

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
ORAL EVIDENCE  
TAKEN BEFORE THE  
WORK AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE

**THE WORK PROGRAMME: EXPERIENCE OF DIFFERENT USER GROUPS**

WEDNESDAY 30 JANUARY 2013

PAUL ANDERS, SOPHIE CORLETT, LAURA DEWAR, DUNCAN SHRUBSOLE AND  
ROBERT TROTTER

Evidence heard in Public

Questions 74-146

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## Oral Evidence

Taken before the Work and Pensions Committee

on Wednesday 30 January 2013

Members present:

Dame Anne Begg (Chair)  
Debbie Abrahams  
Mr Aidan Burley  
Jane Ellison  
Graham Evans  
Sheila Gilmore  
Glenda Jackson  
Stephen Lloyd  
Nigel Mills  
Anne Marie Morris  
Teresa Pearce

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**Examination of Witnesses**

*Witnesses:* **Paul Anders**, Senior Policy Officer, DrugScope, **Sophie Corlett**, Director of External Relations, Mind, **Laura Dewar**, Senior Policy and Parliamentary Officer, Single Parent Action Network, **Duncan Shrubsole**, Director of Policy and External Affairs, Crisis, and **Robert Trotter**, Senior Research Officer and Public Policy Advisor (Employment and Skills), Scope, gave evidence.

**Q74 Chair:** Order, order. Can I welcome you all here this morning? This is our second oral evidence session looking at the claimant experience of the Work Programme. Can I thank you very much for coming along? Before we get into the questions, can I ask you to very briefly introduce yourselves and the organisations you are from?

**Robert Trotter:** My name is Robert Trotter. I am from Scope, the disability charity.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** My name is Duncan Shrubsole. I am from Crisis, the homelessness charity.

**Laura Dewar:** My name is Laura Dewar. I am from the Single Parent Action Network, a Bristol-based charity that has a national reach.

**Sophie Corlett:** I am Sophie Corlett. I am from Mind, which is a mental health charity.

**Paul Anders:** I am Paul Anders. I am from DrugScope, which is the membership organisation for the drug and alcohol sector.

**Q75 Chair:** Thank you very much for coming along this morning. What we are keen to hear about is the experience of your clients, members or the people you support when they are engaged in the Work Programme. Can I just begin with a more general question about the relationship between Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme providers?

The initial report of the Work Programme evaluation concluded that despite an aspiration to deliver “warm handovers” from Jobcentre Plus to the Work Programme, participants often initially had a poor understanding of what the Programme was about, why

they had been referred to it and what was expected of them. Is that your experience and, if it is, how prevalent a problem is it and what could you do about it?

**Sophie Corlett:** Yes is the short answer. People find that they are not really sure what is going on when they are in the system. Their experience of it is that it is quite a harassing, bullying system. They have gone through the WCA<sup>1</sup>, which for many people with mental health problems is extremely stressful. It feels very adversarial. They come to a Jobcentre Plus; they end up in the Work Programme. They are not really sure what is expected. The first conversation with the provider when they appear in the Work Programme is around sanctions. People do find it very disorientating. They are not quite sure what is expected. The public expectation is that this is something that is going to help you find work, but that is not how it feels at any point. Yes, I think it is very disorienting, and it does not really set people up in a way that makes them best placed to be positive about looking for work.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** From the perspective of homeless people—both working with them directly and researching with other charities—this issue about Jobcentre Plus is central to what is happening around the Work Programme. People’s needs are not being adequately assessed either at Jobcentre Plus or when they first go over to the Work Programme provider. Information reaching one is not being passed on to the other.

For homeless people, it is particularly important, because—like ex-offenders and some other groups—they are potentially an early entrant group. If they are identified as homeless, they can get more support in the Work Programme. Instead of around £4,000 a head it would be £7,000 a head. That completely changes what the Work Programme conversation could be and what the offer will be. We have even had examples of homeless people who are sleeping rough on the streets not having it picked up in their assessment that they do not have anywhere secure to stay. They are being passed to a Work Programme provider who does not understand that either and are getting a much more standardised offer, when the whole aim of the Work Programme was to get a more personalised offer.

This issue about the identification of people being homeless is an issue with the Work Programme. More broadly, however, we have also done a lot of work with Jobcentre Plus, particularly in City and East in London, where we helped them to try to understand who is homeless, what the hostels in their area are and what the services are to try to identify homeless people for the Work Programme and other services.

There is a real lack of training and skills on the ground, with a lack of direction from the top: Jobcentre Plus should make this a priority. At later stages in the process, this lack of communication is coming into sanctioning as well, where poor information flows between the Work Programme and Jobcentre Plus mean that people are being inappropriately sanctioned, often at the very first stage.

**Chair:** We have some questions on that later.

**Q76 Sheila Gilmore:** My office was told on reasonably good authority—although I do not believe everything we are told—that one of our local Jobcentres was only giving every person with an employment advisor a four-minute slot to come in and talk about what they have done and where they might be going.

You may not know the answer to this—and maybe we will ask Jobcentre in due course—but is it your experience that people get enough time initially with JCP for these sorts of things to be done? If you do not know, it does not matter.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** I cannot comment specifically on the four-minute thing. However, no, I do not think enough time is being spent to assess needs. This is a problem that

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<sup>1</sup> Work Capability Assessment

is happening throughout the chain. From research that we did with St Mungo's and Homeless Link, 58% of people said they were not getting their needs adequately assessed by their Work Programme provider either. This assessment of need is crucial and it is not happening at the start of the process, whether by the JCP or by the Work Programme provider.

**Q77 Stephen Lloyd:** A very specific aspiration of the Work Programme is for JCP to do what the Chair called a warm handover with Work Programme providers. That is a very specific aspiration for the very reasons you are saying. In all of your experience, very briefly, are you telling me that within your client group that is tending not to happen between JCP to the Work Programme?

**Paul Anders:** Broadly speaking, from my experience and the experience of my colleagues, it is not happening. If I could just expand a little bit to put forward some reasons why I believe that may not be happening, there certainly are concerns around caseloads. This is about how practicable it is to do that warm handover. I am not sure what the caseload is at Jobcentre Plus, but certainly, from the Work Programme provider angle, caseloads of 200:1 are not that unusual. There is a capacity issue in providing those warm handovers.

To say a little bit more about that, where people with histories of drug use in particular are different is that there has been some work to try to encourage closer joint working between drug treatment providers, Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme providers. That has come from work done jointly by the NTA<sup>2</sup> and the DWP. It is a problem that has been acknowledged. Looking at the original protocol that has been in place for some years and the new one that came out towards the end of last year, however, we are starting to see a little bit of movement and a little bit more communication happening. I would not want to sound overly positive about that, however, because it is very early days. It is something we will be paying close attention to. The early signs are mildly encouraging.

If I could also say a little bit about disclosure: this was something that Duncan touched on. Again, notwithstanding the NTA protocol, this is something that we are seeing as a very major problem within the drugs sector. I would echo much of what Duncan said. There is an issue with the skills, ability and time available to Jobcentre Plus advisors to have the kind of communication that enables somebody to disclose.

There is a second issue relating to the disincentives to disclose. I would acknowledge the positive messages being sent out by Jobcentre Plus about people being able to disclose and receiving a more tailored approach. People's experience has shown this is often not the case, which makes people reluctant to disclose. Particularly for drug users, it raises issues that they may actually be disclosing something that relates to criminal activity. They may also be disclosing something that may be of concern to people who are parents or have caring responsibilities about social service interventions and so on.

We need to recognise that people are probably balancing the encouragement that is coming from Jobcentre Plus and the Department for Work and Pensions against the very strong disincentives that militate against that.

**Q78 Stephen Lloyd:** Thank you, Paul. Very briefly, Laura, before it goes on to Adrian, in your experience from your group, is there that warm handover or not?

**Laura Dewar:** I based my evidence to the Committee—although I have a wider context of the work that I do with single parents—on a study that I did towards the end of last year, where I interviewed 16 single parents. Over half of them talked about the problem of the lack of co-ordination between Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme. I only had one

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<sup>2</sup> National Treatment Agency

example of someone who thought it was particularly positive that before they transferred over they saw a lone-parent advisor at the Jobcentre who updated their jobseeker's agreement before transfer. They saw that as very positive.

As a group, single parents are different in that, as well as being a jobseeker, people have responsibility for a child. There are inbuilt lone-parent flexibilities, which, although they are called lone-parent flexibilities, are actually about the wellbeing and the protection of children. For instance, these might be around the hours that someone can work or being able to turn down a job if there is no suitable childcare. Actually, the co-ordination between Jobcentre Plus, having good action plans and having those translated over to the Work Programme is incredibly important. I have examples of the Work Programme not taking account of those flexibilities. There is an issue about children's wellbeing because of that.

**Q79 Mr Burley:** I wanted to follow up on Paul's point about disclosure with Duncan. You can understand the reasons why drug users might be reluctant to disclose that sort of information, but it almost beggars belief that it would not be picked up that someone was homeless. I was wondering if you could give the Committee a bit more information. Presumably this is a question that is asked at the initial stage. There are address boxes on the forms. Why do you think such a basic issue is not being picked up?

**Duncan Shrubsole:** You would think so. One of the things is that on the address box people will put down the address of a hostel, but Jobcentre Plus will not recognise that it is a hostel. I can say that we have done some training with Jobcentres where they thought there were two hostels in their patch and we told them there were 20; they did not know that. Again, it goes beyond the Work Programme; it is actually about Jobcentre Plus understanding the locality people are in. That can include mental health projects; it can include homeless hostels; it can include a range of things that are indicators. There are not standard questions that say, "Are you homeless?"

The reason why this is important, as I said before, is because they can have access to the early entrant group. It is also about understanding unstable accommodation or expensive accommodation that is high-rent because it is supported accommodation. Those are key factors shaping someone's ability to move into work, never mind other issues they may have. It might be tackling mental health, substance misuse or whatever, associated with their experience of being homeless. Again, many people who are homeless do not want to go around shouting about it. If this is a conversation about going back to work, they know their experience of approaching an employer and saying they are in a hostel, they are in unstable housing, they are getting by on someone's floor or they are actually sleeping rough is not going to get them a job either.

That is why the whole purpose of the Work Programme was supposed to be personalised, tailored conversations by skilled people who would tease out some of the barriers there are and put in place the right support to help people tackle them and put them on a positive back-to-work journey. That is what is needed, but even some of the basics like the right forms or asking the right questions are not happening either.

**Q80 Chair:** We have more questions about the minutiae of how the Work Programme works coming up later. Large numbers of people who have been referred to the Work Programme by JCP do not know that is what has happened to them. They have been told, "You have to go and see this company at that address," or "Phone this number." That is all the handover they get. I am saying this from my own constituency caseload, where we get phone calls in the office and people say, "We have to go and see this person." They have no idea why or what the reasons are. Is that too simple?

