



Chapter 6

More support, higher expectations



Chapter six – More support, higher expectations

Summary

Many people who lose their jobs find new employment within weeks. But the longer people are out of the labour market, the more difficulties they face in finding work. And this is a particular danger when the job market tightens because of an economic slowdown.

In previous economic slowdowns the level of support offered to job seekers who do not find work quickly has not always matched these difficulties. Nor have the obligations placed on them fully taken into account the principle that they must look for work in return for financial support. The result has been that too many people have been abandoned to long-term unemployment.

This White Paper confirms our intention, building on the Green Paper proposals and the Gregg Review, to increase both the support offered and activity required from those on Jobseeker's Allowance for extended periods. This includes plans to:

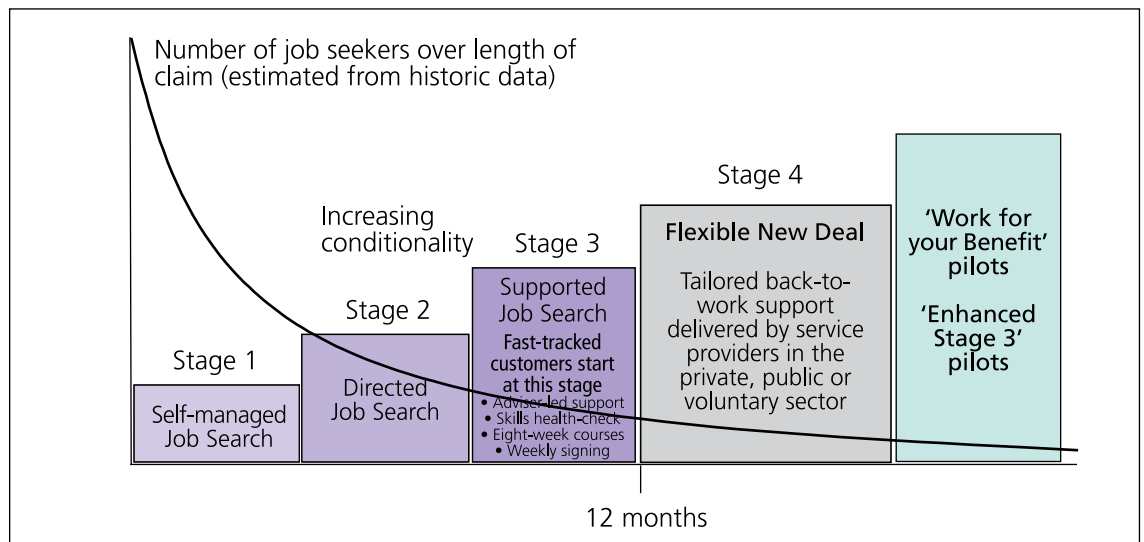
- improve access to skills training for those out of work, together with a mandatory skills assessment;
- increase the expectations we place on more partners of benefit claimants in return for benefit payments;
- trial Work for Your Benefit programmes for those still on Jobseeker's Allowance after two years, and those who may benefit from it earlier in their claim;
- require job seekers with more complex barriers such as drug problems to take action to overcome these obstacles to work in return for benefit;
- put in place a clear and progressive sanctions regime for those who don't meet their obligations; and
- make the penalties for benefit fraud clearer, quicker and more effective.

- 6.1 Support from the State matched by activity from the individual has been the backbone of the welfare state from its creation. People getting unemployment support were always expected to look for work. When this requirement was relaxed, as it was for a time in the 1980s, hundreds of thousands of people lost any prospect of a job. As we have provided increasingly personalised support, so we have expected increased activity from people claiming out-of-work benefits.
- 6.2 In our Green Paper, *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*, we said that we want to extend this approach to more people who have so far had little back-to-work support. We believe this approach is even more important at a time of economic slowdown. A very strong job seeking path for people who are unemployed was also recommended by the Freud and the Gregg Reviews. We are now going to take forward these proposals based around:
- increased support, coupled with an obligation to seek and return to work in return for financial support between jobs;
 - new help for people to close skill gaps;
 - trialling whether those out of work for a long time should be required to take part in full-time activity in return for benefits; and
 - more intensive help for problem drug-users.

