



News in Brief

In a speech on Friday 19 April, the Prime Minister delivered a statement which outlined his “moral mission” to give everyone who is able to work the best possible chance of staying in, or returning to, work’. Some details are confirmation of things that have been previously reported, some are entirely new proposals. We suggest getting a strong cup of coffee before reading!

The full speech can be accessed here: www.gov.uk/government/news/disability-benefits-system-to-be-reviewed-as-pm-outlines-moral-mission-to-reform-welfare

Contents

Accelerating the move to Universal Credit for ESA claimants

Further change to the Administrative Earnings Threshold

Removal of all benefits

Changing the fit note system

Personal Independence Payment consultation

Work and Health Programme

Accelerating the move to Universal Credit for ESA claimants

It was announced in the 2022 Autumn Statement that managed migration for those receiving income-related Employment and Support Allowance only (or those getting it plus Housing Benefit) would be delayed until 2028. The Prime Minister’s statement makes a change to this, stating that the new aim is to move ESA claimants to UC more quickly – ‘we’ll accelerate moving people from legacy benefits onto Universal Credit, to give them more access to the world of work.’ Confirming the news via Twitter/X, Neil Couling, Senior Responsible Owner for Universal Credit stated: ‘The Prime Minister’s welfare reform speech earlier today announced the acceleration of the managed migration of legacy ESA/ESA & HB cases to Universal Credit. All migration notices will now be sent by the end of December 2025.’

Further change to the Administrative Earnings Threshold

From 13 May 2024, the Administrative Earnings Threshold (AET) will be increased again, to the equivalent of 18 hours at the National Minimum Wage for an individual and

29 hours for a couple. This works out as £892 per month for individual claimants and £1,437 per month for couples. Claimants earning less than both the National Minimum Wage for their expected hours of work and the AET may be subject to all work-related requirements. It is expected that this change will move around 180,000 Universal Credit claimants into the intensive work search group, from the light touch group and bring the total moved into the intensive work search group by the recent increases to the AET to 400,000.

Note: the AET was previously increased to:

- 12 hours at the National Minimum Wage for a single person and 18 hours for a couple in September 2022
- 15 hours at the National Minimum Wage for a single person and 24 hours for a couple in January 2023.

Removal of all benefits

If a person has been unemployed for 12 months or more and has not engaged with the DWP, the government have proposed that they would stop their benefits entirely. This is a significant change from the current sanctions regime, which stops a claimant's standard allowance but continues payments for children and housing and allows hardship payments. The proposal is to make this change in the next Parliament.

Changing the fit note system

A consultation on the fit note system has been launched, with the government wanting to 'better understand who needs support'.

One proposal is to move the authority for completing the fit note from the GP (and other specified medical professionals) to 'specialist work and health professionals who have the dedicated time and expertise to provide an objective assessment of someone's ability to work and the tailored support they need to do so.'

You can answer the fit note call for evidence here: www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/fit-note-reform-call-for-evidence/fit-note-reform-call-for-evidence

Personal Independence Payment consultation

A significant portion of the Prime Minister's speech focused on proposed reforms to Personal Independence Payment for those with mental ill health conditions. A consultation will be launched which will look at the following proposals:

- limiting the type and severity of mental health conditions that are eligible
- linking the assessment more closely to a person's actual condition and requiring "greater medical evidence" to substantiate a claim
- considering whether those eligible for Personal Independence Payment due to mental ill health should not receive cash payments, but vouchers for treatment like 'talking therapies or respite care'.

The Prime Minister also made a comment about PIP for those with other conditions, stating:

‘Now [PIP’s] purpose is to contribute to the extra costs people face as they go about their daily lives. Take for example, those who need money for aids or assistance...with things like handrails or stairlifts. Often they’re already available at low cost, or free from the NHS or Local Authorities. And they’re one-off costs...so it probably isn’t right that we’re paying an ongoing amount every year.’

We’ll share the consultation once it is live.

Work and Health Programme

Separately to the Prime Minister’s statement, it has also been announced by the press that the Work and Health programme (which aims to help disabled people into work) will come to an end in the Autumn. This has not been directly addressed by the government – we will keep you updated.

www.gov.uk/work-health-programme

