

Press release: Welfare reforms and £330 million employment package start from April 2017

The government is launching the Personal Support Package, which includes £330 million of additional employment support over 4 years for people who due to an illness or disability are unable to work at the moment, but may be able to in the future.

This will also include:

- 300 new Disability Employment Advisers in jobcentres across the country
- a one-to-one health and work conversation with a Jobcentre Plus Work Coach to help raise confidence in managing a health condition, when appropriate
- the introduction, from the summer, of a new Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Claimant Commitment for disabled people or those with a health condition who are out of work, setting out the support the Jobcentre will provide and what is expected of claimants
- personalised support provided to new ESA claimants placed in the work-related activity group, and new claimants of Universal Credit's equivalent group, to help them move closer to the jobs market and, when they are ready, into work

Other welfare reforms also come into effect in April to further help those who can work get back into work, while ensuring support is in place for those who need it. These include the more generous Universal Credit taper, starting on 10 April, which will mean claimants keep more of their earnings as they build up their work hours.

The other changes were all announced in the summer 2015 Budget and have been legislated.

From 1 April

Delivering on the government's commitment to remove automatic entitlement to housing support for 18 to 21-year-olds for new claims to full service Universal Credit. This means that young people will no longer be able to choose to leave home and claim housing support straight away, and young people on benefits will have to face the same housing decisions as young people in work. Those who are in work, or have been in work for the previous six months, and vulnerable people including young care leavers, those with dependent children and those in temporary accommodation, are exempt.

From 3 April

New claimants to ESA who are placed in the work-related activity group and new claimants to Universal Credit placed in the limited capability for work

group will get the same rate as the job-seeking equivalent in both benefits to reduce barriers against starting to prepare for work and focus support on those who need it the most.

In order to ensure parents have the best chance of returning to work after having children, those in receipt of Universal Credit will be expected to prepare for employment when their youngest child turns 2 and to look for work when their youngest child turns 3. Under Universal Credit, parents in work can claim up to 85% of their childcare costs back.

From 6 April

Child Tax Credits and the child element of Universal Credit will be limited to 2 children, so benefit recipients face the same family planning decisions as those who support themselves solely through work.

The higher rate of child element for the first child in Universal Credit and the family element in tax credits will also be removed for claims where the eldest child is born on or after this date.

Also coming into effect on April 6 is the Bereavement Support Payment, which widens help so that more bereaved people get the support they need. It will replace Bereavement Allowance, Widowed Parent's Allowance and the Bereavement Payment for those who lose a spouse or civil partner on or after this date.

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[News story: Consultation launched on prescribing of gluten-free foods](#)

The [consultation](#) follows NHS England's announcement this week of new guidance on the prescription of low value items such as travel vaccines, painkillers, and gluten-free (GF) foods.

It will consider ending the prescription of all gluten-free foods in primary care, with estimates suggesting this could save £25.7 million a year for the health service. An additional £10 million could be saved through patients no longer needing to attend GP appointments in order to get their gluten-free prescriptions.

Currently, staple gluten-free foods such as bread, flour and pasta are available on prescription to patients diagnosed with gluten sensitivity. Gluten-free foods have been given on prescription to these patients since the late 1960s when it was less easy to buy them. But gluten-free foods are now

sold in many supermarkets and a wider range of naturally GF food types is also available.

Evidence from clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) has also shown that the NHS pays much more than the consumer for the same gluten-free products.

Health minister, Lord O'Shaughnessy said:

The NHS is one of the most efficient health services in the world, but we need to do more to ensure we get the best possible value for taxpayers' money. Changing the way we prescribe gluten-free food could make an important contribution to saving the NHS millions of pounds a year.

Many clinical commissioning groups have already stopped providing gluten free foods on prescription. Norwich and North Norfolk CCGs decided to end prescribing of GF foods, except in exceptional circumstances. Spend on gluten-free prescribing fell from £400,000 in 2015 to 2016, to just £21,000, making more money available for other treatments.

