

Statement in response to Public Accounts Committee report on the Work Programme

A DWP spokesperson said:

"This report (22/02/13) paints a skewed picture. More than 200,000 people have moved off benefits and into a job thanks to the Work Programme.

"It is making a real difference to tens of thousands of the hardest to help jobseekers. Long-term unemployment fell by 15,000 in the latest quarter.

"The Work Programme gives support to claimants for two years and it hasn't even been running that long yet, so it's still early days. We know the performance of our providers is improving.

"Previous schemes paid out too much up front regardless of success, but by paying providers for delivering results, the Work Programme is actually offering the taxpayer real value for money."

On comments by the chair of the PAC

1. The chair of the Public Accounts Committee said that "between June 2011 and July 2012, only 3.6% of people referred to the Work Programme moved off benefit and into work".

In response, a DWP spokesperson said: "This claim is wrong. More than 200,000 participants have already got into work. These comments are very disappointing and are misleading the public about the Work Programme."

The 3.6% figure is based on 31,000 people who qualified for a job "outcome" - that means they had to stay in work usually for at least six months, or three months for the hardest to help. People in work, but who had not reached this point, will not have been counted. Information from industry body the Employment Related Services Association (Ersa) shows that actually 207,000 people on the Work Programme got into work by September.

2. The chair of the PAC also claimed that: "It is shocking that, of the 9,500 former incapacity benefit claimants referred to providers, only 20 people have been placed in a job that has lasted three months."

In fact, the information provided to the committee by the National Audit Office in December shows that 160 people ex-incapacity benefit claimants have found work lasting at least three months. 20 of these were claiming Employment and Support Allowance, and another 140 had moved onto Jobseekers Allowance.

By the end of July, 15,770 ex-incapacity benefit claimants had been referred to the Work Programme. 9,440 of these were claiming Employment and Support Allowance, 6,330 were claiming Jobseeker's Allowance.

How is the Work Programme performing?

Official statistics showed that from June 2011 until July 2012:

- 31,200 participants had stayed in work for long enough to achieve a job “outcome” – that means they stayed in work for a sustained period and the organisation has claimed a payment.
- Of those, 19,300 had been in work for at least six months and 11,900 for at least three months.
- Of those who joined the Work Programme in June 2011, 9.8% had been in sustained work.

Data from industry body the Employment Related Services Association showed that by September 2012:

- Over 200,000 participants had got off benefits and into work.

Department for Work and Pensions data showed that:

- At least 56% of the scheme’s earliest participants had come off benefits.
- Nearly one in five of the earliest participants had spent at least six consecutive months off benefits.