



## **Employment support that works: the importance of relationships, flexibility and removing barriers**

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### **Summary**

While the UK labour market boasts [low unemployment rates](#), underlying issues such as growing inactivity and enduring [high levels of insecure work](#) rightly raise concerns. This rapid response briefing shares findings from the Changing Realities research programme, which works in partnership with over 100 parents and carers living on a low income from across the UK. We share policy recommendations for the DWP and Jobcentre Plus which taken together emphasise the need for urgent improvements to the adequacy of social security payments, and the abolition of punitive, inefficient, and ineffective forms of behavioural conditionality.

We set out six co-produced recommendations for change, developed in collaboration with parents and carers on low incomes. Together, these have the potential to make employment support more effective for everyone. If this six point plan were to be implemented, social security would be improved for everyone, with a significant improvement to employment support and relationships with the DWP/DfC. This work is pressing and much needed. It is work that can and should be done now.

## **We recommend the following changes**

**1**

### **Improving the adequacy of the social security system**

We cannot improve employment support without addressing the inadequacy of social security support. Benefit levels need to be increased and there is a need to reintroduce the additional element for Limited Capability for Work, and provide financial hardship support. The five-week wait for Universal Credit should go, as should the two-child limit and the benefit cap.

**2**

### **Transform Universal Credit to make it fit for purpose**

To make UC fit for purpose, the DWP should create more flexible assessment periods capable of providing stable incomes for claimants. We propose longer fixed awards as the default, and a shift in childcare support from UC to more stable and extended assistance. Work incentives should be increased and the taper rate should be reduced further. Support through UC should also include help with internet access and the funding of necessary equipment through the flexible support fund.

**3**

### **Remove the threat of sanctions**

Abandon punitive conditionality. The focus should shift to support, empowering individuals to find meaningful work that aligns with their aspirations to secure long-term, employment.

4

#### **A consistent work coach**

Claimants should be entitled to a consistent work coach at the Jobcentre. Improve frontline training of work coaches to provide flexible, individual-focused support and enhance awareness of available services and programmes.

5

#### **Create a statement of claimant rights**

Currently, complex procedures overshadow claimants' entitlements. Implementing a 'Claimant Commitment'-like statement of rights, which sets out the rights of claimants themselves would strengthen accountability and improve claimant-work coach relations. Similarly, an external accountability mechanism would further address power imbalances.

6

#### **Improved access to skills/training through JCP**

The JCP should prioritise holistic work approaches, considering individual skills and career goals, shifting decisively away from a 'work-first' approach. The JCP needs to recognise the value of voluntary work, and make this possible as part of work-related activity. Make available job-relevant training and person-centred courses that improve employability in sectors beyond the traditional ones.

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