

Freedom of Information request 654/2013

Received 10 February 2013

Published

Information request

Draft legislation is proposing that unemployed recipients of Universal Credit spend up to 35 hours a week looking for work: I interpret this as meaning a 7 hour active work search per weekday, every week day. At present the government's flagship Work Programme provides most support to unemployed individuals trying to secure gainful employment in a failing economy.

Out of all Work Programme providers is there one single provider, or any sub-contractors, offering clients 35 hours of work-search support, on a weekly basis, week in and week out, indefinitely, while claimants remain in receipt of benefits until they secure full-time employment?

If the answer to the above question is negative, how can the DWP reasonably expect that millions of individual benefit claimants, many of whom have no regular access to the internet, will be able to fulfil a preposterous 35 hour work-search requirement such as that currently proposed by the DWP?

(How can individuals be fairly expected do, unaided, what private Work Programme provider organisations are unable to do commercially and professionally?)

If the DWP are really serious about introducing such a perverse and impossible condition, how many claimants does the department expect to fail said condition and be stripped summarily of financial support, for up to three years, through no fault of their own? The department must surely have some idea in respect to how many people might end up being be penalised and made destitute? Or is the department clueless about potential ill effects in respect to such a policy were it implemented and subsequently enforced locally?

If I didn't know better I might suspect that the DWP were making up policy on the hoof.

DWP response

We do not have the information you have requested about individual worksearch support offered by Work Programme providers. The Work Programme is operated using a 'black box' approach. The providers are paid for the outcomes they achieve, and we do not seek to determine how they

achieve these outcomes. As such the level of support offered to a claimant taking part in the Work Programme is entirely at the provider's discretion.

We consider it reasonable to expect that work search activity will take up the majority of a claimant's time – normally 35 hours a week. Within this expectation we will take account of any work preparation activity being undertaken. We will not specify that a claimant must do seven hours of work search each week day. Work search expectations will differ for each claimant depending on their individual circumstances and job goals and advisers will tailor requirements for each claimant. Our regulations allow that where a claimant has done all that could reasonably be expected of them - for example they have applied for all suitable jobs and undertaken all the activities set out in their work search and work preparation plan - this may be considered sufficient even where the time taken was less than the hours expected.

In Universal Credit, work related requirements will be clearly notified and explained to claimants. It is only where a claimant fails to meet a requirement without a good reason that a sanction will be imposed. Although we have not made a formal estimate of sanction numbers under Universal Credit, we anticipate that only a small number of claimants will be subject to 3 year sanctions. This is because these sanctions may only be applied where a claimant *repeatedly* and without good reason fails to meet the most important work related requirements, for example refusing three times to apply for suitable job opportunities.

Before it is decided whether a sanction is to be applied, a claimant will have invited to provide evidence of good reason for why they did not meet the requirement. Claimants will have the right to ask for a reconsideration and to appeal of a sanction decision.