

B21

Disability Alliance briefing on the White Paper titled 'Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future'

Introduction

This White Paper, published on 10 December 2008, lays out the next steps that Government intends to take under its welfare reform programme. It follows the last Green Paper, 'No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility', which closed for consultation on 22 October 2008. In the Ministerial foreword, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions James Purnell says that there have been three phases of welfare reform under the current Labour administration.

First, the Government deepened the obligation to work, through the introduction of the New Deal and the creation of Jobcentre Plus. Second, they widened the obligation to work, including the Pathways to Work employment programme for people on incapacity benefits and the introduction of employment and support allowance (ESA).

This White Paper represents the third phase and is based on the idea that no one should be left behind, or almost everyone claiming benefits should be required to take advantage of the support on offer to overcome barriers to work. The latest proposals are built on the recommendations of the Freud report¹ about employment support provision and the Gregg review² on conditionality.

Noting the current economic downturn and the impending recession, Mr Purnell states that the pace of welfare reform should be increased because "that means offering more support to people and matching it with the expectation that they should not fall out of touch with the world of work. That is how we avoid the mistakes of the past. We help as many people as possible to find work now, and prepare everyone else to find work in the upturn, so that today's job losses do not become tomorrow's scars on our communities."

Where are we now?

Since the Green Paper was published in July 2008, it is acknowledged that the world economic climate has become significantly more difficult. Both the International Labour Organisation measure of unemployment and the number of people claiming jobseeker's allowance are increasing. Against this, it is thought that we are better placed to weather global economic storms, with interest rates

¹ Reducing Dependency, Increasing Opportunity: options for the future of welfare to work, David Freud, March 2007

² Realising Potential: A Vision for Personalised Conditionality and Support, Professor Paul Gregg, December 2008

low, inflation expected to fall sharply and the number of people in work (29.5million) at its highest level.

Levels of economic inactivity are down from those in the mid-90s, with the number of new claims for incapacity benefit (IB) fallen by over a third, reductions in the overall number of people receiving the benefit and 320,000 more lone parents in employment than in 1997. The UK still has an employment rate which is the second highest in the G7 Group of leading industrialised nations. An extra £1.3billion is being invested in Jobcentre Plus and other services over the next two years to maintain and increase support services on offer to claimants.

Benefit reform (Chapter 2)

It is stated that a clear message from the Green Paper consultation was that the current benefits system is too complex. This complexity acts as a barrier to claimants and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff, in helping people move back towards work. It means that claimants are not always aware of their responsibilities or what information needs to be provided. And in 2005/06, £1.9billion was overpaid as a result of error within the benefit system.

The idea of a single working age benefit remains an attractive option which will continue to be explored over the longer term. Such an approach is thought to allow for a more easily automated claims and payment process, making better use of the internet and other self-service methods, so that people could go online to make claims, keep track of the progress of their claim, and report changes of circumstances. It could also lead to administrative savings for DWP and allow staff to be moved towards a concentration on helping people into work.

Income support and carers

The introduction of employment and support allowance (ESA) from October 2008 is seen as laying the foundations for a simplified system of benefits, with the next natural step being seen as the abolition of income support (IS). Anyone currently claiming IS who did not move over to ESA would be expected to claim jobseeker's allowance (JSA) instead.

However, for carers, the Government has accepted a recommendation by Gregg that it is inappropriate to expect people in receipt of carer's benefits to engage in back to work activity. Thus, the proposal is amended and carers claiming IS will not be moved until there is a clear and detailed plan that sets out how the benefit system will be reformed over the longer term. Additionally, there is a pledge to ensure that proposals for a future system of support makes appropriate provision for carers and fits well with the Department of Health review of the social care and support system currently underway.

Work incentives

In the past, the tax and benefits systems have tended to focus on different objectives, but lately, Government has aimed to improve support for people who

cannot work and stronger incentives to participate and progress in the labour market. These changes aim to underline that for most people, work is the best route out of poverty, as well as freeing up more resources to help those who cannot work. Examples highlighted include the National Minimum Wage and working tax credit, as well as the In-Work Credit for lone parents and the Return to Work Credit available via Pathways to Work.

