

WELFARE REFORM COMMITTEE

THE FUTURE DELIVERY OF SOCIAL SECURITY IN SCOTLAND

ANONYMOUS WRITTEN SUBMISSION

My evidence comes from my own experience of: 1) attending a Jobcentre Plus office in South Lanarkshire to claim JSA in 2015 (any other relevant periods are indicated as they appear), 2) attending the local work-program provided by Ingeus, 3) using the additional support provided by the Universal Jobmatch website, and DWP telephone services.

The Local Jobcentre Plus Office

1. The ethos in my local Jobcentre has changed since the Welfare Reform Act of 2012. Before staff were more able to help. Recently staff have become less in number and clearly possess less time to deal with customers. Staff have intimidated by their behaviour that they are under a lot of pressure to get people off benefits. As a result they are visibly less able to feel supportive. Sometimes the open plan office means I can hear the details of other peoples' names, addresses and National Insurance numbers being shared. Staff who historically genuinely tried hard to help people are visibly restricted in their roles by recent policy changes (such as the necessity to raise more doubts regarding claims), and also by the unavailability of work opportunities. While initially the recession had a negative impact on delivery of available support to claimants, the Welfare Reform Act of 2012 has clearly confounded this negative impact by imposing a regime of sanctioning upon claimants. When I sit with my advisor I can hear all the other advisors around me looking for opportunities to raise doubts in the claims of the other jobseekers. There appears to be no trust, and a never-ending series of hoops for claimants to jump through.

2. It is very unlikely that a customer will see the same advisor two or more weeks in a row – this impacts upon consistency of support. This is clearly related to cuts in staff numbers.

3. Based on overheard conversations between claimants and JCP staff, claimants generally do not know what is expected of them in terms of their claimant commitments. Claimants do not understand sanctions, why they are applied, and how to appeal against them. National guidance regarding claimant commitments and sanctions is all but invisible. Communication from DWP to claimants regarding claimant commitments, and sanctions is (very) thin on the ground. As such it is obvious the more vulnerable (due to Additional Supports Needs, disability, etc.) are sanctioned more often than those with higher integration. I have seen such exclusion play out in front of my eyes a number of times.

4. Since the introduction of the new job search facilities (networked PCs) it has proved literally impossible to log on to the internet to carry out mandatory job searches. Every time I try to connect to the internet on a PC a Google chrome window opens up the BT Wi-Fi homepage asking me to input a user name and password for their service. This is a pay-per-view service. Many people on JSA are

in abject poverty because they do not have a job. Thus, they cannot pay to search for jobs. Another customer raised this issue with an advisor and was told that only certain claimants are allowed access to the job search facilities and she did not need to access them.

The Work Programme and Ingeus Support

1. Letters and text messages allegedly sent out by Ingeus sometimes never arrive. This has a negative impact on both Ingeus provision and my ability to integrate with the program. Once my advisor implied that I was lying about not receiving communication from Ingeus. We have since managed to patch up this issue.

2. I am a graduate with three degrees and cannot see how to integrate effectively with the Ingeus work programme. I asked for information on how to set up my own business. My advisor (who has a BSc in Business Administration) said the person who was historically in-charge of this had left the branch due to cuts in staff numbers. My advisor told me I was not the typical Ingeus attendee. He said I already possessed an excellent CV and he could not help much more. While these compliments were appreciated I felt let down by the work programme. I do not believe it is his fault he cannot help me. My advisor is visibly stressed and unhappy and has told me sometimes his job feels hopeless.

3. After finding a job (on my own) when I was claiming JSA in 2014 my Ingeus advisor repeatedly phoned me up and sent me emails in an attempt to get me to share information on the organisation I was working for, including names and contact details of key figures in the organisation. I later found out Ingeus advisors are told to do this to evidence their effectiveness to the government so they can maintain funding flows. His imposed requirement to harass me was distressing for both me and himself.