**Duncan Shrubsole:** It is partly true. We were trying to do some research and we put posters up saying, “Tell us if you are on the Work Programme.” We had to put in six or seven prompts: have you been sent to this organisation? Did JCP give you this letter? Did they give you this one? People do not understand, quite often, that they have gone onto the Work Programme and how it is different. The only thing they may get is a letter, which lists that they might have a problem with their benefit sanctions.

**Robert Trotter:** I agree with most of what has been said, so I will keep this brief. On the relationship between JCP and the Work Programme, one of the issues disabled people tell us is paramount is the lack of clarity amongst DEAs<sup>3</sup> in the Jobcentre Plus about which scheme is appropriate for whom. There will be clients for whom the Work Programme is not the most appropriate form of employment support. There are other schemes out there; there are things like Work Choice. DEAs are not quite sure about who to refer when. Some kind of gateway mechanism would be extremely welcome, in terms of placing people on the appropriate scheme at the appropriate time, firstly.

Secondly, another issue is addressing the question of information and addressing the idea that people are not 100% clear on what it is they are going through, who it is they are going to talk to and what it is they will be asked to do. Addressing the issue of clarity about programmes and people’s own understanding of the process that they go through would be extremely welcome.

**Chair:** They might need a handy guide.

**Q81 Graham Evans:** There is some evidence that Jobcentre Plus staff are not promoting the potential benefits of the Work Programme to claimants. Have you found this in relation to the claimants you represent? Do organisations such as yourselves have a role to play in positively promoting the potential benefits of the Work Programme?

**Paul Anders:** As a second-tier organisation, we do not have as many conversations with clients as some other sorts of organisations do. Certainly, what we are hearing anecdotally is that it probably is not being promoted as well as it might be. However, turning to what our role in that should be, we have to think in terms of whether this is a programme we could realistically and responsibly promote. What the research we have done with service users is showing us is a number of risks, which can broadly be separated into the risk of being parked—which is something we have seen quite a bit of—and the risk of being placed in an environment where sanctions are applied more intensely than they might be in other environments. If you are asking whether this is something we can promote, we would like to see improvements in the Work Programme to better meet the needs of people who might struggle to engage before we could do that.

**Q82 Graham Evans:** That is great; I am keen to hear the others. That is an entirely negative answer, if I may say so. If you are looking at what we are trying to do here, we are trying to get vulnerable people, in many cases, or the long-term unemployed into a job. You have the Work Programme, which has a lot of positives. I take on board some of the things about being parked and so on and so forth, but do you not feel that you as representatives have an obligation to say something?

Yes, there are always going to be some negatives in anything anybody tries to do to try to help people. You might say, “Yes, there are some negatives. I have heard some anecdotal evidence. However, these are the positives.” Whenever you try to put the positives forward you will always get people who say, “I have tried this and I have tried that.” You might say, “Always look at it as if the glass is half full. There are positives in there. If you go through

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<sup>3</sup> Disability Employment Advisers

this Work Programme, let us know if there are any negatives and we will make representations on your behalf—but for God’s sake, at least give it a try.” Do not use the negatives and the anecdotal information you have heard about as a barrier to stop people even trying to go through it.

**Paul Anders:** If I could just respond to that, as an organisation we are entirely supportive of the line of *Drug Strategy 2010*, which views employment as being one of the routes into sustainable recovery. We are entirely supportive of that. We welcome the Government’s recognition of recovery capital. We share the view that employment is something that everybody who is able to undertake it should strive towards. We also have to acknowledge that within the drug and alcohol sector there are programmes that sit outside the Work Programme that might actually be more suitable for people with that kind of history. In many cases, those programmes are delivering stronger outcomes than the Work Programme appears to be doing at the moment.

I would not for a second want to give the impression that, as a sector, we do not see employment as a priority; we absolutely do. However, the reality is that we would want people to make informed choices. There are programmes like Addaction’s NEXT, for instance, which deliver good outcomes. It may be that we might point clients who are able to join that programme in that direction.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** The starting point for us, as Crisis, is that we are passionate about helping people who have been homeless into work. We think this is the long-term route out of homelessness, getting people back into society and giving people self-esteem and confidence. Our starting point is that we want to get people back into work.

We come from a different perspective: we have a small Work Programme sub-contract, although the referrals are very low. That is an issue I might come onto later. We continue to run a series of employment programmes from our own resources, even though we did not win other Work Programme contracts, because we believe it is the right thing to do. Interestingly, the experience of our clients is that they are getting jobs through the services we are providing, not through the services that are provided on the Work Programme. At its worst, Work Programme providers have rung us up and said, “We have discovered that you have got someone a job; can you let us know, because we will then claim the money.”

This has been the experience. Some 58% of people we surveyed said they did not just feel their needs were not assessed, but that they were not treated with dignity and respect by the Work Programme providers. Homeless people as a client group are not like others; they come with a range of issues and need more in-depth support, which we hoped the Work Programme would provide. We started out referring people on an early basis to it, but too often it is not happening. We want the Work Programme to work. Lots of government money is going into it. That should be the basis of doing it. We have advocated for clients. We want it to work and we advocate for clients for Jobcentre Plus, anyway. The challenge is whether it is actually getting people into work. There is a big question mark over that. We and other charities are continuing to do so outside of the Work Programme, because we believe passionately in the issue.

**Q83 Glenda Jackson:** I am essentially going back to the question Aidan asked on the issue of people not knowing that someone was homeless. I accept both the point that Jobcentres Plus might not know the number of hostels in their areas and the issue of the caution of drug users towards actually laying that on the table. These people are not going into Jobcentre Plus for the first time in their lives, are they? What I am trying to nail down is that they must be regularly going into Jobcentre Plus; they are regular claimants. Where is the gap between the people who must know who they are and actually pushing them in the right

direction? Are you finding that every time they go into a Jobcentre Plus it is a different face across the desk?

**Laura Dewar:** Can I just say something about that in practical terms? Sheila Gilmore was talking about people seeing someone for a very short time. What tends to happen in Jobcentres is that people sign on with someone who is usually an assistant advisor. They will have a very short time with that person. What people should also have is an advisor. Those people have now become generalists. In the past there used to be, for instance, lone parent advisors when people were on Income Support. They would get very holistic support. It is much more generalist support now. What people mostly see is that every two weeks, when they sign on, the meeting is really short. There is an assistant advisor, who could easily be someone different every week.

**Q84 Glenda Jackson:** So it is that fact that nobody really knows who anybody is at the moment.

**Laura Dewar:** Yes.

**Q85 Debbie Abrahams:** Mr Shrubsole, in terms of what you were saying before about programmes that you are operating getting good job outcomes and the providers hearing about that and wanting to claim, that is potentially fraudulent behaviour. Could you clarify that and what evidence you have? I would not say that it does not happen, but we need to be very careful about making statements like that. Do you have evidence to that effect?

**Duncan Shrubsole:** Yes. A couple of individuals in question did a training programme through us and we took them on as employees. The Work Programme provider then got in touch with us and said, "Can you give evidence of employment? We want to claim that as an employment outcome."

**Debbie Abrahams:** That is very serious.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** I would not necessarily judge it as fraud. The reality of what is happening on the Work Programme at all stages is that it is not quite the clear and comprehensive programme that was envisaged. People are being told that if they go on the Work Programme they are going to see somebody and they might not see somebody. We have had one client who was told, "Don't come back until four months' time," or they are seeing them once a month. It is not a very close relationship. Clearly, they are carrying on doing other things. We talked about high caseloads at Jobcentre Plus. Because of the extent to which referrals to the Work Programme are very highly concentrated on the JSA<sup>4</sup> end, which was not necessarily envisaged, there is not much money per client. They have high workloads and they want to get people into work. The DWP's research was clear that people are being parked. In a way, that is an entirely rational thing on the part of some of the providers.

When people are getting help they are not necessarily being referred to specialist providers down the supply chain. Those specialist providers tackling homeless people within London, for example, have all withdrawn because they were not getting referrals. People are being referred to free courses and other things that are paid from Skills Funding Agency money or whatever. Your Work Programme provider will have a chat with you eventually. They might find out that you have a job; therefore, they want to claim that money. It is a symptom of the fact that in-depth support is not being provided for people. People who want to get into work are not going to sit around if they are not being provided with that support; they are going to work with other agencies that can. If people want to work, we want to help them into work—and we are going to carry on doing so.

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<sup>4</sup> Jobseeker's Allowance

**Q86 Chair:** However, the money does not follow them. Presumably, once somebody is contracted to a Work Programme provider that is it. It is almost like a form of bondage: they are there for two years, regardless of what happens to them elsewhere.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** Yes. The money follows the chain. That is one of the challenges about the Work Programme. The chain of contracts is not following what the individual would actually benefit from.

**Q87 Graham Evans:** If I may continue, Mr Shrubsole, you clearly see the Work Programme as not working in terms of the claimants you represent. You have experience of helping them get into employment. What would encourage you to link up with the Work Programme to perhaps change the Work Programme for the people you represent? How different would the Work Programme be with your claimants, if you got involved in it?

**Duncan Shrubsole:** That is quite a lot of questions.

**Graham Evans:** What would you do differently? You have criticised the Work Programme based on your personal experience, but what would you do? How could we encourage you to work with the Work Programme to make it work in the way you describe for some of these claimants?

**Duncan Shrubsole:** One example is that we actually do have one small sub-contract in the North-East, where we were expecting 100 referrals and only had 20. I said we had a range of roles; we are part of the Work Programme in that instance. We are not getting the referrals through and we know that other agencies—St Mungo's, Single Homeless Project and others—wanted to work within it, did not get the referrals and have pulled out. Referrals are one of the challenges.

The second challenge is the point I made about early identification. If homeless people are identified as one of the early-entrant groups, more money can flow so they should get more support. There is a big issue about the extent to which the Work Programme is based on benefit groups anyway, but also with the WCA process a lot of people with higher needs are coming along because they are on JSA, when actually they should be getting a level of support that an ESA<sup>5</sup> claimant might get. Again, more money flows.

If you have more money, you would hopefully then be addressed to more support. Ultimately, the primes need to be much better at assessing people's needs and then building a programme around those needs to bring in the specialist contractors and others who can help them. What is happening in the Work Programme—colleagues here will talk about other client groups—is that rather than a tailored, personalised service it is quite a standardised process, which is also focusing on things like CV, job matching and job search, which are quite standard, generic out-of-work skills, not how we help people tackle literacy, debt, housing issues or mental ill-health—as we all hoped and what Ministers promised when they established the scheme.

**Q88 Graham Evans:** Okay. How would you change that standardisation? What would you do about it to cater for that—for me, it is the American phrase: same meat, different gravy—depending on the claimant groups. What you are saying is that it is standardised. How would you, as a group of people, help the Work Programme to change for the various groups you represent?

**Laura Dewar:** Some of it is about identifying where things work well. In my written evidence, I gave three examples of where the Work Programme had worked particularly well for three single parents. One was provided with a really excellent service, but for all three of

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<sup>5</sup> Employment Support Allowance

them it was about recognising that they were a parent and giving quite an imaginative service. Someone wanted to set up their own business: the Work Programme printed flyers for them; they paid the postage for that; they paid for that person to go to a job interview in another city. I think they did really amazing things. One of the roles of the work that I do is to show where things work well so that practice might be shared. I am unclear how that practice is shared and how it is dealt with when people get a very poor service.

