have access to adult skills funding via the Skills Funding Agency.



Jobcentre Plus is working with employers, Sector Skills Councils, colleges and training providers to ensure that the pre-employment training delivered is flexible and responds to the needs of the local community and businesses.



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# Youth Employment Support

## Enhanced support for young people across Great Britain

In May 2011, the Government published Supporting Youth Employment, which included a commitment to deliver enhanced support for young people to engage them in education or training. This would allow young people to obtain the skills and qualifications they need for success in life, ensuring no young person is left behind.

Research shows that if someone has a history of claiming benefits under the age of 18, they are more likely to still be claiming benefits up to seven years later than those who have not claimed benefits under the age of 18.

Jobcentre Plus 'Youth Employment Support' was introduced on 24 October and enhances existing processes by extending support to the 16/17 year old claimant group that was previously only available to claimants aged 18 or over.

### The support measures are:

- Early access to the Work Programme - for 18 year old young people who have claimed JSA when aged 16/17 - providing the help this group of young people need to make a successful transition from education into work.
- Enhanced adviser support for 16/17 year olds claiming JSA - support focused on the individual young person's need, understanding their goals and how these can be achieved.
- Extended eligibility to Work Experience - providing access to Work Experience for 16/17 year old JSA claimants from day one of the claim. When agreeing Work Experience placements with employers, Jobcentre Plus will ensure the Service Level Agreement is updated to include any additional legal requirements, including Health and Safety, for 16/17 year old participants.
- Promoting Work Clubs for 16 to 24 year olds through local stakeholder and employer engagement, with a focus on supporting young people, and engaging with the existing network of Work Clubs to encourage them to include tailored support for 16/17 years olds.
- Supporting partnership arrangements with Local Authorities, Careers Wales, Skills Development Scotland, and Connexions to provide signposting advice and guidance to 16/17 year olds not claiming JSA, who are not in employment, education or training and who make contact with Jobcentre Plus.
- Additional funding through the Flexible Support Fund for local partnership provision for 16/17 year olds, to purchase support such as confidence building or CV writing.

# Introducing Benefit Integrity Centres (BIC)

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

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

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

Some claimants may ask advice organisations about the new process, and the article is designed to help answer a number of basic questions.

## Common questions about the BIC process

### What kind of information are claimants being asked for?

The BIC review will cover all aspects of the customer's personal circumstances, in the same way as information is taken when a new claim is made. If a BIC asks claimants to provide information they must return it as soon as possible, as there is a possibility that payments may be suspended if there is a delay.

### How are claims selected for review?

Any claimant currently in receipt of benefit can be selected for a claim review.

Claims are chosen across the main four benefits, IS, JSA, ESA and IB, and may be selected for review on more than one occasion.

### Some of the letters and forms from the BIC do not look official; how can we be sure they are authentic?

BIC letters all bear the Jobcentre Plus (JCP) logo and forms are standard JCP issue. If a claimant wants to check the authenticity of a letter or form, they can contact their local Benefit Centre who will be able to confirm that BIC action is in progress.

### What security arrangements are in place to protect claimants?

When a BIC contacts a claimant by telephone they always ask a set of random security questions to verify the claimant's identity. These may include the name of the claimant's bank or building society, but they will never ask for the bank account number or sort code.

When we contact claimants by text the number will display "Jobcentre Plus" or "Jobcentre +". We will never ask claimants to reply to us by text and these text messages will be for information only.

### How can BIC sites be contacted if there is a query?

The BIC sites cannot be contacted directly, but if a claimant has any queries they can telephone their Benefit Centre who will arrange for the BIC to call them back within three working hours, if required.

### What is the process where there is an appointee in place?

The BIC should always contact the appointee rather than the claimant. In the unlikely event that this does not happen, the appointee should contact the Benefit Centre immediately. The BIC will then call the appointee back within three working hours to discuss the situation and arrange a time to review the claim.

### I have received a form to complete for someone else, why is this?

The only time this would happen is if the individual is named as an appointee for the person. Sometimes an appointee is a friend or family member, but it can also be a corporate body, for example a solicitor, local authority, or care provider. If the person is sure they are not the named appointee for this claimant they should telephone the Benefit Centre immediately. The BIC will then call back within three working hours to discuss the situation.

