

The Work Programme Partnership Forum **Thursday 08 December 2011**

Formal Opening of the Work Programme Partnership Forum

Richard Aitken-Davies formally opened the Work Programme Partnership Forum and thanked everyone for their attendance.

Youth Contract

The Youth Contract Project Manager and the Head of Provider Performance for CCSD gave an overview of the Youth Contract and the next steps for provider engagement.

Youth Contract project will focus on the 18-24 age group and will look to build on existing mechanisms in development of the delivery model.

Detailed development of the programme for 16-17 year olds is still being worked through and we are awaiting a decision on which Department will lead on this, either DWP or DfE.

The wage incentive will be available from April 2012 through the Work Programme.

The expectation is that jobs will come from the private sector.

Payments to employers will be linked to sustained work.

DWP will look to keep the processes as simple as possible to minimise bureaucracy for both providers and employers. However, DWP need to make sure the right balance is struck between simplicity and ensuring that risk is mitigated around fraud and compliance.

A working group will be set up with providers and employers to work through the detail and implications of the wage subsidy.

Universal Credit (UC)

Strategy and Universal Credit (UC) Conditionality Policy colleagues spoke to the Forum members on UC and future engagement plans.

There is a clear Ministerial steer in place not to change the basic Work Programme (WP) model during current contracts through development of UC.

There will be a UC Pathfinder in April 2013 and once more detail is known Forum members will be informed.

Work needs to progress to translate current WP processes effectively into UC.

UC will work with HMRC to link employment and payment details for claimants.

Detailed development work will start early next year and a working group will be set up to engage with providers to consult and work through the detail.

Forum members discussed the importance of ensuring we can continue to refer UC claimants to the existing WP payment groups and at the same referral points and looked forward to engaging with the Department in detailed design.

Forum members welcomed the overall approach to change.

Sharing Information with Partners

A presentation on sharing information with partners was given by the Head of Provider Performance.

Information and data sharing will be in line with UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) guidelines.

Proposals have been passed to and are being considered by the Minister in the light of advice from UKSA.

A focus group will be set up with providers to look at the impact of proposals.

Provider Forum

Representatives from Avanta and EOS opened this session raising discussion points for the Forum:

- Feedback from claimants on the change of service has been positive, however, DWP and providers need to continue to build on this to reduce complaints and sell the benefits of the WP to claimants;
- ESA referral levels are increasing, but not equally across all areas. Further work is underway to ensure referral arrangements are working as intended;
- With the award of recent European Social Fund (ESF) contracts, DWP and Forum members need to look at how we can utilise the Work Programme to maximise support for vulnerable families;
- Providers spoke of good working relationships at a local level with Jobcentre Plus;
- ESF audit requirements are extremely time consuming and resource intensive. The Department undertook to ensure no unnecessary additional burden was placed on providers whilst stressing the need to comply with the audit requirements attached to ESF funds.

Improving employment outcomes for people who have mental health problems

The Co-chair of the Work Programme and Mental Health Providers Task Group spoke to Forum members on the principles set out by the Task Group. He asked all providers to sign up to the consensus statement which outlines the Task Groups joint vision for better employment and health outcomes for people with mental health conditions.

Re-profiling of Work Programme volumes

Based on November OBR forecasts, strategy colleagues talked through the re-profiling principles with Forum members. Providers are to be informed of Contract Package Area (CPA) information prior to Christmas.

Additional discussion points

The introduction of CPA level forums to support the National Forum was agreed.

Agreement to develop a National Operations Forum to support the Partnership Forum in looking at detailed process and design issues.

There are ongoing efforts to improve communications channels and the interface between DWP and providers. Providers were asked to consider nominating a single point of contact in their organisations where communications could be sent. This was agreed in principle and providers were asked to send nominated details to the Forum secretariat.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) will report to the Partnership Forum and the Work Programme and Mental Health Providers Task Group will report to the Forum as a SIG.

DWP officials will continue to work with providers to ensure that WP guidance is consistent with policy requirement and that it meets the needs of everyone.

Richard Aitken-Davies thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the Forum.

Attendees

- **Richard Aitken-Davies (Independent Chair)**
- ESG Group
- MAXIMUS
- Rehab Group
- Working Links
- BEST Ltd
- Prospects Services Ltd
- Seetec
- Reed In Partnership
- EOS
- A4E
- Ingeus UK Ltd
- G4S
- JHP Group Ltd
- Newcastle College (Intraining)
- Avanta
- CDG
- Pertemps People Development Group
- Serco
- Co-chair of the Work Programme and Mental Health providers Task Group

DWP Officials

- Alan Cave
- Ruth Owen

N.B names of some DWP official and provider representatives have been removed as disclosure would breach one of the data protection principles.