

4 October 2023

Staffing Chaos in the DWP

The DWP has introduced a range of measures such as easements in Universal Credit and proposing the opening of a new 600 seat site in an attempt to manage staffing chaos.

Staffing chaos

The difficulty that DWP is having in recruiting is apparent from the raft of panic measures that have been introduced to mitigate against it. So far, we have had jobs shipped out to Northern Ireland, threats of privatisation, easements and the opening of a new site. It is clear that working for DWP is an unattractive proposition. The DWP really needs to improve on poor pay and terms and conditions to ensure the most vulnerable in society receive the kind of service they deserve.

Recent announcements by the chancellor at the Conservative Party Conference only serve to increase the feeling of chaos around staffing in the DWP.

PCS is gathering evidence of the impacts of staffing chaos; overwork, stress and anxiety, to assist our negotiations with DWP and to lobby politically. Please share your experiences by emailing dwp@pcs.org.uk

Targeted Case Reviews - Swindon new office

On 20 September the department announced plans to recruit 600 full time equivalent (FTE) EO staff to a newly created site in Swindon as part of their Targeted Case Review (TCR) project to review incorrect UC claims as announced in the 2022 Autumn Statement.

The government has made it clear that TCR work is a priority for the DWP. The department therefore needs around 5,900 FTE TCR agents undertaking case reviews by March 2025, with 2,000 required urgently by September 2023 and 3,430 by March 2024.

The DWP has chosen a vacant site in Swindon that is already part of the government estate that could accommodate over 600 FTE. The recruitment

advert went live on 26 September 2023, with successful candidates expected to start January 2024.

PCS welcomes any recruitment. However we are looking to meet with the DWP to understand the rationale about the location of this job role, and ensure any recruitment is done in the correct manner.

The mass recruitment into Targeted Case Review roles is unbalancing other services in DWP with large numbers of AOs moving into the new roles. Promotion is to be welcomed but the DWP are not addressing the chaos that is left behind in the areas that staff are migrating from.

Kick in the teeth for members recently made redundant

The decision to open a new office in Swindon is a kick in the teeth for the circa 800 staff recently made redundant after many site closures.

Easements

Last month PCS met with the UC director and were told of some planned additional support measures to be put in place in the Jobcentre network to manage workloads of work coaches. These measures have now received Treasury approval.

The measures being put in place at national level are:

- Delaying the introduction of the in-work progression conditionality offer for claimants in Light Touch
- Reduce the work coach impact of the lead carer conditionality measure to increase work-focused interviews for lead carers of children aged one and two
- Reduce work coach contact for WHP and IPES participants from fortnightly to once every four weeks, in line with the change to Restart.

It is hoped that these changes will help to manage the overall work coach position, but management are aware that in some locations pressure points will remain.

Area and national support teams are being asked to make sure that as many EO as possible are deployed in Jobcentres as work coaches.

The department has acknowledged that where caseloads are high and all other options have been exhausted it maybe necessary to apply local easements.

In order of priority these are:

1. Shorten initial Claimant Commitment meeting from 50 minutes to 30 minutes
2. Seeing all Intensive Work Search claimants that are currently in PAYE work monthly.
3. Reduce labour market support for the gainfully self-employed in a 12-month start-up period from four to two 30-minute interventions (one at 6 months, one at 12 months).
4. Pause proactive AWCT Health enrolment for people claiming ESA.
5. All claimants receiving fortnightly Work Search Reviews after 13 weeks (instead of 50% weekly, 50% fortnightly).

DWP state they recognise the importance of delivering Jobcentre support as fully as possible and will continue to attempt to deliver on recruitment plans. Clearly the DWP is failing to meet its recruitment targets otherwise it would not be necessary to downgrade the service they are able to offer.

It is clear that there is a need for further recruitment, however the easements are welcome in helping support our members who are feeling the pressure of high workloads.