To provide further reassurance that people will be better off returning to work, a new in work credit has been piloted since October 2008, which ensures that long-term benefit claimants (over 6 months) who move into full-time work will receive at least £25 a week more than they did on out-of-work benefits for the first 26 weeks in employment. The results of the pilot will decide whether this approach is extended.

Contribution conditions

Currently it is possible for someone to qualify for a lifetime on contributory ESA or 6 months on contributory JSA after 12 weeks work at the National Minimum Wage, or 3 weeks as a high rate taxpayer. This is felt to be unfair so from 2010, new ESA and JSA claimants will only qualify for the contributory element if they have paid National Insurance contributions for a minimum of 26 weeks, although existing protections for self-employed people and vulnerable groups will be retained.

Housing benefit review

Housing benefit (HB) helps over 4million households with the cost of rented accommodation, with nearly three-quarters of these claimants also claiming IS, income-based JSA or Pension Credit. The Government is concerned about the rising costs of HB as well as its effectiveness in promoting work incentives and fairness. An internal review of the HB scheme has been in progress between DWP and HM Treasury since 2008.

It states that they want to make the system less responsive to individual changes of circumstances, give people more certainty about receipt of their benefit and remove perceived risks with administration. They want to build on reforms to the extended payment regime and see how to provide better stability during the transition into work. This could mean some quite radical changes, but the aim is to simplify the structure of the benefit, in common with other simplification measures.

An external consultation will be launched in early 2009, which should set out their long term vision for HB reform and a potential strategy for achieving objectives, including value for money. They want to build on 'In and Out of Work' pilots which have aimed to join up DWP, HM Revenue and Customs and local authorities, so that services are seamless. The pilots have demonstrated that it is possible to fully integrate services so that claimants need only notify one agency when

moving into work, and a streamlined claims process improving the speed of claims processing.

Social fund review

A consultation exercise is underway on proposals to reform the social fund, with a closing date of 23 December 2008, less than one month after the consultation paper was published. The intention is to move forward with plans to allow Credit Unions and others to come forward to deliver affordable credit and advice to social fund claimants, in geographical areas where such capacity exists. This approach will not apply to community care grants. The approach also aims to improve the financial literacy and capability of anyone requiring services from the social fund.

An empowering welfare state (Chapter 3)

There are intentions laid out to explore new ways of ensuring employment service providers offer increased support to those with the greatest needs, to develop a single employment programme that meets the variety of needs, and develop new ways of funding services such as those proposed by David Freud. Further, there are intentions laid out about devolving power to individuals to allow them to design services that fit their needs rather than the needs of the system.

Single personalised employment programme

As proposals are taken forward to develop a simple benefits system and new conditionality and support, there is also a need to ensure that existing employment programmes also evolve to underpin these changes. From March 2011, a new employment programme will be tested that combines Pathways to Work and Flexible New Deal and which delivers a single, integrated, flexible employment programme for people claiming JSA or ESA. Also explored will be whether proposals for lone parents with children aged between three and six to be tested with this programme.

They will explore ways of more closely aligning this programme to other specialist support such as Progress2Work and the new specialist disability employment programme. Gregg recommended consideration of using an accelerator or escalator model of payments, so that those people with higher support needs are not neglected. This would pay providers more for each individual success as more individuals from particular cohorts of claimants find work. The feasibility of this approach will also be tested.

Invest to save

There will be pathfinders for the approach recommended by Freud for providers supporting long-term IB claimants into work, funded by a new financing agreement. He proposed that future benefit savings achieved from supporting individuals back into work be used to reward providers. This would allow DWP to reward providers for each customer they successfully support into sustainable employment, as well as allowing for greater innovation.

From March 2011, there will be five regions that will pilot these proposals, under which it is hoped that new, primarily outcome-based contracts will offer the prospect of greater returns that encourage providers to invest more of their own capital up front and be more innovative in the way that they deliver their support. Also there will be testing of Gregg's vision of personalised conditionality for existing claimants (see Chapter 4 for more on this).

At the moment, there are three regions that we know these pilots will take place in:

- Greater Manchester;
- Norfolk; and
- Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth.

Right to bid

The Green Paper proposed the establishment of a 'Right to Bid' under which organisations could bid for contracts where they thought that they could improve upon DWP services. Any innovative proposal which provides evidence to support their success will be considered for piloting. Although initially this is expected to focus mainly on welfare-to-work delivery, it is not restricted to that sector and may relate to any area of DWP business.

