



**YOUNG  
WOMEN'S  
TRUST**



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10**

LONDON  
CHILDREN  
LIVE IN POVERTY

# **WORKING WELL? YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF JOBCENTRE SERVICES**

By Sian Elliott & Nicole Dulieu

# GLOSSARY

**All conditionality working group:** Those who are able to work but are either not working at the moment or are in work but earning low amounts below the Administrative Earnings Threshold.

**BAME:** Black and Minority Ethnic or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic is the terminology normally used in the UK to describe people of non-white descent.

**Conditionality:** All Universal Credit claimants are expected to do a number of things in order to get Universal Credit. This includes expected numbers of mandated hours job-seeking per week and expected benefit entitlements. This should be negotiated in an initial meeting with a Work Coach. If the commitment is not adhered to, an adverse decision and financial penalty will occur (otherwise known as benefit sanction).

**Council Economy team:** To preserve anonymity, we have labelled individuals we spoke to in Local Authorities as belonging to Council Economy Team.

**Department for Work and Pensions (DWP):** Responsible for welfare, pensions and child maintenance policy.

**Digital by default:** Services for Universal Credit will be accessed primarily online.

**Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS):** A database used by DWP staff to refer clients to other services for employability training and support.

**Easement:** A reduction in required conditions for a person to receive their welfare benefits.

**Employment and Support:** A benefit for people who cannot work because of an illness or Allowance (ESA) disability. ESA was introduced in October 2008 to replace Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Income Support (IS) paid on the grounds of incapacity.

**Jobcentre Plus:** A government funded employment agency and social security office whose aim is to help people of working age find employment in the UK.

**JSA:** Jobseeker's Allowance.

**Online Journal:** Updates are made by the benefit claimant in their online journal. It is then the responsibility of the Work Coach to go into their client file and check for updates.

**Personalised approach:** Design or produce (something) to meet someone's individual requirements.

**Universal Credit:** Rolling six welfare benefits – Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance and Income Support – into one monthly payment. Claimants are expected to sign up to Universal Credit and transition their benefit claim onto the gov.uk website; and negotiate with and update their Work Coach on job-seeking progress.

**Work and Pensions Committee:** A select committee of the House of Commons in the UK Parliament set up to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the DWP.

**Work Coach:** Work Coaches are front-line DWP staff based in Jobcentres. Their main role is to support claimants into work by challenging, motivating, providing personalised advice and using knowledge of local labour markets.

**Youth Obligation:** Young people, aged 18 to 21, who receive Universal Credit will be required to participate in an intensive regime of support from day one of their benefit claim.

# INTRODUCTION

When it comes to employment, young job seekers in London can be considered to constitute a special case: one that has its own challenges and opportunities distinct to its location and compared to other age groups. The level of unemployment for 18 to 24 year olds in London remains higher than their peers elsewhere in the country (9.4% versus 8.3%) and more than double that of the general population (3.6%).<sup>1</sup> Job opportunities in the capital are increasingly insecure, low-paid and low-skilled, meaning young people may move in and out of employment with a low and unstable income.

Given the extent to which early work experiences shape a young person's life, intervention that helps young people overcome barriers to employment and mitigate any disadvantage is key. Support for those out of work and facing barriers to employment remains crucial but, with in-work poverty rising, approaches that focus on young people trapped in vulnerable employment are also vital.

The government's flagship policy for tackling youth unemployment is the Youth Obligation scheme: an intensive, mandatory programme for job seekers aged 18 to 21. As part of the scheme young people should receive six months intensive job-seeking support. After this time, if they are still unemployed, they will be mandated to do work-related training or work experience. Participants are not paid a wage for their work but instead receive benefit payments.

Additionally, as part of reforms to in-work benefits under Universal Credit, young people in employment could still be supported by Jobcentre Plus and face benefit conditionality. This means claimants could face penalties if they do not comply with mandatory work-related requirements, such as searching and applying for additional work depending on the number of hours worked and their earnings.

