

Improving the effectiveness of the Claimant Commitment as a tool to support people into work

The claimant commitment is a document that is meant to set out individually-tailored requirements that must be met in return for Universal Credit payments. Work coaches in jobcentres have discretion to define tailored requirements for claimants based on their circumstances, such as caring responsibilities or health conditions.

The main findings show that work coaches are trying their best to develop effective commitments, in what can be very challenging circumstances. There are excellent examples of work coaches defining tailored requirements for claimants, including claimants with complex circumstances.

However there is evidence that the quality of claimant commitments is variable, and there are some instances of inappropriate requirements being made of claimants. In some cases claimants were struggling with their claimant commitments. For example, some commitments contained requirements that were not suitably tailored to a claimant's circumstances, thereby potentially not fully supporting claimants to move into paid work. The Department for Work and Pension's (DWP) own survey evidence shows nearly 40% of claimants were not sure that their commitment was achievable. Claimants with physical and mental health problems were less likely than others to feel their commitments reflected their circumstances.

The report also found that some claimant commitments are not being reviewed regularly enough to ensure requirements remain relevant and appropriate.

The Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) welcomes DWP's existing work to ensure the claimant commitment is effective and helps ensure claimants achieve better labour market outcomes. However, where claimant commitments are not being developed and used well, it presents a real risk that they are not doing what they could to help claimants to achieve better labour market outcomes.

To complement the department's drive for continuous improvement, SSAC recommends that DWP should:

1. Work with a wide range of stakeholders to improve the design and delivery of the claimant commitment. This should be supported by a clear articulation of DWP's views of the objectives and principles underpinning the claimant commitment and how it believes these objectives can be best delivered.
2. Publish an evaluation strategy and an ongoing assessment of performance against the claimant commitment principles and objectives.
3. Define, and then test, a list of new approaches to improve the design and development of the claimant commitment. DWP should publish this list

and a timeline for when test results can be expected.

4. Develop a more rigorous approach to ensure work coach discretion is applied fairly and systematically. Specifically, DWP should prioritise data collection and analysis on the application of discretion (and easements). This analysis, including the statistics from the data, should be made publicly available.

While this happens, DWP should:

- provide clarity on when they'll be trialing new approaches to ensure discretion is applied fairly and a timetable of when improvements can be expected
- urgently act to ensure requirements placed on claimant commitments are just work-related and do not inappropriately include requirements related to a claimant's health or medicine

5. Act to understand why (and where) claimant commitments are not being regularly and frequently reviewed by work coaches and claimants, and then publish steps for how best to ensure they are.

Liz Sayce, interim Committee Chair, commented:

The claimant commitment is a central part of the government's approach to helping people back into work. But the Committee's work has shown that improvements need to be made. Inappropriate conditions and ineffective support risks failing some benefit claimants and their families, and in some cases may cause harm. Getting this policy right, all the way across the country, is essential. DWP needs to do more, more quickly, to ensure that happens.

[This research](#) considered claimants who are required to look for work and involved a [public consultation](#) and speaking with work coaches, policy and operational delivery experts, claimants, and a number of third sector organisations who work with claimants.

SSAC is an independent advisory body of the Department for Work and Pensions. The Committee's role is to give advice on social security issues; scrutinise and report on social security regulations (including tax credits) and to consider and advise on any matters referred to it by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions or the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland.

The Committee members are:

- Liz Sayce (Chair)
- Bruce Calderwood
- David Chrimes
- Carl Emmerson
- Chris Goulden
- Philip Jones
- Jim McCormick

- Grainne McKeever
- Dominic Morris
- Seyi Obakin
- Charlotte Pickles
- Victoria Todd

Further enquiries should be directed to Denise Whitehead, Committee Secretary, on 020 7829 3354.