



Potteries Gold



Benefits Newsletter November 2015 (Part 1)

1. Personal Independence Payment

Citizens Advice has reported that problems with PIP have now overtaken problems with ESA as the biggest enquiry area for the Citizens Advice service. Since April 2013 the Citizens Advice service nationally has dealt with more than 460,000 problems relating to PIP claims; in some areas claimants are still waiting more than a year for an assessment. In North Staffordshire we are having problems with access to our local assessment centre and problems arising because people are being asked to attend assessment in Derby or Birmingham. We have also seen an increase in demand for assistance with applying for a Mandatory Reconsideration and appeals.

We have contacted Capita to discuss the local issues and hope to meet with them before Christmas; so we would like to know what problems your service users are experiencing to discuss these with Capita. We have produced a short survey for service users to use to tell us of their experiences of booking assessments; if you have anyone who would be willing to complete this please show them the survey. <https://surveymonkey.co.uk/s/K56LY9L> Alternatively complete the paper version of the survey and return it to tina.mendolia@sncab.org.uk

We are also holding a meeting of the **North Staffordshire Advice Partnership on 25th November at Hanley Library at 2pm** to discuss PIP and the problems our service users are having with the assessment centres and the transfer from DLA to PIP. If you are interested in attending please contact deborah.williamson@sncab.org.uk

2. Tax Credits and the Autumn Statement

On 26th October the House of Lords voted in favour of two amendments to the Tax Credits (Income Thresholds and Determination of Rates) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 which force the Government to delay the consideration of the regulations to allow a full impact assessment to be carried out and for a consultation and report on the provision of transitional protection for a minimum of 3 years for existing Tax Credit claimants.

The Chancellor George Osborne will be announcing proposals to take these forward in the Autumn Statement on 25th November; but there are concerns that he will be announcing cuts to other benefits. There have been rumours that he was intending to make savings by increasing the taper rate for Universal Credit from 65% to 75% but Iain Duncan Smith had objected to this; there are now rumours that he is intending to make further cuts Housing Benefit such as only allowing a maximum of 90% of rent as HB.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2015/october/lords-tax-credits-si/>

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/george-osborne-targets-housing-benefit-6835734>

3. Universal Credit

In-work conditionality

The Channel 4 programme 'Dispatches' has investigated areas where the in-work conditionality is currently being trialled with some low income working claimants in the North West of England.

If you missed it then catch up <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/on-demand/62079-001>



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4. Work Capability Assessment

The Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health has published an article 'First, do no harm' by academics from the University of Liverpool and Oxford University. which reports that they have found a significant increase in suicides, self-reported mental health problems and prescription of antidepressants for claimants whose benefit was reassessed between 2010 and 2013

The research has found that -

- there were around six extra suicides, 2700 more cases of mental ill health, and an extra 7020 prescriptions for individual antidepressants for every 10,000 people reassessed during this period; and
- this adds up to a total of 590 additional suicides, 279,000 extra cases of mental ill health and 725,000 more prescriptions for antidepressants across the country as a whole that were associated with the reassessment policy.

See <http://m.jech.bmj.com/content/early/2015/10/26/jech-2015-206209>

And <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34838539>

5. Benefit Claims by EEA Nationals

The DWP has published statistics on benefit claims by EEA nationals in 2013; results of the DWP's analysis include that, at March 2013 -

- it is estimated that between 37 per cent and 45 per cent of the EEA nationals (excluding students) who were resident in the UK having arrived in the preceding four years were in households claiming either an in-work or out-of-work benefit or tax credit;
- this represents between 195,000 and 235,000 (numerator) EEA Nationals in recently arrived households claiming benefits or tax credits at March 2013 out of 525,000 (denominator) recently arrived EEA nationals resident in the UK at March 2013;
- around 66 per cent were claims where either a main claimant or their partner (if in a couple) was recorded as being in work; and
- around 34 per cent were claims where neither a main claimant nor their partner (if in a couple) was recorded as being in work.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-benefit-and-tax-credit-claims-by-recently-arrived-eea-migrants>

6. Homeless JSA/UC Claimants

The latest edition of Touchbase contains a reminder that the domestic emergency rules allow people who have recently been made homeless time out from the requirement to actively seek work to enable them to focus on finding accommodation. We are being urged to encourage claimants declare their housing status to their work coach if they need this break.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/476815/touchbase-edition-106.pdf

7. State Pension Online Claims

Claimants approaching retirement age can now claim their State Pension online; see

<https://www.gov.uk/claim-state-pension-online>