A Bidder's Guide for organisations that wish to develop proposals was published to the DWP website on 17 October 2008, with the first proposals expected in January 2009.

Local devolution

There are three distinct levels of devolution proposed to increase influence and accountability at a local level. The aim is to better align funding streams and allow local priorities to be met. Jobcentre Plus is thought to be well-placed to play a pivotal role and facilitate better engagement and collaboration between partnerships and providers.

This will include offering involvement in the DWP commissioning processes from specification design, through to tender evaluation and performance management, enabling local partners to clearly identify elements targeted at local needs and priorities and ensuring the involvement of local partners in all areas, not just City Strategy Partnerships.

Adviser discretion

As resources allow, it is intended to build on current pilots to test if additional funding for Jobcentre Plus advisers during the 'supported jobsearch' stage of a JSA claim, together with an appropriate accountability and contestability framework', could improve the quality and reduce the cost of provision.

A right to control for disabled people

Government recognise that the question of choice and control for disabled people extends beyond the fields of social care and health. Many disabled people access a wide range of state funding and services in the course of their everyday lives. Thus, it is important that there is not a 'sole' gateway towards delivering choice and control.

As a result of the consultation, the intention is now to create a right to control, rather than a right to request control over funding. This right is intended to reflect the fact that a disabled individual is the expert in their own life. Authorities taking part in Individual Budget pilots have reported that they faced legislative barriers on integrating certain services or funding streams, so the White Paper commits to taking steps to address these.

From 2010, it is intended to run some pilots (described as "trailblazers") in which disabled people will be told how much they are eligible to receive in support and will be able to choose how that money is used to achieve outcomes agreed with the State. Individuals will be able to receive a direct payment, continue to allow the public authority to arrange their support, or use a mixed approach. There will be no compulsion on disabled people to take state funding as cash – if they wish to continue to receive services commissioned on their behalf then they can do so.

The right to control will not change eligibility criteria for funding streams. Instead, it is about disabled people being able to control the support they receive more flexibly, in order to work towards outcomes agreed with the State. If a funding stream already has outcomes set out in legislation, these will feature in the agreed outcomes.

To start with, the pilots will run in a small number of public authorities in England. The Scottish Government support the approach and will be closely involved in any plans for wider roll-out, and they will also be working with the Welsh Assembly Government in looking at whether and how the right could be implemented in Wales.

Current thinking on the pilots is that a funding stream will be considered for inclusion if it is accessed by disabled adults and meets criteria which include:

- a) the focus of the funding stream is to enable individuals to overcome barriers associated with illness or impairment;
- b) the funding stream seeks to address the additional needs and difficulties experienced by disabled people, thus enabling disabled people to fully participate in all aspects of their lives, including at home, at work and in the community; or
- c) inclusion of the funding is likely to have a positive impact on the lives of disabled people and will enable more efficient delivery of services administered by public authorities.

Conversely, funding streams will not be included under the right to control either in pilots or in any subsequent extension if:

- a) the funding stream is paid as a cash benefit, there is little advantage to including benefit payments within the right to control as they are already cash payments; or
- b) the funding stream is for a universal service where eligibility is not determined by an individual needs assessment, such as defence, primary and secondary education, public transport, refuse collection, or libraries.

Before commencing the pilots, DWP commit to consulting widely with disabled people, service providers and other stakeholders to establish the best way to achieve the objectives of choice and control whilst also safeguarding and improving services. They also commit to local and national consultation ahead of the trailblazers to investigate which sources of support could be included.

Choice over providers

There are plans to include a 'customer experience measure' to help claimants choose between different providers of employment programmes. DWP will provide information on provider performance, including success in delivering sustained employment and customer experience to help make informed choices. Initially, this will be in areas where the Flexible New Deal has been operating for 12 months. A Star Rating system will also be introduced for Flexible New Deal.

Personalised conditionality and support – the Gregg Review (Chapter 4)

This chapter lays out the Government's response to Professor Paul Gregg's report, *Realising Potential: A Vision for Personalised Conditionality and Support*, which was published on 2 December 2008. The report looked at the current requirements placed upon people claiming JSA, IS and ESA. Although Gregg finds that current regimes have been effective, he feels that more could be done to improve the efficacy of conditionality as it applies to benefit claimants.

