

Dear Work & Pensions Committee in particular Graham Evans,

Referring to the 1st session on Benefit Sanctions beyond the Oakley review. I noted that you took a particular dislike to Dr Webster's assertion that sanctions were being dished out 'willy nilly'.

Q52 Graham Evans: I have spoken to people who are Jobcentre Plus advisers, and I have asked them about sanctions. In my constituency, relatively few sanctions are given out. I have asked them about the process for giving out sanctions on a case-by-case basis. I find that the way that they go through it is very professional. It is certainly open, it is not secret, and they do it very reluctantly. I have to ask you, if someone has signed up to look for a job, a 35 hour commitment to look for employment, and there has been a job interview that the individual has failed to attend, they have not gone into the Jobcentre Plus as they said they would, and so on and so forth, do you believe that there should never be a sanction?

Dr Webster: The legal position at the moment is that you cannot be sanctioned for not doing what you said you would do. If you challenge a sanction and go to a tribunal, the only matter that the judge will consider is whether you took such steps as were reasonable to help you find employment in your circumstances. That is the legal position. What DWP is doing is sanctioning people willy nilly for not doing arbitrarily imposed things. They say to claimants that they have to apply for 30 jobs in a fortnight and then they only apply for 29, and they sanction them. This is completely absurd.

Graham Evans: I do not agree with you, Dr Webster. I have two Jobcentre Pluses in my constituency and to describe sanctions being dished out willy nilly is bizarre and completely ridiculous.

You cannot make accurate assertions based upon visits to your local two jobcentres. Whilst I agree the term 'willy nilly' was perhaps a little much I wish to remind you of two things.

First of all Dr Webster was presenting his evidence and opinion to the committee and he, as the other panel were guests. I found it completely inappropriate for you to say his comments were bizarre and completely ridiculous. If he was a fellow MP it would be different but this was not the case.

Second I take it that you hadn't read the evidence which I presented to the committee which demonstrated targets in the benefit sanctions system.

As you should be aware Job Centre Advisers are issued with PIP (Performance Improvement Plans) including for reasons of not referring enough doubts for sanctions. Below is an actual example of such a plan which demonstrates there is a 4-6% MEL (Minimum Expected Level) of claimants to refer doubts for sanctions. In this case each full time adviser should refer 8.6 customers per month for sanctions.

Evidence 1

SBR/DMA Performance is monitored on the weekly Performance Charts, which are emailed to all Assistant Advisers on a weekly basis. Where SBR referrals are low the email states that more referrals are required. SBR referrals were discussed with advice for ASE + RE on [REDACTED] at the Assistant Adviser Meeting. [REDACTED] is currently achieving an average of 3 SBR referrals a month. The Office MEL is 4-6% of Live Load.

Average of 900 25+ Claimants/Fortnight

=450/week

4-6% MEL

= 18 SBR/week (x52 /12)

= 78 SBR/month

/ 9 members of staff

= 8.6 SBR Referrals/Month Full Time

**[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
referrals a month to assist the office in meeting its Minimum Expected Level.**

Your basis of opinion was purely of two job centres and that is insufficient to form a definitive opinion of what the reality is.

Take a look at what two front line advisers had to say in completely different parts of the UK and the effect it had on one individual: **Evidence 2** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmCD6z3-Qzc>

This wasn't raised in either of the two meetings held but the DWP had also denied existence of "league tables", yet this letter to Walthamstow Jobcentre directly proves the existence of such "league tables". It gives names of high level managers who're not happy.

Evidence 3

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FEBRUARY 2013

20 FEB 2013

JOBCENTRE PLUS
WALTHAMSTOW JOB CENTRE
NINE ELMS LANE
LONDON E15 5DD
TEL: 0845 604 3719

Dear All,

SBR raises its ugly head again!

I attach the latest SBR figures. As you can see, Walthamstow are 95th in the league table - out of only 109.

Obviously our District Manager is not pleased; James Corbett is not pleased and neither is John. Because John is under pressure to improve our (Office) output and move up the league he has to apply some pressure downwards - that's us ATM's.

