



Benefits Newsletter October 2017

1. Universal Credit

Calls for delays in the roll-out of UC

There is growing pressure on the Government to delay the roll-out of the full digital version of Universal Credit with several reports on the [BBC](#) and in newspapers about the effects that delays in payment of UC are having on people who left without money for more than 6 weeks, including one [young mum](#) who has been waiting 8 months for her first payment. There are also stories from DWP [whistle-blowers](#) who have shared stories of having to work with suicidal claimants, starving children and untrained staff.

The [Works and Pensions Select Committee](#) is continuing with the UC Inquiry and has been taking oral evidence from witnesses and cross-examining DWP Ministers. The Chair of the Committee Frank Field MP says *'The overwhelming picture we are getting is that Universal Credit as currently configured is very bad news. We have heard nothing, to the contrary or otherwise, from those running it.'*

[David Gauke MP](#) Secretary of State for the DWP has responded to the questions from the committee, his reply show there are about 11% of UC claimants who have not received any UC at the end of the first assessment period due to problems with claimant commitments and problems with verification.

An [Opposition Day Debate](#) has taken place on Weds 18th October 2017 to force the Government to pause the roll-out of Universal Credit to fix the problems that are arising. At the time of writing this the vote has not taken place but even if the majority vote in favour of the motion, the result is not binding on the Government.

Statistics

The [latest statistics](#) published by the DWP show that 610,000 people were on the Universal Credit caseload across the UK as of 14th September 2017 (an increase of 20,000 over last month). Of these 230,000 (37%) were in employment.

Local Authority	New Claims 24 th Aug - 14 th Sept 2017	Caseload 14 th September 2017		
		Not in emp	In emp	Total*
	Total			
Stoke-on-Trent	179	1,095	674 (38%)	1,767
Newcastle	67	426	256 (37%)	681
Staffs Moorlands	27	137	125 (48%)	260
Total*	271*	1,654 (61%)	1,059 (39%)	2,713

41.3% of claimants on the UC caseload in North Staffordshire are under 25.

under 25s	Not in employment	In employment	Total*
Stoke-on-Trent UA	453	272	726
Newcastle-under-Lyme	184	109	291
Staffordshire Moorlands	59	50	107
Total*	697	431	1,122

In September 2017, 214 claimants (7.8%) had in-work conditionality and were expected to be looking for better paid work and 631 claimants (23%) were working with no conditionality applied to their claim.

Conditionality Regime	Searching for work	Working with requirements	No work requirements	Working no requirements	Planning for work	Prep for work	Total*
Stoke-on-Trent	1,164	142	41	411	5	15	1,767
Newcastle	440	56	28	140	0	14	681
Moorlands	161	19	6	76	0	0	260
Total*	1,765	214	75	631	11	26	2,713

*Figures in these tables have had statistical disclosure control applied to avoid the release of confidential data. Totals may not sum due to the adjustments.

2. Personal Independence Payment/ESA Assessment Inquiry

The Work and Pensions Committee has launched new inquiry on how the assessment processes for Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) are handled by ATOS, Capita and Maximus, and how the application, assessment and appeals processes for these two benefits are working.

Frank Field MP, Chair of the Committee, said:

“The truly amazing rate of overturned ESA and PIP decisions seems to point to something being fundamentally wrong with the initial assessment and Mandatory Reconsideration stages. Quite apart from the human cost this represents – the distress and difficulty for applicants trying to get help with daily living or getting into work – it looks to be wasteful, inefficient, and a huge cost to taxpayers.”

The Committee welcomes written submissions on any or all of the following questions.

Assessors and assessments

- Do contractor assessors possess sufficient expertise to carry out assessments for people with a wide range of health conditions?
- Is Department of Work and Pensions quality control for contractors sufficient and effective?
- Should the options for reforming the Work Capability Assessment mooted in the Government’s Improving Lives green paper be taken forward?
- What examples of best practice in assessing eligibility for benefits are available internationally, and how transferrable are they to ESA and/or PIP?

