



Public Accounts Committee

**Sir Peter Schofield KCB
Permanent Secretary
Department for Work & Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9DA**

By email

10 July 2025

The Public Accounts Committee's report on jobcentres

Dear Permanent Secretary,

Thank you for your letter of 30 June following our evidence session on jobcentres on 15 May. In your letter you set out the changes you are making to the frequency and length of appointments for service users in jobcentres, which you first introduced on a temporary basis in order to manage the shortage of work coaches.

In our report on jobcentres, published on 2 July, which the Committee agreed and issued under embargo before receiving your letter, we concluded that your department seems complacent about the impact that the reduction in support caused by the shortage of work coaches may be having on claimants. We noted that you were considering making some of the measures in your local flexibility framework permanent changes and recommended that you should evaluate the impact on claimants of jobcentres implementing measures from the framework, and share the results with the Committee, before making any of the measures permanent changes.

Your letter, however, confirms that a decision has already been taken to make some of the measures in the flexibility framework permanent, with immediate effect. I was disappointed to see that the evidence you cite in support of the changes is not based on a robust assessment of the impact of the framework which has been operating since September 2023, but is instead based on data that is now very old and of questionable comparative value. The National Audit Office set out in its report the limitations of the *Weekly Work Search Review Trial* which, although dated April 2018, is based on trials from 2015 with Jobseeker's Allowance claimants. Similarly, the *Universal Credit: In-Work Progression Randomised Controlled Trial*, while more relevant as it relates to Universal Credit claimants, was based on trials between 2015 and 2018. The only current information appears to be feedback from your staff, as opposed to the experience of claimants, about the length of the first claimant commitment meeting.

This decision, therefore, deepens my concern about the impact on claimants of the changes you are making. And, although there is much work to do before you implement the proposed reforms to benefits and support to help people with disabilities and health conditions into work, this reduction now in the support for claimants does not seem to fit well with the undertakings your Secretary of State has given to bring forward extra investment in employment support.



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The Committee therefore looks forward to your formal response to its recommendations, including a substantive response to recommendation 1. Given space constraints, it would be helpful if, alongside the formal Treasury Minute, you could provide a separate letter to cover the following:

- a) further information to explain how this decision is being or has been implemented, including how you will gain assurance that claimants who need a longer initial meeting with a work coach will get that level of support – based on their needs rather than on your department's resourcing constraints;
- b) further detail about the research you undertook with your frontline staff, such as the number of staff consulted, where they were located and the extent to which they reported positive and negative impacts;
- c) assurance that your department will undertake and publish a robust assessment, in response to recommendation 1 of our report, of the impact of the recent reductions in support and that you will monitor impact on an ongoing basis, including on different groups of people; and
- d) your analysis of the impact that this decision will have on your ongoing ability to match the demand for support with supply, both in jobcentres now and as you develop the new jobs and careers service, and the extent to which this decision is based on affordability concerns or ongoing issues with work coach recruitment and retention, or both.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, to the Comptroller and Auditor General, and to the Treasury Officer of Accounts.

Yours Sincerely

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts

Cc'd
Debbie Abrahams MP, Chair, Work and Pensions Committee
Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General
David Fairbrother, Treasury Officer of Accounts