So, the bottom line...I have until the 15th Feb - along with the other ATM's to show an improvement. Then it's a PIP for me. Obviously if I am on a PIP to improve my Team's SBR referral rate I will not have a choice but to consider implementing PIP's for those individuals who are clearly not delivering SBR within the Team.

The fact we are delivering in other areas will not stand up as an excuse for not delivering in this area of work as SBR is a separate measure of achievement from Off Flow for the Office.

I refer you back to my e-mail from last week about the process for implementing a PIP and remind you that initially a PIP is not a formal action but a plan to highlight where improvements can be made and what action needs to be taken to support those.

John is looking for about 25 referrals per week.

*
We made 6 last week and so far this week have made 4. There is a shortfall here!

* ON ONE SECTION.
THESE ARE FO

We talked about this yesterday and I really don't want to do this to death but.....it is the only area we need to make a significant improvement in as a Team and as an Office. You should consider every doubt - if you are unsure then please conference with me.

ASE - do not accept the same jobsearch every week

do not accept "I dropped off my CV" to shops like ASDA or Sainsbury's - they need to download! Ask for proof of registration to websites and agencies. Ask customers to show you what websites they use and bring them up on screen.

do not accept the same old excuses from people who we have worked with or given FSF to to help remove barriers.

what are speakers of other languages doing to find work within their community - who is helping them, are we asking them to bring in an interpreter or using the big word?

Avail and Restricted Avail - listen for tell-tale phrases - "I pick up the kids", "I look after my neighbours children/my grandchildren" or just "I am busy" all of which suggest that the customer may not be fully available for work. Even cases where a parent shares custody can be considered if the arrangement is informal - not that I am suggesting you go there but you need to consider each case individually.

1

SBR = STRICTER BENEFIT REGIME

JOHN = WALTHAMSTOW J.C.P. MANAGER

PIP = PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN - 1ST STAGE TO DISCIPLINARY ACTION

JSD = JOBSSEEKER DIRECTION

Is the customer placing restrictions on their availability - wants retail but can't work on Saturday or can't consider working in the west end or travelling to Stratford to work at Westfield? Are they studying and not willing to give up the course? Are they available for every day of the week - "I can't work on Monday's as I like to do my shopping and visit my Mum".

If someone FTA's you must consider their availability as well as the FTA. They are always late - is there an availability issue? Are they working as well...FRF action may also be required. For example, "I was late because I had to take the dog to the vet"; "I didn't come in yesterday because my husband was ill"; "I can't come in on Saturday because my girlfriend is visiting me" - these are all availability doubts and should be raised. If someone is going away from home but is not willing to return to take up employment - availability; not willing to leave details of how they can be contacted should a job become available - availability; not looking for work whilst away - possible availability or ASE or both!!!!

RE - "I don't want to work in Stratford so I am not applying for that job"; "I don't want to work in that Garage, I don't like the people there"! These are cases of RE. As are cases where the customer is trained and qualified for a particular job but refuses to consider or apply for a job in that field because of where the job is; the journey; the pay etc.

An easy win is a JSD. Set one, if the customer does not comply then action the direction!

*

Guys, we really need to up the game here. The 5% target is one thing, the fact we are seeing over 300 people a week and only submitting 6 of them for possible doubts is simply not quite credible.

Happy to discuss.

* THERE IS NO TARGET SET IN OUR OBJECTIVES

Cheers
Ruth

Ruth King

Adviser Manager | Department of Work and Pensions | Walthamstow Jobcentre Plus | 7-13,
Westbury Road | Walthamstow | E17 6RH | 020 8210 3102 | Textphone 0845 608855|
www.dwp.gov.uk | Please consider the environment before printing|E_M_A_I_L_B_L_O_C_K

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For helpful reference - feel free to get in touch with these managers:

Please find the list of District Managers here should you wish to go further afield in your search of more evidence:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398695/jcp-district-managers.pdf

Evidence 4 Then we have the "Customer Focus" Newsletter from Malvern

DMA performance for 01/10/12 - 30/10/12

Live load 732 customers

SBR 3.01% ASE 1.91%

AVAIL 0.00%

RE 0.00%

Directions 1.09%

Overall performance should be around at least 5% of the live load. As the DMA champion I will be looking at how performance can be improved.

