

Section 03 – The Initial Meeting, Customer Action Plan and Fortnightly Contact

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Introduction

- 3.3. The following section details the actions you must undertake, following the referral from Jobcentre Plus (JCP), to ensure customers are swiftly engaged with and are eligible to be registered as starting with you on Flexible New Deal (FND).

The initial meeting overview

- 3.4. You are required to arrange and undertake an initial one-to-one, face-to-face assessment of each customer's barriers to work and individual needs, and start to develop a work focused action plan, which is tailored to the individual.
- 3.5. You must also ensure Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) customers have a clear understanding of their responsibilities whilst participating in FND, and understand that failure to attend/ comply/ participate could result in loss of benefit.
- 3.6. Once a customer has attended an initial meeting, and an action plan has started to be formulated you are then to notify JCP of the customer start, at which point the 52 week FND period begins ([Further information regarding customer referrals and starts can be found in: Section 02 – Customer Referrals, Starts and Allotted Time](#)).
- 3.7. **Please Note:** Where a customer is recognised as a Special Customer Record customer, information that would normally be managed through the PRaP system **must** be managed and maintained clerically. In these circumstances you should follow the guidance contained within this section in conjunction with the guidance contained within the Special Customer Record Customer Section ([Further information regarding the management of Special Customer Record customers can be found in: Section 21 – Special Customer Record Customers](#)).

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Booking the initial meeting

- 3.8. Once you have received a referral notification from JCP you are to arrange for a customer to attend a face-to-face meeting. How you do this is your decision and you may decide to implement a 'warm' handover with JCP ([Further information regarding 'warm' handovers can be found in: Section 02 – Customer Referrals, Starts and Allotted Time](#)).
- 3.9. You may invite the customer to attend through various means (e.g. via telephone, text, e-mail etc) and have the flexibility to decide how many times and by what method you attempt to do so based on your delivery model.
- 3.10. If, when you are speaking to the customer to arrange an initial face to face meeting, or, during the meeting, the customer indicates that they will shortly be starting work, and you are able to confirm this (the customer may have a letter from or contact details for their prospective employer) you should refer them back to JCP. If you have accepted the referral on PRaP you should cancel the referral as a "Did Not Start". If you have not yet accepted the referral, you should reject it as a "Not Eligible". You should then notify JCP of the actions you have taken and your reasons for doing so.
- 3.11. However you decide to inform the customer of their initial meeting you are required to register a FND start within 15 working days of being referred by JCP and must in your attempts to engage with them ensure that an appointment notification **letter** is issued in advance of at least one proposed meeting (as this will be required for any sanction activity that may be appropriate) ([Further information regarding sanction activity can be found in: Section 08 – Customer Benefit Sanctions and DMA](#)).
- 3.12. The appointment notification letter must state the date issued, along with the time, date, and where the appointment is to take place. The importance of the customers' attendance should be explained along with a warning that failure to attend could result in their benefit being affected. It should also detail who/ where to contact if they cannot attend. An **example** letter, which JCP uses for contacting customers about their Interviews, can be found at [Appendix 1](#) of this section.
- 3.13. Where a customer does not comply, you must keep evidence to demonstrate that every effort has been made to start them on the programme (such as details of phone calls made, failure to attend and any re-booking of any appointments) ([Further information regarding customer starts and where customers do not start can be found in: Section 02 – Customer Referrals, Starts and Allotted Time](#)).

Identity checks

- 3.14. It is important that in any communications with customers you verify the customer's identity, which could include asking them to state their:
 - full name;
 - address; and,
 - National insurance number.

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- 3.15. You may also decide to request further information such as details that were included within the original referral from JCP such as:
- a customers preferred employment goals; or,
 - details of a customers previous 2 periods of employment.
- 3.16. It is your responsibility to carry out these identity checks and you may decide to use a combination of this information to verify identity.
- 3.17. If you suspect someone is impersonating a customer fraud action should be taken. The National Benefit Fraud Hotline is a government service for the confidential reporting of benefit fraud. Reports of suspected fraud can be made by post, over the telephone or online. For further information please see http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DI1/Directories/DG_10026666

The initial meeting

- 3.18. Once a customer attends their initial meeting you are to undertake an in-depth assessment of their barriers to work and individual needs. You are to discuss the range of services that are available and how it will be best for the customer to receive them.
- 3.19. Alongside the activities you offer through FND, customers should be encouraged to seek skills advice through appropriate adult advice, guidance and careers services and access appropriate training.
- 3.20. To support you, JCP will share details contained within a customers' JCP action plan with you at the point of referral. This will detail the aims the customer has agreed to and the activities they have undertaken during the supported jobsearch stage of the Jobseeker's Regime. This will help to focus discussion and avoid duplication where possible. You may however wish to further discuss:
- educational qualifications;
 - employment history;
 - aims for future employment;
 - skills,
 - work related abilities;
 - caring/ childcare responsibilities;
 - barriers (such as substance abuse, debt management or medical issues).
- 3.21. Throughout this discussion you should start to formulate a [work focused action plan](#) with the customer.
- 3.22. Once you have started to develop a work focused action plan you should then notify JCP that the customer has started. ([Further information regarding customer referrals and starts can be found in: Section 02 – Customer Referrals, Starts and Allotted Time](#)).
- 3.23. As part of the initial meeting you should identify any childcare concerns of the customer and seek to address these where they are identified as a barrier to work ([Further information regarding childcare can be found in: Section 04 – Provision, Childcare and Additional Support](#)).