Increased requirements for job seekers – the first two years

- 6.3 Our Green Paper proposals for job seekers build on the reformed Jobseeker's Allowance which will be phased in across the country, beginning in April 2009. These changes will be supported by initial contracts for the Flexible New Deal and will make more use of contracted employment support. These changes have been broadly welcomed.
- 6.4 This new approach means that we have a single structure for job seekers whatever their age. We will explain clearly that financial support between jobs is based squarely on the obligation to seek and prepare for work, and that, in return for world class support, a continuing commitment to making the most of these opportunities is expected. This provides certainty for people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, while also controlling benefit spending.

Figure 6.1: The Jobseeker's Allowance regime and the Work for Your Benefit programme pilot



- 6.5 Around half of all Jobseeker's Allowance claimants leave the benefit within three months, and three-quarters leave within six months. However, the minority of people who stay on benefit for more than six months find it increasingly difficult to get back to work, with the danger that short-term job losses become permanent unemployment. This matters most for those with the greatest barriers to gaining and retaining sustained work, for instance, those with multiple skills needs or those in disadvantaged groups such as members of black and ethnic minority groups and disabled people.
- 6.6 As the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance rise, we must step up, rather than relax, both support for those seeking work and the requirements on them. We are creating a new contract for job seekers, promising help with skills and help with employability. This will help to build a well-trained and motivated workforce for the future upturn. It will also help everyone make the most of their abilities, increasing their job prospects.

Work for Your Benefit

- 6.7 Our Green Paper, *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*, set out proposals for a 'Work for Your Benefit' programme for people who are long-term unemployed. The aim of this programme would be to help people who have been out of work for a long time to learn or regain work habits and routines. We proposed testing whether job seekers who have not entered sustained work after 12 months of the Flexible New Deal should take part in this programme. We know that many customers will reach this stage because they have significant barriers to work, such as gaps in their skills. We envisage that Work for Your Benefit will provide support to address these barriers alongside full-time work-related activity.

- 6.8 Others who are still on Jobseeker's Allowance at the end of Flexible New Deal may be 'playing the system', preferring living on benefit to employment, or simultaneously claiming and working. This is unacceptable. We believe the prospect of attending mandatory full-time activity for a substantial period of time would act as an effective deterrent.
- 6.9 This proposal provoked differing responses during the Green Paper consultation. Some were supportive, but others have suggested that Work for Your Benefit could be seen as a punishment. This is certainly not our intention. In line with the Gregg Review recommendations, we intend that the full-time activity undertaken by participants in the pilot areas will provide substantial back-to-work support.

Piloting the programme

- 6.10 As the changes would be intended to provide extra support to help people back into work, we will pilot Work for Your Benefit to test whether it has this impact. We will test the programme 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.
- 6.11 In pilot areas, we will also test allowing Jobcentre Plus advisers to refer customers to Work for Your Benefit-type provision earlier in their Jobseeker's Allowance claim. To ensure greater personalisation and tailoring of employment support we want advisers to have access to the programme for job seekers who could benefit from this type of activity earlier in their claim, including those who refuse to engage with the other support on offer. The pilots will start in 2010, in line with the first people completing 12 months on Flexible New Deal. The pilot areas have yet to be determined, but we will engage with local partners in developing the specification for the provision when locations have been finalised.
- 6.12 In running these pilots, Jobcentre Plus will identify people who are not suitable for one of the three options. These will include people who need more intensive support, such as Progress2Work or Linkup and those who should not be on Jobseeker's Allowance. 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.

A clearer, quicker and more effective sanctions regime

- 6.13 With the willing support of the vast majority of customers, our ‘something-for-something’ approach has helped more people move back into employment more quickly. But for it to work, there must also be some way of ensuring the compliance of those who may not be so willing. We introduced benefit sanctions to remind the minority that meeting the requirements of Jobseeker’s Allowance and the New Deal programmes is not optional.
- 6.14 Sanctions are vital in supporting and enforcing the conditionality regime outlined in the Gregg Review. As welfare reform continues, we need to ensure that the sanctions regime for all benefits develops with it.
- 6.15 Professor Gregg found that the current sanctions regime largely works well, but will need a few refinements over the long-term to truly support his vision. He believes that in the short-term the focus should be on speed, clear communication and ensuring that appointments are attended wherever possible. Beyond that, the Government should explore clearer fixed fines and more innovative approaches for repeat offenders.
- 6.16 The Gregg Review noted that around a third of all referrals for a sanction are for failing to attend a mandatory interview or appointment, and 70 per cent of referrals result in a sanction being applied. As a result of people failing to attend appointments or work programmes, there are around 12,000 Jobseeker’s Allowance claim terminations per month. Many job seekers return shortly after their claim has been closed down to start a new Jobseeker’s Allowance claim. In this costly process of termination and reclaim, only one or two days of benefit are lost to the claimant, which is a poor deterrent at a high administrative cost.
- 6.17 Therefore, we intend to bring forward new legislation to close this gap in the way sanctions respond to serious non-compliance. It would no longer be possible for a job seeker to ignore a mandatory appointment. Those who do would be subject to a benefit sanction of no fewer than one full week of Jobseeker’s Allowance. We will also ensure that any subsequent failure to attend would result in a sanction amounting to the loss of two weeks’ benefit.
- 6.18 We believe that introducing a consistent and automatic sanction for failing to attend a mandatory interview or work programme will clarify the current process so that job seekers know what is expected of them and what will happen if they do not comply without very good reason. Our intention is to ensure that attending mandatory interviews, including signing on every fortnight, is recognised by everyone as a key part of accounting for active work search.