Under the approach set out, virtually everyone claiming benefits and not in work would eventually:

- have a personal adviser with whom they would be able to agree a route back to work;
- be obliged to act on the steps they agree with their adviser;
- have a clear understanding of the expectations placed upon them (and why) and what the consequences are for failing to meet these;
- be able to access a wide range of personal support on the basis of what they need not a benefit label; and
- have a requirement to engage in activity that will help them to move towards, and then into, employment.

Gregg proposes that there should be three main groups of claimants:

1. The 'Work-Ready' group;
2. The 'Progression to Work' group;
3. The 'no conditionality' group.

The 'Work-Ready' group: these people face a largely rules-based set of conditionality requirements, with active job seeking and aimed at those able to make a quick return to work. Requirements would be much based around the current JSA job seeking regime and would apply to people currently claiming JSA, including lone parents and partners with older children who it is proposed should move across to the job seeking regime.

The 'Progression to Work' group: this is for those people for whom a return to work is a possibility with time, encouragement and support and where their conditionality:

- reflects the client's co-ownership of the return-to-work process;
- is tailored to their capability and reflects their circumstances;
- is based on activity that supports the client's own path to work; and
- links up with effective support.

Gregg recommends that this group includes people claiming ESA who are not in the support group, and those lone parents and partners with a youngest child aged between one and six, although Government believe the correct approach should be for lone parents with a youngest child aged three (see chapter 6 below for more).

The no conditionality group: this is the group of claimants who should not be required to meet any work conditionality requirements, because it would not be reasonable for them to undertake any mandatory activity, or because they are already undertaking activity which means taking steps back to work would be inappropriate. This includes individuals meeting the criteria for the ESA support group, lone parents and partners whose youngest child is under 12 months old and carers fulfilling the criteria for carer's allowance or carer's premium. These people could volunteer to participate in back to work support services.

People in the '**Progression to Work' group** will be asked to:

- attend Work Focused Interviews (WFI) with their adviser at appropriate points;
- agree an action plan with their adviser that sets out the work-related steps they agree to take to help them back to work;
- undertake the work-related activities that support their own route back towards work; and

- follow adviser directions as a last resort.

Anyone in the 'Progression to Work' group should get support from an allocated adviser from the start of their benefit claim. The purpose of the WFI would change, with early interviews not aiming to 'sell' the support available but rather hoping that the person continues to engage on a voluntary basis. The adviser would use early interviews to start to build a good rapport with the client and ensure a deeper exploration of the client's situation, their aims and aspirations.

Later WFI's will provide continuing contact to offer support and encouragement and to identify and deal with the barriers to work that claimants face. At the WFI, claimants would agree and update their action plan to record the work-related activity they had agreed to undertake between WFI's. The Review suggests this pattern of WFI's should continue for the entire duration of the claim to benefit.

Individuals would be expected to undertake some work-related activity between WFI's. This activity, agreed with their adviser, is anything that both parties agree would support an eventual return to work. Such activity could vary considerably and may, at least at first, have very little directly to do with job seeking. So it could be stabilising their own or their family situation, it could be managing health for work, or skills for work, or it could be more directly work-related such as looking for work or undertaking work experience.

Proposals are also made about Action Plans that contain details of the work-related activity agreed upon, adviser directions, sanctions and adviser directions, as well as emphasising the importance of working with employers. It is intended to consider and pilot these proposals, which are described in more detail below.

No one written off (chapter 5)

The new approaches to incapacity for work that have taken place recently are highlighted, including New Deal for Disabled People, Pathways to Work and ESA, as well as the Gregg Report detailed above. The Government state that they wish to build on these strategies in the following ways.

Review of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA)

Even though there is an independent annual review of the WCA, used to assess eligibility for ESA, the White Paper proposes another separate evaluation of how effectively the WCA is in identifying the level of disability and health conditions among claimants throughout the next year. This will include refinements to the assessment and recommendations on changing it to better take account of people's adaptation to their condition.

It is envisaged that these changes will lead to an increase of 10% in disallowances for ESA, which follows on from the expected increase of 10-12% already expected simply by the introduction of the WCA. Thus, it is clear that one strand of the Government's pledge to reduce the numbers of people claiming

benefit due to incapacity is simply to make the test of entitlement much more difficult. More people with lower levels of physical and mental health problems will be expected to claim JSA instead.