I am going to talk about that later, but I mean people who are actually turned away from the Work Programme because they have children. They cannot physically get to the offices of the Work Programme if they have children and then they are threatened with sanctions. That is obviously very poor practice, but that is going on. However, yes, I think there is a role in showing where things work well and where the Work Programme has worked well. I am more than happy to do that.

**Robert Trotter:** From a Scope perspective, I would strongly take this back to the issue of assessment. One of the things we are seeing is huge numbers of inappropriate referrals coming through: people who have been found fit for work who are a long, long way from work. The problem we have there is that people are coming through the Work Capability Assessment, which is a test that effectively assesses medical functional capability, rather than assessing readiness for work. For instance, the idea that if you can stand up in a shower for 15 minutes or something you are able to go into work seems inappropriate as a way of measuring distance from work. Actually, in terms of your question about improving the scheme, one of the things we could do would be to look at the Work Capability Assessment and look at if there is a way of introducing a distance from work test which looks at readiness for work.

**Chair:** That question will be coming up. In fact, we are in danger of answering all of the other questions on our brief in this first one. Remember that we are supposed to be talking about Jobcentre Plus and the handover.

**Q89 Glenda Jackson:** You said—and we have heard this before—that the primes do not refer to you. When they obtained their contracts, did they quote you and the other organisations you refer to as being people they would refer to? Did they include your names?

**Duncan Shrubsole:** Where we had this sub-contract in the North-East, we actually entered it after the Work Programme was initially launched. It was a later negotiation. The core question is that when people listed who was on their contracts, there was not much differentiation in the public announcements between whether they were end-to-end specialist sub-contractors or spot sub-contractors. A spot contract could be, “We might use you to do a couple of job-coaching lessons or use your furniture workshop or whatever.” Their name might have appeared, but, potentially, what they might offer would not be very in-depth.

However, those spot contractors are not being used very much at all, because there is still an expense involved and many of the primes and the sub-contractors want to use other, free courses instead. With sub-contractors, what is happening is that many of the people being referred to them might not actually be from the client group that they were set up to serve.

One of the things that Crisis does is run a network, talking to over 200 small and specialist organisations across the country. Some of them have managed to make the Work Programme work, but you can effectively either make your sub-contract work or you can serve the client group you were set up to serve. Most people cannot do both, because the referrals you are getting are just whoever the prime has decided to send to you. You might be a disability charity, a homeless charity or whatever and they are sending you a range of people with a range of needs. You do what you can to help them with the best intentions and do what

you need to do to meet your contract, but that will not necessarily be for those who you are set up to serve, which is homeless people, disabled people or whoever.

**Q90 Glenda Jackson:** What I am trying to drill down to here is this: when we have asked the Government these questions—and, indeed, we have done so in a variety of ways—we have said the most vulnerable are the hardest to reach and get into work. We have argued that the primes have a responsibility to engage with those specialist groups, some of which you represent. That seemed to me to be contingent upon the primes being awarded the contracts. What I am trying to find out is whether they exploited you to obtain contracts. Now—you have given fairly telling evidence—they are simply parking the most difficult.

**Paul Anders:** Could I possibly say a few more words about that, if that is okay? Unlike the homelessness sector, the drug and alcohol sector is quite well represented on Work Programme supply chains across the country. There are several organisations delivering in total about 35 contracts. Broadly speaking, there is at least one specialist sub-contractor in each contract package area (CPA). In a sense, we have quite a good overview of what is going on in terms of where the referrals are flowing to specialist organisations.

This backs up what Duncan has said. For organisations that are delivering on a spot purchase basis, we have seen very low take-up of that. There is one organisation which had anticipated having around or possible a little bit above 1,500 referrals in the first year across several CPAs; it has received four.

I have spoken to another organisation that is delivering end-to-end. What we are seeing there is something very different, which is a much larger number of referrals. Again, as Duncan said, these are not necessarily a good fit with their expertise. The one thing they have in common is that they are all a very long distance from employability and a long distance from the job market. You might see that as being quite rational behaviour on the part of a prime, because you outsource that risk, let somebody else provide the service at some cost and you hope that, at some point, a job outcome payment and sustainment fees come in. We are seeing a real mix, depending on what type of sub-contractor an organisation is.

**Q91 Glenda Jackson:** The bottom line to all of this is that your client groups are not getting the absolutely tailored, flexible service that the Government told us they were going to receive.

**Paul Anders:** We have not seen that so far.

**Q92 Graham Evans:** Can I get back to the original question? How are you engaging with the Work Programme to try and get that tailored service for the people you represent? If I may, can I ask Sophie: what do you regard as good practice in terms of handover co-ordination between Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme, based on the people you represent?

**Sophie Corlett:** We would like to see—this does not exist at the moment—a really good assessment of what somebody would need in order to get back into work. What is it that is holding them back? Obviously, the WCA is looking at their functional capabilities, but if we are talking about someone with mental health problems it will be issues to do with confidence, anxiety and employer attitudes. Those are probably going to be the two big issues, as well as their mental health. We would like a proper assessment of that.

We do find some Jobcentres Plus that are doing that. In fact, having done that they are thinking, “This person is not appropriate for the Work Programme.” They are encouraging or supporting them to appeal, sending them to a local Mind where they can get support to appeal, or they are sending them to Work Choice. One of the things we are finding is that at the beginning of every month the DEAs in Jobcentre Plus—because you can only send a certain number of people to Work Choice every month—are sending off huge numbers to

Work Choice, because they realise that you actually get a better service in Work Choice than you do in the Work Programme.

To have a little look about what that is about, it is about a specialist understanding of what an individual needs; it is about doing that in a much more supportive environment, so it is not couched in this sanction and mandation culture, which is quite difficult if you have a mental health problem, because, as I said, one of the issues is confidence. That is akin to a psychiatrist saying, "Pull your socks up; it is your problem." That is not an encouraging culture.

There is another thing as well. The best services for getting people back to work are based in health services, including IPS. There is a really good evidence base for IPS. They are dealing with people who have moderate to severe mental health problems. They are dealing with people in secondary care; that is not an easy group.

**Q93 Chair:** You used the acronym IPS; what does that mean?

**Sophie Corlett:** Sorry, that is Independent Placement and Support. It is a very radical approach. It says, "Let's get somebody into the workplace very fast, within a month, and support them when they are there." It might not be full-time work; it might well be under 16 hours, but it is work. It is recognition that people want to work, they can work and that the issue is not to do with motivation but to do with confidence or employer attitudes. It is based in the Health Service and works very closely with the employers. The key thing that it does is integrate health and work advice. One of the things that the Work Programme does not really do is integrate that. People are getting different advice, a different message and a different service from health than they are from work.

**Q94 Graham Evans:** What sort of communication and liaisons have you had with the Work Programme to make those changes you have just described?

**Sophie Corlett:** We have tried to work with different providers. Some of them are trying to set things up. Some of them will have counselling support and all sorts of things. Rather than just being based on the goodwill of providers, part of the expectation could be that they integrate with the support somebody was getting from their GP, secondary care, psychiatrist or community care support. If that was part of the expectation for all the providers, it would make quite a significant difference.

**Q95 Graham Evans:** Are you making representations to the Work Programme to put that co-ordination in place?

**Sophie Corlett:** I would have to see whether my colleagues nod or not. Yes.

**Graham Evans:** What I have noticed here, Chair, is that there are lots of good ideas and suggestions. The Work Programme is working to a greater or a lesser degree; how do you improve it? In anything one tries, a journey of a million miles starts with the first step. You can change it on its way, but you should perhaps not just say, "This does not work; that does not work; we are going our own way." Rather, you might say, "Let us look at the Work Programme. How can I improve it for the people I represent? You are doing this and not doing this." You could explore the ways that you can improve it.

**Sophie Corlett:** We think it needs to be part of the system. At the moment, some providers are doing one thing and some are doing another. There is an assumption that Work Programme providers will come to this on their own. We have been talking to the DWP about making that part of the expectation. We have had conversations with individual providers as well. It is a system.

**Chair:** We are getting bogged down. You are answering all of the other questions we have to come and everybody is asking all of the other questions that are meant to come up. This section was meant to be about the co-ordination between Jobcentre Plus and the

Work Programme. We have all of the questions on the black box and everything coming up. Can I stop this discussion there? I am sure everyone will get a chance to say what they want to say later, but, Graham, you have a question on sanctioning and mandation. I will get you to ask that one; we will then move on.

**Q96 Graham Evans:** Do you accept that mandation and sanctioning has a role in encouraging participants to engage in the Work Programme?

**Sophie Corlett:** I would like to start on that one. I do not think it works as an encouragement for mental health. I used the metaphor before of a psychiatrist who is telling an individual to pull their socks up. For us, it has exactly that impact. We know that people with mental health problems have one of the highest want-to-work rates. They are very keen to get back into work but confidence and anxiety about their ability to do that are the issues. Sanctions and mandation, right from the beginning, are the wrong prescription based on the wrong diagnosis of what the problem is.

The other problem that we find is that people are not looking into the reasons why somebody has missed an appointment. One person reported to us that they had been there in the waiting room, but their anxiety levels were such that, when somebody had been saying they were not there and that this was terrible and they would have to take steps, they did not even feel that they could say, "I am here." They went away; letters followed.

There is an assumption that people are acting in a particular way, which I do not think fits the facts. It does then have a negative impact on individuals and precisely on this issue, on their confidence level to progress. We would like to see a different approach. Work Choice, where people are involved voluntarily, has much better outcomes. It seems to us there is a message there about sanctions.

**Robert Trotter:** The issue around conditionality is whether it supports the policy intention of supporting disabled people back into work. The DWP evaluation of the Work Programme has found that conditionality and sanctions are making people's lives harder without necessarily making them more likely to meet the programme requirements, which implies that it is not supporting the policy intention. The issue with conditionality is that in supporting people back into work we have to focus on all the barriers they face into work, whereas the conditions and the sanctions are focused on one particular barrier, which is a lack of motivation. It is saying, "If you are not motivated into work and do not attend the appointments, we will sanction you," rather than saying, "What are the things that will help you? What are the things we can incentivise? What are the steps that we can take to reward you?" The evaluation showed some clear themes of things that do work, which are things like: building human relationships between advisors and individuals; being able to involve users in their own journey back to work; or being able to say to a disabled person, "What are the things that you would like to do? What are the things we can support you to do? How can we work together to make this work better?"

The third aspect, which is related to that, is actually finding a placement that meets the aspirations of the individual, rather than just finding any placement and saying, "This is something you could do." Those things will help conditionality; it does not appear to be working at the moment.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** Building on that, for the more than 300 people whom Crisis got into work last year, we used a positive coaching methodology, which was about saying, "Where do you want to go? Let us help you aim for something." These are people who have often had negative experiences of education or previous employment. It is about saying to them, "Where do you want to go? What are your aspirations?" It is realistic, challenging and often uses tough love. It is about trying to achieve something positive, not just looking at the negative things that have happened.

