**Northumberland, Tyne and Wear District External Partner Newsletter**

**W/C 6/4/2020**

## **Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

[Information about coronavirus and claiming benefits](https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/).

[Guidance for employers and businesses](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-covid-19).

[Guidance for professionals helping people in education, transport and other sectors](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-guidance-for-non-clinical-settings-and-the-public).

[Advice for the general public](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public).

## **Jobcentre Plus arrangements over Easter**

Jobcentre Plus opening times are different over Easter:

| **Date** | **Easter opening times** |
| --- | --- |
| Friday 10 April | Offices and phone lines are closed |
| Monday 13 April | Offices and phone lines are closed |
| From Tuesday 14 April | Phone lines are open revised telephony opening hours” 9.30am to 3.30pm |

To make sure people receive their payments on a day when Jobcentre Plus offices are open, arrangements have been made to make some payments early.

| **Expected payment date** | **Date benefits will be paid** |
| --- | --- |
| Friday 10 April | Thursday 9 April |
| Monday 13 April | Thursday 9 April |

## **Changes to overpayment repayments because of coronavirus (COVID-19)**

Repayments of overpaid benefits have been temporarily stopped because of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Claimants do not need to make any repayments until July 2020 at the earliest.

Any money currently taken from benefits to repay an overpayment will stop automatically and restart in July at the earliest.
Claimants should contact their bank to cancel repayments made by standing order for April, May and June.
Claimants should stop repayments by bank giro credit or through online banking for April, May and June.

**Clarification – application process for New Style Employment and Support Allowance**

Following queries last week, we wanted to clarify the process for applying for New Style Employment and Support Allowance.

People should apply for New Style Employment and Support Allowance by phone, where they are not already claiming Universal Credit.

[More information](http://news.dwp.gov.uk/dwplz/lz.aspx?p1=MF0DU3OTAwNFMxMTE0OjY0MTA3NzIxNTk5MEMwNjM2NzI1MUYxRDExMEUzNzYy-&CC=&w=71637)

When a New Style Employment and Support Allowance claim is taken over the phone we will verify a person’s identity at the same time. Claimants do not need to complete a form.

We are aware the phones lines are exceptionally busy and are working to improve the situation as quickly as possible. Claimants will be able to back date their claim and they should keep trying to get through on the phone.

People who have applied for Universal Credit or are already getting Universal Credit should contact their work coach or case manager about applying for New Style Employment and Support Allowance by signing in to their Universal Credit account.

[More information](http://news.dwp.gov.uk/dwplz/lz.aspx?p1=MF0DU3OTAwNFMxMTE0OjY0MTA3NzIxNTk5MEMwNjM2NzI1MUYxRDExMEUzNzYy-&CC=&w=71638)

**Carer’s Allowance easements**

DWP has introduced two important temporary measures to help unpaid carers through the current emergency.

Unpaid carers will be able to continue to claim Carer’s Allowance if they have a temporary break in caring, because they or the person they care for gets Coronavirus or if they have to isolate because of it. Under normal rules there are restrictions on breaks in care, but these have been lifted.

Providing emotional support rather than just more traditional forms of care to a disabled person will also now count towards the Carer’s Allowance threshold of 35 hours of care a week

**Carer’s Allowance Earnings Limit Increase**

From 6 April 2020, the Earnings Limit for Carer’s Allowance (CA) will be £128 per week after allowable expenses.

* Allowable Expenses can include:
* 50% of pension contributions
* equipment needed to do your job e.g. specialist clothing
* travel costs between different workplaces that are not paid for by your employer e.g. fuel or train fares
* business costs if you’re self-employed e.g. a computer you only use for work

From the 8 April 2020, Gov.uk will be updated with the new weekly Earnings Limit, as will the Carer’s Allowance claim form, relevant CA customer enquiry forms and the CA uprating letter

**Uprating**

The annual uprating of Universal Credit and other benefits will take effect from 6 April in the service. This uprating will also include the additional increases in Standard Allowance and Local Housing Authority (LHA) rates recently announced by the Chancellor in response to Coronavirus

**Universal Credit Transition Fund suspended**

We are temporarily suspending the Universal Credit Transition Fund application process.

Our priority at this time is to ensure people get their benefit payments and to protect vulnerable people who need our support most. We also recognise that organisations may not be in a position in the current circumstances to proceed with an application or mobilise a new project.

If you have already submitted your application we will hold this on record, provided you are content for us to do so, in the event we are able to progress with the process later in the year.

**Job Opportunities**

A number of businesses have suspended trading but some sectors are still recruiting, although in many cases these are short term rolling contracts, to help them cope with the current demand on their services. Where we are aware of vacancies we are asking the organisations to bulk upload to Find a Job and where possible we are highlighting these on our NTW twitter feed @JCPinNTW which continues to post those key worker jobs across our region and we encourage people to follow that feed.

In the current climate digital is the way people will be able to find out and apply for jobs. Please encourage employers who are letting staff go to signpost the[**Find a Job website (link is external)**](https://findajob.dwp.gov.uk/) to them so that they can find out about some of the opportunities that are open to them.

#### Advice to Support Mental Health

People struggling with their mental health during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak will be offered [additional online support and practical guidance (link is external)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-advice-to-support-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak) to help them cope. Public Health England has published new [online guidance setting out principles to follow to help people to manage their mental health. (link is external)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing) It also includes steps that those living with serious mental health problems can take, including seeking support from their mental health teams.

Parents and Carers will also benefit from tailored advice on how to support children and young people with stress during the coronavirus outbreak, which includes providing clear information, being aware of their own reactions and creating a new routine.

#### National Minimum and Living Wage Increase

The 2020 National Living Wage comes into effect on the 1 April, a 6.2% increase on the previous rate. Alongside the increase in the National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage, further labour market reforms are also coming into place on 6 April, enhancing workers’ rights across the board. All of these are detailed in the [story on GOV.UK (link is external)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-minimum-and-living-wage-increases-come-into-effect).

#### Job Retention Scheme - Updated

The guidance on GOV.UK has been updated on the 4 April with more information about the [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (link is external)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-if-you-could-be-covered-by-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme). Note any questions about this scheme should be directed to HMRC.

#### Touchbase

Touchbase is produced quarterly by DWP and is available on GOV.UK providing news and articles from across government for advisers, employers and organisations that help people find jobs. During the current Coronavirus Pandemic, it is being emailed on a weekly basis with the latest roundup of announcements to anyone who has subscribed. These editions are not being published on the [Touchbase website (link is external)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/touchbase-dwp-news-about-work-working-age-benefits-and-services) at the moment. Anyone can sign up to receive these updates - to sign up [click on this link (link is external)](http://news.dwp.gov.uk/dwplz/WebCapture.aspx?pID=2764) and enter your details.

Latest edition - [Coronavirus Special - 03 April 2020](https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/file/756232/download/Coronavirus%2520Special%2520-%252003%2520April%25202020.docx)

**We would encourage Partners to sign up.**