

Interview with a Job Centre Advisor: sanction targets & corruption revealed

Employment rights, unemployment, Jobcentre & workfare



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1 Comment

@JobcentreMole is a Job Centre advisor who has taken to Twitter to speak out about the Job Centre's unfair treatment of people who are claiming benefits. For obvious reasons he is anonymous. I think that what he's doing is very brave. We did this interview by email. (All emphases are mine).

The Mole says: "I started my career with Jobcentre plus over 15 years ago at such a young age, I have literally done every job at lower (band B) level there is within the Jobcentre. I can assure you my knowledge of Jobcentre Plus is up with the best, I can also assure you I am not alone with my views."

Do the management have targets to sanction x number of people, or are your team encouraged to sanction people?

There is 100% no specific target at all, however it is and has been mentioned before that **each signer should be looking at a minimum of 2 sanctions a day**. say for example offices are looked at in clusters, and say there are 7 offices in a cluster, lets use London for example.... if there are 10 offices in London, Office one achieving 100 sanctions a week, office two 90, three 80 and so forth, I can guarantee you that offices 5 to 10 will be pulled week in week out regarding why they are not achieving what the other offices are achieving. we all have a sister office (generally means an office that has a similar register to yours) and we are marked on our achievements in accordance with theirs. If they have a bad ass office manager who hammers staff to sanction customers, it impacts on office b. **I once saw a guy who works for us sanction 23 customers in one day!, it took him a ridiculous amount of time to do all the paperwork!, had he done this to get a better box marking? or to warrant his job? no he did it because the night before he had watched a programme on tv.** it disgusted me!. There are customers that quite blatantly flaunt the rules and there are the odd customers that indeed require a sanction!, but I mean this, only the odd one!. and never generally the ones that actually get the sanctions!.

What was the worst thing that you saw happen in your Job Centre?

Without a doubt has to be the two facedness of the managers. we have weekly meetings, in these meetings we are encouraged to sanction customers for various reasons mainly not actively seeking employment in adherence to their jobseekers allowance. now not a lot of customers know this but its a lottery who gets pulled, it depends on the member of staff, and also on the customer, example, if a 6ft 2 big aggressive builder was to walk over to the signing section I can assure you he would not be challenged, however the more weaker clientel are. **We give customers a JSA1(ils) form and are encouraged to get them to sign it to (re-open their claim if sanctioned), what we dont tell the customer is that signing this form puts another 2 weeks on the sanction.**

We also do our referrals online now, and these are not vetted by anyone, so basically you could walk into a jobcentre and be pulled for not actively seeking, **we would take the details of what you have been doing over the past fortnight and totally change your answers, thus guaranteeing a sanction.** I have never in my time seen one customer ask to see the papers as to why they have been sanctioned. not one. the unfortunate thing is the general public is too trusting of jobcentre staff. Neither by the way do customers demand to speak to FJR managers (basically the manager responsible for the member of staff doing the paperwork). Sure they ask to speak to the office manager, who comes along and hasnt a clue whats really happening so pay lip

service. Customers need to deal with the front line managers, only then will something be done, these guys get the easiest ride in the jobcentres, trust me I've been one!.

SO...individually what is the worst thing I have ever seen in a jobcentre, I see people on the DEA caseload (disabled people) sanctioned week in week out because if they don't ask for support no one gives a damn. I see customers come in and get lied to and fobbed off. **I once saw a gent come in who had missed an appointment because his wife had passed away, and because he did not make a fuss about this he basically accepted his claim had been closed and he had lost 2 weeks benefit.** It's a cruel world out there, and as much as I do believe people need to be looking for work, I can also assure you that even the genuine people that are genuinely looking lose their benefits.

Have you ever been made to take action on a benefits claimant that you feel wasn't right?

