



Chapter 4

The Disability Employment Adviser role

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Introduction

1. Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) in Jobcentre Plus currently act as a gateway to some of our specialist disability services, for example, Work Preparation and Residential Training Colleges, to help ensure this provision is targeted at those customers who would benefit most.
2. However, on WORKSTEP we allow a range of providers to carry out the eligibility process on their own behalf, in addition to accepting eligible people referred by the DEA. This arrangement was introduced at a time when Jobcentre Plus was much less engaged with this customer group and the programme was failing to meet potential demand.
3. While this direct route onto our services has its advantages, it has also raised some questions around whether customers facing the greatest barriers are being adequately prioritised. The consultation considered the appropriateness of reaffirming the DEA role of ensuring that our specialist disability employment services, including supported employment, are only available to individuals who need them.

Reviewing the need for support

4. We are also aware from our research that many people stay on our supported employment provision longer than is necessary for them and their employer to reach a position where they can sustain their employment independently. In respect of this we are looking at how DEAs could work with our customers and providers to ensure that the support given is still appropriate to the customer's employment needs.
5. DEAs are extremely well placed to look at the totality of support that a disabled person may need to enter and retain employment; the consultation proposed making better use of this position, by giving greater emphasis to the role DEAs have to develop, with their customers, high-level action plans that identify key goals and the main elements of support that a customer can use to get into and retain employment.

Preparation of action plans

6. We proposed making action plans in partnership with support from social services and education and training programmes where appropriate. This support may be a mix of specialist and/or mainstream support, internal Jobcentre Plus support or external provider-based support.
7. For example, the consultation proposed that the DEA may determine that a customer requires specialist work entry support and is highly likely to require some transitional supported employment and an ongoing Access to Work adjustment. This package could then be conveyed to the customer, provider and, when appropriate, an employer. It would be the responsibility of the provider, customer and the employer to develop a more detailed employment plan.
8. Such involvement of the DEA in the development of a personalised broader upfront understanding of this potential package should help ease the transition into work and help the customer achieve their full employment potential.
9. In recognition that a person's life circumstances can change, even in a relatively short period of time, we believe it would be important that these plans are not 'set in stone'. For most developments the discussions between a provider, customer and possibly an employer would be sufficient. A DEA would only need to become involved if the changes impacted on the overall nature of the support delivered, for example if a customer's health condition significantly deteriorated and it became evident that they would not be able to progress to fully independent working in the timescales that had previously been agreed.

In summary

10. From the outset, DEAs would prioritise drawing together a more comprehensive support package – thinking more actively about the full range of support needed to help a customer into sustainable employment. Rather than a fundamental change, this would put in place as a standard feature best practice that is already practiced by many DEAs.

We asked:

Question 15 – We are proposing that only Jobcentre Plus Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) would be able to refer individuals to the proposed new programme. What are your views on this proposal?

Question 16 – Do you believe that DEAs should have a higher profile role for people to feedback on the support they receive from our externally provided provision?

Question 17 – If you have used the Jobcentre Plus DEA service to help you find or retain suitable employment, what aspects of the service do you like and are there aspects that you think could be improved?

Question 18 – As an employer or provider of our services, in what ways, if any, do you currently use the Jobcentre Plus DEA service to help you employ or retain disabled people in employment? What aspects of the service do you like and are there aspects that you think could be improved?

You said:

There was a mixed response to whether only DEAs should be able to refer individuals to the new programme. Jobcentre Plus DEAs who responded to the consultation were overwhelmingly supportive of this, whereas responses from individuals tended to be more mixed, with their views influenced by their experiences of previous dealings with DEAs.

Also the views of current service providers tended to be more mixed with many feeling that while DEAs could monitor referrals there should not be a blanket removal of the facility to self-refer and for providers to refer. Many were also supportive of other organisations such as Social Services, NHS services and specialist disability organisations being able to refer. This was more pronounced from those working with people with mental health disabilities, who suggested that many would not go to/contact a Jobcentre Plus office and therefore would not come into contact with DEA services.