Disability Alliance understands that Terms of Reference are currently being drawn up for this exercise and has already registered our objections to any review taking place that has, as a key objective, a policy to increase the numbers of disallowances without any supporting evidence to suggest that people are claiming ESA when they should not be. We have also asked why the ongoing issue of the high numbers of successful appeals against refusals under the WCA (and its predecessor the Personal Capability Assessment) is not being looked at within this review.

Reassessment

Government want ESA to be seen as a temporary benefit by most people claiming it and propose to establish a maximum of two years between medical assessments. This will include repeated Work-Focused Health-Related Assessments as part of the WCA.

New ESA claimants

In agreement with the Gregg proposals noted above, the White Paper confirms intentions for new ESA claimants to have to carry out the following:

- a series of Work Focused Interviews, extended to the two-year point of a claim to provide a longer, more comprehensive framework of engagement with personal adviser;
- in pathfinder areas, an action plan agreed by the customer together with a personal adviser, outlining appropriate activities that will help the customer move towards work; and
- in pathfinder areas, a requirement for individuals to show that they have been undertaking activities that support their own route back towards work, between Work Focused Interviews, including a requirement to undertake activities specified by a personal adviser in some cases.

From late 2010, ESA claimants will be expected to have WFI's every three months, once they have completed the first six mandatory WFI's, until the point that they have been on benefit for two years. Claimants will be expected to commit to undertake at least on the activities included in their action plan between WFI's. The pathfinders noted above will be run in 8 areas, with an evaluation taking place to assess whether more mandatory activity increase successful outcomes.

Community Allowance pilots

Community Allowance is a scheme created by CREATE, a consortium of organisations, whereby benefit claimants undertake paid work of benefit to their community and continue to receive benefit payments. A pilot will be run under the

ESA regime to assess whether it helps individuals move into work and off benefit to consider whether it should be rolled out more widely.

Migration to ESA for existing claimants

Between 2010 and 2013, it is intended to move all current incapacity benefit claimants over to ESA, by way of assessment under the WCA. Anyone who establishes eligibility for ESA in this exercise, and who is aged under 50 years, will be expected to participate in three WFI's, whereas anyone over 50 years will be expected to attend one WFI. There will also be five large-scale pathfinders using the 'invest to save' model noted in Chapter 3, for longer term claimants.

Benefit rates

Anyone on contributory incapacity benefit without an age addition will now have their benefit uprated by the Rossi index, in line with other benefits. Anyone on contributory incapacity benefit with an age addition will have their benefit uprated by half of Rossi. This is to aim to equalize the value of incapacity benefit and ESA over the longer term.

Employers

Government asked employers already committed to recruiting and retaining disabled people, what more could be done to persuade other employers to develop and sustain the same commitment. They gave two important messages:

- employers take more notice of the ideas of other employers and their support organisations than they do of government and pressure groups. So, an employer-led national campaign is needed to engage more employers to recruit and retain disabled people; and
- there is a need to work more effectively with employers to design and deliver processes that help disabled people get or keep jobs.

Expert employer panel events are taking place and will look to establish a 'beacon group' of employers who will take a lead in promoting good practice. Work is also ongoing with the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, the Office for Disability Issues, The Government Equalities Office, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, as well as business and other stakeholders to take forward various strands of this engagement.

The Employ ability campaign is to be widened in 2009-10 to promote the business benefits of employing a diverse workforce to target groups of small and medium sized employers. Employment Retention Assessments are thought to be a valuable tool in considering reasonable adjustments when people acquire a disability or when an existing impairment worsens, so work will be done to support employers and employees to develop guidance and good practice in this area. DWP is also working with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills to ensure that work with employers is not just about getting people ready for work, but also about developing skills once in a job.

In work support

The White Paper flags up Dame Carol Black's recent review of the health of the working age population, which recommended the establishment of a national Fit for Work service, as well as fit notes instead of sick notes. Work is also going on with respect to people with mental health conditions as well as specialist disability employment support services. The latter initiative will see new contracts awarded from April 2010, with a new programme of support commencing from October 2010. Access to Work will explore the possibility of better supporting people with fluctuating conditions in the workplace.