The research is clear: 77% of homeless people want to work now and it is 97% at any one time. Yet one fifth of them, in a year's operation of the Work Programme, have been sanctioned. The DWP's own research highlighted how many of those who had been sanctioned had been sanctioned because of confusion over the JCP-Work Programme relationship about when the initial meeting was to happen. There may be a place for sanctioning, but the evidence so far is that sanctioning has not been applied correctly and has not helped people; it has been more of a barrier.

We have seen letters in relation to this. The first letter people have had from a Work Programme provider has not been, "We want to help you on your journey, but of course you need to do these things." It has basically been, "Hello. Turn up. If you do not turn up we will take your benefits off you." That is not the start of a helpful, productive relationship that helps people get back to work. As everyone has said, it increases anxiety, trepidation and an unwillingness to disclose because you think whatever you might say might be used against you. Actually, when people get back into work it is because they have been positively encouraged and supported to think differently, do differently and have aspirations to achieve, rather than thinking, "What do I need to do in order to avoid a penalty?"

**Chair:** I know you have a lot to say—and we do have your written evidence as well—but I am going to move on, otherwise we will never get past the first section.

**Laura Dewar:** Could I just give one case? It was something that happened at the weekend. We have an online forum. We have someone who has been sanctioned, who has an eight-year-old child. All of her appointments are either given at nine o'clock in the morning or three o'clock in the afternoon. Last Monday, she took her child out of school so she could make a Work Programme appointment. Her son is eight. Is that the point of a sanction? Do you want to encourage people to take their children out of school? I am sorry; I just had to say it.

**Q97 Stephen Lloyd:** Let us move on to the black box. Quite a lot of this has been covered already, so we can go through it quite quickly. As we all know, the black box concept, which was taken from Australia, was supposed to be the silver bullet that would allow creativity, imagination and specialist providers who had expertise dealing with particular groups to play a key role in the Work Programme. Clearly what we are hearing indicates that this does not seem to be working terribly well. Let me drill down on a couple of questions, so that I can be quite specific. It will assist us with our report.

In your judgement, do providers need to be free from the over-prescription from Government about the services they deliver, in order that services can evolve and be responsive to the needs of different claimants? Essentially, my question there—you can answer it quickly because I have a more detailed one afterwards—focused on the principle of the black box that you do not have over-prescription from the Government. Do you think that is a good thing or a bad thing in principle?

**Paul Anders:** If I could say a couple of words about that: in principle, yes. However, the black box, in conjunction with incentives that are not necessarily aligned to somebody's needs and barriers and a complete absence of minimum standards, does create an environment in which people can receive an ineffective or, in some cases, completely lacking service.

**Sophie Corlett:** We have heard enough disturbing stories to feel there needs to be quite a lot more transparency. It is one thing to have a black box to encourage innovation and encourage people to do new things—although I am not sure we have seen anything particularly innovative, to be frank. Actually, the black box also means that there is a lack of transparency about how people are doing things. We would like to see a lot more about ensuring that people are treated with dignity and respect, that they are not parked and that that is much more evident to the outside world.

**Laura Dewar:** The single parents I interviewed wanted some predictability. I do not think that that precludes innovation. In fact, some of the people who fared the best were the ones who knew exactly what was on offer. If they were not going to be seen as frequently, they would say, “I will see you a lot over the time you have a job interview.” It was really clear: there was predictability and an understanding of the basics around the service.

**Q98 Stephen Lloyd:** Do you mean a very clear communication to each client of exactly what they were going to receive?

**Laura Dewar:** Yes.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** I agree with everything about the need for transparency and better diagnostic tools. The challenge is that the black box is being asked to do two different things. There is one thing that says, “We as the Government ask you as the provider to do whatever is best to get someone back to work.” If that flexibility was there in reality it would be good, but with the black box the Government is actually also saying, “We give you, the prime provider, the ability to devise whatever supply chain you want.”

If you were going to a disability or homelessness charity and saying, “Do whatever you want to get people into work,” that would be one thing. However, the black box has meant the prime provider—based on, as Paul said, a payment mechanism that is not supporting the most disadvantaged into work—is being left to devise the supply chain. What they are doing is hedging the risk they put in; they are working with the easiest to help. They are behaving entirely rationally in that black box to protect their income stream, their contract and all the rest of it.

That is not the same as giving a black box approach to the client on the ground. We have ended up confusing two things: a flexible approach to help our client with an individualised, tailored response, and a hands-off contracting where the DWP says, “We do not want to individually sub-contract like we used to.”

**Q99 Stephen Lloyd:** In a sense, one of the challenges for you as groups representing clients with particular challenging needs is that you understandably would want a minimum standard. I can appreciate that. By the same token, you would want an element of transparency so you could see what works within a black box and what does not. The problem with that is that the direction of travel eventually means that we will not have a black box; we will just have a set of minimum standards and guidelines that we all adhere to, which means we will lose the creativity. Maybe another way of looking at the black box is to say, “Forget all that. The only thing that counts is the outcomes with the hard-to-reach groups.”

Maybe another way to set the creativity of the black box concept free would be to say, “Forget about minimum standards; forget about transparency; forget about that. What counts is getting jobs for 75 homeless people or people with mental health problems by the end of the month.” Is it perhaps sensible for us to go to that sort of creative extreme? Otherwise, all the things you are describing, which I understand are wholly about minimum standards and transparency, mean that you actually do not have a black box concept.

**Robert Trotter:** That is an extremely interesting point. The issue for us around the black box is the question of accountability. How do you hold providers to account for delivering the services they intend to deliver for disabled people? One issue in terms of how we get around that is involving disabled people more. One way of allowing providers to have innovation whilst holding them accountable for meeting a central Government set of things that need to be done would be to devolve the question to disabled people and involve disabled people more in the initial planning process about what kind of support they will receive. Once that plan has been agreed with the disabled person, use that to hold the provider accountable. That would get around some of your issues, in a sense.

**Q100 Debbie Abrahams:** I just wanted to get comments from other members of the panel on what Mr Shrubsole said, which was that a financial model is driving what is being provided, rather than it being innovative, flexible and person-centred interventions according to what the client needs. Is that what you would all agree with?

**Sophie Corlett:** None of this applies to everybody, but this is certainly what we have found. One of the problems—perhaps this relates to Stephen Lloyds’s question as well—is the system of payment by results—even if you said it would be based on getting so many people into work or such a proportion—because you would then go for the people either who are going to bring you the most income or who are easiest to get into work.

So long as you could come up with a financial incentive that was sufficiently nuanced that it really did represent the amount of support and time you would need to spend on getting somebody into work, it would be fine. People are going to be motivated by whether they think they are going to be able to make a success of that individual client. They are businesses; it is payment by results. They are not paid if it does not happen. At the moment, the system is not that nuanced.

**Q101 Stephen Lloyd:** If I could ask one more question, very quickly, to each of you again, if you would, because it feeds into the report, what would you define good employment provision looking like for the claimants you represent? Let us start with Sophie from Mind. By the way, Sophie, I would be grateful if you could send to the Clerk the information you had about IPS. I would really like to see that; I am very interested.

**Sophie Corlett:** Yes.

**Stephen Lloyd:** This is to each of you—very quickly, because we have many more questions. What would you define, for your client group, as a good employment outcome?

**Sophie Corlett:** Do you mean a good employment outcome or a good employment service?

**Q102 Stephen Lloyd:** I mean good employment provision. A good outcome would be a job.

**Sophie Corlett:** Yes, a good sustainable job. I would go back to IPS, because what they do probably sums it up. It is integrated with health, which is not going to be relevant for all the client groups. It is integrated with health and other needs such as housing, debt and other sorts of advice people might need. It is extremely ambitious on behalf of the person. It looks to their aspirations and is uncompromising in saying, “Yes, you can get a job,” and being supportive in that way. However, it is ambitious without being punitive. It assumes that the person can and does want to co-operate, rather than starting from the assumption that the person’s motivation for a job might be low. It then builds on that; it is extremely successful within IPS.

**Stephen Lloyd:** I will hold you there, Sophie. That is really good. I want to get everyone in.

**Paul Anders:** In a sense, there is no great secret to it. Lots of organisations are doing it. It is a multidisciplinary approach. It is something that brings in health, psychosocial support and people who are skilled in supporting people to deal with other barriers they may have, which could also include housing. A lot of provision includes accredited training. Some agencies use something that is very similar to the IPS approach; others will do more to engage with key employers and support people through that. A final thing that is possibly of particular concern to this sector is staff who are, in effect, skilled intermediaries liaising with employers about the individual concerns they may have as employers about recruiting people with a history of drug dependency and, in some cases, criminal records.

**Laura Dewar:** I would echo some of those points. Single parents are a very broad group. I was quite struck by the fact that quite a lot of the single parents I interviewed were

perfectly well qualified. Many of them were teachers, social workers or psychiatric nurses. There was a whole range of qualified people. It was that there are not jobs for them to do around their children. Again, I would support working with employers. I know the local Partnership Agreements that Jobcentres Plus have are not as strong with the Work Programme providers. Those things take time to build up.

For single parents who are not as skilled, it is about helping them in training. Some of them have not been in employment; they need a basic computer course. Also, it is about helping those who do have qualifications to work with employers and the public sector having a role in thinking about how jobs are designed. I had an example of a single parent who was a qualified teacher. The Work Programme paid for her to do a food hygiene course to become a dinner lady. In terms of conditionality in the longer term, although it might be some stepping stone to work I am not quite sure whether that is making the most of someone's skills. It is not going to help sustain them into the future. It will mean they have more contact, over time, with the Jobcentre. It is not going to help them sustain their family.

**Stephen Lloyd:** I think this is about childcare provision and growing that—but that is for another day.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** I agree with everything everybody else has said. Crucially, you have to link an employer with an individual who wants to work and provide everything that is needed in the middle to tackle issues and motivate people to be able to go into a realistic job and make a success of it. One of the things we talk a lot about is that the Work Programme at the moment is very generic. There are groups of people, many of which we represent, who need some kind of pre-Work Programme support. We need joining up between the skills agenda, the funding of that and what is going on in the Work Programme. They remain a perennial problem of Government. Those two bits of Government remain entirely separate.

Lastly, going back to your earlier question about how we might see the Work Programme, the challenge is that Crisis, as an organisation—not all would take this view—has said, “We believe in our employment services enough that we would actually go out and fundraise or seek money from other sources to get people into work and be paid by our results, by whether we achieve that.” You cannot do that in the Work Programme currently, because the black box is a rigid box and a contracting line that people are pushed down. It is not payment by the results you achieve, in terms of getting people into work; it is payment by whether you do what was on your contract, which was all that was available.

**Stephen Lloyd:** That is a very useful and important point. Thank you, Duncan. I know it will be noted; I have certainly noted it.

**Robert Trotter:** I would also endorse much of what has already been said—particularly Duncan's point about pre-employment support.