- 6.19 We believe the use of actual violence, or the threat of violence by a small but very disruptive number of customers, is unacceptable. In some cases, where a customer is claiming Jobseeker's Allowance their behaviour means they are not able to attend Jobcentre Plus premises. Aside from the impact upon Jobcentre Plus staff, such disruptive behaviour can act as a barrier to support, limiting the customer's chances of getting and keeping a job. It prevents our staff from being able to offer customers the support they need which can result in them becoming distanced from the labour market.
- 6.20 In 2007-08 there were over 16,000 reported assaults on Jobcentre Plus staff, the overwhelming majority of which were 'verbal assaults'. Jobcentre Plus takes a robust approach to such behaviour and will act against it when it occurs, including calling the police and supporting criminal prosecutions. Job seekers can also be required to attend a different office to fulfil their work search commitments when directed to do so. Jobcentre Plus will continue to undertake these actions when appropriate.
- 6.21 In the Green Paper, *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*, we said that we would explore imposing a benefit sanction in addition to the action Jobcentre Plus already takes. We will introduce a sanction which will tackle violent behaviour through a loss of benefit. This will give Jobseeker's Allowance claimants the clear message that avoiding conditionality through violence towards Jobcentre Plus staff will not be tolerated.
- 6.22 Most of the individual respondents responsible for delivering Jobcentre Plus services recognised that sanctions are vital in ensuring that our 'something-for-something' approach to employment support is effective, and were in favour of strengthening the sanctions regime. There was broad support from many of them for the proposal to introduce benefit sanctions for violent behaviour. Other individual responses from members of the public were along similar lines. However, many organisations expressed concern that particularly vulnerable groups, such as disabled people or people with a mental health condition were at particular risk from sanctions and their administration.
- 6.23 We recognise these concerns, but we do not believe that they amount to a reason for weakening the structure of conditionality which necessarily underlies our aims for welfare reform. We will continue to ensure that each individual's circumstances are carefully considered before imposing a sanction. We will maintain the safeguards which are already in place to prevent anyone – including vulnerable people – being unfairly sanctioned.

Tackling benefit fraud

- 6.24 Our strategy based on preventing, detecting and deterring benefit fraud has proved very successful. Benefit fraud is now at the lowest level ever recorded, with our latest estimate showing that by March 2008 we had reduced fraud across all benefits to just over half a penny for every £1 of benefit that we pay.
- 6.25 We know that we need to continue to develop and enhance our strategy for combating fraud. In particular, we aim to strengthen the effective deterrents and punishments currently in place to deter more people from committing benefit fraud in the first place. This is why we asked in the Green Paper, *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*, for views on whether we should further develop the sanctions for people who commit fraud.

Building on the current criminal sanctions regime

- 6.26 Since 1999, cautions and administrative penalties have been offered to customers for less serious cases of benefit fraud, with criminal prosecution pursued in more serious cases. We also have a policy of referring all suitable cases for financial investigations under relevant legislation³⁶ with a view to obtaining from Courts, the authority for restraint and/or confiscation of identified assets.
- 6.27 For repeat offenders, 'Two Strikes' is a fixed 13 week benefit disqualification period for anyone who is convicted of benefit fraud in two separate proceedings within a five-year period. The 'Two Strikes' provisions enforce the principles of rights and responsibilities by ensuring that those who repeatedly defraud the benefits system can lose their right to financial support. It has been successful in deterring fraud. We now consider that the same principle should be extended to everyone who commits fraud and deliberately ignores the rules. This White Paper confirms that we intend to introduce a new sanction to reduce or withdraw entitlement to benefit for four weeks after a first benefit fraud offence (a 'One Strike' approach). This will extend the penalty to cover those who commit a first offence which results not only in convictions, but also administrative penalties and formal cautions.
- 6.28 The proposals on benefit fraud penalties would mean that in all cases where there is sufficient evidence that benefit fraud had been committed to consider a prosecution there would be:
- Recovery of the overpayment.
 - A fraud sanction.
 - A four-week benefit penalty.