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- 3.24. Children's Centres and Children's Information Service (in England), Childcare Information Service (in Scotland; <http://www.scottishchildcare.gov.uk/> and Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) (in Wales); <http://wales.gov.uk/about/departments/dcells/> are appropriate sources of help along with the JCP 'Childcare Partnership Managers'. For sources of information on formal childcare see the 'direct.gov' site: http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Childcare/DG_066832.
- 3.25. **Please Note:** All customers referred to you, should expect the same level of service as they would receive from JCP. The JCP Service Standards can be found online at: www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk.
- 3.26. Where a customer has a complaint about your service they have the right to complain to you directly. During the initial meeting you must explain to the customer your "Grievance and Internal Complaints" process and the escalation route through your organisation. You must inform them of the timescale for resolution and how you will formally notify them of the outcome.
- 3.27. You must also ensure that customers are aware that if complaints are not managed to their satisfaction, they still have access to the JCP complaints procedure. (from October 2009) Where a customer wishes to complain to JCP you should direct them to obtain the leaflet 'Our Service Standards' which explains more about how to complain to JCP. A copy of the form is available online at: www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk or from any JCP Office.

The work focused action plan

- 3.28. You are required to discuss, agree and record specific, stretching, and challenging steps focussed on helping the customer move from benefit into sustained employment.
- 3.29. To effectively track a customers' progress, you will need to devise methods to record outcomes from activities and discussions, and are expected to maintain records for customer's that support your rationale for determining this course of action.
- 3.30. Each customer must have a work focused action plan which enables the recording and reviewing of all agreed steps, including the outcome of the initial needs assessment and sets out the activities agreed to address those needs (e.g. provision you may deliver or any suitable JCP provision you may decide could benefit the customer) ([Further information regarding available JCP provision can be found in: Section 07 – Accessing other programmes, Schemes, Grants and Incentives](#)).
- 3.31. You will be responsible for developing and agreeing the work focused action plan with every customer, tracking their progress and offering them practical support and guidance to secure work.
- 3.32. Once you have agreed an action plan with a customer and they have signed it, all activities will be enforceable. Customer participation is mandatory and you may

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decide to inform JCP of any customers who fail/ refuse to undertake activity that you feel is suitable for them.

- 3.33. Once JCP have been notified they will then make a decision whether to take further action which could result in changes to a customer's benefit and where there is disagreement to specific actions you are required to record such information as this might be required in the event of a sanction being applied and any subsequent request for reconsideration or an appeal ([Further information regarding sanction activity for customers who fail to agree or undertake activities detailed on their agreed action plan can be found in: Section 08 – Customer Benefit Sanctions and DMA](#)).
- 3.34. You must also ensure that the effectiveness of the action plan is regularly reviewed (for example at [fortnightly contact meetings](#)). These reviews must be undertaken with the involvement and agreement of the customer.
- 3.35. Once reviewed and updated, a copy of the completed action plan must be given to the customer and a copy must be retained and available for inspection by DWP, Ofsted in England, Estyn in Wales and HMIE in Scotland ([Further information regarding inspection can be found in: Section 16 – Data Security, Audit and Information Retention](#)).
- 3.36. You must ensure that action plans are kept up to date as you will be required to supply JCP with a copy of the each customer's action plan if the customer completes their 52 week FND period and is to return to JCP.

Meaningful fortnightly contact

- 3.37. Meaningful fortnightly contact is defined as a face-to-face meeting of reasonable length, sufficient to ensure that a customer's progress can be discussed, their action plan reviewed and updated and next steps agreed.
- 3.38. Where a customer is undertaking a specific period of job focused activity this may be accepted in place of a face-to-face advisor and customer meeting. Such activities could be a short period of job focused training, workshops to develop job search skills or work experience.
- 3.39. You are required to undertake meaningful fortnightly contact with every customer in receipt of JSA. At the same time, customers are also required to attend fortnightly jobsearch reviews (FJR) with JCP. The two meetings are intended to complement each other not duplicate, and each should have consistent messages about the customer's responsibilities. The primary difference in the purpose of the meetings is that JCP are responsible for establishing ongoing entitlement to JSA.