### The claimant has received a reminder letter or text, but has not received the initial letter or form. What should they do?

The claimant should telephone the Benefit Centre and tell them what has happened. They will contact the BIC who will arrange for a telephone review or another form to be sent immediately. The claimant should not collect a form from the Jobcentre as it will get returned to the wrong address and may cause a delay in their benefit payments.

### Will a claimant be checked again?

This is possible. A case can be selected for review on more than one occasion. The claimant will still need to comply even if the BIC has conducted a recent review, as there may have been a change of circumstances since the last review.

### Will a claimant's benefits be stopped?

The BIC will only stop benefits if the claimant has no entitlement or has not provided the information within the legally prescribed timescale. They will base their decision on the information the claimant has given to them, and will always write to the claimant to tell them the decision.

### What if the review shows that the claimant owes DWP money?

If the claimant owes DWP money, the BIC will arrange for it to be repaid. This can be done over a period of time, so the claimant does not face undue hardship. The Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987, Schedule 9, lays down what deductions may be made from prescribed benefit, the maximum amount deductible, and the order of priority.

### What if DWP owes the claimant money?

If DWP owes the claimant money the BIC will ensure this is paid as soon as possible.

### What if the claimant wishes to appeal against the outcome of the review?

The claimant has the right to appeal the BIC decision. This should be done by phone or in writing within one month of the day the decision was made.

# The Work Capability Assessment

## Improving customer experience

Following Professor Harrington's first [Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment \(WCA\)](#), DWP is taking positive action to put Decision Makers at the heart of the decision making process. This includes:

- Introducing new learning and development
- Developing new Quality Checks
- Establishing a decision-making forum
- Providing additional support for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants, by explaining decisions and discussing options.

### Learning and development

Our new learning and development package ensures Decision Makers understand the Work Capability Assessment process, their role in it and how to gather and use all the available evidence to make better quality decisions.

### Quality Checks

New quality checks aim to identify any errors and to establish if the Decision Maker uses a consistent approach to gathering, weighing and presenting evidence. Decisions are checked against a set of required standards covering the whole process, from the gathering of evidence to the outcome of the decision.

### Every Decision Counts

Our Every Decision Counts forum promotes quality standards in decision making and is a channel for Decision Makers to raise issues and share best practice.

### Additional support to claimants

As well as an additional letter explaining the WCA process, ESA claimants will benefit from Decision Makers calling them to talk through decisions and discuss options. If a claim is likely to be unsuccessful, the Decision Maker will call the claimant prior to making a final decision, to check that they have all the available evidence to make a decision and explain next steps.

### Positive about the changes

Feedback from our sites in Wrexham and Oldham, that have been delivering additional support to ESA claimants, has been very positive, and indicates that Decision Makers are gaining confidence in the importance of their role within the decision-making process, and that the new procedures offer an improved service.

### When will the changes occur?

The changes will affect all new claims and existing claimants being re-referred for a WCA on and after 31 October. Due to the length of the assessment process it may be December before all ESA claimants start to receive the telephone calls from Decision Makers.



Find out more about Professor Harrington's Review on the DWP website [Work Capability Assessment independent review](#)

# Improved access to careers advice

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



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

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

Minister for Employment Chris Grayling said: "We want to make sure that we give those looking for work the right skills that mean when we put them in front of an employer, they get the job."

"Too often in the past jobseekers were sent off to do long courses that taught them skills that local employers didn't value. That's all changing - we are getting people 'job ready' to take advantage of the opportunities being created across the economy."

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

Look out for more information in future issues of Touchbase e-zine.



For more information go to [Next Step \(Directgov website\)](#)

# Extra support to help lone parents into work

From the 31 October 2011 lone parents on Income Support with a youngest child aged four and over will get extra support to begin their journey back to work

These lone parents will be asked to attend a 'Work Focussed Interview' four times a year so they are getting all the help they need to become work-ready. At the moment they only see an adviser every six months, which can leave many lone parents without the right level of support.

## Mailshot letters to inform lone parents of the changes

Mailshot letters informing lone parents of more frequent Work Focused Interviews were sent on the 14 October 2011 to lone parent customers whose youngest child was born between 1 October 2005 and 31 December 2007.