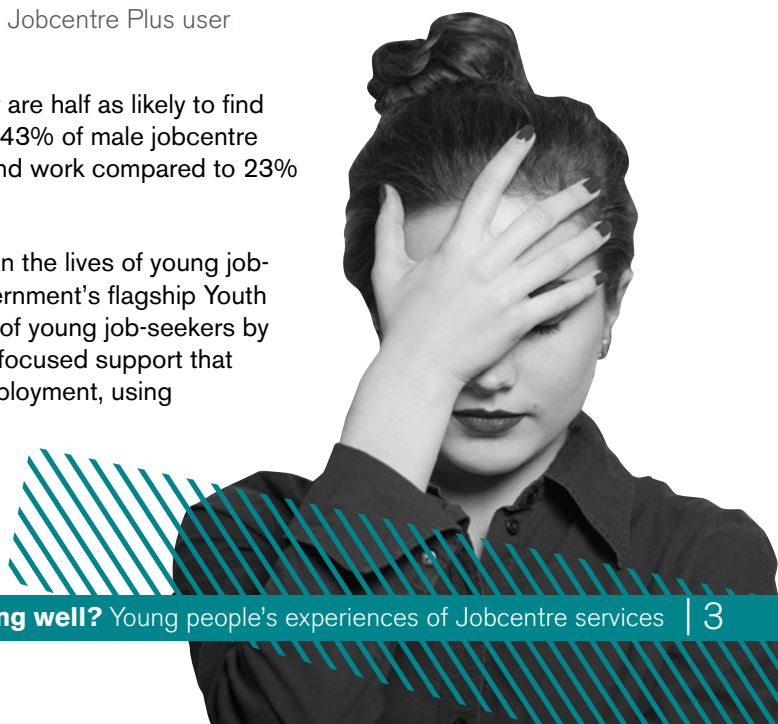
There has been a 17% increase in the number of users claiming the jobcentre helped motivate them in their job search since 2016. However, a Young Women's Trust survey shows that young women using Jobcentre Plus have over the last three years consistently ranked their experiences as humiliating (52%), stressful (56%) and stated that they felt ashamed to go to the jobcentre (53%).<sup>2</sup> This echoed with 4in10's findings where young jobseekers reported an overwhelming negative experience and impression of jobcentres.<sup>3</sup>

*"When I was pregnant with my daughter and they [the jobcentre] could see, I went there and the person behind the desk was really abusive – saying how could I get myself in this situation again and I'm not gonna do anything my life, was I just going to be on benefits. I was quite shocked that he was allowed to say that stuff."*

Young Jobcentre Plus user

Young women using Jobcentre Plus reported they are half as likely to find work through the service as young men. In 2018, 43% of male jobcentre users attributed Jobcentre Plus to helping them find work compared to 23% of female jobcentre users.<sup>4</sup>

This research explores the role of Jobcentre Plus in the lives of young job-seekers. In particular, it looks at whether the Government's flagship Youth Obligation scheme addresses the specific needs of young job-seekers by providing appropriate, personalised, employment-focused support that enables young people to enter secure, quality employment, using London as a case study.



# METHODOLOGY

This research project focuses on the experience of young people seeking work or who come into contact with Jobcentre Plus because of their receipt of benefit payments. This involved:

- Surveying over 700 young Jobcentre Plus users in the UK, over 3 years;
- 1 Freedom of information request (FOI) to Department of Work and Pensions;
- Focus group interviews with 28 young people aged between 18 to 25 years old, living across 10 different London boroughs;
- In-depth interviews and focus groups with 13 Jobcentre Plus staff from across three London boroughs;
- In-depth interviews with six council staff in four boroughs;
- Survey of 24 youth employability service providers in London;
- Four peer research interviews; and
- Roundtable discussion with service providers and stakeholders in October 2018.

# KEY FINDINGS

## Personalised approach to employment

Barriers to and opportunities for employment differ across London between: young men and young women; different ethnic groups; able-bodied and disabled young people; as well as those with additional or complex needs. These differences are evident at a pan-London and localised level. At a pan-London level, BAME groups experience more discrimination in the workplace than their white peers.<sup>5</sup> However, when researchers asked Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff about specific barriers young people face in relation to job seeking, only one borough identified potential discrimination as a specific challenge.

The barriers that different groups experience require appropriate, personalised responses that recognise all factors affecting an individual and their circumstances. However, in a survey of young job seekers, only one third of women (33%) and two fifths of men (44%) felt they were getting personalised support from their Work Coach. Worryingly, 21% of BAME job seekers said they were treated unfairly by Jobcentre Plus staff (versus 15% of white job seekers).<sup>6</sup>

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff that we spoke to recognised that every young person's employment journey is different; they emphasised that not every person in contact with Jobcentre Plus has a clearly quantifiable journey nor is it linear. What success looks like for one individual can be very different to another.

*"It's about where they start."*

JCP Youth Obligation Manager

However, there are concerns that the new Universal Credit system does not allow for this nuance. Instead of being a centre of support, jobcentres are increasingly a place of enforcement. This is evident in the way the system assesses a young person's needs and vulnerabilities.

## Assessing need

The initial meeting between a young person and their Work Coach is crucial to establishing each young person's starting point. Meetings typically last for 10 minutes, during which a Work Coach must verify a young person's identity, assess their vulnerability status and decide on and agree with the young person the plan for going forward – the 'claimant commitment'. This commitment sets out the number of hours a claimant is required to work or seek work for, as well as mandation, e.g. the number of in-person visits a claimant must make to a Jobcentre Plus.

Work Coaches are expected to identify and support vulnerable claimants, recognise and consider the impact of complex circumstances, including emergency situations, and adjust the requirements they expect from claimants. For example, if a young person has caring responsibilities, they may be given fewer hours of job seeking activities to complete in recognition of their caring responsibilities. This is similar for those with mental health issues, those in housing need or experiencing domestic violence.

