



Benefits Newsletter August 2016

1. Benefit Cap

From 7th November 2016 the total amount of benefits a family can receive is reducing from £26,000 a year (£500 a week) to £20,000 a year, (£384.62 a week).

For single people without children the amount is being reduced from £18,200 a year (£350 a week) to £15,410 a year (£296.35 a week).

Benefit cap exemptions

The Benefit Cap does not apply if the claimant/partner (or child/young person) is receiving

- Working Tax Credit or is working enough hours to qualify for WTC but has a nil award (for UC have earnings/joint earnings of £430 a month net)
- ESA with Support Component or
- UC that includes the limited capability for work-related activity element
- Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit
- AA/DLA/PIP or DLA/PIP for child
- War Widow/Widowers Pension

The Benefit Cap does not apply to anyone over Pension Credit age (currently 63 years and 3 months). However, if one of a couple is under Pension Credit age and is receiving a working age benefit such as JSA then the cap will apply.

Warning

If you are assisting someone to claim PIP, DLA or AA in order to avoid the effects of the benefit cap, please remember, if they have a variable condition, **do not complete the form as if it is their worst day**. We have seen cases of claimants who have fraud action taken against them by the DWP because their claim form had been completed by a support worker based on their worse day. If your client's condition is variable you need concentrate what they are like on a typical day, then give details of the variations i.e. what they are like on a bad day and what they are like on the occasional good day. This should 'snooper-proof' the form against the risk of your client being seen digging the garden or cleaning the windows on a 'good' day.

If you want to know more about competing claim forms, come along to one of our Advice House training sessions. <http://www.snsCab.org.uk/how-you-can-help-us/buy-our-training/>

Benefit Cap Statistics

The DWP has published the latest benefit cap figures up to May 2016 which relate to the current £26,000 a year cap. Across the UK there were 20,100 households which have been capped two-third of these (66%) were lone-parent households.

Locally the cap has only affected families with 3 or more children. Newcastle Borough and Staffordshire Moorlands have low numbers but surprisingly Stoke-on-Trent is one of the areas outside London which has been worse hit.

	Stoke-on-Trent	Newcastle Borough	Staffordshire Moorlands
No. Currently Capped (May 2016)	81	5	5
Total households capped since July 2013	312	43	21
No longer capped – claimed working tax credit	72	19	5
Average cap amount	£48.17	£56.16	£41.47
Total no. lone parents	136	18	7
Total no. couples with children	174	29	12
3 dependents	18	5	
4 dependents	98	8	5
5 or more dependents	191	30	13

Nationally (at May 2016)

- 15% of capped households were claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance.
- 54% were claiming Income Support.
- 15% were claiming Employment and Support Allowance (Assessment Stage and Work-Related Activity Group only).
- 7% were claiming Carer’s Allowance.
- 92% were claiming Child Tax Credits.
- 1% were claiming Housing Benefit only

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/542734/benefit-cap-statistics-to-may-2016.pdf

Interactive Map

<http://dwp-stats.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Viewer/index.html?appid=9cfbe6a929db475587f8829cbc4bf1e5>

2. Personal Independence Payment

PIP: walking through pain is not walking to an acceptable standard

A recent Upper Tribunal decision by Judge Markus has ruled that while someone may ‘push through pain’ in order to continue walking this does not mean that they are walking to an “acceptable standard” for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) purposes.

The new judgment means that consideration should not only be given to whether a disabled claimant can reliably walk up to 20 metres or 50 metres in total. In addition, consideration should also be given to whether they are walking through pain before reaching 20 metres or 50 metres.

Judge Markus rejected the Secretary of State’s submission that if pain was not significant enough to prevent someone walking it is only at the stopping point at which the pain meant that walking was to an unacceptable standard.

<http://www.osspsc.gov.uk/Aspx/view.aspx?id=4916>

Claiming PIP using Next Generation Text

The DWP has announced that Personal Independence Payment has become the first benefit within DWP to trial Next Generation Text (NGT).