More support, higher expectations (chapter 6)

The changes detailed below aim to build on the Flexible New Deal regime that was rolled out nationally from April 2009, which has increased levels of engagements and requirements the longer that some claims JSA. There are also proposals about the partners of benefit claimants, fraud, drug dependency and skills.

Work for your benefit

For anyone who is still out of work at the end of their Flexible New Deal programme (i.e. after two years on JSA), there are to be pilots of a Work for Your Benefit programme to test whether it can provide extra support to help people back into work. These pilots will run in a number of Jobcentre Plus districts, requiring participation from a proportion of those who are still out of work at the end of the Flexible New Deal period, and as a discretionary power for advisers for claimants they believe would benefit. In pilot areas, job seekers who do not return to the 'supported job search' stage of the Jobseeker's Allowance regime will be required to participate in either:

- a full-time Work for Your Benefit programme involving full-time work experience for up to six months; or
- an alternative programme delivered by Jobcentre Plus involving increased support and interaction to help long-term unemployed people find work.

In pilot areas, they will test allowing Jobcentre Plus advisers to refer customers to Work for Your Benefit-type provision earlier in their JSA claim. Pilots will begin in 2010, in line with the first people completing 12 months on Flexible New Deal. Pilot areas have yet to be determined, but local partners will be engaged in developing the specification for the provision when locations have been finalised.

In running these pilots, Jobcentre Plus will identify people who are not suitable for one of the three options. This includes people who need more intensive support, such as Progress2Work or Linkup and those who should not be on JSA. Job seekers who have made good progress with their Flexible New Deal provider, but have not managed to make the move into sustained work, will also be outside the pilot programme. They would be able to remain with the Flexible New Deal provider on a voluntary basis for up to six months to build on progress.

Sanctions

New legislation will be introduced so that it is no longer possible for a JSA claimant to ignore a mandatory appointment without incurring at least one full week's sanction of their JSA. Subsequent failures will lead to a sanction equal to two weeks' benefit. There is also a sanction being introduced if a claimant is deemed to be behaving violently towards Jobcentre Plus staff.

Fraud

A new sanction is introduced under which anyone who commits a benefit fraud offence will incur a four week sanction (or loss) of their benefit payments. This means that in all cases where there is sufficient evidence that benefit fraud has been committed, the following will occur:

- Recovery of the overpayment;
- A fraud sanction; and
- A four-week benefit penalty.

Drugs

The Government has backed down on proposals to make all new benefit claimants make a declaration of drug use at the start of their claim. However, where advisers suspect that a claimant is using heroin or crack cocaine and this is a factor in preventing them from working, they will be encouraged to ask individuals about this. Further, DWP will be exploring ways that existing and new powers of data sharing can support this approach.

A new drug and employment support programme will be developed to provide integrated and personalised support for problem drug users on JSA or ESA, covering:

- support to stabilise the claimant's drug problem;
- support to help build self-esteem and confidence;
- steps to address barriers to work such as housing and debt; and
- support to gain the skills needed to get ready for work.

Claimants identified as problem drug users will be referred for an initial assessment with a healthcare professional who decides whether the individual has a heroin or crack cocaine problem, and will determine whether they should be referred to the new programme. Whether drug testing has a role to play in respect of claimants who fail to engage will also be explored. Individuals will be required to engage with a personalised programme of support until they are ready to move onto the mainstream Flexible New Deal or Pathways to Work programmes. Regular feedback will be provided to Jobcentre Plus on their progress.

During the period on the programme, claimants will receive a Treatment Allowance. This is paid within the existing structures of JSA or ESA, but the conditions of entitlement will be varied and replaced with a more tailored and appropriate set of conditions for supporting recovering drug users. For example, this will mean that JSA claimants will not be required to sign on or be required to show that they are actively seeking work for this period. They will, however, be expected to engage with, and undertake, the actions in their rehabilitation plan.

In return for receiving the Treatment Allowance, they will be required to agree a rehabilitation plan, and to make real efforts to make progress against it. If they fail to do so, without good cause, they will be subject to sanctions. These will be based on those already present in JSA and ESA.

