

Skills in the Pre-Work Programme Job Centre Plus offer

Access to Full-time and Part-time provision; support in meeting learners' Travel and Childcare Costs

April 2011

Introduction

1. This note sets out the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus policy positions on access to skills provision and support available to help meet claimants travel and childcare costs whilst undertaking skills activities.

Background

2. Learners on Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance (Work Related Activity Group) [henceforth 'active benefits'] who have not yet reached the Work Programme may access skills training through a number of routes, including via Jobcentre Plus or Next Step referral, or through making their own arrangements directly with a college or training provider.
3. Detailed local referral and delivery arrangements will be for Jobcentre Plus, colleges and training providers, Next Step and other delivery partners to determine jointly. This note clarifies the basis on which learners on active benefits can access skills training while continuing to meet the conditions of their benefit according to DWP benefit regulations. A similar communication has being circulated within Jobcentre Plus.
4. This communication describes arrangements in place now and until further notice. It is not linked to changes to funding rules from August 2011 onwards.

Jobcentre Plus referrals

5. Under the new arrangements introduced from April 2011, Jobcentre Plus referrals to skills training will be based on the needs of the individual, not linked to a specific stage of claim or age. Advisers can refer recipients of

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active benefits to any Agency funded skills intervention at any point in their claim, if they believe this is the most efficient means of helping them into work. This includes referrals to Next Step for advice or a Skills Health Check, as well as part-time or full-time training.

6. In practice, we expect Jobcentre Plus advisers will consider a claimant's skills needs in the early stages of a claim, addressing any severe barriers or obvious mis-matches between the individual's skills and job goals (and employers' needs) immediately, especially if the individual is a repeat claimant.
7. From now on, Jobcentre Plus referrals for pre-employment training will be to a college or training organisation rather than to a specific course or programme. Local dialogue between Jobcentre Plus and colleges/training organisations will be expected to ensure that Jobcentre Plus advisers are aware of the sector subject areas offered by local colleges and training organisations, and their areas of expertise. Jobcentre Plus advisers will support the customer in making the choice as to which local provider might be most able to help them address their skills barriers to employment. It will be for the college/training organisation to determine the most appropriate provision to meet the needs of the claimant. In the case of Service Academies, Jobcentre Plus Advisers are expected to refer to specific provision opportunities designed to meet the need of the employers engaged with each Service Academy. In this case the provision offer will be agreed between the college or training organisation and the employer(s) involved in advance.

Direct recruitment of learners

8. Claimants will also be able to make their own arrangements for participating in skills training (or Next Step) directly with a college, training organisation or Next Step provider. Jobcentre Plus adviser agreement is not required for fee remission to apply (though the college or training provider will need to satisfy themselves of the individual's eligibility for fee remission). However, as previously, the claimant will be expected to notify their Jobcentre Plus adviser if undertaking part time training, and seek their agreement if the training is to be delivered on a full-time basis (see below), prior to commencing the training.

Access to training provision – JSA Customers

9. As previously mentioned, Jobseeker's Allowance claimants will be able to undertake training:
 - For less than 16 hours a week or
 - For 16 hours a week or more for less than 2 weeks in a 52-week period while remaining on Jobseeker's Allowance and continuing to attend fortnightly jobsearch reviews. They will need to be able to demonstrate to

their Jobcentre Plus adviser that they are available for and actively seeking work.

10. Those wishing to undertake training for 16 hours a week or more for more than 2 weeks in a 52-week period will need to seek their Jobcentre Plus adviser's agreement. They will also need to be transferred from Jobseeker's Allowance to a training allowance. The cost of training allowances will be met from the Jobcentre Plus Flexible Support Fund. The Flexible Support Fund will be managed at Jobcentre Plus District Level, and it will be up to District Managers locally to agree the use of the Flexible Support Fund for this purpose.
11. There is no longer a nationally prescribed 8-week upper limit on full-time training, as there has historically been for provision delivered through the recession-related training programmes for unemployed people who had been claiming Jobseekers Allowance for 6 months or more. Jobcentre Plus now have flexibility to refer to longer full-time courses from the start of a customer's claim period if they perceive this as the most effective way of helping the claimant secure sustainable work as quickly as possible. Colleges and training organisations will need to work closely with Jobcentre Plus locally to understand the likely volume of referrals from Jobcentre Plus who would be expected to need longer, more significant skills interventions.
12. Colleges and training organisations will have an important role in helping Jobcentre Plus to:
 - a) identify which types of provision available locally are most likely to help which claimants into work; and
 - b) to recognise the labour market advantages offered by the provision.
13. Next Step providers will also play an important role in identifying suitable opportunities in the local labour market for customers. Next Step will need to work closely with Jobcentre Plus, colleges and training organisations to ensure that that customers are made aware of forthcoming opportunities locally that might be of interest.
14. Colleges and training organisations should note that all individuals claiming JSA are not automatically entitled to full fee remission until August 2011, and until then eligibility for fee remission should be assessed in the usual way.

Access to provision -ESA (WRAG) claimants

15. For those claimants receiving ESA (and classified in the Work Related Activity Group), they are able to continue to claim ESA (WRAG) and attend provision on a full-time basis throughout their claim. Colleges, training organisations and Next step providers should note that individuals claiming

ESA (WRAG) are not automatically entitled to full fee remission until August 2011, and until then eligibility for fee remission should be assessed in the usual way.

Service Academies

16. The exception to the approach described above is any pre-employment training delivered as part of a Service Academies partnership with Jobcentre Plus and employers (possibly to be known as Work Academies in the future). Further information will be published regarding access to full-time provision as part of a Service Academy.

Alternative approaches under consideration

17. We are currently exploring the feasibility of allowing JSA claimants undertaking training for up to 30 hours a week to remain on JSA, with their Jobcentre Plus adviser's agreement. These discussions remain at an early stage and the outcome will be subject to agreement by BIS and DWP Ministers and by HM Treasury. Whilst this option is being discussed, even if it was to be agreed it would require changes to benefit regulations to be introduced, and therefore any change would not take place with immediate effect.

Travel and childcare costs

18. From April to end of July 2011: Jobcentre Plus will consider meeting the travel and childcare costs for customers attending provision on a voluntary basis, both full time and part time. This will include claimants accessing the Service Academy trials taking part in Merseyside and South Yorkshire.

19. From August 2011, skills conditionality (the practice of referring claimants to skills interventions with possible benefit sanctions for non-attendance) will be rolled out across England. For more information on skills conditionality see the government's response [here](#). More detailed guidance on the implementation of this policy will be provided in due course. From August, all claimants who have been 'mandated' to training (whether on a full- or part-time basis) will have their travel and childcare costs met by Jobcentre Plus where required. Advisers will also have discretion to pay these expenses for customers who access skills training on a voluntary basis as referenced above (in paragraph 7).

Implementation

To determine what these important changes will mean in practice for your organisation (including provision design, recruitment of learners, referral arrangements, etc), colleges, training organisations and Next Step providers should engage closely with Jobcentre Plus through the coming weeks and months, in order to consider together the implications of the new approach for your joint

working arrangements and the likely attendance patterns of active benefit claimants accessing skills provision.

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