I cannot say I have ever been made to take action on a customer, but what I can say is I was acting front line manager for 12 months due to me being the most experienced member of staff and the manager being on long term sick. During this time **I was reprimanded repeatedly regarding the team I had and how little DMA we had done (not enough benefit sanctions ect).** I was told that it was my teams fault that our office had no one kicking and screaming at the security guards, and this was a bad thing as it reflected that my office was not strict. I have seen many advisors and front line staff waiver their end of year bonus, we get box markings ranging from 1/2/3, 3 = £0 bonus, 2 = £300, 1 = £500, this is my grade, the ammounts go up the higher up the ladder you get. **I have seen advisors and front line staff get a 3 because they are not sanctioning enough customers.** They are the good people that work in the jobcentres, and generally are the ones that smile and can have a human conversation with customers on a 1 to 1 level.

I have also seen members of the public attend Jobcentre plus and just because they are known outside the organisation by certain managers they are let off certain requirements of receiving jobseekers allowance. Only 2 weeks ago my direct line manager was stood over me as I was explaining to a customer he had worked 16 hours so unfortunately had to sign off, she proceeded to ask him if it was 16 hours or 15.45 due to a 15 minute unpaid break, he didnt understand her so repeated 16 hours until she amended his B7 part time earnings form. unfortunately I wasnt in a great position as the said manager is very good friends with the office manager... nowhere to go you see.

Do you think that any groups (e.g. disabled, lgbt, women) are treated worse by the DWP or your Job Centre? Or is everyone treated equally badly?

Groups... Right, there is a guy who signs on in my office. He has signed on for over 6 years, I guarantee you he has never been challenged regarding what he has done by any member of staff why? because he is over 50 and death stares everyone who he comes into contact with. Also anyone who comes to sign who believe they are upper class, or lets say looking for work in certain sectors or area's that jobcentre plus dont have expertise in basically get a pass through the system until they find work. Work programme participants get no support from jobcentre plus, and as for work programme.. dont get me started.

Again I've visited offices and know the staff over there to know they have the most ridiculous easy job you could imagine... more on this later. to finish question 4 the group thats most effected is the vulnerable. they are targeted by the majority of staff, you know the ones, they approach and are not going to answer back or fight their corner. I am a firm believer that IF every customer read what they signed, and if they completed their paperwork according to their jobseekers agreement there would be no sanctions at all from jobcentre plus. unfortunately the weak dont ask questions, they take what they are told and live by that. "I'm sorry its not me that makes the decision" all lies, the front line member of staff knows categorically its a disallowance before it go's up!. Another casing point, did you know that **if you as a member of the public ask for a reconsideration and list enough to cover your jobseekers agreement, regardless of what initial paperwork went to the decision makers, the**

decision will come back favourably allowed?. No one knows this you see!.

Are the middle class jobseekers treated better than working class, unskilled or long term unemployed jobseekers?

Middle class, elder, all very rarely challenged on jobseekers allowance. 80% of sanctions come from young Britons. I can tell you too that not even 5% of foreign customers get sanctioned for actively seeking or anything else like that, why? Because its too difficult to do in the 10 minutes tops that we have with a customer. There is not enough support in my opinion for the unskilled person. nowadays you need pc skills, online cv, a licence for this, a certificate for that. Do you know you now need a certificate to be a cleaner???. Where do the unskilled start if thats the case?. its a bad circle that will not be broken until we treat people like individuals and not all as collectives.

Does the Work Programme help the job seekers who attend your Job Centre find work or have more motivation?

Work programme..... total and utter failure, bad management, bad advice, bad motivation, and a total lack of customer understanding. We set out with work programme to target the "hard to work on" customers. genuinely for every 1000 people signing on for jobseekers allowance 200 are the hardcore, who are either more than happy with jsa and their life on jsa, or their skills are not required in the work place at any level. Work programme was set up to target these people and inspire them and help them to become more employable. Total and utter failure, this has come to light ever since april, since the returners have been coming back into the mainflow for jobseekers... basically put on weekly signing for no reason other than to inconvenience them... another interesting fact for you, every work programme returner is interviewed PURPOSELY 3 days after their signing day so we have 5 clear days if they forget to ensure their claim is shut... all craft you see!. My view is the work programme will be dressed up a success, but show me one success story and I'll show you 100 that have not got anything from it apart from an utter waste of time.

Do the Job Centre courses or group sessions help people find work?