I would make five quick points, if I may: firstly, good employment services give you time to build relationships with the client; secondly, placements that meet the aspirations of disabled people; thirdly, user involvement, i.e. getting people involved in defining the process they will go through and the modules of support they will receive.

**Stephen Lloyd:** The Coalition is expanding Access to Work to include work experience and internships. I would assume you would endorse that heartily.

**Robert Trotter:** I would absolutely endorse that. Fourthly, try to have a focus on non-employment outcomes. For a lot of disabled people, the Work Programme is medicalising people and saying, “You have x amount of time before you will be better. Once you are better you will be able to get a job.” For some people, voluntary work, work experience or work in the community are all real achievements and are of benefit to society. We should recognise that. Finally, there is the point others have made about wrapping services around the individual. I am thinking of things like social care in particular. Childcare is another excellent point.

**Q103 Jane Ellison:** I would just follow up on something a couple of you mentioned about the liaison with employers, particularly with hard-to-reach groups or people who are further away from the world of work. A lot of employers—the majority, I imagine—do not really have a lot of insight into specialist needs. I wondered, as advocacy groups, how much work you actually do or contact do you have as different groups with employers. What medium is that through?

**Duncan Shrubsole:** We put a lot of effort into working with employers, because we know they will be sceptical, ultimately, until they see the white of your eyes, as it were, and you can tell them, “Actually, a homeless person can achieve things, this is the support we provide and they will be good workers. Here is an example of someone else who has done it before.”

That is the key to getting them into work. We have employer partnership events, where we get employers to meet potential clients. We do work placements and various things like that. One of the challenges about the Work Programme is that in some instances it has cut across what had become quite well-established relationships with employers. Partly, in this scramble for jobs, some areas have developed good vacancy-sharing arrangements that were quite open. Employers and organisations that might be best placed to do it would come.

Now, people have said, “That is my employer.” Jobcentre Plus is keeping one set of employer relationships; the Work Programme is trying to do it separately; the charities are trying to do it separately. That is a real challenge. It goes back to the closeness of the relationships. If you have to use a Work Programme provider who only has one set of relationships and they are trying to get people into work, again, they are going to suggest to the employer the person who is more readily going to appeal and look like they are going to make a success of it. The homeless person, the drug user or the person with mental health issues are not likely to be pushed forward. We have to rely on doing it ourselves, to make the employer aware.

**Q104 Jane Ellison:** You have employer events; that was one of the things you said.

**Sophie Corlett:** We do a lot of work with employers. Employers are part of society; they share the same prejudices society has. One of the more recent and slightly discouraging findings we have had is that 40% of employers think that people with mental health problems would be a significant risk as an employee. We are quite up against it in that respect.

We have two big campaigns. One is our Time to Change campaign, which we run in conjunction with Rethink Mental Illness. It is based broadly in society but has had and does have specific aspects that are based around employers. It is focused quite a bit on employers supporting people they already employ. One of the things we find is that employers think they do not employ anyone with mental health problems. Once they realise they do and that they are good workers, it obviously changes their attitudes towards recruitment as well. That is one of our pieces of work. Mind has its own campaign, Taking Care of Business, which works very closely with employers on developing their policies for recruitment, HR and management approaches, so they can work much better with employees within the business.

That is where we are working generally with employers. Duncan or Rob pointed out earlier that when you are talking about trying to get someone into a job, it is about making a particular connection between that individual and that employer. It is about thinking through some of the practical concerns about that particular line manager or the particular flexibilities that that individual will need. All the work that Mind and other organisations can do with employers will not substitute for that individual piece of work that needs to be done with the individual when you are talking about trying to get someone a job.

**Laura Dewar:** We do not do direct work on that, but we work with the Working Parents Group and do work to try to influence how jobs are advertised and the legislation

about people starting work. At the moment, if you are starting work you have no right to request working flexibly, which is a big issue for single parents entering the workforce. We deal with those broader issues and also around the role of the public sector in how jobs are advertised. Some of it is a structural thing about jobs. Organisations like Women Like Us in London have done research on the part-time jobs that are advertised; they are the most poorly paid jobs. Only one in 17 jobs pays a pro rata wage of £20,000. Yes, you can do work with individual employers around saying, “Why do you not advertise a job part time?” However, it is a more endemic attitude about the quality of part-time work.

**Q105 Jane Ellison:** Picking up on that last point, if you were advising someone, would you be a bit discouraging about going for one of those jobs that you thought was poorly paid?

**Laura Dewar:** No, there is a role for jobs as a stepping stone. The overall policy about single parents moving into work and the whole principle around it was around addressing child poverty. There should still be a place for trying to make the most of people’s skills. There is a balance. Yes, some jobs are a stepping stone. If the Government are looking at the longer term and whether they want to address the poverty of this group, I do not necessarily think if people are qualified teachers, social workers or whatever—

**Q106 Jane Ellison:** Would you advise them to stay on benefits?

**Laura Dewar:** No, I would not. What I would want is more effort to try and design jobs better. A lot of these are public sector jobs that could be designed better. Maybe the Government should subsidise job shares in the public sector if they need full-time hours. Economically, that might be better and might help more families out of poverty than getting someone who is a qualified nurse to go into a very part-time job being a dinner lady.

**Q107 Graham Evans:** Job shares are there now. My nine-year-old is at school and he has two part-time teachers. That is a job share.

**Laura Dewar:** It is still the exception, though.

**Graham Evans:** Personal experience.

**Q108 Anne Marie Morris:** Stephen very sensibly asked you what “good” looked like, in effect, in terms of the experience of this black box. They do say that what gets measured gets done; the answers you gave to his question had some common themes, but clearly they were different given the different groups you represent. Is there any way you could articulate and describe what quality is? Could we and should we try to measure it? In some sense, this might get us away from purely looking at the finances, which is now actually the focus and the prime measure. Indeed, there was the suggestion Stephen came up with, which was looking at outcomes, as in whether someone got the job. Do you think this issue of quality is one that we could articulate, could measure and should measure?

**Paul Anders:** Could I start off by saying that I am aware that in some similar systems—in Australia, for example—feedback from users of programmes is sought as a matter of routine? That might be one step towards addressing it, as would a broader approach to quality assurance. We are well aware of the evaluations of different sorts that are in place for the Work Programme, but my understanding is that they will pick up the experience of different groups as part of the process but that is not part of the intent. They are not in any sense a substitution for a different approach towards quality assurance. It is certainly something we would welcome.

In terms of moving away from outcomes—I say this entirely conscious that it is somewhat swimming against the tide—for some customers, not necessarily entire customer

groups but for some people within those groups, the reality is that it will take rather more than two years of what can be sometimes a very light-touch programme to move people into employment. I wonder if there might be some merit in looking at steps towards employment. I know this will start to look a bit like a minimum standard or a distance travelled model, but perhaps the Department should consider whether for some customers there would be value in that. It might move providers away from the feeling that if somebody cannot go all the way into employment there is not much point in doing anything, because it does not count.

**Q109 Anne Marie Morris:** My concern is that then will end up being a financial measure, rather than a genuine quality measure. There is a difference between having a minimum standard and quality, if you see what I mean. I understand where you are coming from, which is trying to ensure there is progression that moves along the quality spectrum, but there is also ultimate quality.

**Paul Anders:** Yes, I see what you mean. In a sense, there are two different aspects, aren't there? There are things you could do to try to drive quality and things you could do to try to monitor quality.

**Anne Marie Morris:** They are not the same.

**Paul Anders:** Yes.

**Q110 Anne Marie Morris:** Do you have any suggestions for how we might do that? Apart from your stepped approach, how could you actually measure quality?

**Paul Anders:** First of all, taking a very systematic approach to the customer experience, one self-described by the customers would be one step. Also, given that the Minister is now talking about a perspex box rather than a black box, the DWP could take more interest in what goes on inside, even it retains that hands-off approach.

**Q111 Anne Marie Morris:** Your approach to this is very much getting feedback from the user groups. What about an independent assessor? I do not know whether you have some thought about that.

**Paul Anders:** There have been in the past and there might be value to seeing if that could bring about some change in future.

**Anne Marie Morris:** Might be, or from your view—

**Paul Anders:** From my position, there would be—to be clear about that.

**Q112 Anne Marie Morris:** Sophie, what are your thoughts on quality and whether we should measure it and how?

**Sophie Corlett:** Should we measure it? Yes. How should we measure it? I do think it is difficult. The ultimate goal is for somebody to get a sustainable job out of it. There are interim points for people. This is a two-year programme, and for some people 16 hours might be something you have not reached yet or you might be in voluntary work. At the moment, if people do not think you can get there in two years, the incentive is to park you. It may be that they could get you into voluntary work and park you there, but at least you have gone a little bit further.

There are these things about quality drivers and actual quality—and how they intersect. An independent assessor might well be a way to begin to get to the bottom of what is happening and maybe to help understand those drivers a bit better and to adjust them so that they are more useful. I do think an independent role could be helpful, at least in that respect.

One of the things about what quality would be and how you would measure it—people might say that this is much too subjective—for people with mental health problems one of the big issues for them is confidence. Something that looks at individuals' satisfaction with the

process and whether they feel more confident that they are able to get a job would be a genuine measure of their ability to look for one and project well in an interview and all of those things.

**Q113 Anne Marie Morris:** In a sense, your measurement—rather like Paul’s—is a staging approach and looking at the smaller and then increasing outcomes. What about the intervention itself? One of the comments Laura made was that there has not actually been much innovation here. Much of the same old stuff is being put out. In a sense, if we are just measuring the outcomes, is that going to help motivate the whole innovative piece, which is not there, to get some quality that is a quality not just of the outcome but of the tools we are using to try to raise the game. I do not know, Laura, whether you have any thoughts on that.

**Laura Dewar:** Yes, it should be very much be rooted in the experience people have had. It would not be that difficult even now. The thing that worries me is that time ticks on for a lot of people and a lot of people are not having any intervention at all. They could be on the programme for two years; what is going to happen to those people? As a first measure, not that many people have moved into sustainable employment. Interview them; find out what works; be a bit positive about it.

**Q114 Mr Burley:** What is your definition of sustainable employment? A lot of you mentioned that word this morning and I am not clear what “sustainable” is.

**Laura Dewar:** There are different payment groups. If someone gets into work for six months they get a certain payment, and if they are in it for two years. Obviously, it will not have kicked in for some people. The current measurement is those who have been in employment for six months.

**Q115 Mr Burley:** I am conscious that they get paid if someone is in work for six months, but is that your definition of a sustainable job? Duncan, you mentioned it earlier as well. Short-term shelf stacking in a supermarket would not be your definition of a sustainable job, would it?

**Laura Dewar:** That is what they define it as.

**Q116 Mr Burley:** You would not, however. You sort of laughed; is it that you would not define that as a job?

**Duncan Shrubsole:** We think that any work, providing it is safe and legal, is good in terms of experience. At the moment, people we get into work will be doing all sorts of things. There is no snobbery about it. You get people into work; they can do it. Sometimes there are zero-hour contracts, because that is the nature of the game, or it might be two months or whatever.

