

Press release: Ministers take action to bolster PIP services

As part of its ongoing commitment to strengthen its services for disabled people, the government has accepted the recommendations of the second independent review of Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

The review, commissioned by the government and led by Paul Gray, was published in March 2017. Action will be taken on the recommendations including simplifying communications for people claiming PIP, and exploring how to ensure evidence is collected and reviewed as effectively as possible to support people's claims.

Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, Sarah Newton, said:

We're determined to make the PIP application process as simple as possible both for the independent assessors and the people applying for it. That's why we commissioned the second review on top of the strong steps we've already taken, so we can fully understand what works best, and what we need to improve on.

Working closely with disabled people and their representatives, we'll continue to explore how to help meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

PIP was introduced to replace the outdated Disability Living Allowance (DLA) system. At the core of PIP's design is the principle that awards should be made according to someone's overall level of need – taking into account both physical and non-physical conditions. Under PIP 29% of claimants are now receiving the highest rate of support, compared to 15% under DLA.

The first independent review was published in December 2014. Since then, significant improvements have been made to the PIP assessment process including:

- restructuring decision letters to make them easier to understand
- working with the Money Advice Service (MAS) to ensure PIP claimants can get bespoke budgeting advice if they need it
- introducing SMS messaging to keep a claimant informed throughout the journey of their claim
- introducing the Video Relay Service for claimants who use British Sign Language (BSL) so they are able to communicate with the department more easily
- introducing the Next Generation Text (NGT) for deaf or hard of hearing claimants unable to use BSL or those unable to speak
- amending the PIP (Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2013 by removing the requirement for DLA claimants to wait a minimum of 28 days when they transfer to PIP if they became terminally ill

Assessment providers have also introduced Mental Health Champions, who are experienced professionals with direct and relevant work experience of helping people with mental health problems.

[PIP](#) is designed to help with the extra costs associated with a disability or health condition. It is not means tested and not linked to someone's ability to work.

Read the [government's response to the second independent review](#).

Read Paul Gray's [second independent review](#).

Media enquiries for this press release: 020 3267 5125

Follow DWP on:

[News story: 200 suppliers now signing up to Contracts Finder every week](#)

The Contracts Finder platform now has more than 22,000 registered suppliers, with almost two-thirds of them small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – a 53% increase since the beginning of this year. Around 200 suppliers sign up to use the platform every week.

The site now regularly features more contract notices than TED, the EU procurement portal.

Contracts Finder is managed by the Crown Commercial Service (CCS), as part of the Cabinet Office, with the aim of increasing procurement transparency and providing more opportunities for SMEs to supply goods and services to the public sector.

Automatic email alerts are distributed to interested suppliers, with suppliers able to tailor their searches to deliver news about opportunities in their own specialism.

Caroline Nokes, Minister for government Resilience and Efficiency, says:

Contracts Finder is a great way for small and medium sized businesses to search for opportunities in central government and the wider public sector. Smaller businesses are the lifeblood of our economy, and I am keen that they are able to access as many opportunities as possible, helping the Government to achieve our aspiration of spending £1 in every £3 with SMEs by 2022.

Ian Fishwick, Chief Executive of Adept Telecom, Commercial Director for Innopsis, and member of the Cabinet Office SME Panel, says:

Almost all public sector buyers are now registered to use the service including councils, emergency services, central government, universities and the NHS. We are closer than ever to having a single website where you can find the bulk of public sector tenders.

Emma Jones, Small Business Crown Representative, says:

Contracts Finder is the go-to place for SMEs to find government and public sector opportunities. More and more organisations are using it with twice as many UK opportunities published when compared with the TED website. I'd urge SMEs to log on for free and find out what opportunities are out there. We'd like to see the platform go even further and become the single location on which government's major suppliers also list their opportunities, whilst making performance data on existing contracts more transparent.

Contracts Finder supports the UK Government's commitment to the Open Data Contracting Standard (ODCS), ensuring that all stages of the public procurement process are open and transparent.

The UK is the first G7 country to implement the ODCS for contracts administered by a central purchasing authority – CCS.

This means that the whole process of awarding public sector contracts is visible to the public for the first time. Data and documents are disclosed at all stages of the contracting process. This allows deeper analysis of contracting data by a wide range of users.

The government is currently exploring measures to further increase business with SMEs, including by asking larger suppliers to advertise subcontracting opportunities through Contracts Finder.

For more information on Contracts Finder and to sign up to alerts, visit <https://www.gov.uk/contracts-finder>

[News story: Twenty three universities join student visa pilot](#)

A pilot which is looking at streamlining the process for international

Masters students wanting to study in the UK has been extended to an additional 23 universities, the Immigration Minister announced today.

Currently in its 2nd year with the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Bath and Imperial College London, the pilot will streamline the process for international students looking to study on a Masters course of 13 months or less in the UK.