³⁶ The Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2002.

Drugs

New benefit rules for problem drug users

- 6.29 We said in our Green Paper, *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*, that we thought the social and economic cost of drug misuse was unacceptably high. Evidence showed that many people who are dependent on benefit are also dependent on drugs. The Government published its ten-year Drug Strategy for England in February this year. It describes the costs of problem drug use to individuals, their families and society. Drug use causes short and long-term damage to health, particularly mental health. It causes crime and family breakdown and it contributes to social exclusion.
- 6.30 The Drug Strategy sets out a number of key objectives including:
- targeting those most at risk;
 - improving the quality and effectiveness of treatment;
 - using new treatment approaches more widely; and
 - adopting a radical new focus on services to help problem drug users to re-establish their lives.
- 6.31 It is clear that helping problem drug users into work has a major role to play. Work reduces the risks of poverty and social exclusion and improves health. Work can also be critically important in helping people recover from drug dependency. This is why an integrated approach to drug treatment, employment support and the range of barriers that recovering drug users may face is so important.
- 6.32 Many drugs organisations and charities said they would welcome a stronger approach. They have said that they believe this will provide the impetus that many problem drug users need to move into and remain in treatment, provided positive support processes, such as a Treatment Allowance, are also in place. There was general support too for the wider policy aim of supporting drug users into employment, and integrating employment with treatment and rehabilitation.

Declaration of drug use

- 6.33 Many stakeholders criticised the proposal to make declaration of problem drug use a condition of benefit entitlement. There were suggestions that this was asking people to incriminate themselves and concerns that the proposals would push drug users further from the benefits system. In particular, there was anxiety that women, in particular, would not declare drug use due to fear that their children would be taken into care. There was further concern about proposals to use drug testing.

- 6.34 The Government understands these concerns and we will not make all new benefit claimants make a declaration of drug use at the start of their claim. We recognise that drug addiction is a long-term, chronic, relapsing condition that generally takes years to overcome. While the ultimate goal must be abstinence, we understand that many problem drug users need additional help such as substitute medication to become drug-free. The approach that we adopt will support that.

Sanctions

- 6.35 Stakeholders feared that sanctions which led to loss of benefit might drive drug users into crime and prostitution and that this would have a negative impact on families. Contributors thought that such sanctions would single out drug users for unfair treatment.
- 6.36 We believe, however, that it is wrong for individuals, their families and society to allow people to use drugs long-term without challenge while they are on benefit. It is impossible to sustain a drug problem on benefit income alone so many of those with entrenched, serious misuse problems are very likely to be involved in crime. We understand these concerns, however failure to engage in the programme without good cause will lead to a sanction.

Identification

- 6.37 To support problem drug users back into employment we need to be able to identify them. This is likely to happen for those claiming the Employment and Support Allowance during the Work-Focused Health-Related Assessment, but we also need to identify people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. Where advisers suspect that this may be the case, those claiming this benefit may therefore be asked whether current or recent use of heroin and crack cocaine is preventing them from working.
- 6.38 We will support this by exploring the use of existing and new powers to enable data to be obtained from the criminal justice agencies. This information will include, for example, details of people who have left prison, and those who are subject to a Drug Rehabilitation Requirement imposed by the courts as part of a community sentence. The information given by claimants and provided by the criminal justice system will be safeguarded and will only be used for benefit purposes and the operation of the new programme.

A new regime for problem drug users

- 6.39 A new drug and employment support programme will be developed to provide integrated and personalised support for problem drug users on Jobseeker's Allowance or the Employment and Support Allowance. The programme will cover:
- 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.
- 6.40 Claimants who are identified as problem drug users will be referred for an initial assessment with a healthcare professional who will decide whether the individual has a heroin or crack cocaine problem, and will determine whether they should be referred to the new programme. We are exploring whether drug testing has a role to play in respect of claimants who fail to engage.
- 6.41 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.
- 6.42 During the period they are on the programme, claimants will receive a Treatment Allowance. This will be paid within the existing structures of Jobseeker's Allowance and the Employment and Support Allowance, 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 those on Jobseeker's Allowance 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.
- 6.43 It is important, though, that individuals engage properly. 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 Jobseeker's Allowance and the Employment and Support Allowance.
- 6.44 The introduction of this 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.