However, the responsibility lies with the claimant to disclose their circumstances and any issues they are experiencing to their Work Coach. Jobseekers told us this can be difficult.

*"I felt nervous because when you try to get them to help you, or when you do an interview everyone can hear you when there is no privacy and you end up not asking for what you need. When you leave you feel like you didn't resolve anything."*

Young Jobcentre Plus user

## KEY FINDINGS

Managers in Jobcentre Plus offices also reported issues with the disclosure process. Work Coaches informed us of difficulties in establishing proof of vulnerability. Assessing an individual's risks and circumstances is a complex process, and highly determinant on the skills and capabilities of each Work Coach. DWP teams told us that, while training is given to staff, it can be difficult to establish a relationship in which claimants feel safe enough to disclose their issues within the 10 minute window that is allowed for initial appointments.

*“You may get an 18 year old that will tell you their life story, you may get another that's had an awful life and they don't want to tell you anything. It's all about the relationship... an individual thing.”*

Work Coach

Statutory and non-statutory service providers working in employment services suggested it can take between four to six months to develop the relationship and trust needed for a young person to disclose sensitive information.<sup>7</sup> The Universal Credit system as it currently operates, does not allow for this although Work Coaches suggested it was a problem that may resolve over a longer period of time.

*“You may not identify everything at one meeting. But as time goes on, subsequent meetings, you may pick up things and that will make you change the way you deal with that person.”*

Work Coach

This causes concern as to the extent to which a claimant commitment is appropriate to a young person's individual circumstance as it has such significant consequence to their outcomes. If their needs are not established, the claimant commitment may be inappropriate and unworkable for the young person. If a young person is unable to meet their claimant commitments, they may be subject to sanctions that could trigger profoundly negative financial, personal and health outcomes.

Some claimants will have more complex barriers than others, such as disabled people, homeless claimants, self-employed claimants, lone parents or those with drug and alcohol problems. These groups may require more targeted, specialist support to help move them closer to the labour market and to find and maintain employment. Under the old legacy system, these groups would see a specialist team within the Jobcentre Plus, experts at helping people in similar circumstances.

With the introduction of the Work Coach Delivery Model, under Universal Credit, Work Coaches see a cross-section of claimants who stay with them regardless of their circumstances or any changes, for example, a health condition or pregnancy. As a result, Work Coaches support a variety of individuals, from high to low levels of need, all of whom may be in markedly different circumstances.

*“Previously, the simple singles, we [the Job Seekers Allowance team] would have seen. But young people with children or anything, we wouldn't have seen... JSA was people specifically looking for a job. The difference with Universal Credit is that its six benefits combined so we are dealing with a big cross-section of people.”*

Work Coach

Transitioning to this model has strengthened continuity of support, important for building relationships and trust, but it has also resulted in a loss of specialism. The fracturing of expertise was observed by Work Coaches and young job-seekers alike and seen as having a direct impact on the quality of advice and the appropriateness of support offered to a claimant. As support has become more standardised, it has also become more generic. Many young job-seekers we spoke to were frustrated by this approach and did not always see engagement with Jobcentre Plus as productive.

*“I find the jobcentre useless. I don't find them helpful.  
I don't think they've ever helped me find a job.”*

Young Jobcentre Plus user

Within limited diary time and an increasing work load, there is often not the time nor resources within the Jobcentre Plus for a Work Coach to provide the level of focused, personalised support many young job-seekers need. Under recent Universal Credit reforms, we found Work Coaches have an average caseload of between 100 to 150 customers, with a range of needs and ages.

Fragmented and pressurised services lead to a “postcode lottery” of support for Jobcentre Plus users. Young job seekers are highly dependent on the specialist knowledge and expertise of their Work Coach which can differ between Work Coaches and Jobcentre Plus.



# KEY FINDINGS

## Overcoming barriers

Just over half of Jobcentre Plus users (56%) have reported feeling they were treated with respect by Jobcentre Plus staff, while three in 20 described their treatment as “unfair”.<sup>8</sup> One young parent told us about an incident with her Work Coach:

*“I was told by my jobcentre to do an employability course when my daughter was six weeks old. When I got there the lady running it found out my daughter’s age and said ‘go home and be with your daughter’ but I thought I had to go there because jobcentre told me to.”*

Young Jobcentre Plus user

Work Coaches we spoke to recognised that young people’s perceptions of Jobcentre Plus could be negative, whether from word of mouth, bad press or previous experiences, and in the Work Coaches’ view these perceptions can hinder the support they offer.

