



Potteries Gold



Benefits Newsletter October 2015

1. State Pension Top up

From 12th October 2015, Men born before 6th April 1951 and women born before 6th April 1953 (i.e. People who reach state pension age before April 2016) will be offered the chance to top up their state pension by up to £25 a week by buying a 'top up'. The cost of the top up depend on the person's age and their life expectancy; for example, for a 65-year-old, an extra £10 of pension a week will cost £8,900, whereas for a 75-year-old the contribution rate for the same amount of pension is £6,740. Surviving spouses and civil partners will be able to inherit at least 50% of the extra pension. See <https://www.gov.uk/statepensionpopup>

Anyone thinking of doing this should get advice first <http://www.pensionsadvisoryservice.org.uk/>

2. Universal Credit

New earnings thresholds establish entitlement to help with health costs

The DWP has published new regulations which come into force on 1st November which introduce new earnings thresholds in universal credit to establish entitlement to help with health costs.

UC claimants must have income below the thresholds to automatically qualify for help with health costs; these are free NHS prescriptions, dental treatment, sight tests, and optical vouchers, and free wigs, free fabric supports, and assistance with the costs of travel to an NHS appointment on referral by a doctor, dentist or optician. Two levels of thresholds are introduced -

- **the lower threshold no earnings/net earnings below £435 per month** - for those who do not have a child and/or limited capability for work (or limited capability for work related activity) element included in their universal credit award,
- **the higher threshold no earnings/net earnings below £935 per month** for those who do have a child and/or limited capability for work (or limited capability for work related activity) element included in their universal credit award.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/1776/made>

Changes to universal credit transitional provisions

The DWP has published new regulations which come into force on 16th November which prevent a claimant who has claimed UC and is not entitled to it for reclaiming Income Support, Housing Benefit or Tax Credits within the six month re-award period.

This will apply when the claimant:-

- has been awarded universal credit but their earnings have reduced their universal credit award to nil; or
- has made a claim for universal credit, but is not entitled to an award because of the level of their earned income; and
- enters a six month 're-award' period, during which universal credit may be awarded without a further claim if their earnings drop or there is another change of circumstances that would make universal credit payable;

See <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/1780/made>



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Universal Credit Stats

125,877 people were on the Universal Credit caseload across the UK, as of 10th September 2015. Of these, 38,109 (or 30 per cent) were in employment and 87,768 (or 70 per cent) were not in employment.

In North Staffordshire (r=revised, p=provisional)

Local Authority	Aug 2015 (r)			Sept 2015 (p)		
	Total	In emp	Not in Emp	Total	In emp	Not in emp
Stoke-on-Trent	19	6	15	15	7	13
Newcastle	185	71	111	218	82	138
Staffs Moorlands	15		12	18		15
Total	219	77	138	251	89	166

Sept 2015 Jobcentre	ESA	IS	JSA	Universal Credit	Total
Hanley	10,723	2,191	2,545	0	15,459
Newcastle	3,978	816	911	172	5,877
Longton	3,845	1,032	885	0	5,762
Kidsgrove	1,805	386	403	55	2,649
North Staffs	20,351	4,425	4,744	227	29,747

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-29-apr-2013-to-17-sept-2015>

3. Personal Independence Payment Roll-Out

Since July 2015 DLA claimants living in the ST postcode area and are receiving indefinite or long-term awards of DLA, have been receiving letters advising them that their DLA award is ending and they need to make a claim for PIP within 28 days. From Oct 2015 PIP is to be rolled out to all DLA claimants living in the parts of the UK where the roll-out has not already happened. This change only affects DLA claimants who are over 16 and were under 65 on 8th April 2013. See <https://www.gov.uk/dla-ending>

4. Housing Benefit during sanctions

The DWP has confirmed in a new memo that HB will continue to be paid when a claimant receives a JSA or ESA sanction.

The notification from the Automated Transfer to Local Authority System (ATLAS) should display three awards -

- award No 1 - current award with award amount and an end date;
- award No 2 - sanctioned period - the award amount for this award will still display the actual amount; however the award will be labelled 'Sanctioned'; and
- award No 3 - a further award will follow this which will be £0.00 pending an entitlement review.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hb-bulletin-u12015-clarification-on-the-impact-of-sanctions-on-housing-benefit>

5. New tailored support for disabled people who are out of work

The DWP has introduced a new support service for unemployed disabled people called Specialist Employability Support (SES). This new service is being delivered by six national SES providers. Shaw Trust, Remploy, Kennedy Scott Steps to Employment, the Royal National College for the Blind and Doncaster Deaf Trust. More details are available from local Jobcentres. See [Touchbase Magazine](#)