- 6.45 We believe that these measures, which we plan to pilot and fully evaluate before any national rollout, will provide an effective means of identifying problem drug users and providing effective support to give them the opportunity to rebuild their lives.
- 6.46 The benefits system applies across Great Britain, but health services are devolved in Scotland and Wales. Criminal justice is also devolved in Scotland. We are continuing to 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.

Working with former offenders

- 6.47 Helping offenders into employment is one of the governments key social inclusion objectives under its reducing re-offending strategy and the Public Service Agreement (PSA) 16. If we are successful in increasing employment outcomes it would make a substantial difference not only to the lives of the individual offender, but also to the wider community through enabling offenders to become fully contributing members of society. Much of this work is already underway through the offender skills and employment programme delivered with the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.
- 6.48 We are therefore working to ensure that former offenders are offered a clearer route to achieve their employment potential. This will not be a 'guarantee of a job', but rather we would, for example, focus on the more effective directing of former offenders to existing training opportunities, provide them with help and support in finding a job, and focus them on working with local authorities where necessary to find secure accommodation.

Volunteering and developing skills for work

- 6.49 Volunteering can help job seekers develop important work-related skills and improve social cohesion. The current benefit rules balance the expectation that claimants should be actively looking for paid employment with recognition that volunteering can be part of the path back to work.
- 6.50 Jobseeker's Allowance claimants may participate in unlimited voluntary activity alongside, but not in conflict with, the basic conditions of entitlement of availability for work and active job search. Any money paid to refund expenses during voluntary activity is disregarded in full when working out benefit entitlement and we have specified volunteering as one of the activities a job seeker can undertake as part of the supported job search stage of Jobseeker's Allowance. We have relaxed the rules for volunteers, allowing them 48 rather than 24 hours to attend a job interview, and a week to take up a job offer.

- 6.51 In the Green Paper, *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*, we asked how job seekers could be encouraged to use volunteering as a deliberate back-to-work strategy within these current rules for benefit entitlement. We want to ensure that Jobseeker's Allowance claimants are able to take advantage of volunteering opportunities while retaining their focus on moving off welfare into paid employment.
- 6.52 The responses we received showed support for our approach to volunteering for people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance and provided valuable feedback on how we could further promote volunteering opportunities to claimants. This included improving the information provided to customers, and the guidance provided to staff, to ensure that the benefit entitlement rules for volunteers are understood by all.
- 6.53 As a result, Jobcentre Plus is now following through with the project proposed in the Green Paper to involve key players from the third sector to look at how this can be done. This will feed into a memorandum of understanding between Jobcentre Plus and third sector representatives to improve the relationship between employment support and voluntary activity.

Equipping people with the right skills

- 6.54 People need the right skills to prepare for work and to progress in a job. People who are out of work should have the opportunity to identify and address their skill gaps through our improved services. People who are already in a job may need help to update their skills or to get advice about moving jobs and developing a new career. We are giving people more control over the skills they gain through better advice and guidance from the new adult advancement and careers service. This will help to ensure that work is sustainable and more rewarding and enables people to develop their skills in work as they progress.
- 6.55 In 'Work Skills' we set out our ambition to bring together the commissioning of core employment and skills services and set up new trials to test how this will work, as described in Chapter 3. Through these, as well as through our trials to integrate employment and skills services, we will help over 100,000 people in 2010-11 to gain sustainable employment and achieve a recognised qualification. Together these will establish the groundwork for a reform of the systems that support people both out of work and in work to improve their skills and secure more sustainable employment.

The Integrated Employment and Skills Service

- 6.56 Integrating back-to-work support and training will increase the effectiveness and relevance of the help we offer people who are out of work. Our Integrated Employment and Skills Service will offer opportunities to join up support, with independent assessment of skills abilities and needs. It will provide those who need help with opportunities to train for jobs in the local labour market. We will also test using the Integrated Employment and Skills Service to provide training and support for people in work.
- 6.57 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 those customers who have potential skills needs (including basic skills needs) which are preventing 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 in the same place;
 - enhanced nextstep services, offering more in-depth support to those with the most severe skills needs; and
 - from December 2008, we will begin testing Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills-led Skills Accounts for Jobcentre Plus customers to help them keep a log of the training or skills activities they undertake and understand the range of support they can get.
- 6.58 Over the next two years, we will develop further Integrated Employment and Skills Service trials across England, and will expand their focus to include lone parents and people claiming the Employment and Support Allowance. We are also working closely with colleagues from the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government to deliver an integrated service to all Jobcentre Plus customers, right across the UK.