In recognition of the limitations experienced by Work Coaches, partnership managers at Jobcentre Plus are responsible for engaging external agencies to deliver personalised, specialist services for different groups of young job-seekers. We saw good evidence of partnership managers making strong links with voluntary organisations in the local area and trying to find various programmes for young job-seekers in their Jobcentre Plus. However, there are challenges with this:

**1. Partnerships programmes are not always led by need.** Jobcentre Plus partnership managers choose from a selection of commercially-driven contracts advertised to them through their Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). As a result, the selection of programmes can be led by the options available, and cost of the programme rather than led, in the first instance, by need. This also destabilises local authorities by reframing the Jobcentre Plus as a purchaser of their services.<sup>9</sup> Jobcentre Plus managers do have some remit to procure their own services, which would rely on their own knowledge of what is available and their perception of how best to respond.

**2. Partnership programmes may be financed by third parties.** A number of partnership programmes managers told us that programmes are contracted out to voluntary organisations and may be funded by local authorities or other funding bodies. This can benefit the provider by giving them autonomy and independence from Jobcentre Plus. This could be an important factor for developing trusting relationships with the service users, especially as it can take “up to four months to develop a relationship of trust.”<sup>10</sup> However, it leaves Jobcentre Plus and, crucially, jobseekers vulnerable. For example, in one London borough, the funding for a voluntary-led jobs club for deaf and hearing-impaired jobseekers was lost, leaving the Jobcentre Plus with no specific support offer for its deaf and hearing-impaired customers.





# UNIVERSAL CREDIT

## Accessing services

Overall the changes in welfare payments under Universal Credit are seen by DWP staff as a beneficial process. One Work Coach described Universal Credit as “the future” of welfare.

*“You deal with people more from start to finish... you get to know them so from their point of view I think it's a lot better... It's much less disruptive.”*

Work Coach, focus group

However, the transition from six benefits rolled into one – Universal Credit – has been a rocky journey for many young welfare claimants. Registration under the new system is the responsibility of the claimant and, for many young people, this represents a challenge in itself. Knowing when to transition, what benefits you are entitled to, and for those living with impairments and disabilities, the process of signing up represents a barrier to support.

Universal Credit is part of the government's move to digital by default, where services will be accessed primarily online. The first stage of transitioning onto Universal Credit must be done online by the claimant, prior to being allocated an appointment at the Jobcentre Plus. Young people without access to internet or a computer, or who may have additional needs or language barriers, may be unable to do this. DWP staff said claimants often require assistance to sign up via the website and fill in registration forms. However, they are unable to help or to advise. Instead, young people and other claimants are increasingly turning to libraries and voluntary organisations for help with Universal Credit applications, and DWP has resorted to contracting Citizen's Advice Bureau to help aid the rollout of Universal Credit.<sup>11</sup>

For many, transitioning to Universal Credit has resulted in financial instability. The payment process – from the initial five week delay for the first payment and transition to the monthly rather than fortnightly payments – is causing many issues for young people. This puts young people, already on low income, under intense financial pressure leaving some in rent arrears, debt and without any money to live on. The decision to provide a hardship loan to Universal Credit claimants traps these young people in further avoidable debt. As one DWP Income Support Officer told us, “99% of them need the advance”. This model is not sustainable.

Young people interviewed said incorrect payments have been made due to carer's allowance being classified as income (reducing amount of Universal Credit); due to loopholes in policy provisions under the two child benefit cap; and, finally, although Universal Credit is expected to help provide support for those to claim benefit and work, individuals who are paid lump-sum amounts, e.g. for backdated payments for a part time job, will have the full amount deducted from their Universal Credit that month.

Claimants expressed frustration at the inability to contact jobcentres directly to discuss these issues, and the current system does not allow for a claimant to upload evidence to support their case. This one-size-fits-all approach to benefits and work cannot respond to the complexities of individuals' real lives.

## Fair services

Conditionality and mandation are causing problems for many young people that we spoke to – an issue that DWP staff acknowledge. Indeed, throughout this project, some Work Coaches have admitted to turning off conditionality agreements as they do not serve their client's needs and are not fit for purpose. While this is a clear example of personalised approaches to supporting an individual's needs, this also demonstrates that the current system does not work for clients or their Work Coaches.


Peer researchers found that many young people feared mandation and were worried about the negative impacts this may have on their time and responsibilities. While some jobseekers attested that *“without this Youth Obligation meeting being mandated I wouldn’t have been here to meet providers”*, others believe the punitive approach to welfare caused them to disengage from the job-search process. Although Work Coaches recognized this, they did not always empathize:

*“They’re scared. They don’t like the four week idea. They’re like “ooh I might spend it”, well if you’re gonna spend it you’re gonna lose your property. Set up a standing order”.*

Work Coach

*“I went in with my student finance letter and the way they spoke to me was awful. The women told me I was at risk of losing £400+ a month (when I only get £631 as it is) and the way she was just treating me in general was just horrible, made me feel so small and like I was stupid”.*

Focus Group participant, lone parent.