Source: <http://freepdfhosting.com/6ee73a9b88.pdf>

What's New by Louise

- We are all facing a challenging time ahead with the launch of Universal Jobmatch from 19/11/12. It will ensure our customers abide by the JSA Conditionality rules and make matching much easier. I am sure we will all cope with this new system really well.
- We are now in to the new Sanctions Regime and have had some strong messages from Richard Griffiths in the performance review. We are currently one of the worst performing offices with SBR and unless we improve we will be put under special measures. This will mean staff from other offices and the Performance Team coming in to Malvern and looking at all our processes to see how we can improve our SBR performance. We will have little say on their recommendations and they will have the option to place staff on PIP's to achieve the end result. **WE DO NOT WANT THIS!!!!!!** My plea to you all is to identify SBR issues and refer to DMA where appropriate. We need to ensure that we follow-up on all Jobseeker Directions and take DMA action on customers who do not abide by their JSD. We must start matching customers to vacancies and taking RE action when they do not apply. Please do not let me and yourselves down in this challenge – I know we can pull our performance around.

Evidence 5

Then we have the restricted DWP Scorecard for all regions of England, Scotland and Wales. Did your two Jobcentre managers mention that they submitted data which formed part of this scorecard?

<http://freepdfhosting.com/af6d5b75bd.pdf>

Evidence 6

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

<http://freepdfhosting.com/68d25c3f64.pdf>

Evidence 7


Leaked Evidence Shows DWP Set Quotas For 'Fit For Work' Assessments:

<http://freepdfhosting.com/e5b3a2be4d.pdf>

Evidence 8


Leaked Cluster Coach Newsletter showing evidence of targets

Cluster Coach Newsletter Page 1 of 2



Cluster Web Page – is now up and running and currently under construction.

Please take time to have a look and please let . or know of any content that you would like to see appear on these pages. Please follow the below link to access our page.
http://intranlink/1/jcp/csd/southeast/thamesvalley/about/dwp_t605106.asp#TopOfPage



Performance Update for Wk com 24th Jan

Daily reporting on key performance areas is continuing to take place. Celebrations for this week include:

- Customer Compliance Team have remained in the No: 1 spot on the Balanced Scorecard exceeding the targets in Compliance Activities, Outcomes and MVA – Well done to all
- DP – MK and BLE achieved 95% DP target
- **DMA / SBR – Both offices smashed target – Well Done!**
- Support Contract – cluster target: 35 achieved: **a massive 85 referrals**

Work Trials

- 3 Work Trials achieved last week – Well Done to .
- The target is for every Stage to achieve 1 Work Trial per week, lets all keep driving to meet and exceed this target.
- There are 8 work trial vacancies available at the moment lets try and fill them all and we will achieve our target. Continue to discuss Work Trials with your customers and issue the self-marketing forms to customers.

REMINDERS


- The Southgate League Table is now up and running and for all to see in the Break Out Room. Congratulations to 'The End' and 'Top Banana' for coming in 1st place last week. The Bletchley League Table will be displayed in the Tea Room wk com 31st Jan.
- Productivity interventions – in order to keep the cluster on track we need to achieve 480 interventions a day. Please all ensure that you are maximising your FTA time by conducting preview calls, telephone interventions and managing your caseloads. This is a target that as a cluster we can achieve.

Congratulations

DMA = SANCTION REFERRAL
SBR = STRICTER BENEFIT REGIME

<http://intranlink.link2.gpn.gov.uk/1/jcp/>

**NO TARGETS
IAIN DUNCAN
SMITH?**



Here's an article from May 14th 2014 - thank goodness for the work of Debbie Abrahams:

Last week Iain Duncan Smith met a whistle-blower who has worked for his Department for Work and Pensions for more than 20 years.

Giving the Secretary of State a dossier of evidence, the former Jobcentre Plus adviser told him of a "brutal and bullying" culture of "setting claimants up to fail".

"The pressure to sanction customers was constant," he said. "It led to people being stitched-up on a daily basis."

The man wishes to be anonymous but gave his details to IDS, DWP minister Esther McVey and Neil Couling, Head of Jobcentre Plus, who also attended the meeting.

