

Jobcentre Plus update to our Gender Equality Scheme

The Department for Work and Pensions aims to deliver the Government's welfare reform agenda. Jobcentre Plus is a Delivery Business of the Department. Our detailed publication [Disability and Gender Equality Schemes and Race Equality Scheme Progress Report](#), published in December 2006, provides information on our gender objectives and actions. This update adds more detail to our gender scheme and associated action plan.

Mainstreaming gender equality into Jobcentre Plus business

The Department for Work and Pensions' agenda builds on the Government's commitment to achieving a fairer, more inclusive society where nobody is held back by disadvantage or lack of opportunity. Jobcentre Plus is committed to playing its part in this. The Department is committed to tackling child poverty, working towards employment for all and reforming the welfare state. To help achieve this Jobcentre Plus is introducing new initiatives including:

- Supporting the development of the New Deals with a focus on women returners, in particular Lone Parents. We are currently piloting 'In Work Credit' across 22 Jobcentre Plus Districts. This is a support initiative intended for Lone Parents and can provide up to £60 per week (depending on eligibility) for up to 52 weeks. It is non-means tested and does not affect other benefits or tax credits.
- Changing the Lone Parent work focused interview (WFI) regime to introduce 6 monthly interviews for all Lone Parents. These interviews will be available from April 2007 for those with a youngest child aged 5-13, and from April 2008 for those with a youngest child aged 0-4. Lone Parents continue to receive Income Support and any activity undertaken to prepare for work remains voluntary.
- Offering a voluntary session with a Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser to access information on work, childcare and commuting.
- On 27 March 2007 the DWP published *Working for Children*. This document sets out the Department's strategy for tackling child poverty and includes plans for taking forward recommendations within the report. Jobcentre Plus will work with other colleagues in the Department to put the recommendations in place. Many of them are intended to help families and, in particular, Lone Parents, the majority of whom are female. A full copy of the report can be found at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2007/childpoverty/childpoverty.pdf>

Our long-term intention, by 2008, is that our Equality Schemes - and in particular their associated action plans - become part of our Annual Business Plans, with the yearly progress report featuring in our routine Annual Report.

Reducing the Gender Pay Gap

- Many of our existing policies have a part to play in addressing the gender pay gap. For example:
- We work with employers, both to ensure that they do not break the Sex Discrimination Act and that they understand the benefits of employing a diverse workforce. Our advice is designed to ensure that employers do not stereotype either female or male employees.
- The Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) Demonstration project gives support and financial help to low-income workers to stay in work and to take up training. Early feedback suggests that Lone Parents taking part in the project

earned more than other Lone Parents, partly because the financial support encourages them to make the move from part-time to full-time work; and that those participating were more likely to take up training both in and out of work. Overall, 45 per cent of the New Deal for Lone Parents group undertook some education or training. Evaluation is still taking place, and will provide the Department with valuable lessons on how to sustain employment and help those with lower skills to progress and lift their families out of poverty.

- Discussions are underway in the Department about what more can be done to address the gender pay gap. We will continue to work with our Departmental colleagues on new strategies and policies.

Gender reassignment and our customers

Jobcentre Plus provides advice to its staff on dealing with Gender recognition issues. We are a member of the Gender Trust – a charity set up to support people going through gender reassignment. Staff whose roles entail advising others in Jobcentre Plus on diversity issues attended a presentation from the Trust about the processes involved in gender reassignment and the issues for people undergoing reassignment. Jobcentre Plus publicises the Gender Trust and its website.

We also have processes in place to deal with Gender Recognition Certificates.

Impact assessments and monitoring

Jobcentre Plus carefully considered the impact of our functions and policies when reviewing them as part of our Equality Scheme. We considered the likely impact of each of our functions and policies on the equality duty for gender. For the future, we are currently investigating how to obtain the data needed to monitor, effectively, the impact of our services - for example the New Deals and our benefit processes - on men and women. Our Board will take a proposal on this in the summer. We will report on progress, and publish a timetable for impact assessing our existing functions and policies in December 2007, when we issue an update on our Gender Equality Scheme.

Involving our customers

We will conduct an involvement exercise as detailed in our Gender Equality action plan published in December 2006.

We will actively support the Department's Customer Insight Team in providing a cross cutting approach to involvement and consultation. This new team will ensure a more inclusive and joined up approach to involvement activities across the Department and all of the diversity strands.