Work Coaches must also use their discretion to judge which work-search interventions and conditions will best support a young person to employment. The decision to turn off work-search conditions (known as “easements”), or the decision to sanction a jobseeker are largely based on the relationship made between a Work Coach and their claimant. A Work Coach informs a superior DWP staff by raising “doubt” if they believe a claimant has not fulfilled a mandatory requirement. The Work Coach’s discretion ultimately equates to power. Identifying what support is appropriate, and at which point in a claim, requires specialist knowledge and places faith in Work Coaches’ ability to remain objective in stressful and brief encounters with their clients, even if the relationship is poor.

*“It’s all about the relationship and the right person. I’ve been with customers and you just don’t click. They don’t like me, I don’t really like them. It’s an individual thing.”*

Work Coach

# YOUTH OBLIGATION

In April 2017, the Government redesigned its welfare offer for young people under the banner of the Youth Obligation Scheme. This package is designed to provide intensive help from “specialist Work Coaches” for 18 to 21 year-olds, in the All Work Requirements Conditionality Group for a period of six months. According to the DWP statement: “if they are still unemployed and claiming Universal Credit after six months they will be referred to work-related training or guaranteed work experience. This will give them the skills and experience they need.” Throughout the research project, it is evident that the understanding of the priorities and implementation of the Youth Obligation varies from borough to borough. One Youth Obligation manager described their package for young people as intense specialist support for six months; whereas another explained that over the course of six months they “*have two workshops where young people can learn how to write a good CV and meet providers*”.<sup>12</sup> This postcode lottery is not only affecting the level of support young people receive but also their potential to find work in the future.

## Mismatch between aspirations and opportunities

There was an evidence of miscommunication between Work Coaches and many young jobseekers, in explaining the roadmap to career goals and how to make best use of opportunities to get there. Work Coaches perceive there to be job opportunities available, but some commented that young people do not have, in their view, realistic expectations, nor understand the local labour market to get a good job. Work coaches saw their role as one of ‘managing expectations’ and felt young people should take whatever position was offered to them. There was little acknowledgement that young people may be hesitant to take the types of jobs that are often insecure with little chance of career progression or professional development.

For inner-London youth, growing up in areas so close to affluence, thinking they are not able to take part in the opportunities that big-business brings is demoralising and segregating. An employment programme manager at a Local Authority explained:

*“It’s a tale of two cities. I work in an area where there’s £3 million houses across from a social housing estate. How do you get them to know that those jobs are available to them?”*

Council Economy team

In areas where there is a larger amount of investment into youth employability, we found Work Coaches and management discussing the issues of “raising aspirations” of young people in London. This research shows that there needs to be a clear definition of employment support, in which young people are up-skilled, trained and provided with realistic work goals and aspirations.

Many Work Coaches interviewed surmised that school careers advice was not robust enough nor did it provide young people with the adequate skills they needed to apply for higher-level jobs. This in turn reduces young people’s entry-level options and pushes them into sectors of low pay and insecure work.

*“They come to you and they don’t have even a CV.”*

Work Coach, focus group

Meanwhile, the young people we spoke to have high aspirations for themselves and their careers. They did not see the jobs they aspired to work in reflected in the opportunities available to them via the Jobcentre Plus. In one Youth Obligation meeting, the eight young people attending voiced their career aspirations, all of which were in creative industries, administration, filming and fashion.

# YOUTH OBLIGATION

However, the job offers available to them via the Jobcentre Plus were heavily geared towards apprenticeships in construction and low skilled, low paid hospitality positions. This mismatch between aspirations and offers results in young people disengaging with the Jobcentre Plus.

Young job-seekers have a range of ambitions: many have high aspirations and may also be highly qualified while some may be unable to work or have caring responsibilities.

*“There’s a dilemma of do we get them to be more flexible with their job search, or do we get the jobs to be more flexible to young people’s needs?”*

Council Economy team

*“Jobs don’t match up with aspirations. We have graduates but only entry-level jobs.”*

DWP Jobcentre manager

Many employers demand experience, particularly in a highly competitive jobs market. Lack of experience or relevant experience is perceived to be a barrier faced by many young people. Many young people felt they lacked, or were perceived to lack, the experience employers demand in a highly competitive jobs market:

*“A lot of the jobs want you to have the experience already and if you’ve just come from school or sixth form or had a child you’re spending that time with them so you’re not going to have that experience.”*

Young Jobcentre Plus user

## Quality of the Youth Obligation

What does this employability journey mean for young people? The long-term effects of not being in employment, education or training (NEET) for more than six months during these critical years has been well-documented.<sup>13</sup> Results show that in comparison to non-NEET peers, young people are 2.8 times as likely to be unemployed or economically inactive 10 years later. However, results of the flagship Youth Obligation programme are not well documented.

As there is no monitoring and evaluation of the Youth Obligation scheme, it is difficult to measure its effectiveness. However, anecdotal evidence suggests it does not typically end in a mandated apprenticeship or voluntary work experience as stated in the policy.

