

## Quarterly Business Up-date July 2009



Welcome to the July 2009 Social Security Advisory Committee's quarterly business up-date. This up-date provides a summary of the Committee's activities, including formal referral of regulations, publications and developments around its independent work programme. The next up-date will be published in October 2009.

### **Forthcoming Event: the SSAC Stakeholder Seminar – 4<sup>th</sup> November 2009**

The fourth annual SSAC Stakeholder Seminar will be held at Saddlers Wells on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> November. Speakers are currently being finalised and more details will be circulated shortly.

### **Command Paper and regulations to amend Social Security payments (Claims and Payments and Transitional Payments) (Cm 7573)**

The Government referred proposals to SSAC in September 2008 for regulations that would change the way that certain working age benefits would be paid. The changes mean that certain working age benefits will be paid a minimum of a fortnight in arrears and on a payday determined on the basis of the individual's National Insurance number (NINO).

Following discussions with officials we had concerns about a number of aspects of the proposals and so took them on formal referral. Contrary to our usual practice, we did not run a full public consultation exercise but took the views of a small number of groups and individuals with knowledge of relevance to the proposed changes. The project to implement the proposed changes was already well advanced at the point they were presented to us for scrutiny, and our concerns related wholly to the transitional arrangements rather than the changes themselves. Accordingly – and exceptionally – we decided to move as

quickly as possible to put our views to the Secretary of State.

Whilst we broadly supported the proposed changes and recognised the contribution they would make to benefit simplification, we had some concerns about the potential for negative impacts on customers at the point of change.

In our report to the Secretary of State, we recommended: a 100% (rather than 75%) bridging payment, on the basis of an active 'opt-out' for those who do not wish to receive the payment; that the repayment period be extended to 52 weeks; a temporary increase in the 'debt ceiling' for Crisis Loans, and an extension to the period for repayment; and that the option of a continuation of weekly payments is made known to the most vulnerable customers.

In its response, the Government was persuaded of the case for increasing the adjusting (bridging) payment from 75% to 100%, but rejected the other recommendations.

*Command paper available at:*  
<http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm75/7573/7573.asp>

### **Current consultations**

Two proposals that were referred to SSAC in July 2009 have been taken forward on referral (Job Seeker's Allowance (Skills Training Conditionality Pilot) Regulations 2010 and Housing Benefit Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2009). Both consultations are active until 3/8/09.

See <http://www.ssac.org.uk/consult.asp> for details.

### **Publication of SSAC Occasional Paper No. 6: Rights and Responsibilities in the Social Security System**

The Committee published the latest paper in their Occasional Paper series on 16 July. *Rights and Responsibilities in the Social Security System* was produced by independent researchers at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Oxford (Dr Julia Griggs and Ms Fran Bennett), working to a commission from SSAC. The paper draws on a discussion of relevant issues with our stakeholders at the Committee's annual Stakeholder Seminar in November 2008.

The paper provides an overview of the development of rights and responsibilities in the UK social security system and elsewhere, describes current and future policy in the UK, and summarises key evidence on the effectiveness of conditionality and benefit sanctions. The paper also discusses some of the issues that are raised when proposals are put forward to change the balance of rights and responsibilities in the social security system, especially by deepening or widening the responsibilities of claimants through an extension of conditionality.

*Occasional Paper No. 6 available at:*  
[http://www.ssac.org.uk/pdf/occasional/Rights\\_Responsibilities\\_Social\\_Security.pdf](http://www.ssac.org.uk/pdf/occasional/Rights_Responsibilities_Social_Security.pdf)

### **SSAC Independent Work Programme**

Each year we develop an independent work programme that is undertaken by our research and policy specialists. The topics for the work programme are developed in consultation with stakeholders at the annual Seminar. The key topics for 2009 are listed below:

- Rights and Responsibilities
- An up-date to the 2006 Occasional Paper on Telephony
- Vulnerable Customers and DWP
- Public service and earnings disregards
- The role and training of Personal Advisers.

If you would like any further information on the work programme you can contact Anna Bee [anna.bee@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:anna.bee@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) or Nicola Moss [nicola.moss@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:nicola.moss@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

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