The introduction of the new regime will be facilitated by new drug co-ordinator posts in Jobcentre Plus. They will be introduced in England and funded by the Department of Health, from April 2009. There will be co-ordinators in each English district who will establish close links with Drug Action Teams and drug treatment providers in their area. Although the benefits system applies across Great Britain, health services are devolved in Scotland and Wales and criminal justice is also devolved in Scotland. They will explore with the Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly Government if these measures can be extended to Scotland and Wales in a way which is consistent with their respective drug or substance misuse strategies.

Skills

The first Integrated Employment and Skills Service trials started in the West Midlands in September 2008 with the aim of identifying and addressing the skills needs of benefit claimants. The key features of the trials include:

- an enhanced Jobcentre Plus skills screening process to identify claimants with potential skills needs that prevent them from finding sustainable work or staying and progressing in a job;
- the introduction of a skills health check, delivered by nextstep advisers, to identify an individual's existing work-focused skills levels and those that they need to develop;
- nextstep careers advisers working in Jobcentre Plus offices alongside personal advisers to deliver skills and employment advice;
- enhanced nextstep services, offering more in-depth support to people with the most severe skills needs; and
- from December 2008, testing of Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills-led Skills Accounts for claimants to help them keep a log of the training or skills activities they undertake and understand the range of support they can get.

Over the next two years, further Integrated Employment and Skills Service trials will be developed across England, and will expand their focus to include lone

parents and people claiming ESA. They are also working with the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government to aim to deliver an integrated service to all claimants across the UK.

Government wants to start exploring what arrangements might look like for parents when the youngest child reaches three. Under these arrangements, lone parents with a youngest child aged between one and two would be required to attend Work Focused Interviews, as is currently the case. They would have no further requirements placed upon them, but they could volunteer for support under the New Deal for Lone Parents.

They intend to expand the pilot measures for lone parents with younger children as proposed in the Green Paper to incorporate wider return to work activity as well as activity to address skills gaps. They need to consider issues around childcare provision to assist people preparing to move into part-time work. For those parents who do need childcare, services are increasingly available, but they also need to make sure that safeguards are in place for those with special needs, such as parents with disabled children.

Consideration is being given to pilot a financial incentive for lone parents with younger children undertaking voluntary skills-related activity. In line with the Gregg Review, for lone parents with younger children, they intend to make lone parents attend a mandatory skills health check and subsequent training. They will introduce legislation that enables advisers to require lone parents with a youngest child aged three or over to undertake work-related activity, a skills health check and training where a lack of skills is identified. These measures will also apply to partners of claimants with young children.

From April 2009, there is an intention to extend income support and housing benefit from the present maximum age of 20 to 21 for estranged young people in non-advanced full-time education. This will allow them to complete their A-level courses.

Partners

Couples with older children in which both partners are capable of work will be required to make a joint-claim for JSA. Both members of the couple will need to be available for and actively seeking work as a condition of receiving benefit. This extends arrangements which currently apply only to couples without children claiming JSA to include couples who have dependent children where the youngest child is aged seven years or older.

Where one member of the couple is capable of working but the other is not because, for example, they have restricted capability because of illness or disability then they will be able to access income-related assistance via JSA only. However, in these cases the partner who is capable of work will make the claim on behalf of the couple and will have to fulfill JSA conditionality. The partner who

has the health condition will still be able to establish that they have limited capability for work and, if eligible, will be able to claim contributory ESA in their own right. They will also be able to access additional support through the work-related activity premium if they are prepared to comply with the work-related conditions of the ESA.

The changes will have two main effects. First, they extend JSA joint-claims to cover couples with a youngest child aged seven or over who is a member of the same household and for whom they are responsible. Second, income-related support payable in respect of couples where at least one member is capable of work, is available via JSA only. These changes will be phased in from 2012/13.

Ending child poverty

These proposals are intended to assist towards the Government's goal to eradicate child poverty by 2020. Although progress has been made since 1997, with 600,000 children lifted out of relative poverty, there remains some 2.9million children who are still living in relative poverty. A child poverty Bill is to be introduced in 2009 to enshrine the ambition in law.

Joint birth registration

Both parents, whether or not they live together, must jointly register the birth of their children. This move will allow unmarried fathers to acquire parental responsibility rights.

Child maintenance disregard

A full child maintenance disregard will be introduced for all income-related benefits from April 2010.

For more information about this White Paper, see the Disability Alliance website www.disabilityalliance.org/raising.htm

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