Increased requirements for skills assessment and attendance on courses

- 6.59 We have already announced our plans to pilot in England a requirement for job seekers to attend skills health checks and relevant training where their adviser has identified a lack of skills as a barrier to work. The Green Paper, *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*, proposed piloting an extension of this new conditionality to lone parents on Income Support and people who start to claim the Employment and Support Allowance. The Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Government have both responded to these proposals pointing out that skills provision and career advice are devolved matters. They have said that, before they are prepared to consider allocating their resources to supporting this policy, they would need to see clearer evidence that changing the conditionality of benefit claimants in this way helps people towards work.
- 6.60 We believe that the proposed changes will make a real difference to the job opportunities for the people affected, and that investing in skills in this way is vital to our welfare reforms. Our skills proposals have been developed with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills with an agreement that training funded through the Learning and Skills Council in England will be made available to customers for whom the training is most appropriate. However, we recognise that the devolved administrations must have control over their skills resources and, should the devolved administrations not agree to supporting pilots of skills conditionality, we will limit these to England.
- 6.61 We strongly believe that the new Integrated Employment and Skills Service service, enhanced with improved and more relevant training provision, is an environment in which our customers can be supported to identify and address their skills needs and therefore find more satisfying work. Piloting skills conditionality for benefits customers will enable us to understand better how this supports individuals back into employment.

Skills for lone parents

- 6.62 The Green Paper, *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*, contained proposals to support more lone parents with younger children into employment, so that preparation for work becomes a natural progression, rather than a sudden step-up. Some respondents supported the idea of skills training and skills health checks in advance of the transition to full job seeking, while others felt it should be up to the individual to decide whether and what training they needed. A common theme in responses was the need for flexibility in training, with the flexibility to fit provision around lone parents' childcare responsibilities.

- 6.63 We understand the need for flexibility and we have no intention to force people to undertake training that is not appropriate to their needs. This is why we will be introducing a skills health check for lone parents. We also intend to modify the Green Paper proposals to take account of the new personalised conditionality vision for lone parents with younger children proposed by the Gregg Review. We agree with the Gregg Review that further extensions of the Jobseeker's Allowance regime to lone parents with younger children (i.e. below the age of 7) would not be appropriate and that the introduction of a new conditionality regime in line with the proposed 'Progression to Work' group could potentially help many more lone parents back to work. We therefore want to expand the current regime for lone parents and our Green Paper proposals to start to build up the supportive regime suggested by Professor Gregg (see Chapter 4).
- 6.64 While Professor Gregg suggests that lone parents with a youngest child aged between one and six should be in the 'Progression to Work' group, we believe that we should start to explore what these 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.
- 6.65 We therefore intend to expand the pilot measures for lone parents with younger children which we proposed in the Green Paper, *No-one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*, to incorporate wider return to work activity as well as activity to address skills gaps. We want to discuss with people the detail of how this would work. We particularly 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 we need to make sure that safeguards are in place for those with special needs, such as parents with disabled children.
- 6.66 Similarly, we will reflect on our proposal to pilot a financial incentive for lone parents with younger children undertaking voluntary skills-related activity and how this fits with pilot arrangements which will take us towards the Gregg vision of a personalised conditionality regime, providing enhanced support for those preparing for work.
- 6.67 Consistent with the Gregg Review, for lone parents with younger children, we need to make sure that addressing skills needs becomes fully integrated into the preparation for work path for this group. Attending a mandatory skills health check and subsequent training to help them identify and develop the skills they need or undertaking other work-related activity, could form a vital part of the long term action plan for lone parents. These measures will add to the effectiveness of the comprehensive package of back-to-work and in-work support already available to all lone parents. Training opportunities will include English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training for those with language needs.

- 6.68 To underpin the Gregg vision, we will be introducing legislation that will enable 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 as a barrier to employment. We also intend that these arrangements would apply to partners of claimants with young children.