The letter tells lone parents of the immediate changes and includes a page of frequently asked questions which may be helpful.

## Work and Pensions Minister Maria Miller said:

"We know that many lone parents want the opportunity to get back into work earlier and that work is the best route out of poverty. This is why we are increasing the support we offer to lone parents."

"Getting a good balance between work and family responsibilities is important for every parent. We will actively support lone parents so that they can get that balance right to take account of caring responsibilities and childcare."

One in four lone parents with a youngest child of six has never had a job. Increasing the number of times they meet with a specialist lone parent adviser will give parents help and advice on looking for work and the opportunity to take part in training to improve their chances of finding a job. They can also receive advice on childcare, benefits and part-time or family friendly working.

# The Work Programme

## A good news story

Ian came to the Work Programme with 20 years' welding experience, however this was irregular contract work and he was looking for something with more stability with a potential career change.

He had been applying for driving jobs for over a year but wasn't getting anywhere. Ian had been receiving JSA for 18 months and no longer felt that there was any point in carrying on trying to get a job due to the lack of responses. Ingeus provided him with the help and support he needed and assisted him with his CV and interview techniques. Ingeus had developed a strong relationship with Stagecoach Buses, who had vacancies in Aberdeen. Ian was offered an interview, where he really impressed the employer, and was offered a trainee position in which Stagecoach is funding his PCV license training and assessment on a paid trainee basis.

Ian has already passed the first two assessments of the PSV course with flying colours and is working towards a permanent, sustainable career with Stagecoach. He is really enjoying the challenge of the trainee role and all the learning that he has to do.

"For me personally I think schemes like this are really good for people, especially people who are actually interested in getting a job. It took me no time at all."



Ian is incredibly happy about having a job as it's given him back his independence and a reason to get out of bed in the morning. He feels like he's come back to reality from spending a long time out of real life and it feels good.

Ian said 'For me personally I think schemes like this are really good for people, especially people who are actually interested in getting a job. It took me no time at all.'

# Cross government action on gangs and serious youth violence

Iain Duncan Smith, the Secretary of State for DWP, has said that Britain's street gangs are both a driver and a product of social breakdown, linked to broken families, addiction, unemployment and worklessness

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

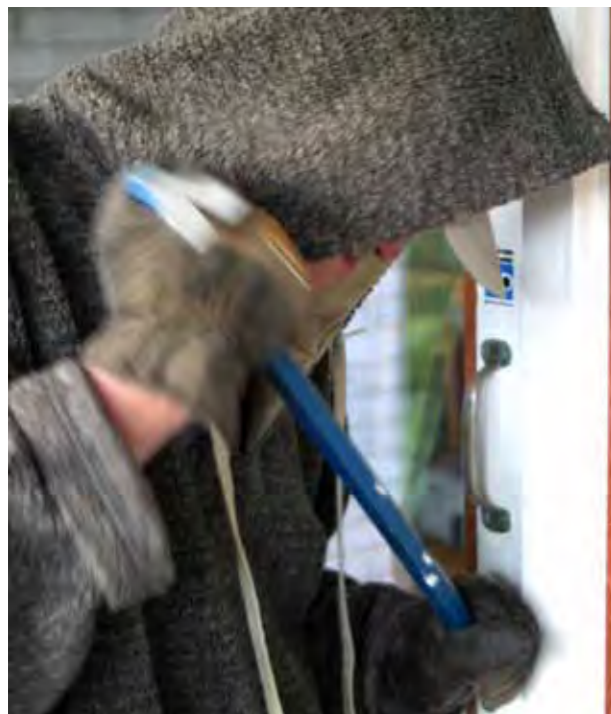
After listening to the views and experience of young people from some of London's areas blighted by gang violence when he visited the Safer London Foundation in early October, Iain Duncan-Smith said:

"The recent riots provided a moment of clarity for us all that cannot be ignored. Stable families and a welfare system that encourages people to work are vital in addressing the issues that breed gang culture by giving young people purpose, aspiration and positive role models."

For DWP, this means providing assistance for young people, by making sure there is an alternative, mainstream lifestyle available – through improving skills and back to work support, and through completing welfare reform. This will help lift thousands out of poverty and give many young people the chance to get into work for the first time.