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- 3.40. **Please Note:** In some cases a customer with childcare responsibilities may not be able to attend face-to-face meetings during the school holidays because, for example, they are unable to make arrangements for short-term childcare to cover their attendance. In these circumstances you should attempt to agree alternative arrangements for example contact by telephone etc.
- 3.41. At these meetings you are required, as a minimum to:
- establish clear achievable job goals;
 - identify issues and barriers that may be impacting on jobsearch activity;
 - identify issues and barriers that may impact on the ability to stay in work once in a job;
 - refer the customer to appropriate support to address identified barriers (either in-house or beyond). This may be a short one off activity, such as modifying a CV, but also may take longer undertaken alongside jobsearch activity for example debt counselling;
 - ensure that the customer is actively seeking employment. To satisfy the actively seeking condition the customer must demonstrate that they have taken steps to seek work, or steps to enhance their employability. You must be clear what is expected and explain that the same supporting evidence will be required when attending their FJR. (Further information regarding actively seeking employment can be found in: Section 08 – Customer Benefit Sanctions and DMA);
 - if you doubt the customer is available for, or is actively seeking work you are required to alert JCP. JCP will ensure this doubt is explored at their next attendance (usually the FJR) (for further information on how to alert JCP see Section 08 – Customer Benefit Sanctions and DMA);
 - update a customer's action plan. Encourage the customer to share the action plan with JCP so that a meaningful work discussion can take place at the FJR and so that JCP can make a more informed decision on whether or not the customer is actively seeking work; and,
 - reimburse a customer's travel expenses.

Other activity

- 3.42. Where the customer has engaged in specific activity related to their jobsearch action plan this may negate the need for a face-to-face meetings. For example:
- job focused training, E.g. a Health and Safety Certificate;
 - jobsearch skills workshops, E.g. events/activities you may provide to improve jobsearch skills, motivational workshops, interview skills etc; and,
 - specified periods of work experience.
- 3.43. However the following does not constitute fortnightly contact in place of face-to-face meetings:
- voluntary attendance at a resource centre (or similar). However specific workshops that may be run in and around the resource centre (as highlighted above) may be counted; or,

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- part time voluntary activity, it may be that the customer is already engaged in part time voluntary activity E.g. helping in a charity shop, or carrying out conservation work on an ad hoc basis. Whilst the benefits of volunteering are recognised it is expected this to be in addition to fortnightly contact and the jobsearch activity required.

Customer engaged in Full Time Activity

- 3.44. If the customer is engaged in full time activity you are not required to undertake structured fortnightly contact with them.
- You are however responsible for ensuring the customer's attendance and participation in activity and are also required to inform JCP should the customer leave or complete the activity, and therefore will need to be in regular contact with the customer. ([Further information regarding full time activity can be found in: Section 05 – Training Allowance](#)).

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Appendix 1 – Example JCP invitation letter

Jobcentre Plus

Telephone: Fax: Textphone:
www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk



Part of the Department
for Work and Pensions

NINO:

Date: / /

Dear **[Insert Customer Name]**

Your appointment details for your interview are:

On: **[Insert date]**

At : **[Insert time]**

We are writing to let you know that we have arranged the above interview for you with one of our Personal Advisers who will offer you additional support to help you to find and stay in work.

What you can expect from us

- We will look at your Jobseeker's Agreement to see if it is still relevant.
- We will talk with you about jobs, training and other ways of helping you back to work.
- We will also tell you about help you may be able to get when you find work.
- We will consider refunding the cost of registered childcare (payment will be made direct to the child minder on your behalf).
- We may be able to arrange an interpreter, if English or Welsh is not your first language.
- We will refund your travel costs (the cost of travel by the cheapest way) if your interview is:
 - Not on the day you sign on; or
 - Not at the place you sign at and you have to pay more to get there.

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What we expect from you

- To get Jobseeker's Allowance and credits of National Insurance you must be looking for work and must take advantage of any opportunities that are made available to you.
- At the interview you must tell us what you have done to find work, it is easier if you write this down and bring with you any letters from employers and anything else to prove what you have done to look for work.
- If you cannot show that you are looking for work a Decision Maker may have to decide if your Jobseeker's Allowance and National Insurance credits should be stopped.

What if I cannot come to the interview?

Please telephone us immediately on the number at the top of this letter.

You must notify us BEFORE, not after, the interview appointment whenever possible.

What happens if I don't come for an interview?

It is a condition of receiving your Jobseeker's Allowance that you must come to interviews when asked to do so unless you have a good reason. Your benefit could be suspended unless we agree to postpone your interview.

If you do not attend the interview we have to ask a Decision Maker to decide if you have a good reason for not coming.

- You must tell us within five working days of the date of the interview if you want your reason to be considered by a Decision Maker.
- If they decide that you do not have a good reason your Jobseeker's Allowance and National Insurance Credits may be stopped.

[Manager Name]

Manager (on behalf of the Secretary of State)