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# Benefits Update

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# Pensions, tax & benefits

- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will contact thousands of mothers this autumn who may have been underpaid their State Pension. This follows earlier errors affecting widows and widowers, and women who paid the 'married women's stamp'. The DWP has said women in their 60s and 70s who made a claim for child benefit before May 2000 are most likely to be affected by the latest error. It dates back to a system known as 'Home Responsibilities Protection' (HRP), which was introduced in 1978 to protect the State Pensions of parents or carers before the introduction of National Insurance credits in 2010. Errors have occurred where periods of HRP were due, but not recorded accurately on someone's National Insurance record.
- The amount low-earning parents on Universal Credit can claim for childcare costs has increased by almost 50%. Parents can now claim up to £951 per month for one child or £1,630 for two or more children. There is also further support available to help parents who are moving into work or increasing their hours cover the costs of the first month of childcare. Eligible parents are now entitled to receive up to 85% of childcare costs back before their next month's bills are due, meaning they should have money to pay one month in advance going forward. These changes are designed to support low earning parents to progress in their careers and boost their finances.
- Two thousand people in Great Britain will receive letters inviting them to apply for Pension Credit as part of a new trial launched in July. The campaign will target households in 10 local authorities that are already in receipt of housing benefit, but not claiming Pension Credit. Pension Credit can be worth over £3,500 per year on average for people over State Pension age and on a low income – and it can lead to further support including extra cost of living payments being made later this year.
- The DWP has launched a new Midlife MOT website, encouraging people to review their skills and break down barriers to the labour market. It will allow people to identify job opportunities across the UK as well as better preparing them for later life and their retirement. As part of this, MoneyHelper has created a financial tool which will provide a personalised report to help people understand what to prioritise to improve their financial position, from now through to retirement.
- Most people entitled to the £150 disability cost of living payment will have been paid it automatically between 20 June and 4 July. If someone thinks they may be missing a payment (either the £301 payment for low-income benefit, or the £150 disability payment), they can report it through the GOV.uk website.

- HMRC has announced that taxpayers now have until April 2025 to fill in gaps in their National Insurance so they can get the full State Pension – a boost that will be particularly welcomed by women who took time out to raise a family, carers and those who have worked abroad. This is the second deadline extension – it was previously changed from 5 April to 31 July 2023 – and follows reports that government helplines had been completely overwhelmed by demand, preventing callers from being able to get the necessary advice. In addition to extending the deadline, the cost of paying voluntary NI contributions will remain frozen until 5 April 2025.

## General

- From 10 June 2024, it will be a legal requirement for all cat owners in England to have their cat microchipped or face a hefty fine.
- A brand-new, UK-wide ‘Find a grant’ digital service offers a free central place online for business, individuals and organisations to find and apply for government grants. Each year government awards over £50 billion in general grant funding. Government grants can be awarded for anything from improving local housing, to funding innovative new research into advanced fuels and digital technologies or providing better sports facilities and youth centres for communities. The service will make it easier for organisations to find grants, as well as reduce duplication and cut time spent on grant applications by 72%.
- The Disability Action Plan consultation is now under way. The open consultation is aimed at anyone with an interest in what action the government will take during 2023 and 2024 to improve the lives of disabled people. The proposals include initiatives such as promoting life-changing technology for disabled people, mandating disability awareness training for taxi drivers, implementing autism-friendly programmes in cultural and heritage sites, and fostering a more inclusive society in the long run. The consultation is open until 6 October 2023.
- The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Bill, which will allow UK workers to request flexible working from day one in a job, has received Royal Assent. Employees now have the right to request this twice a year instead of just once. Employers are now required to consider these requests and provide a reason before rejection within two months, a change from the previous three months. The government has also removed existing requirements for an employee to explain what effect, if any, the change applied for would have on the employer and how that might be dealt with.

- Since Monday 24 July, children aged 10 or over have been able to enter the UK using eGates across 15 air and rail ports, helping families travel more easily.
- For the first time in 70 years, British passports bearing the title of 'His Majesty' are now being issued in the name of His Majesty King Charles III.