NGT is a free text relay service for customers who have hearing, speech impairments or are partially sighted. Customers communicate by typing to a text relay assistant, who relays that information to our agents verbally, and vice versa.

The trial covers telephony lines for:

- New Claims
- Reassessments
- Enquiries

See Touchbase 113 for more information.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/touchbase-dwp-news-about-work-working-age-benefits-and-services>

3. Universal Credit

Latest UC Stats

The latest statistics published by the DWP show that 303,839 people were on the Universal Credit caseload across the UK, as of 14th July 2016. Of these 120,700 (40%) were in employment.

In North Staffordshire the numbers of new claims for UC have decreased this month. In Stoke-on-Trent there were 463 claims for UC between 16th June and 4th August a decrease of 5.5%. There are currently 1,484 UC claimants on the UC caseload whose claim for UC has been awarded; this has increased from 1,279 in June 2016 (16% increase).

Local Authority	New Claims 16 th June - 4 th Aug 2016	Caseload 14 th July 2016		
	Total	Not in emp	In emp	Total*
Stoke-on-Trent	463	487	348 (41 %)	841
Newcastle	109	291	201 (41%)	493
Staffs Moorlands	20	81	71 (47%)	150
Total	592	866 (58.4%)	618 (41.6%)	1,484

45.5% of claimants on the UC caseload in North Staffordshire are under 25; no change from the percentage in June 2016

under 25s	Not in employment	In employment	Total*
Stoke-on-Trent UA	225	157	381
Newcastle-under-Lyme	134	98	233
Staffordshire Moorlands	40	27	65
Total	393	280	675

*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.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-29-apr-2013-to-4-aug-2016>

For link to interactive map see <http://dwp-stats.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f90fb305d8da4eb3970812b3199cf489>

4. Citizens Advice UC report

A group of 16 local Citizens Advice offices have published a report sharing their experiences of working with clients who are claiming Universal Credit. The report highlights the following issues:

- problems caused by the fact that claimants are paid monthly in arrears and delays getting claims into payment;
- problems caused by the confusion over which benefit people should be claiming
- problems with verifying claims and drawing up a claimant commitment
- structural issues can mean claiming one or two days earlier could lead to a loss of benefit entitlement and being paid early at Christmas could result in loss of UC entitlement the following month. See

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CABlink/Policy-research/Local%20R%20and%20C%20reports/Waiting%20for%20credit.pdf>

5. Youth Obligation and Cuts to Housing Benefit for under 21s

The charity Homeless Link is reporting that the Youth Obligation which was announced in the Summer Budget in 2015 is now only going to be introduced from April 2017 in areas where Universal Credit Full Digital service has been rolled out.

However they understand that the removal of the automatic right to Housing Benefit or UC housing support for under 21s is still going ahead as planned. The legislation has not yet been published for either of these changes so details could change again.

See <http://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2016/aug/07/benefit-changes-for-18-21-year-olds-further-details-announced>

6. Supervised Jobsearch Pilot

The DWP has published an evaluation report of the Supervised Jobsearch Pilot which ran between October 2014 and March 2015 the DWP for JSA and Universal Credit claimants who were still unemployed after completing 2 years on the Work Program. Claimants were referred to the pilot by their Jobcentre Work Coach and were required to attend a local provider centre for 35 hours a week for 13 weeks.

The evaluation report found that

- 17 per cent of long-term unemployed claimants were sanctioned while undertaking the Supervised Jobsearch Pilot,
- only 52 per cent of participants reported that the pilots helped equip them for coping with the routine of going to work;
- although there was evidence that participants spent less time on benefit and more time in employment than a control group, the return to the Exchequer of reduced benefit expenditure was 'by a significant margin' insufficient to compensate for the large costs of running the programme; and
- the pilot model was not always delivered in line with the service specification and frontline staff reported negative consequences including overcrowding, lack of desks and inadequate staffing levels.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supervised-jobsearch-pilots-trial-evaluation>

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