Second Chance Learning option

- 6.69 We set out in the Green Paper our intention to remove obstacles to learning and skills within the benefits system for vulnerable young people who need a second opportunity to study up to level 3 (A-level or equivalent) to fulfil their potential. Typically, these would be care leavers and young people from chaotic family backgrounds whose schooling has been disrupted and who are likely to be two or three years behind in their education.
- 6.70 This White Paper confirms our 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. We will bring in this change from April 2009.

Skills support for people in work

- 6.71 It is important to ensure that people are given the opportunity to progress once in work. Access to training is key to this, especially for people from different cultural backgrounds. In integrating employment and skills services, the Government is committed to providing a seamless transition from pre-employment to in-work training supported through Train to Gain as set out in Box 6.1.

Box 6.1: Train to Gain

The Train to Gain programme, run by the Learning and Skills Council and funded by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, gives every employer access to a free Skills Broker service offering independent and impartial advice and matching training needs with training providers.

The Train to Gain Skills Broker will identify the best training provision to meet the employer's needs and put together a tailored training package for employees. The Broker will also advise on whether any government funding is available to support the employers' needs.

- 6.72 At the moment the employment and skills systems do not always work together as well as they need to. There is a need to ensure:
- individuals move along a ‘seamless’ journey from entering employment to developing their skills once in work; and
 - we maximise the number of potential customers who benefit from the Train to Gain service.
- 6.73 As well as ensuring a link between pre and in-work training, we need to ensure that the system enables people moving from benefit into employment to take up training.
- 6.74 There are a number of ways we can achieve this ‘seamless’ journey. The co-commissioning trials announced in *Work Skills* this summer give one way of ensuring that there is a clear link between training provided pre-employment and training provided in employment. There is more detail about these trials and how they contribute to our broader strategy on devolution in Chapter 3 of this White Paper.
- 6.75 The full engagement of employers is essential if Integrated Employment Skills is to succeed. In January, the Government set out its plans in *Ready to Work, Skilled for Work*³⁷ for a new deal between government and employers. In return for government support for disadvantaged people to get ready for work, employers with vacancies give them a fair shot at their job through interviews, work placements and mentoring. Local Employment Partnerships, delivered by Jobcentre Plus, are a key vehicle for this deal.
- 6.76 In addition we are developing an Integrated Employer Offer. This will allow all employers access to the appropriate range of recruitment, training and business support services offered by government agencies. Employers will be able to gain access to the service they require from any point of contact with government agencies and their contracted providers or partners.
- 6.77 The Department for Work and Pensions, Jobcentre Plus and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills provide customers facing redundancy or who have just lost their jobs with a variety of support, some which can start before redundancy occurs. Much of this support can be provided through the Rapid Response Service working through delivery partners. Additional in-work training will be coordinated by the Learning and Skills Council to help employees moving back into employment. This will include drawing on Train to Gain funds (subject to available resources) for every Jobcentre Plus client re-entering work to provide the employer and new employee with a guarantee of training relevant to the new job up to a minimum of level 2. In addition, for those out of work, the Learning and Skills Council will be offering additional pre-employment training where this can improve job prospects.

³⁷ Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. (2008). *Ready to Work, Skills for Work: Unlocking Britain’s Talent*. Cm 7316.

Supporting more partners into employment

- 6.78 We must ensure that we are providing all those who can work with the support they need to make the move from benefits to paid work. We require couples without children on Jobseeker's Allowance and now lone parents with older children to take up opportunities to help them into work. However, we make fewer demands on two-parent families where both partners are out of work.
- 6.79 Approximately 350,000 partners receive support through the benefits system. Currently a couple can choose which one will make a claim for income-related benefit (Income Support, the Employment and Support Allowance or Jobseeker's Allowance) on behalf of the family. This person will normally be required to undertake some action to improve their employability. However, the other is required to do very little, even if they are fully capable of work.
- 6.80 Partners form a very diverse group facing a variety of different work-related issues. Partners are disproportionately likely to report that they are sick or disabled. Thirty-nine per cent of partners of Income Benefit, Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance customers stated that they are sick or disabled. To provide context, according to the Labour Force Survey 16 per cent of the overall working age population have a Disability Discrimination Act defined disability. Of partners who said that they were sick or disabled, around three in ten (29 per cent) said that it affected the type or amount of work they could do. This includes around one in eight (13 per cent) of partners who said that they were too ill to work again.³⁸
- 6.81 Twenty-one per cent of partners receiving benefits are of non-white ethnicity; this is compared to nine per cent of the working-age population. The majority (75 per cent) of partners are women.
- 6.82 We believe that it is right to provide partners with the support they need to achieve their potential. A move into paid work can be the catalyst they need to help them progress and meet their aspirations. We know that many partners of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants want to work. Nearly nine in ten Jobseeker's Allowance partners with children expect at least one of the couple to be in work over the next couple of years, with a third expecting both partners to be working at least part-time. In addition, almost all partners of Jobseeker's Allowance recipients state that they would be happy for their partner to take over childcare responsibilities if they got a job.