*“After 6 months they become a regular client”*

Work Coach



If after six months' support young job-seekers still have not transitioned into employment, this clearly shows that the Youth Obligation is not meeting its mandated criteria. This is a critical issue not just for the earning potential for the jobseeker, but also poses a longer term risk for the jobseeker's future employability.

*“The longer a person is unemployed, the more deskilled they become. This means that entry points in the job market become reduced and their job options narrow”*

Council Economy Team

The lack of success is also demonstrated by the lack of effective monitoring and evaluation of this programme. Youth Obligation managers from all boroughs told us they do not have a monitoring system in place to record the number of young people referred to employability services and training providers, nor the outcomes of these referrals. It is up to the jobseeker to update their 'online journal' to track meetings with employability providers and the outcomes of this. Even when the journal is updated, these outcomes are not centrally monitored.

*“We don't record referrals”*

JCP Youth Obligation Manager

Although there is a feedback mechanism between the jobseeker and Work Coach to complain about the quality of training provided, there is no centralised mechanism in place to record if being referred to an external organisation has had a positive impact on the jobseeker's skills, training or employment prospects. Furthermore, results from Young Women's Trust's polling of Jobcentre Plus users show that a quarter (28%) of Jobcentre Plus clients have not been referred to other services.<sup>14</sup> With cuts being made to the level of employability training options available through the Jobcentre Plus directly, Work Coaches are reliant on local service provision to provide much needed advice on how to write a CV, succeed in an interview or further an individual's digital skills. All of this is reliant on local service provision and the local expertise of the Work Coaches, subjected to ring-fenced funding and eligibility. As one in 10 jobcentres have closed or are set to,<sup>15</sup> the geography of their clientele is spreading across borders and service provision is not catching up. This means that a job-seeker will have access to employability training limited by where in the borough they live. Work Coaches told us they were frustrated by this.

*“There's been quite a lot of changes with three centres going. The provision, the availability of stuff hasn't caught up with the changes.”*

Work Coach

*“One of the challenges, we cover so many boroughs. You're like 'I've got this brilliant course to send you on.' Wait, what nah you live in [a neighbouring borough]....”*

Work Coach

*“I'm not aware, I'm still getting to grips with what's available in [neighbouring borough]”*

Work Coach

Finally, in a small survey of voluntary sector service providers who work in youth employability and training, 79% were unaware of the Youth Obligation scheme. 37.5% of these service providers work with their local Jobcentre Plus on a weekly or monthly basis. This suggests that there is a disconnect between the local Jobcentre Plus and those who may be able to support them in reaching young people in need of employment support.<sup>16</sup>

# DISPLACING RESPONSIBILITY – A MOVE TO LOCAL COUNCILS

The poor levels of support young people receive to secure quality employment is resulting in disengagement with Jobcentre Plus, and a displacement of responsibility of care from Jobcentre Plus to London's Local Authorities and voluntary sector organisations. Jobcentre staff told us they regularly signpost to these organisations or rely on them to deliver specialist employment programmes.

There is a clear national and local support gap for low-income working individuals, and those seeking work. In two of the four boroughs visited, local authorities are taking an increasing role in providing integrated support to young people.

*We've been around for two years and were set up because the Jobcentre Plus was performing negatively in comparison to expectation. [With the establishment of a joint approach between DWP, housing and the council] our joint synergy has had an impact but shows we are more effective than Government [alone].*

Council Employment Manager

In one inner-city borough, the council's approach to tackling youth unemployment stemmed from a concern that chronic or continued unemployment makes groups of young people at risk of being set aside by the state. In inner-London boroughs, the housing situation of many young people (described as "dire" by caseworkers) compounds their inability to work.

In this case, the council's holistic approach sees chronic unemployment combined with the current housing crisis, in which many families have had to move to temporary accommodation, as a risk factor for unemployment and as a precursor to a rise in homelessness, gangs and violent crime.

*"The continuation of unemployment makes these groups more at risk of being set aside in terms of London's demographic dynamics. In other words, they would become forgotten by the state".*

Council Economy Team

Some Local Authorities are taking a proactive role to combat long term unemployment and to stimulate the economy via outreach, training programmes and job-matching services. In some areas of London, integrated teams from Local Authorities, DWP and housing services have come together to develop integrated units to tackle the multifaceted issue of unemployment. The success of these programmes lies threefold.

