



HM Government

# Independent review of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions

## Matthew Oakley

Call for information

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November 2013

# Call for information

## About the call for information

I have been appointed to undertake an independent review of the operation of benefit sanctions that are imposed as a result of, or have been validated by, the Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013. I will present my report to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions after the 26 March 2014. After this, he will lay the report before Parliament. To help inform my review I am issuing a call for information.

I will be looking at Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) sanctions where claimants of JSA have had their benefits reduced for failing to participate in a mandatory back-to-work scheme such as the Work Programme (a full list is in Annex A).

It is essential that this system works well. In general, the provision of clear and easily understandable information to benefit claimants is vital to ensuring both that the benefit system supports people when they need it and that benefit claimants know what is expected of them in return. When considered in the context of benefit sanctions, it is clear that failing to do this risks putting families into financial hardship simply because they did not understand the system or what was expected of them.

My review will provide an objective and independent reflection of operation of sanctions that are imposed as a result of, or have been validated by the Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013, and whether it is performing as it should. Where problems are found, it will then make recommendations to the Government about how the processes surrounding benefit sanctions and their application, should be improved.

## Who is the call for information aimed at?

To help widen the reach of my review I would like to hear from as many people as possible who have been affected by benefit sanctions. This includes:

- claimants who have been on mandatory employment programmes and had sanctions imposed;
- partner organisations who represent claimants who have been affected by the process; Jobcentre Plus advisors, managers and decision makers; and
- organisations and individuals delivering mandatory back-to-work schemes on behalf of the Government.

## What I want to find out

For me to get a good understanding of how the system is working and to make recommendations for how the Government might improve it, responses need to be focused on these questions:

- To what extent do JSA claimants understand that when they are referred to a 'back-to-work' scheme (such as the Work Programme) their benefit may be sanctioned if they don't take part?
- To what extent does a claimant's failure to meet their conditions arise from them not having a sufficient understanding of what is expected? Are there ways in which this could be made clearer to them?
- Do sanctioned claimants understand why they have been sanctioned, and if not are there ways in which this could be made clearer to them?
- Do sanctioned claimants feel informed throughout the sanctions process, and if not how could their awareness be improved?
- To what extent are sanctioned claimants aware of the help available to them from Jobcentre Plus? For instance are they aware of how to appeal a decision or how to seek help through hardship payments? Are there ways in which this could be made clearer to them?

## What are the next steps?

I will consider all evidence relevant to the review; however I will not be able to include evidence in the report which is not relevant to the scope of the review.

Please give me your views by 10 January 2014. I cannot guarantee that any information provided after this date will be included in the review.

Alongside written evidence, I am also keen to meet a range of claimants and others with experience of the system in order to discuss these issues in more depth. If you are interested in meeting with me or some of the Review Team, please contact me via the email below.

## Matthew Oakley

Matthew Oakley is an expert in welfare and labour market policy having worked in this area throughout his career and education. He is a member of the Social Security Advisory Committee and, until October 2013, was head of Economics and Social Policy at Policy Exchange. Before joining Policy Exchange he was an Economic Adviser at the Treasury, where he worked on a number of tax and welfare issues for the previous 8 years

## Contact details

Please send your responses to the Review Team at:

### Email

[sanctions.review2013@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:sanctions.review2013@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

### Address

Independent Review of Sanctions  
Review Team  
1st Floor, Caxton House,  
6-12 Tothill Street,  
London,  
SW1H 9NA.

All responses will be treated in confidence unless we explicitly seek your permission to attribute your comments.

# Annex A: Terms of reference for the review and schemes affected

An independent review will examine benefit sanctions imposed under the Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013.

The Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013 requires the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to appoint an independent person to review the operation of sanctions validated by the Act. This announcement sets out the terms of reference of that review.

This review will provide the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with a report evaluating the operation of the provisions relating to the imposition of benefit sanctions that are imposed as a result of, or have been validated by, the Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013. The report must be presented to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions as soon as reasonably practical after the 26 March 2014.

What the review will do

1. It will review the clarity of the initial information provided to Jobseeker's Allowance claimants in the notifications provided to them about the consequences of failing to take part in these back to work schemes.
2. It will evaluate, where a claimant has failed to participate, how the sanctioning process then worked. This will include reviewing the clarity of information given to claimants to help them navigate this process. This will include what information was provided to explain that they can avoid a sanction by showing good cause and that they can apply for a review or appeal if a sanction is imposed.
3. It will evaluate, where a sanction has been issued, the clarity of the information provided to claimants about why the sanction was issued, and the options they have, including application for hardship payments, and an explanation of the review and appeals process.
4. It will include recommendations about how the government can improve the information provided to claimants in relation to Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions and appeals.

## Schemes described by the Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013

The Work Programme (Jobseekers Allowance claimants only)

Day One Support for Young People trailblazer in London

The Derbyshire Mandatory Youth Activity Programme

Full-time Training Flexibility

New Enterprise Allowance

sector-based work academy

Skills Conditionality

Mandatory Work Activity

The Community Action Programme Pilot