**Q117 Mr Burley:** Are you telling me that any work is good?

**Duncan Shrubsole:** Yes, providing it is safe and legal, as I said. There is a lot of work out there that is not safe and legal, because it is for gangmasters and under the radar.

**Q118 Mr Burley:** Laura was saying earlier that she would not encourage someone to be a dinner lady if they had been a teacher. That is still work.

**Laura Dewar:** I was not saying that, and it is still work. What I am saying is that if the agenda is getting single parents to not rely on the state, tax credits and housing benefit, it seems very short term to automatically think that someone will go into a very low-skilled job when they have skills and qualifications. That is very short term.

**Q119 Mr Burley:** Why? Is there not a dignity in work? Is it not good that they get back into the workplace? Could not being a dinner lady lead to them being a teacher again, working in a school?

**Laura Dewar:** It is quite common. If a single parent is going to be a breadwinner in a family, they are going to be the person who is going to sustain that family into the longer term. I agree with you: lots of parents want to move into work and they see lots of very positive things in doing that about pay or being a role model for their child. I am just saying that you might be creating a time-bomb around conditionality for that group if all you are relying on is jobs that are advertised part-time and you are saying that people must take them. You are going to be much more restricted in the jobs you can apply for if you need to work part-time because you also care for your children. I am just saying that if the Government policy is around addressing child poverty, that might not be, in every instance, the best thing to do.

**Q120 Mr Burley:** It is not just about income, is it?

**Laura Dewar:** No, it is not.

**Mr Burley:** There are other advantages to work: being in a workplace, meeting colleagues.

**Laura Dewar:** There are programmes that have happened in America around sustainable work. They are about it being not necessarily work first, but about holding on for a job.

For instance, I work with someone who was told—this was not the Work Programme; it was the Jobcentre—to apply for a job that was miles away from where she lived. She is a single parent; she has no other family support; she has a six-year-old child. She is a qualified graphic designer and that is what she did before she had her daughter. She was going to be sanctioned if she did not go for this particular job, which was an hour and a half away. She was very worried about it. In the end, she found out more from our organisation about some of the flexibilities that might be open to her around the hours that she worked and she stood her ground a bit with the Jobcentre. The Jobcentre and other agencies then worked with her and she now works in the art department of a school. It is a job that is near to where she lives and it is sustainable for her. It is sustainable for her because it is about her in the round. It is a job that has prospects. It does not pay as well as being a graphic designer and the job she used to do, but that is the sort of stepping stone job.

**Q121 Mr Burley:** That is based on transport; that is different from the nature of the job. If the original job was too far to commute, that is different.

**Laura Dewar:** It is a bit of both. Sustainable work for single parents is seen as being a more local job, being part-time and being a flexible employer that allows them to sustain that work. Otherwise, someone will cycle back to benefits.

**Sophie Corlett:** I would just like to add a couple of things. For people with mental health problems there is lots of evidence that work is a really positive thing towards their recovery, but there is also good evidence that the wrong job is bad for your mental health. You do have to take into account somebody's mental health and what would be stressful for them, but also somebody's aspirations and abilities. Those are two things that can make a job—even if it is legal and safe—not a good choice for you and not sustainable in the long term.

The other thing for sustainability is that the job you do—whether it is being a dinner lady or a shelf stacker—might be sustainable if the support you get continues, so that when you have built up your confidence and you are a little bit better, the support is still there to help you to get to the next step. It might be working on the till; the next step might be that

you eventually move into management or become chief executive of Tesco or whatever it is. Those things are available to you, but only if the support to you and to the employer continues so that they can see that just because you have a mental health problem it does not mean shelf stacking is all you can do. There are both sides to that. Shelf stacking might turn out to be absolutely the wrong thing or absolutely the right first step—even if your abilities are way beyond that.

**Q122 Anne Marie Morris:** Back to quality: you came out with five points, didn't you, in terms of what you thought good looked like. What is your take on quality? How do we measure it? Can you measure it?

**Robert Trotter:** I would strongly come down on the side of user experience and perspective. Something is conspicuously absent at the moment from the evaluations of the Work Programme, as we have statistics that show the Work Programme is not working for disabled people. One in three of the people on the scheme are disabled people, but only one in five job outcomes are for a disabled person.

We have those figures: they are pretty clear; they are pretty damning. We have the evaluations that have been carried out by academics, which are telling us some of these things. However, one of the things that is missing is a systematic way of collecting user views.

**Q123 Anne Marie Morris:** What do you think about the independent assessor idea?

**Robert Trotter:** There is potentially some value in that. The thing I am thinking of is the Work Capability Assessment. There was the Harrington review, which was an independent review. It went through three iterations and there are still problems in the Work Capability Assessment it is fair to say. The question in relation to an independent assessor is the leverage and bite they would have to make changes in the programme.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** You are going to need a variety of tools. Minimum standards are one thing; people need to be clear this should not be a minimum people do not go above. At the moment, 58% of homeless people have not had any proper assessment of their needs and understanding. Distance-travelled tools are out there, which are not just about the progress you have made but also about the confidence the individual feels. Lots of organisations do client feedback. It should be there. It does not mean you mandate a single system, but you have a system that is verifiable and you report that to DWP and, crucially, to your clients and other organisations. Mark Hoban has started taking about progression payments when you are in work. That should be looked at in the pre-work journey, particularly if you are in a work placement or volunteering. There is the Merlin Standard, which DWP will probably come and talk about and say is really good.

**Glenda Jackson:** They can't even define it.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** There was supposed to be a framework. It should be used to look at the supply chain and see what is happening there. Ultimately, the DWP needs to do a bit more. They need to pick some areas and do some digging around and see what is actually happening on the ground—open up that black box and see the woodlice crawling under the stones—and see what is happening in different areas. In some areas, if there were poor performance they could take a contract and, effectively, a supply chain in-house to try to get a better sense of what was going on. They really need to understand more what is happening. We also need to look at the basic payment processes. Most of the referrals have been on JSA and have very high levels of need. You cannot do it all with payment by results, but what we have achieved with payment by results at the moment is not fine-tuned enough to recognise what is going on. You do need to look at that.

**Q124 Anne Marie Morris:** I have one final question about complaints. An awful lot of people say the system is not working; why is the level of formal complaints, relatively speaking, so low?

**Laura Dewar:** People do not know how to complain. In fact, they are not told how to complain. A lot of the single parents I interviewed, when they went to their signing on at Jobcentre Plus, would go, “I am not happy about this. What do I do?” They would be told, “You are on the Work Programme; you are nothing to do with us.” There is low understanding of how to complain.

**Q125 Chair:** So you are saying that most people do not know that the Independent Case Examiner exists.

**Laura Dewar:** No.

**Sophie Corlett:** A lot of people with mental health problems do not have the confidence to complain. That is a big issue. People underestimate the impact of mental health problems in that respect. Some people actually drop out of the benefits system, which is probably chalked up as a success, sadly. Actually, the person just cannot interact with it anymore. Another very sad point is that when people are getting a very poor service, for instance, if they have been parked, some people with mental health problems are so grateful to be left alone by a system—because of the WCA and that initial interaction that says, “You will now need to do the things that we say because otherwise you will be sanctioned”—and have not heard anything further, the last thing they are going to do is raise their head above the parapet. That is very unfortunate, because it means we are not finding out the full implications of what is going on.

**Q126 Anne Marie Morris:** What could we do differently? What is the magic bullet that is going to enable people to understand and make sensible use of that complaint process?

**Sophie Corlett:** I have said this before: if you could take the initial bad experience out of the WCA, it would be helpful. If your initial interaction with the Work Programme was a much more positive one, it would be something people would have expectations of and want to be involved in. They would then feel motivated to complain when they were not getting what they felt they had been promised.

**Paul Anders:** This does speak a little bit as well to the issue of minimum standards again. You can think about minimum standards in two ways. Should it be something that, in effect, comes from the DWP and all providers have to meet, or is it just the case of all providers being expected to provide their own minimum offer that they can be held accountable for delivering?

As I am sure the Committee knows, each provider has done that but in some cases they are quite general and not very specific. It might be, “You will have regular contact with a member of staff,” which does not specify who, how or how often, for instance. As a bare minimum, it might be getting providers to work up their own minimum standards to something that is a bit more advanced and clearer, to which people can say, “Hang on; I am not receiving this.”

**Anne Marie Morris:** I think that moves us on to the next section.

**Chair:** Yes, indeed it does. We will move onto payment groups, which we have already covered, but I will leave Glenda to ask this question.

**Glenda Jackson:** Can I raise one point, Chair?

**Chair:** It was your question, Glenda.

**Glenda Jackson:** I know, but this question relates to the previous exchange. I personally found it deeply, deeply unacceptable that Mr Burley implied that a single parent

who was a trained teacher did not want to be a dinner lady because she preferred to be on benefits.

**Mr Burley:** That is absolutely not what I implied, nor would I ever say such a thing. You are misrepresenting the previous discussion.

**Glenda Jackson:** Could I point out that single parents work extremely hard? They have to be two parents, and that is work? Perhaps we should be examining the old, old requirement many, many years ago of keeping women at work but paying them a vast amount of money because of all of the jobs that they actually do at home.

**Chair:** I think our witnesses were very clear in explaining that.

**Glenda Jackson:** I just wanted it on the record. It is completely unacceptable. Now I will come onto my question.

**Q127 Glenda Jackson:** This is for Sophie. You have said the payment groups within the Work Programme are too broad. Presumably you would like to see claimants classified differently; how would you do that? How many payment groups do you think would arise if that happened?

**Sophie Corlett:** This is a really difficult question.

**Glenda Jackson:** That is why we are asking it.

**Sophie Corlett:** We have created a system that depends on a financial incentive, which potentially is the problem. We are going to start off with a system that is based on a financial incentive, which I do not know would be the way I would go.

**Q128 Glenda Jackson:** You mean that payment by results would not be your chosen path in this way. That is what it essentially is, isn't it?

**Sophie Corlett:** Yes. It is very difficult. Once you are going to give anything to a provider who is going to be motivated by the income, you are going to have to find a system that incentivises them in some way. The result is what the system wants out of it. We are stuck with that, but it would be good to look more at what the other mechanisms and drivers might be. This relates to Anne Marie Morris's question about how you mitigate some of the implications of that.

I have not really thought about how many groups you would have, but what you would want to have is an assessment process that looked at and categorised people on a range of different issues, rather than, at the moment, focusing on a functional assessment of somebody's disability. It does not take into account confidence levels; it obviously does not taken into account skills and experience at working; and it does not take into account the difficulties people face externally in terms of employer attitudes. How you could put all of that into a system, I do not know. That would be a challenge for bigger economic heads than mine.

**Paul Anders:** Could I say something very briefly?

**Glenda Jackson:** Absolutely, you can all chip in.

**Paul Anders:** I am aware that this was raised by some of the experts in the previous session. There might be some value in the Department looking at or potentially trialling an approach similar to the Australian JSCI, the Job Seeker Classification Instrument model, which, as the Committee may know, has been developed and refined over a number of years.