It also provides greater support for students who wish to switch to a work visa and take up a graduate role, by allowing them to remain in the UK for 6 months after they have finished their course.

Responsibility

Universities taking part are given responsibility for eligibility checks, meaning that students can submit fewer documents than required in the current process alongside their visa applications.

Applicants that do not meet immigration rules will be refused. All students will continue to require Home Office security and identity checks.

The additional 23 universities to benefit from the pilot include 2 in Scotland, 2 in Wales and 1 in Northern Ireland as well as universities from across England.

Immigration Minister Brandon Lewis said:

I am delighted to announce the expansion of this pilot which is part of our ongoing activity to ensure that our world-leading institutions remain highly competitive.

The UK continues to be the 2nd most popular destination for international students and the number coming to study at our universities has increased by 24% since 2010.

This is a clear indication that genuine students are welcome and there is no limit on the number who can come to study in the UK.

Increase

The most recent Home Office statistics show that the number of students applying for visas increased by 8% over the past year, and there has been a 9% increase in the number of students applying to Russell Group universities.

The 23 additional universities will be able to apply the pilot to their 2018/19 intake. The universities were selected as their visa refusal rates are consistently the lowest in their area or region.

The 23 universities to be added to the pilot are:

- Cardiff University

- Goldsmiths University of London
- Harper Adams University
- Newcastle University
- Queen's University Belfast
- The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
- University of Bristol
- Durham University
- University of East Anglia
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Essex
- University of Exeter
- University of Glasgow
- University of Leicester
- University of Liverpool
- University of Manchester
- University of Nottingham
- University of Reading
- University of Sheffield
- University of Southampton
- University of Wales Trinity St. David (Swansea Campus)
- University of Warwick
- University of York

Press release: Highways England is 'gearing up' to remove miles of roadworks in time for Christmas

Almost 400 miles of roadworks across England will be lifted and completed in December, leaving almost 99 per cent of motorways and strategic A roads roadworks-free in time for Christmas.

All roadworks will be lifted or completed by 6am on 22 December until 12.01am on 2 January to help people get away this Christmas with as little disruption as possible.

With the festive countdown well and truly underway, the UK's largest coach operator National Express, has praised Highways England for its role in helping people get to their destination on time.

Chris Hardy, National Express Coach Managing Director, said:

We'll be moving hundreds of thousands of passengers around the UK during the festive period, including on Christmas and Boxing Day when there are no rail services; and New Year's Day.

We work with Highways England round the year to support them in maintaining and improving the road network so that we can offer our customers a reliable and convenient service.

It's great that they've lifted road works during a busy time for travel, helping us to make sure we can get passengers where they want to be for Christmas.

And with thoughts turning to the all-important getaway, Highways England is also calling on motorists to do their bit before getting behind the wheel.

Highways England's customer service director, Melanie Clarke, said:

We're doing everything we can to make journeys as smooth as possible this Christmas and that's why we're keeping 99 per cent of the road network we manage, free from roadworks.

Safety is our top imperative and we know from experience that almost half of breakdowns are avoidable and these can easily be avoided with simple checks. Christmas is always a busy period on the road network and we'd urge all motorists to make sure they do their bit to check their vehicle is roadworthy before setting off over the festive period.

Highways England has also launched a special [festive animation](#) which shows Santa carrying out vital checks to his sleigh before embarking on the most important journey of the year – and he's got a little help from his festive friends including Rudolph!

Some of Santa's pre-flight checks include:

- checking that there is plenty of grip on his sledge – motorists should check their tyre tread to make sure it is within the legal limit
- making sure Rudolph's nose is shining bright – always make sure lights on the vehicle are working correctly before setting off
- making sure the reindeer are full of fuel before travelling – make sure that you always keep your tank at least one quarter full to avoid running out of fuel on your journey

The animation can be found online at the Highways England YouTube channel. Latest statistics from Highways England show almost half of all breakdowns are caused by basic mechanical problems which could be avoided with simple checks.

Furthermore, nearly a quarter are caused by tyre problems; with more than 7,000 cases nationwide of vehicle breakdowns on the strategic road network due to lack of fuel over the course of a year.

Motorists can head online to the Think website where they can watch bespoke videos showing how to carry out basic vehicle checks.

Those wishing to find out more about driving on smart motorways can [go to our webpage](#) for further information.

Drivers planning to use the Dartford Crossing are reminded to pay Dart Charge in advance or by midnight the day after crossing.

More information can be found on our website or by calling our information line (0300 123 5000) they can keep up to date with conditions on the roads.

For more detailed information on how to carry out your vehicle checks, search Think!

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[News story: VIDEO: A historic year at Sellafield.](#)

Huge strides are being made in the clean-up mission.

Highlights included cutting holes in the world's oldest nuclear store and bringing down the site's tallest chimney.

Thanks to our world-class workforce and supply chain for making 2017 a year to remember...

[Sellafield Ltd's achievements 2017](#)