Norfolk CCG reported no negative feedback on the decision, with their patients saying they didn't have any problems accessing gluten-free foods since the ending of prescriptions. The decision in Norfolk was also well received by GPs, and by members of the public, who were often surprised to hear that gluten-free food had ever been available on NHS prescription.

Differing approaches to prescribing GF foods has created variation across CCGs. The consultation looks at a new, national approach, creating consistency in gluten-free prescribing across the country.

Press release: Ordnance Survey sets out to enhance its aerial mapping technologies

Ordnance Survey (OS) has signed an agreement with the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), negotiated by its technology transfer arm, Ploughshare Innovations, to allow it to licence various forms of cutting edge aerial mapping technology.

The main technologies covered by the licence will enable the rapid processing, classification, analysis and extraction of geographic content from satellite and aerial images. The capability could facilitate the efficient production of new types of mapping content of the natural and man-

made environments.

Paul Cruddace, OS Technical Change and Innovation Manager said:

We are always looking for opportunities to improve and increase our data capture and processing capabilities – creating new approaches to generating geospatial content. In accessing and applying technology of this nature, the hope is that it will allow us to further optimise our current operations as well as provide new capabilities and geospatial content to current and future customers.

It is a great opportunity to partner Dstl. For over two centuries, OS has continuously invested and innovated in new ways to map the environment. We are looking forward to exploring, trialling and hopefully adopting the latest innovations from Dstl and I am excited to see how they can enhance our processes and geospatial content to provide our customers with premier mapping services.

Ploughshare's CEO James Kirby added:

This is the latest contract that we have signed which supports the use of technologies developed by the defence and security sectors in other areas. The technology has the potential to improve the speed that maps can be prepared and to enhance their accuracy.

This licencing agreement will enable Ordnance Survey to assess the technologies initially, in order to determine the potential efficiency benefits and enhancements they offer to gathering mapping data, prior to taking a full license.

[News story: PM call with Prime Minister Rutte of the Netherlands: 30 March 2017](#)

This evening the Prime Minister called Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte following yesterday's UK letter of notification to the European Council.

The Prime Minister underlined the UK's determination to agree a deep and special partnership between the UK and the European Union.

Both Prime Ministers agreed that the UK would remain a close and committed ally, and that they would approach the talks to come in a constructive manner.

News story: Bradford & Bingley asset sale to raise £11.8 billion for UK taxpayers

The loans will be sold to Prudential plc and to funds managed by Blackstone. There will be no changes to the terms and conditions of the loans sold. Borrowers do not need to take any action.

The price achieved reflects the strong credit quality of the portfolio and the outcome of a highly competitive sale process. It delivers value for money for the taxpayer and compares favourably with the 'fair value' of the B&B loan book disclosed in B&B's accounts last year. The fair value of the B&B loan book is less than its book value, reflecting the low interest rates payable on the loans.

UK Asset Resolution (UKAR) manages Bradford & Bingley and NRAM's closed loan books on behalf of the taxpayer. Allowing for today's transaction, UKAR's balance sheet now stands at £22 billion, down from £37 billion in September 2016 and from £116 billion in 2010.

Chancellor Philip Hammond said:

The sale of these Bradford & Bingley assets for £11.8 billion marks another major milestone in our plan to get taxpayers' money back following the financial crisis.

We are determined to return the financial assets we own to the private sector and today's sale is further proof of the confidence investors have in the UK economy.

At [Budget 2016](#), the government announced that it would explore a programme of sales designed to raise sufficient proceeds for Bradford & Bingley (B&B) to repay the £15.65 billion debt to the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) and, in turn, the corresponding loan from the Treasury. Today's (31 March 2017) sale is the first in the programme.

The programme of sales is expected to conclude in full before the end of 2017-18. Any further sales will be subject to market conditions and ensuring value for money.