I am not going to claim it is perfect, or that in its own way it is not without its own problems, but it is probably a more reliable indicator of needs, barriers and the amount of support needed to overcome them than this very crude, broad payment-by-benefit-type system that we have at the moment.

**Q129 Sheila Gilmore:** I hope people who are watching this do not think people on this side of the room are not interested in the subject; it is just the way the questions have fallen that we have the second half and are now running out of time.

If we had a test like that, who would do it? It is relevant to all of these questions. Is this something that Jobcentres should do? Should the Work Programme provider do it? If it then defines what money you get, should it be a Work Programme provider who does it?

**Duncan Shrubsole:** Ideally, this is where you would have a warm handover. There would be a three-way between the Work Programme provider, the Jobcentre and the individual themselves. At the moment, as I talked about, there are higher payment groups such as the early-entrant groups, where you would get an extra £3,000 if Jobcentre Plus identified them properly; they are not currently. There is a challenge here that you do not want to do it completely with the Work Programme provider, because they might start finding barriers to work that were going to chalk up. It is going to involve time and effort, but a calibrated system with a range of individual payments reflecting barriers and needs would ideally be done on the basis that Jobcentre Plus understand it and are clear, the Work Programme provider understands it and is clear and then the support they are referred to is the best support.

The fundamental challenge at the moment is that we have said it should be a system based on need, but we built it around benefit types. The benefit type you were on does not necessarily reflect your need, particularly, because we have the WCA process as well. Potentially, the WCA process lands you not only in a category that is putting conditions around you to move into work, but you might actually be able to make it into work but you are not then entitled to the support that would allow you to do that because you are put under the JSA group rather than the ESA group. You cannot take away from the fact that this WCA-Work Programme interaction is a real problem for any system that relies on payment by benefit type.

**Sophie Corlett:** I do not think Mind would want to see one assessment that covers both the benefit and the need. The level of anxiety that relates to the WCA process—and will always do, even with a fantastic system, because it relates to someone's income—is not a good basis for a good discussion about needs.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** They still need to be separate.

**Paul Anders:** We would agree with that as well.

**Q130 Glenda Jackson:** That leads on very neatly to the next question. If the Work Programme does move away from classifying the claimant according to benefit type—which you have already said is the wrong way round—is it not going to become excessively complex from an administrative point of view? Could that not have a knock-on deleterious effect on the claimant? They would actually slip further and further down the system. We are seeing, at the moment, are we not, that the concentration is on JSA? The hardest to reach are effectively being parked. If this changed, could there be a knock-on effect of leaving your client groups further down the chain?

**Robert Trotter:** There are two things. Firstly, there is the issue of how we assess distance from work and vulnerability, which comes under the Work Capability Assessment thing. That is one issue.

The second thing is a gateway mechanism into the Work Programme, which is what Duncan is talking about, where you have the individual concerned, the provider and the Jobcentre Plus advisor all working collaboratively to decide what happens.

Is there a question around complexity? Would that make too many categories that are too difficult to administer? I would strongly argue that it would not. The reason I would argue that is because person-centred planning has become the gold standard across a range of

different public service types: things like social care, for instance, would be the best example. That has not added to the complexity; rather, it has streamlined it for the user. Rather than starting from the perspective of bureaucracy, you start from the perspective of what the user's experience is and what they want as they go through the programme. By building it around the individual, you achieve all sorts of positive knock-on effects, but reduce the complexity for them. It is interesting; there are two separate issues.

**Q131 Glenda Jackson:** Where is that support going to come from? You are talking about a perfect system of people who absolutely understand, which we were led to believe by the Government was going to be inherent in this programme but it clearly is not. You have mentioned the Work Capability Assessment. The complaints we all receive as constituency MPs on that are growing exponentially. Where would you look for that kind of support?

**Paul Anders:** In many cases, those specialist organisations are already on Work Programme supply chains but are not being used.

**Q132 Glenda Jackson:** So it is the linkage, is it? Is it already out there, but nobody is tapping into it.

**Paul Anders:** It is the linkage and, if the route we are going to go down is really around tinkering with incentives to align them, maybe we also need to look at some of that payment being reallocated and coming at different points. For example, if what is needed—I am thinking specifically about people with a history of drug use—is some form of very specific assessment followed by some psychosocial intervention, which is then handed back over to a mainstream provider, this is something that should probably come reasonably early in the process. There could be an argument that the money to pay for that should be accessed earlier, rather than being contingent on an outcome.

In terms of whether the specialist support is out there, it is certainly out there and in many cases is nominally—if not in reality—in Work Programme supply chains. If the incentives are going to be the levers, it is about whether they are pushed left and right as well as forwards and backwards, if that makes sense.

**Q133 Glenda Jackson:** Where should the responsibility for that referral lie? Should it be Jobcentre Plus?

**Paul Anders:** Within the current system it lies with the prime contractor. We may be going back to this idea of how quality is monitored. One of the things that would be of interest in terms of assessing the quality of the Work Programme is whether those options to refer people to specialist services are being exercised.

**Glenda Jackson:** We were told they were; that is how they got their contracts.

**Sophie Corlett:** In the best circumstances, this is what happens anyway: people receive a good assessment and then they receive support, advice, guidance and interventions appropriate to that assessment. In the best circumstances, this can support somebody to get sustainable work. Making a system that did that routinely would actually not be an administrative burden; it would smooth things out fundamentally for everybody. Jobcentre Plus has a role to play. Whether everybody should be going into the Work Programme or whether more people should be going to Work Choice or whether there should be other things available at that level is worth looking at.

**Q134 Sheila Gilmore:** I wonder if I can ask a follow-up to something that Graham asked earlier; I wanted to ask it then. For those, initially, who may have had experience as sub-contractors: Graham's challenge was whether you were feeding your expertise into the

system. My question would be this: if you have been or are contractors, have you ever been asked to feed that into the process by the prime contractor you were working with?

**Sophie Corlett:** One of the things we have had most referrals on, which some of our local Minds have contacted us about, has been when either the Jobcentre or the contractor has contacted them because they have had people who they feel should not be involved in work-related activities at all and should be in the Support Group. They have had them referred back to them to support them with an appeal. Some of the contact we have had has not been the contact we expected to have, which has been very interesting.

**Paul Anders:** As an umbrella organisation, our input has been sought by providers. Treatment providers have been asked to go in and provide training to Work Programme providers. It is that kind of thing. It is going on; it is maybe not having the impact at the scale we would like to see it.

**Q135 Sheila Gilmore:** Can we expect this from voluntary organisations? Contractors, it seems to me, pitched for this work on the basis that they could provide all of this. I am uncertain why you should be being asked to provide all this expertise, apparently for free.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** In some instances, voluntary organisations are subsidising the Work Programme because they are doing things like continuing to run training, employment, supporting employment opportunities, work placements and more in-depth help around housing or other issues—but they are not getting paid for it out of the Work Programme supply chain. We do it because we are charities and we want to ensure that those needs are met.

There are challenges about what is happening. Graham, you asked, “Are we feeding back to the Work Programme?” The problem is the Work Programme is not a thing. In every area it is a range of different bodies. Your issues might be at a whole range of different points. People are not necessarily clear themselves, as sub-contractors, why they are not getting referrals. Is it because Jobcentre Plus is not passing the referrals on? Is it because of the prime? There are a whole series of conversations that you have to have, which takes time. Crisis is focusing on the Jobcentre end, and we are trying to provide training and expertise about better identification there. Other people are working on being able to make their supply chain work, but it takes time and effort to follow up the supply chain or individual complaints or client experiences.

**Q136 Sheila Gilmore:** When WCA was introduced there was a second stage to it, which was the Work-Focused Health-Related Assessment. It was done at the same time—which may be problematic, perhaps, as Sophie said earlier. It was in the system initially, but it was dropped by the Government a couple of years back and has not been reinstated. The aim of that, effectively, it seems to me, was how somebody’s condition could be managed and how they could be helped into work. That seems to be closer to some of these distance-to-work conversations you are having.

**Robert Trotter:** I would have to look into the evaluations of how that worked; I do not know the details of it, unfortunately.

**Sheila Gilmore:** I do not think it ran for very long, which was part of the problem. Of course, WCA was only introduced in 2008. This was dropped in 2010.

**Robert Trotter:** I would strongly support anything that brought in to the Work Capability Assessment more measures of employability and measures of the barriers disabled people face, rather than focusing on medical capability. It is important to focus on the big question around WCA, which is the fact it is placing on the Work Programme disabled people

on Employment and Support Allowance, who are a long way from work, who need a great deal of support and who are not being supported through the Work Programme.

We know the figures overall for the Work Programme, which are that one in three are disabled people but only one in five of the job outcomes are from that group. For the ESA group those statistics are far, far worse. It is something like 1.3% of claimants who come on to the Work Programme from the Employment and Support Allowance have a job outcome. For those who come off Incapacity Benefit and then onto ESA, the figures are even worse. We are looking at 0.3%. Scope's statistical analysis says that only around 30 people from that group are getting jobs through the Work Programme.

The Work Programme is not supporting this particular group into work. That problem is compounded when you look at the overall picture of the employment support landscape. We have spoken a lot about Work Choice today, which is a pretty successful scheme in comparison to the Work Programme: there is a 24% to 25% outcome rate there. Again, only 16% to 17% of people on Work Choice are in the ESA claimant group. There is a group of people who are not being supported by the Work Programme, who are not being supported by Work Choice and who are falling through the gaps in those programmes. I would draw that back to the issue around the Work Capability Assessment.

**Q137 Sheila Gilmore:** Sophie was suggesting that if you test people for their eligibility for a benefit and you mix that up with the other assessment, would you suggest they probably should not be done at the same time, because the purpose is different?

**Sophie Corlett:** Yes, I would separate them out. It may well be appropriate to consider how difficult it is for someone to get a job in terms of deciding what their benefit is. A conversation about someone's income should be separate from a conversation about what support they get. Whatever goes into the conversation about what benefit you receive, when you start to have a conversation about how Jobcentre Plus will help you or what we can put in place to support you or what you need to do and what you want from us to help you do that: all those sorts of conversations need to happen in a much more positive, less anxiety-inducing environment.

**Paul Anders:** Certainly, for JSCI, it is very much not something that could realistically form part of the WCA, in that it is looking at different things and is, as much as anything, a predictive tool.

**Q138 Chair:** When the Government suspended the Work-Focused Health-Related Assessment—or WFHRA, as it was called—they said it was because they were introducing the Work Programme and the initial interview that a referee had with either the prime or the sub-contractor would be the equivalent. From what you are saying and the evidence we have, that does not seem to be happening. Is that right?

**Paul Anders:** Yes, it is, from our experience. Some of the prime contractors have been kind enough to share their diagnostic tools with me. The questions might be specific and detailed with regard to issues around transport, travel or physical health. The questions then start to become vague when it gets to anything that might be considered a more socially difficult subject to raise. For things like accommodation, drug use, alcohol use, mental health, the questions start to get a little bit vague and, in some cases, euphemistic. Certainly, there is scope that, if people do not volunteer that information or are unable to read between the lines of the questions that are being asked, the information will not be picked up by the Work Programme provider at that point.