The vast majority of responses highlighted that even if they supported the DEA as the only referrer, this would only work if there was an increase in the number of DEAs, if they were given improved training and there was a change in the way DEAs were valued within the Jobcentre Plus business. There was a feeling that DEAs should have a higher profile and more rewarded career structure to reflect the importance of their role.

continued

These points were also reflected in responses to whether the DEA should have a higher profile for people to feed back their experiences of the new provision. The majority were supportive of this suggestion while highlighting the resource implications and concerns over their independence. Some people would not feel comfortable feeding back criticism of Jobcentre Plus or DWP via such a route.

In responding to the questions on the previous use of DEA services, there were both positive and negative examples. These highlighted once again concerns over the resource implications of the proposals and this affected whether responders were positive or negative about the suggestions.

Specifically you said:

“There are benefits to this in terms of oversight of the programme and ensuring that providers take people on appropriately. However, we would have concerns about individuals being able to access provision only via the DEA. People find services by different routes and third sector providers, for example, may be better at reaching some people than DEAs – it is essential that the DEA not become a barrier to accessing the service. Perhaps the DEA could approve entry to the programme, though it would be important not to require any more assessment or bureaucracy than necessary.”

(Mind)

“Mencap would agree with the principle of the DEA acting as the ‘gatekeeper’ for referrals, although there are some real issues of capacity...Many people with a learning disability will not access Jobcentre Plus and in turn a DEA. When we consulted with people with a learning disability using Mencap’s employment services, over half said they had not gone to their local jobcentre to look for a job before approaching Mencap. Currently, if individuals directly approach one of our employment services, Mencap makes contact with the relevant DEA. There should be scope for providers to be able to continue doing this or risk individuals being excluded by this move.”

(Mencap)

“Mencap supports the proposal for a higher profile role for DEAs. However, there is a significant capacity issue if no further resources are to be invested in the role. There is a need for increased investment in terms of addressing issues around limited staff numbers and training.”

(Mencap)

“DEAs should continue to approve eligibility for the majority of new referrals. However, a percentage of referrals should be available for direct referral through local health and social care pathways.”

(British Association for Supported Employment – BASE)

continued

“DEAs could provide a very useful first port of all feedback on the experiences of clients. Any feedback would have to be undertaken under conditions of the strictest confidence with clear guidelines.”

(RNID)

“Ensuring everyone can access the appropriate services for their needs is a vital part of this reform, but the key role of DEA in providing focused support to those who require it will need to be maintained, and adequately resourced and supported.”

(Office for Disability Issues – ODI)

“The choice of the referral and the provider must be down to the individual disabled person with advice from the DEA.”

(Scottish Union of Supported Employment – SUSE)

“ERSA has concerns about this proposal. Although the DEA provides a valuable role in identifying appropriate provision, they are also a gateway to services. Members have highlighted that DEAs in some areas work only on a part-time and term-time only basis and that often there is no holiday or sick leave cover. In some areas there is up to 8 weeks waiting time for a DEA appointment, and due to their pressures of work they are often unable to answer telephone calls.”

(Employment Related Services Association – ERSA)

“DWP should develop an online and paper based feedback system where customers can report their views on the service they receive. The DEA could make the customer aware of these other feedback routes if they were not willing to do this in person.”

(Employment Related Services Association – ERSA)

“RNIB are supportive of the role but only if there is a formal inspection regime as well to back this up.”

(RNIB)

“This would be a very effective way of independently monitoring the performance of providers at a local level.”

(Scope)

“Leonard Cheshire Disability is supportive of the enhanced role for DEAs as envisaged, but for this role to work DEAs will need of information, very extensive training and for all facilities and systems to be fully accessible to all disabled people.”

(Leonard Cheshire Disability)

How the Government is taking this forward

11. One of the goals of the new programme is to ensure that only those who need the provision can gain access to it. We are considering the views from the consultation regarding referral mechanisms and will be discussing arrangements during a series of events with customers, employers, providers and disability representative organisations over the next few months.