"We were constantly told 'agitate the customer' and that 'any engagement with the customer is an opportunity to sanction'," he told them.

Labour MP Debbie Abrahams, the member of the DWP Select Committee who set up the meeting, has renewed her call for an inquiry into inappropriate sanctioning.

"I am deeply concerned that sanctions are being used to create the illusion the Government is bringing down unemployment," she said.

Sanctions pre-date the Coalition as a way of ensuring benefit claimants, who include the jobless and sick and disabled people on Employment Support Allowance, attend appointments and apply for jobs. But under the Tory-led Government, they have soared – to 897,690 a year from the most recent data.

Sanctions can last from a couple of days to three years, and leave claimants destitute.

Abrahams says that sanctioned people only continue to be counted as unemployed as long as they continue to sign on.

The DWP says most people who receive a sanction remain on Jobseeker's Allowance for the duration of their sanction and so will be included in the claimant count.

IDS and his department have repeatedly denied there are targets for sanctions.

"They don't always call them targets, they call them 'expectations' that you will refer people's benefits to the decision maker," the whistle-blower says. "It's the same thing."

He claimed managers fraudulently altered claimants' records, adding: "Managers would change people's appointments without telling them. The appointment wouldn't arrive in time in the post so they would miss it and have to be sanctioned. That's fraud. The customer fails to attend. Their claim is closed. It's called 'off-flow' – they come off the statistics. Unemployment has dropped. They are being stitched up."

For 20 years, the whistle-blower loved his job as an adviser. He says: "It was really rewarding helping people into work."

But he says the culture changed after the election of the Coalition.

"Customers were being deliberately and inappropriately targeted," the whistle-blower says. "I would see people crying in frustration, knowing they have been stitched up. Yet my Jobcentre was held up as a shining example to others. One of the district managers came to congratulate us. He said, 'I see these people hanging round the precinct, being lazy, drinking, taking drugs'. That was a very senior leader. Another said, 'These people are taking your money'. There was a total disrespect for the customer."

Advisers were told to "inconvenience" benefit claimants, he says. "I was told see them face to face, agitate them. 'Let's inconvenience the customer', they said, 'get on these people from day one'.

"They were treated appallingly, lots of conditions put on them. Many of them were vulnerable people with low self-esteem or coming back off sick. We were setting customers up to fail.

"If I do my job well and their claim is managed well, there should be fewer sanctions. Instead, good advisers were the ones who sanctioned more people. It was a daily mantra, 'Have you sanctioned anyone?'

I particularly remember a well-qualified father, he was desperate to work, with a wife and child to support. I was told to agitate him. They said, 'Tell him he's got to apply for factory and labouring jobs. Change his contract. If he doesn't take the jobs, stop his benefit'. It was a trap."

When managers refused to listen, he became sick with stress. "My body just gave up," he says. "I had high blood pressure, I was put on beta-blockers. I was in a state of physical collapse."

Debbie Abrahams, MP for Oldham East and Saddleworth, says Esther McVey had agreed to a sanctions inquiry, but has since made a U-turn.

She says: "Just what are Iain Duncan Smith and Esther McVey trying to hide?

"This Government has developed a culture in which Jobcentre Plus advisers are expected to sanction claimants using unjust, and potentially fraudulent actions, in order get people off the dole.

"This creates the illusion the Government is bringing down unemployment.

"The last thing Iain Duncan Smith and Esther McVey want is for this uncomfortable truth to be uncovered."

Last night a spokeswoman for the DWP said: "We take any allegations such as this seriously and will - investigate.

“Our frontline staff work hard to support people off benefits and into work, and it’s only right that we ask claimants to do everything they can to look for work in return. Unemployment is falling, there are record numbers of people in jobs and there are 600,000 vacancies.”