**Sophie Corlett:** What Paul said underlines that it is an assessment rather than a discussion. Duncan was describing earlier having a conversation with the individual, Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme provider, who might be providing that support. The

conversation might be, “What are your aspirations? How might we get you there? What we have is this. What is in the work environment at the moment is that.” That is not a list of questions and writing down some things in a form; that is a conversation. This is the beginning of the process. I think that is a qualitatively different approach.

**Q139 Glenda Jackson:** In those situations, would it be helpful if the individual claimant had someone with them who, if they dried up for a minute, could act as their voice? Do you think that would be valuable and useful? It would not cover everybody, because, of course, there are people who have no one they could take with them.

**Sophie Corlett:** It would be really valuable for mental health. They might not even speak up for the person, but having them there is confidence-inducing in itself.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** Going back to that thing about assessment, the thing we need to be clear about in the Work Programme is that much of what is happening is based around a model of a generic jobseeker. Some of those questions about travel and so on are barriers. They are also barriers in the sense that people think, “If I give them some money to help cover travel, it will cover that. It will help them to prepare a CV.”

Much of it is what was previously happening in Jobcentre Plus or under New Deal or other programmes. It is not to say it is not important or that it does not help people to think about travel and budgeting and whether you can get a suit and how to improve someone’s CV. However, what the Work Programme was supposed to be was more than that. That is why we, as a set of client groups, are here. We generally represent people who need more than that to tackle those issues around debt, housing, mental and physical health, self-confidence and all the rest of it. We are never getting to the point where that is being unlocked in the supply chain. We are saying, “We will provide this range of in-depth, tailored support, which we really need to help these people get into work.”

What is happening is—there are exceptions—a lot of fairly standard conversations. We had a client who was sent off on a literacy course to improve his English because he was from an African background. Actually, his English was perfect. That was a case of the computer saying, “You go off and do a literacy course.” We had people hauled off programmes and training they had been doing and which were good for them. This has happened under previous programmes as well. They are told, “You will go off and do basic Word” or whatever, even if you are actually quite good at computers. What we need is a tailored approach and what we are getting too often is standardised assessment and standardised offers.

**Q140 Teresa Pearce:** I am going to make a point about what was said earlier about the amount of time that is spent in Jobcentre Plus and personalising it. I was on Jobseeker’s Allowance when I took a voluntary redundancy. I did not really need it; I wanted my stamp paid, so I had to claim. I remember saying to the person there, “Actually, I am thinking of going on a course instead of looking for a job.” She tried to refer me to Resources Plus, which is a place that does numeracy and literacy courses. I had just left a six-figure salary job. I clearly did not need that. The point was she did not look at me as a person or even look at my CV. If she was giving me the wrong advice, which I could reject, what sort of wrong advice is being given to other people? It is exactly that. The people who come through need to be customers, not commodities. It seems to me that the Work Programme policy is good, but they are delivering a contract rather than a policy. If the policy fails, it will be because of the contract—not because of what everybody wants, which is for people to have sustainable work.

**Robert Trotter:** The Work Programme, as delivered through payment by results, is a step change in policy and process. It does not seem to have delivered a step change in

outcomes yet. Some of the people on previous panels have mentioned using prices to drive improvements in the system. It is worth raising some scepticism about that.

To give you an example, there is one young man in his mid-20s, who is one of Scope's customers. He has learning difficulties, mobility impairments and epilepsy. He has been on 17 different employment support programmes and has not yet found a job. He is incredibly motivated; he sees the value of work; he wants to get into work. He is an ex-IB claimant, so he attracts the highest placement fee for the programme and he has not yet been found a job. There is some scepticism about whether making him of greater monetary value to a provider is necessarily going to deliver the right kind of support and quality of support to get him the kind of job placement he is looking for. That is an issue worth raising.

**Paul Anders:** There probably needs to be a balanced approach, looking at the range of levers that are still available—the ones that have not been surrendered as part of the black box process. Clearly, the direction of travel is that the price incentivisation is a part of that, but I would not call it a complete solution to any extent.

**Q141 Nigel Mills:** We have covered a lot of the specialist expertise areas. The people you are trying to support need specialised support. Do you see the prime contractors getting slowly better in this area and learning how to deal with people, or do you see it still being as bad as it was at the start?

**Paul Anders:** There is some improvement in some areas, around the type and frequency of communication that goes on. As I said earlier, there are some encouraging signs around that. The problem that comes into the Work Programme is that, if one looks at performance against expectations—I do not want to go too far into that, other than to point this out—at its current level of performance, I would assume their income flows will be below where they were expected, which could create further difficulties in accessing specialist support. Is there, in a sense, a financial imperative to retrench somewhat and concentrate on the core business of getting the easiest to help back to work? The more expensive business of supporting those with additional barriers gets put to one side. Yes, there are some small encouraging signs in localised places, but I am still very concerned about the future.

**Q142 Nigel Mills:** You are not seeing, say, x contractor in x city, where they have a big incidence of mental health issues, becoming quite good at supporting those people? Are you seeing that kind of specialism being built up by certain contractors in certain areas?

**Paul Anders:** Yes, within some prime contractors—probably less so in others.

**Laura Dewar:** In terms of the single parents I interviewed, there was not much evidence of people being transferred on to other services. It was always internally focused. The one person who did move into employment had a lone parent advisor on the Work Programme. They had a system that when people were referred to the programme that is who they would see. It was really effective. All the evidence from the DWP research is that lone parent advisors within Jobcentre Plus were really effective.

I was not seeing much specialism at all overall. That is a real issue and it does not seem to be changing. It is more expensive to have that specialism, but it definitely helped that person move into work because they were seeing in the round very much that they also needed to care for their child, negotiate with an employer and do all sorts of things to help someone move into work. They were also very good at supporting that person once they were in work and giving ongoing support.

**Q143 Nigel Mills:** We are in a situation where we probably need more specialist sub-contracting or spot contracting, but there is less money around for contractors, given they

have not hit their targets. Is the only fix for that the Government should mandate some contractors and say, “You must sub-contract people in these categories somewhere?”

**Laura Dewar:** It could be internally. This was a lone parent advisor within the provider; it was not a moved-on service.

**Paul Anders:** Part of the problem of updating something is that it is not always easy to identify people who need that sort of service. We have spoken about how that need is not always identified at Jobcentre Plus. Similarly, it is not always picked up at the Work Programme stage.

**Q144 Nigel Mills:** That does not mean you could not mandate it.

**Paul Anders:** It would make it very difficult.

**Sophie Corlett:** When it comes to mental health, very large numbers of people within the system, including people on JSA, have mental health problems of some sort. Those issues might not be the primary reason why they are not in work, but have become an issue for them. To have a very fixed system that says, “If you are a single parent you go here; if you are homeless you go there,” does not actually take into account the complexity of people’s lives. There does need to be external expertise, but that will, again, be no substitute for having a good understanding and level of expertise actually within the prime.

**Laura Dewar:** If I could give a small example, lots of single parents, before they move into work will get a better-off-in-work calculation, which they used to be able to get at Jobcentre Plus. That is very important for someone moving off benefits and into work. There is not that expertise within the Work Programme, yet single parents on the Work Programme will say, “Who can give me that calculation?” They are told, “We do not have that expertise.” Yet they cannot go back to the Jobcentre and see someone there, because they are on the Work Programme. Things like that might seem slightly mundane, but they are actually very important. From some of the examples that I have seen, it was actually stopping people moving into work.

**Duncan Shrubsole:** There are probably three sets of things they could do. One is about better transparency and ensuring the existing contracts work. Secondly, DWP has the right to terminate some contracts. There might be a stage where it says, “Okay, we need to terminate a prime contractor’s contract, and re-let it when there is better specification around disadvantaged groups and the use of sub-contracts: when they appear on a bid they are in the supply chain and there is clarity over referrals etc.”

The third approach is to say that, for the Work Programme to work for everyone who is out of work, we perhaps need some more differentiation and more programmes like Work Choice but for other groups—where there is some more direct contracting of specialist providers outside the arrangement through the prime. That might be better value for money and might at least deliver better certainty of who is going to be worked with, what they get and understanding what the outcomes are.

**Q145 Nigel Mills:** That is going to be hard, isn’t it? If I am a prime contractor, I might be doing really well with people who have been out of work a long time—my statistics are pretty good and I have met my contract requirements—but I might be terrible at the harder to reach, because I have prioritised the ones who are easier. How are you measuring missing their contract requirements? You could take the contract away, but it would be quite hard, then, wouldn’t it? You would be getting quite granular in the detail of who is getting helped by what contractor.

**Sophie Corlett:** Maybe that is where a much better assessment conversation with Jobcentre Plus and a much better understanding of who you are passing on to the provider and what their needs are would be very helpful. That granularity would then be available, because

you would know—because you would have the assessments—who the provider was prioritising and who they were putting aside.

Maybe, it would be for Jobcentre Plus to make better decisions. You might have a system where you perhaps say, “That is fine. You are very good at that; carry on being good at that, if that is what you are good at. These other people we will give to somebody who is good at that.” There is no reason why we should assume that a one-size-fits-all system would work. In fact, we know it does not.

**Q146 Chair:** You seem to be saying that financial incentives have not really been there for the prime contractors to sub-contract unless it is an end-to-end, but for very small bits of the customer journey that has not been financially viable. That has been why you have been providing that service free. Laura, you gave an example of a lone parent advisor working for the prime. Within the way the contract is, there is presumably nothing to stop the primes directly employing people with that expertise and then doing the triaging of their own client groups.

*Laura Dewar:* Yes, that is the example that I had.

**Chair:** If the primes perhaps themselves started—rather than, as Nigel says, looking at the low-hanging fruit of the easy ones—looking at all the others, would that get over a lot of the problems we have been talking about regarding lack of financing and specialist help?

*Duncan Shrubsole:* We should stand up for the client group, primarily. If they are going to be helped by a prime contractor who has put in place, in house, the range of support, it is a good thing. That would then be an individual who is then getting helped back to work. The challenge is that is not what we are seeing.

**Chair:** That is not what is happening at the moment.

*Duncan Shrubsole:* If they wanted to do that, they could take the view, “We want control of our staffing, our referral numbers and a much closer view on what we deliver. We will have it in-house.” That would be fine, but this is not the experience that is happening.

*Laura Dewar:* Additionally, some of the expertise—the primes and what worked—was around things like people with a HR specialism within a prime contractor of the Work Programme, which is very effective for some single parents. They knew what agencies to refer them to: they helped them write their CV in a better way, a competence-based CV rather than a chronological one, because they are not going to have such a long career history. Yes, I agree: prime contractors can have that expertise.

**Chair:** These are questions for us to put to the prime contractors. Thank you very much for coming along this morning. It has been quite a long morning. It is always difficult when there are five witnesses and everybody, quite rightly, has their own views. It is always difficult to fit everything in. Can I thank you all for coming along this morning? Your evidence will be very useful to us when we come to complete our report. Thank you very much.