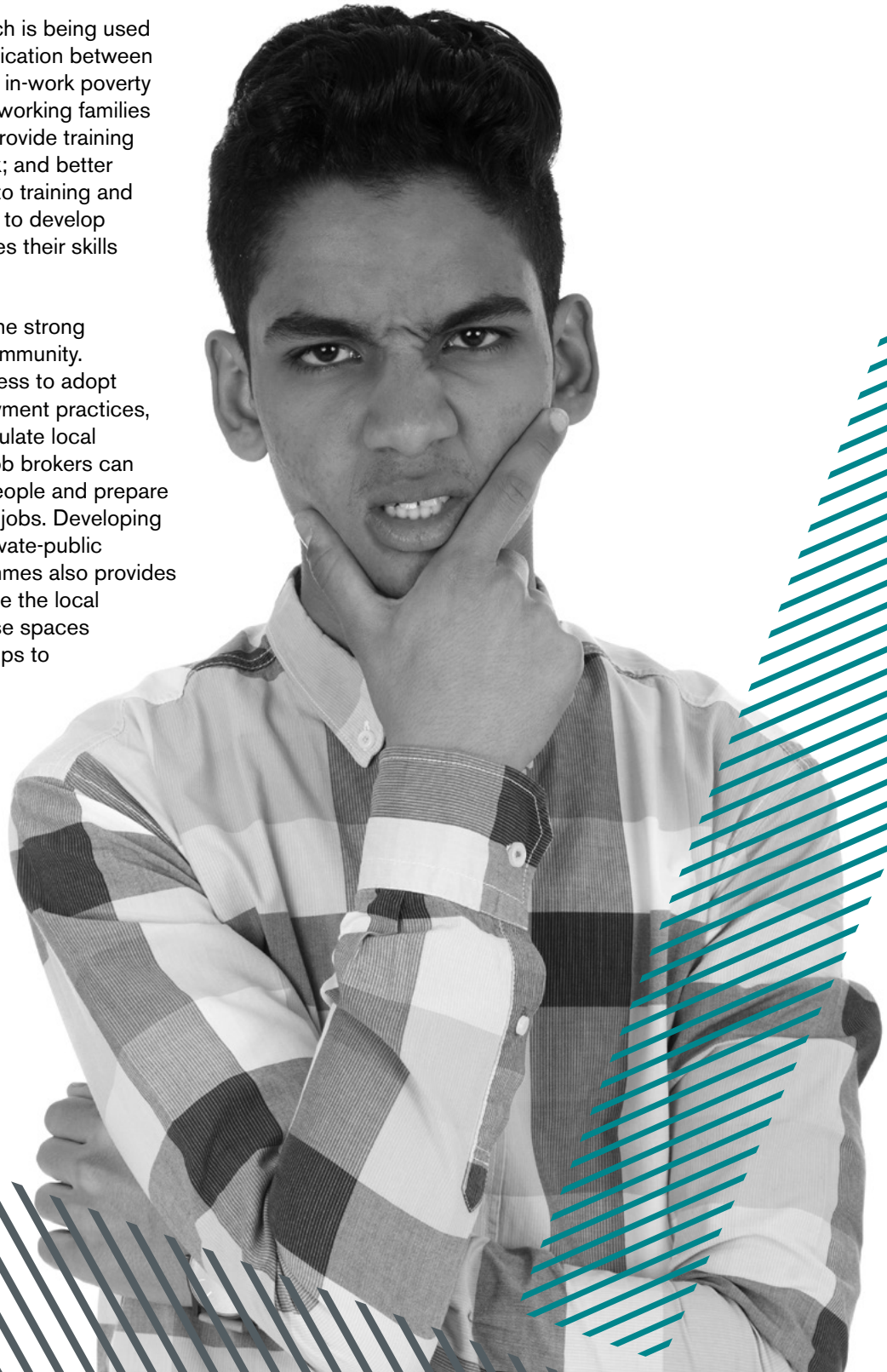
Firstly, they take a longer-term approach to the relationships between service users and their coaches. This takes longer to develop with a client but, when they are matched with a job, it is a sustainable and more suitable role for the jobseeker. In areas of best practice, jobseekers are not only matched with work that suits their skills, but they are encouraged to have listed their "dream job" on their profile, so that the Local Authority Work Coach can suggest roles that will help develop their skills with this end-goal in mind. Local authorities also work on raising aspirations among groups of young people at an early intervention point, prior to GCSEs, so that young people "know that in 5 years' time a job might be open to them". This also means letting jobseekers know that there are lots of jobs available to them, and in multiple industries. Support is available for those who want to set up their own business.

*“We felt actually there’s loads of jobs available and there’s a disconnect. Something’s needed to reinvigorate the job-seeking journey, and being closer together, we can be successful”*

Local Authority

Secondly, the integrated approach is being used to combat previous non-communication between services. Tackling issues such as in-work poverty through programmes to support working families with childcare; careers hubs to provide training and mentoring for people in work; and better connecting low-paid employees to training and development opportunities helps to develop individuals’ capacity and enhances their skills and value to employers.

Finally, and most importantly, is the strong relationship with the business community. By providing incentives for business to adopt more socially responsible employment practices, local councils are helping to stimulate local economic recruitment. Council job brokers can help employers to recruit local people and prepare workless candidates to apply for jobs. Developing longer-term solutions through private-public partnership employment programmes also provides a basis within which to regenerate the local economy. Creating new enterprise spaces and backing local businesses helps to increase opportunities for local residents. And, in areas where integrated approaches are working well, recruitment needs are better matched to people living in the local area.