Well.. thats a tricky one, group sessions tend to be information sessions based at helping customers to know what their role as a jobseeker is, or other things ie what is expected of them. Some courses can help them find work, we often refer the customer to the FLT courses, or on occasion SIA courses, this of course will give the customer something new in their gun to fire at prospective employers. Now the basic skills courses... not one bit of those helps any customer in any way. One to one coaching in my opinion is what is required. Why try to milk a dog?, or teach a cow to bark?, its how it is!. If I had a customer and after a 30 minute consultation worked out that the best this guy could do was push trollies at a supermarket, why spend 6 months trying to brush him up?. We should be starting him pushing the trollies and move him up whilst in the job. instead we concentrate on making him apply for jobs beyond his reach, each time knocked back takes a bigger chunk from his confidence. deep and disasterous hole that he gets himself into!.

How have sanctions affected Job Centre customers who attend your Job Centre?

Now thats a hard question.... how have sanctions changed jobcentre customers.. Well they certainly have become aware of how to note down their activities a lot more than some of them were!, they also come across more matter of fact. the problem here is again people tend to accept things!. they accept that they have a sanction because this happened or that happend!. I liken it to insurance quotes... I often wonder each year how many people auto renew their car insurance?, one year £300 a year, the folowing £900, how many people actually check what they are signing?. Check why certain things are happening?. "the process has changed, if you have forgotten your looking for work book you now have to fill in this ASE stencil"..... really?.... no thats a coward working at jobcentre that dare not tell you he/she is not happy with what you have produced as evidence to support your JSAG. (jobseekers agreement). Problem is too many people want a smiley face, I once saw a tattoo of two guys face to face shaking hands, whilst holding a knife behind their backs... unfortunately thats the relationship thats

forming from these sanctions.... customers do not trust the jobcentre, and it will only get worse, while the jobcentre staff on large will always find ways to stick the knife in without the customer actually knowing who it is that had the final push!.

Are most of the Job Centre customers you see benefits scroungers who are happy to be on benefits for life?

Hmmmmmm, I am not going to lie to you, I see a fair few people that are MORE than happy to remain on benefits all their lifes. I see sally who's 30 with 9 children, I see jason who's 40 and has continually signed for over 10 years without a job. all of which have in my opinion not had the education or the pat on the back throughout their lives to make them realise their is actually a purpose for them in civilisation. **It takes on average is it £19k per year to rehabilitate a prisoner, a jobseeker gets £80 a week... cheap at half the price is it not?.** A prisoner comes out of prison with one of the biggest barriers to work anyone could wish for, a criminal record, yet whilst he/she is in prison they are given all the education and training they require. A jobseeker is HIGHLY lucky to recieve training to get a CSCS card... We should be helping customers to achieve reasonable goals as aposed to sanctioning the ammount of benefits we sanction. I'll tell you what heres one for you..... lets give the customer the choice actively seek work, however IF we feel you have not done enough to look for work we will sanction your benefit, and put the money we stop towards your FLT licence ect ect.

Unfortunately jobcentre plus as a business model and a public service is dead. My prediction is it has minimal time to run, customers are now using online services, within the next few years all jobcentres will be fitted with IAD's (internet access devices), so customers can do all their benefit work online. Staff will be cut of course, and before you know it you'll do everything from home, failing that an out reach or a library. The digital age is upon us, and will take with it all the bad advisors and bad management, unfortunately the good people that work for jobcentre plus will also be taken down with what is a sinking ship.

Why did you decide to take to Twitter to speak out?

Why Twitter? well... I had seen and been pushed with many @jcp twitter accounts, and how they were pivotal to getting the digital word out there for customers and staff, it took a certain office over 2 years to get 1000 followers, its taken me 3 months to get over 500, and I havent been going gung-ho at that. I guess its just my way to stick it to the man, and also throw out some help to members of the public who are treated unfairly. Its a shame about the anonymousness (is there such a word? ha ha), but in a way I prefer it that way, I'd like to think of myself as the invisible friend. Come to me and ask, if I can help I will, simple as that.

You can follow the Mole at [@JobcentreMole](#). Also follow [@JCPAdwiser](#).