³⁸ Coleman N., Seeds K. and Edwards G. (2006). *Work Focused Interviews for Partners and Enhanced New Deal for Partners: Quantitative Survey Research*. Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No 335.

Expecting more of partners

- 6.83 In the Green Paper, we set out proposals to introduce an increased requirement for partners of benefit claimants to look for work. This included more engagement with the partners of benefit claimants who are capable of work, addressing their individual needs to help them overcome any barriers that may be keeping them out of the labour market. Our proposals extended the joint-claims requirement in Jobseeker's Allowance to couples with a youngest child aged seven or over. In addition to couples who are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, these proposals would affect couples claiming Income Support or the Employment and Support Allowance. We suggested the new joint claims provisions would apply where the partner is able to work; they would not apply to carers.
- 6.84 This White Paper confirms our intention to introduce new measures to provide help that is more appropriate to the individual needs of both members of a couple who do not have children or have older children to assist them return to the labour market. As outlined earlier, following the Gregg Review, we also agree that partners with young children generally fit within the progression to work group and will legislate to enable us to take forward the Gregg vision on the same footing as the proposed arrangements for lone parents.
- 6.85 Couples with older children in which both partners are capable of work will be required to make a joint-claim for Jobseeker's Allowance. Under these arrangements both members of the couple will need to be available for and actively seeking work as a condition of receiving Jobseeker's Allowance. This extends arrangements which currently apply only to couples without children claiming Jobseeker's Allowance to include couples who have dependent children where the youngest child is aged seven years or older.
- 6.86 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, too, will be able to access income-related assistance via Jobseekers Allowance 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 fulfil Jobseeker's Allowance 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 Employment and Support Allowance 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 Employment and Support Allowance.

- 6.87 The changes will have two main effects. First, they will extend Jobseeker's Allowance joint-claims to cover those couples with a youngest child aged seven or over who is a member of the same household and for whom they are responsible. Second, they will ensure that income-related support payable in respect of couples where at least one member is capable of work, is available via Jobseeker's Allowance only.
- 6.88 The Government intends to introduce these changes taking a phased approach starting from 2012-13. Table 6.1 summarises the effect of these measures for couples on Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support and the Employment and Support Allowance where exemptions do not otherwise apply.

Table 6.1: Conditionality for partners of benefit recipients

Claimant of:	Partner capable of work?	Children?	Current conditionality for partner	Proposed conditionality for partner
Jobseeker's Allowance	Yes	Yes – youngest aged seven or over	Worked Focused Interview every six months and access to New Deal for Partners	Jobseeker's Allowance joint-claim, full Jobseeker's Allowance conditionality for both members of the couple
Income Support/ Employment and Support Allowance	Yes	No	Worked Focused Interview at six-month point only and access to New Deal for Partners	Partner becomes main claimant in a new Jobseeker's Allowance claim and full Jobseeker's Allowance conditionality applies. Employment and Support Allowance main claimant can still claim the Employment and Support Allowance
Income Support/ Employment and Support Allowance	Yes	Yes – youngest aged seven or over	Worked Focused Interview at six-month point only and access to New Deal for Partners	Partner becomes main claimant in a new Jobseeker's Allowance claim and full Jobseeker's Allowance conditionality applies. Employment and Support Allowance main claimant can still claim the Employment and Support Allowance

Conclusion

- 6.89 The proposals in the White Paper reinforce the principle of more support and higher expectations for job seekers the longer they receive benefits. They are aimed at helping ensure short-term job loss does not become permanent unemployment with individuals and their families trapped on welfare.
- 6.90 But along with extra support, we are also expecting more from claimants. By piloting Work for your Benefit for those on Jobseeker's Allowance for two years, we will help people develop work habits and employability skills while underlining their responsibilities to actively look and prepare for work. By requiring claimants with drugs problems to take up treatment options, we will help both them and society as a whole.