# RECOMMENDATIONS:

## Work Coaches should...

- **Conduct regular reviews of vulnerability markers** to record young people's situation and make sure the support given is reflective of young people's circumstances.<sup>17</sup>
- **Develop a holistic understanding** of jobseekers' situations and aspirations. Support should be appropriate and personalised accordingly.
- **Provide private and non-judgemental spaces** to facilitate disclosure of vulnerability.

## Youth Obligation Managers should...

- **Increase the efficacy of referral process** between Jobcentre Plus and partner organisations.
- **Monitor the numbers and outcomes of those referred through the Youth Obligation.**
- **Ensure information is shared widely** with internal staff and external service providers about the Youth Obligation policy and its aims.

## Jobcentre Plus services should...

- **Measure Work Coaches' success using longer term outcome indicators** such as improved employment and education outcomes, or reduction of housing and homelessness costs, rather than target numbers in jobs.
- **Provide fair support and motivation for jobseekers across all boroughs.** Jobcentre Plus needs to develop further guidance for Work Coaches to standardise the initial assessment process and strike the right balance between coaching and conditionality. There needs to be a review the automation of markers, such as failure to attend interview, when claimants make reasonable efforts to contact Jobcentre Plus.
- **Develop an initial assessment self-referral tool** for welfare claimants to disclose disadvantage, circumstances or markers that might affect their benefit claims and support. This should be routinely reviewed on a six-monthly basis.

## Government should...

- As a matter of urgency, **pause the roll out of Universal Credit** until a fully functional system is in place. Continuous updates and changes to a flawed system have caused confusion for claimants and service providers alike. Young people need comprehensive benefit support to provide them with the same benefit entitlements as those over age 25.
- **Develop automatic rollover to Universal Credit** once a final system is in place. By taking responsibility for the system it is using, the DWP can save staff time, cost and claimant confusion by automatically rolling over benefits into Universal Credit, rather than relying on the claimant to provide relevant documentation in the initial stages.
- **Ensure Department for Work and Pensions communicate closely with local councils** and commissioners to ensure that clients in boroughs under the same Jobcentre Plus jurisdiction have access to similar services. Jobcentre Plus needs to develop unrestricted, standardised service provisions for basic services such as CV development and interview training across boroughs.

## Additionally,

- Parliament's Work and Pensions Committee should **conduct a full review of the Youth Obligation** policy and its effectiveness.



## SOURCES:

- <sup>1</sup> Trust for London's London Poverty Profile (2017) <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/londons-poverty-profile-2017/>
- <sup>2</sup> Young Women's Trust (2018) It's (still) a rich man's world, <https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/still-a-rich-mans-world>
- <sup>3</sup> 4in10 (2018) Young Parents in London: Living With Precariousness <http://www.4in10.org.uk/userfiles/Young%20Parents%20in%20London.%20FV.pdf>
- <sup>4</sup> Young Women's Trust (2018) *ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Hudson, M. and Radu, D. (2011) 'The role of employer attitudes and behaviour', *JRF programme paper: Poverty and ethnicity*, Joseph Roundtree Foundation: London
- <sup>6</sup> Young Women's Trust (2018) *It's (still) a rich man's world*, <https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/still-a-rich-mans-world>
- <sup>7</sup> 4in10 and Young Women's Trust, *Working Well?* Roundtable event, October 2018
- <sup>8</sup> YWT (2018) *ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> Additionally, this places the voluntary youth employability sector in a precarious position, to decide whether to attempt to be placed on the DWP Dynamic Purchasing System, or to continue to provide services for free.
- <sup>10</sup> 4in10 and YWT, *Working Well* Roundtable event, October 2018
- <sup>11</sup> The Independent, 'DWP calls in Citizens Advice to aid rollout of universal credit to claimants', Monday 1 October 2018 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/universal-credit-citizens-advice-dwp-work-and-pensions-esther-mcvey-conservative-conferency-tory-a8563181.html>
- <sup>12</sup> In-depth-interview with Jobcentre manager, September 2018.
- <sup>13</sup> Feng et al. (2013) Consequences, risk factors, and geography of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), Scottish Government, available at: <https://calls.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/00487854.pdf>
- <sup>14</sup> YWT (2018), *ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> DWP (2017) *JCP Office Estate Proposals*
- <sup>16</sup> 4in10 and YWT survey conducted in October 2018
- <sup>17</sup> According to DWP LMS Marker and Hotspot Guide "not all stages of conditionality are used in all locations even though they are displayed". This indicates different approaches to conditionality and mandation in boroughs. <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/401360/response/972836/attach/12/8.LMS%20Marker%20and%20Hotspot%20Guide.pdf>




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