Visit the [Home Office website](#) to read the report in full.



# New research highlights financial and health risk to UK carers



As winter approaches, a new survey, commissioned by Turn2us, highlights the worrying situation faced by the country's six million carers.

Turn2us – which helps people in financial need to access welfare benefits, charitable grants and other financial help – has released a study among carers, showing that two-thirds struggled to pay their bills last winter, and over nine in 10 have concerns about being able to pay high energy bills this year. Moreover, 42% faced debt as a result of last year's fuel bills, with over one in five incurring over £600 owed.

Alison Taylor, Director of Turn2us, said: "Given the extent to which carers relieve pressure on health and social services and serve their communities – saving our nation the equivalent of £13.6m every single hour – it is especially worrying that 23% of respondents classifying themselves as carers were not in receipt of any benefits, and over half were not claiming carers allowance."

"As winter approaches, we urge carers to ensure that they check their welfare benefit entitlement, together with their eligibility for grants, by visiting [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk).

Sadly, the research also exposes the fact that almost 90% of carers feel high fuel costs have caused their physical health to suffer. Over a third experience more

physical pain in the winter, while mental health is also a concern when it comes to winter costs, with over 80% feeling stressed by the high cost of heating their homes.

Angela, who cares for her disabled son, said: "As the winter months approach, I dread the gas and electricity bills arriving. The Turn2us service has helped me find a way to increase my income over the toughest part of the year."

## Winter Fuel Payments – apply for the first time

People need to apply for their first Winter Fuel Payment if they were born on or before 5 January 1951. If they meet the qualifying age but don't yet get State Pension, or receive another Social Security benefit, they need to fill in a claim form. Even if someone is working, they could get help towards their fuel bill.

Claim forms must be received on or before 30 March 2012 to meet the final deadline. Call the Winter Fuel Helpline on 0845 9 15 15 15 for a claim form or to tell us about a change in circumstances, or visit the Directgov website for more information [Winter Fuel Payment](#).

## Cold Weather Payments

DWP pay Cold Weather Payments in very cold weather. These are paid automatically when triggered between 1 November and 31 March. To find out more, visit the Directgov website [Cold Weather Payment](#).

# Other news in brief...

## Support for the very long-term unemployed

The Work Programme, launched in June 2011, will help ensure participants receive the support they need to help them find sustainable employment. Even with the improved support offered in the Work Programme, some Jobseeker's Allowance claimants may reach the end of their time on the programme and remain on benefits looking for work.

To understand how best to support this group, the Department will be running a small-scale trial in the East Midlands and East of England from November 2011. This will test whether, with an increased level of support, and opportunities to gain work experience, longer-term claimants have greater success in finding and staying in employment.

The trial comprise two key elements of support:

- Ongoing Case Management (OCM), provided by Jobcentre Plus; and
- access to a contracted Community Action Programme (CAP) comprising work experience and provider-led supported jobsearch.

## Universal Credit policy briefing notes

We have recently published a series of short briefing notes, which support the Welfare Reform Bill and offer detail on the shape of Universal Credit. These follow on from notes previously published in this series in September. The notes focus on:

- Treatment of income (other than earnings)
- Childcare
- Extending conditionality under Universal Credit to working claimants: setting a new conditionality threshold
- Conditionality under Universal Credit: the work search and work availability requirements
- Extending conditionality under Universal Credit to working claimants: safeguards within the new regime
- Earnings disregards and tapers.

The briefing notes can be read in full on the [DWP website](#).

## Second independent review of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA)

Our article on Page 4 shows some of the initiatives we've taken to improve the WCA. Professor Malcolm Harrington's second independent review of the WCA will be published at the end of November. Further details will be available at: [www.dwp.gov.uk/wca-review](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/wca-review).

## Correction to Touchbase November 2011 edition – Paying State Pension automatically

In the article 'Paying State Pension automatically' on page 6 of Touchbase e-zine October 2011, we incorrectly stated that automation of State Pension payments would begin on 10 October 2011.

For the foreseeable future this project is subject to further testing with no confirmed start date as yet. This is to ensure we can provide the best and most secure service possible to DWP customers. We apologise for any confusion this may have caused.