Mandatory Reconsideration and appeal

- Why do claimants seek to overturn initial assessment outcomes for ESA and/or PIP?
- Why are levels of disputed decisions higher for PIP than for ESA?
- Is the Mandatory Reconsideration (MR) process working well for claimants of ESA and/or PIP?
- What accounts for the rate of overturned decisions at appeal for PIP and/or ESA?
- Are there lessons that could be learned from the ESA MR and appeal process for PIP and vice-versa?
- What changes could be made earlier in the process to ensure fewer claimants feel they need to appeal?

Claimant experiences

- Do prospective claimants currently understand the purpose of the assessment?
- How could claimants be helped to better understand the assessment process?

- Are some groups of claimants particularly likely to encounter problems with their assessments – and if so, how can this be addressed?
- Should the assessment processes for PIP and ESA be more closely integrated? How else might the processes be streamlined for claimants?

Click on this link to [written submission to the inquiry on PIP and ESA Assessments](#) by Friday 10th November 2017.

Gareth Snell MP for Stoke Central has asked a [question](#) during Prime Minister's Question Time about the case of a local man whose family won his PIP appeal 2 days after he died. This raised the issue of problems with PIP, Theresa May passed on her condolences, but there were no promises to look into this.

3. Employment and Support Allowance

Work capability re-assessments

The government [recently announced](#) that repeat work capability assessments will no longer be required for ESA claimants in the support group and UC claimants who have limited capability for work-related activity, who attend an assessment after 29 September 2017 and are found to have a severe, lifelong disability, illness or health condition and are unlikely to ever be able to move into work.

The DWP has informed us that decisions will be taken on a case by case basis and will not be considered until the claimant has been called for their next Work Capability Assessment.

4. PIP Tribunal Decisions

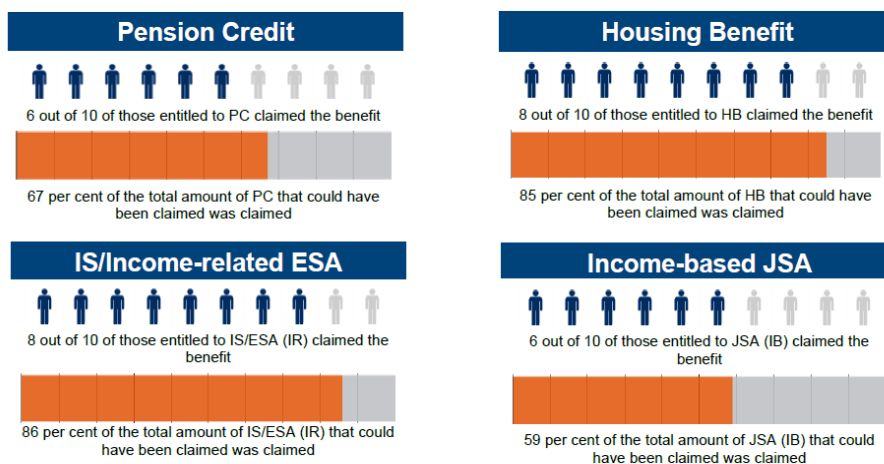
FK v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (PIP): [2017] UKUT 375 (AAC)

[CPIP/3872/2016](#) Grab rails count as an aid for using the toilet, so someone who needs to use them should be awarded 2 points.

The [BBC news](#) has reported that **Nev Cartwright** secretly recorded his PIP assessment and the evidence from this was allowed by the First Tier Tribunal that considered his appeal.

5. Benefit Take-up

The DWP has published the [latest estimates](#) of the number of people who are receiving their full benefit entitlements – only 67% of people entitled to Pension Credit are receiving it and only 59% of people entitled to income-based JSA are receiving it.



In Stoke-on-Trent there are 44,535 pensioners receiving State Retirement Pension but only 9,104 pension credit claimants, so there are likely to be hundreds of pensioners who are missing out. There will be a benefit take-up campaign run by the Financial Inclusion Group in the week beginning 13th November – details to follow.