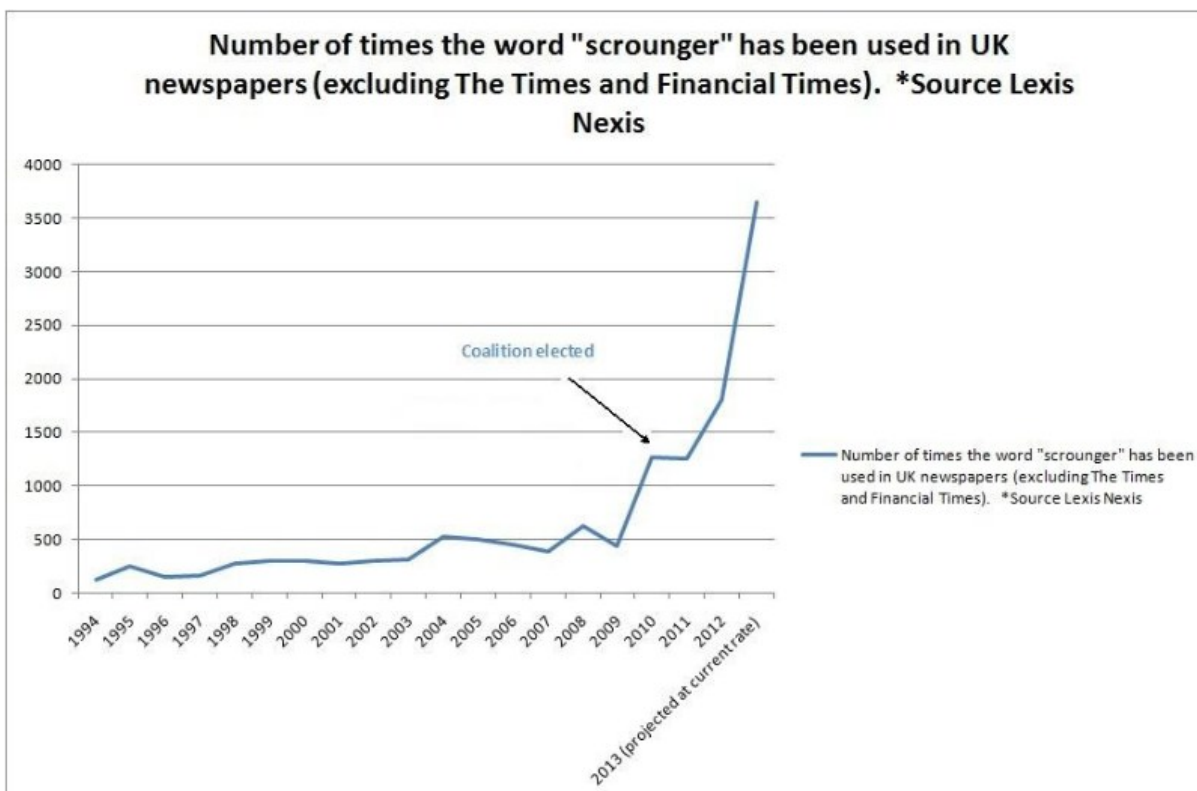
Taking up that final point with unemployment falling. It co-insides with the number of zero hour contracts rising as this graph demonstrates:



Sourced from Office of National Statistics figures: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_373757.pdf

The reality

Then there is the abuse of statistics which feed newspapers such as the Mail which leads to disabled people getting beaten up. <http://freepdfhosting.com/10e781fded.pdf>



Teen gouged disabled man's eyes until they bled in horrific city centre attack

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/teen-gouged-disabled-mans-eyes-5069687>

DWP staff told to Google illnesses when assessing Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance claims

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/civil-servants-told-judge-whether-2810718>

Investigating the real reason for the misery of 'fit for work' assessments:

<http://freepdfhosting.com/8eff944d68.pdf>

The Scandal of DWP Silence: <http://freepdfhosting.com/abc8d46c52.pdf>

So Mr Evans, while I would agree that the term of phrase 'willy nilly' was perhaps inaccurate, you cannot provide an effective argument based on a visit to your two Jobcentres. Your attitude was akin to the panel being crossed examined in a court. These people were guests and you should have kept your view regarding the 'willy nilly' comment to yourself or simply restrict it to "I don't agree".

However as you can now see from the evidence I've provided (which I provided already yet you don't seem to have seen it) more accurately reflects the reality across England, Scotland and Wales today.