Universal Jobmatch and DWP Telephone Services

1. The ability to submit a saved CV to an employer at the click of a button on Universal Jobmatch is efficient when access to Universal Jobmatch is available. However, last week after having inputted my Government Gateway Number correctly and my password correctly I was locked out of my account for no good reason.

Note - My PC is not at fault. My browser is fully operational, my firewall is not blocking Universal Jobmatch, and all other websites operate with efficiency on my PC.

Steps taken to regain access to my account:

- a) I requested a new password be sent to my personal inbox from the help pages on the Universal Jobmatch website.
- b) I retrieved this password from my inbox and attempted to log into Universal Jobmatch with the aforementioned Government Gateway Number. The site would not allow me access to my Jobmatch account. A notice appeared at the top of the page suggesting I should contact the helpdesk providing a list of links to the various departmental helpdesks.
- c) I scanned down the list to find the DWP helpdesk link.

- d) I clicked the link which led to a dead page with no contact information. (I repeated this step several times – the information never became forthcoming).
- e) I phoned the DWP contact centre. I was put on hold while the advisor looked for a contact telephone number for the necessary department. The advisor gave me the number.
- f) I phoned the number and reached the contact centre. The gent on the other end of the phone said, and I quote *verbatim* “DWP do not support Universal Jobmatch, I cannot help you I am afraid”.
- g) I told the gent at the contact centre everything that had happened. At the end of a six minute conversation he retracted his claim he could not help and gave me this email address: UNIVERSAL.JOBMATCHGG@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK
- h) I emailed this address. I received this message in return:
‘Thank you for your email. This mailbox is no longer monitored so please do not reply to this message. If you wish to make contact with the Universal Jobmatch helpdesk, please redirect any queries to the ‘contact us’ section whilst signed into the website. This mailbox will be permanently deleted from 05th October 2015’

Note – this email directs me to log in to an account I have been locked out of to amend the issue of being locked out.

- i) I set up a new email address and Universal Jobmatch account.

Note – I have now lost my entire electronic application history, contact details of all employers contacted, and each piece of electronic evidence of my job search activity.

- j) When logged onto my new Jobmatch account I searched for twenty minutes and could not find the ‘contact us’ section. I now do not believe it exists.

Recommendations:

1. Jobcentre Ethos

The Scottish Parliament could encourage all governments world-wide to pay into an international fund to create international projects aimed at ending global unemployment and sharing good employment practice between international governments. Only when all international parties world-wide buy into such a process can employment become stable in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament could encourage all governments world-wide to prohibit the slander of the unemployed as a crime equivalent to racist or sexist abuse punishable by national law operating within an international legal framework. The Scottish Parliament could insist on the international eradication of extremes of wealth and poverty with a cap on maximum earnings for individuals and organisations, and an international minimum wage. The Scottish Parliament could insist the global community regulate the flow of profit to the owners of organisations by feeding it back into the workers’ pockets perpetually and indefinitely, with owners afforded the status of a moderately higher earning type of worker.

2. The Work Programme and Ingeus Support

The Scottish Parliament could ensure no worker anywhere ever feels the pressures of having to support a customer without the necessary tools or resources required to carry out their job effectively. This would require that individuals in organisations are not viewed as the frontline of diminishing national services but as the backbone of an internationally flourishing global community. The Scottish Parliament has a profound responsibility to ensure that it affects global discourse in a positive fashion to engender such an effect, and to attack all cynicism regarding the unity of humanity at the most foundational level. Culturally, Scotland with its historically strong communitarian ethic, is in an enviable position regarding its ability to lead such an international social discourse. Scotland could insist to the global community that authentic human relationships are infinitely more valuable than piles of money.

3. Universal Jobmatch and DWP Telephone Services

The Scottish Parliament could ensure that online and telephone services are accessible to all and that these services never lead to dead ends or confusion and trauma. This would be very straightforward to accomplish.