

# House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee

## Getting Britain Working: Reforming Jobcentres

### Inquiry response from the Career Development Institute

#### About the Career Development Institute (CDI)

The Career Development Institute (CDI) is the UK's professional body for all aspects of career development, supporting its members to work to the highest standards and championing the profession. It sets standards for professional practice, including the [CDI Code of Ethics](#), which are recognised by government, and manages the [UK Register of Career Development Professionals](#). It awards the Qualification in Career Development and delivers training through the CDI Academy for those looking to enter the sector and progress in the profession. CDI also provides resources, training events and networking for members.

In May 2024, the CDI carried out research including a YouGov survey of 5,004 UK adults covering their perceptions of their life and career, the careers support they have accessed (including Jobcentre plus) and their perceptions of that support. The [CDI Valuing Careers research](#) is referenced throughout this response.

#### The purpose of Jobcentre Plus

The key challenge in reforming Jobcentres is that they don't seem to meet the needs of either individuals or employers, and in doing so miss opportunities to have a greater positive impact for individuals, the economy and society.

Their approach can too often be seen as being to deliver government policy to reduce benefits costs –perceived as being punitive or a barrier to gaining benefits. The CDI Valuing Careers research showed 56% of users of Jobcentres found it gave them benefit, compared to 84% of careers service users. Only 48% would recommend the Jobcentre while 79% would recommend the careers service.

While undoubtedly many of those working in Jobcentres wish to help and support clients, the structures, programmes and measures create an image of the Jobcentre as being to push people into any job rather than finding the right job<sup>i</sup> to reduce benefits costs. This is damaging, especially in light of the proposal to move the National Careers Service (NCS) provision into Jobcentres, as careers guidance is by its nature client-centred and there is a risk that potential users will be put off by the image and perception of the Jobcentre.

There is a concern that by encouraging clients – especially under the threat of punitive action regarding benefits – to move into work that may not recognise their issues, situation or aspirations, Jobcentres are failing to address longer-term employment issues, such as the skills shortage<sup>ii</sup>, and risk generating a cycle of clients returning to unemployment after short periods of unfulfilling work.

Jobcentres are also not meeting the needs of employers. Alison McGovern MP, Minister of State (Department for Work and Pensions) said in the House of Commons on 16<sup>th</sup> December “Businesses are crying out for staff, yet only one in six employers uses jobcentres.”<sup>iii</sup>

Employers do not engage with Jobcentres as sources of support for recruiting and developing their workforce.

The role of the Jobcentre has become narrowly focused on encouraging those out of work to get into work. It needs a fundamental change of principles – to help every citizen to get into, and on in, work that is fulfilling and sustainable, and to help employers develop their workforce to maintain and develop the skills they need to progress in their careers, and drive the economy.

Both the employment and careers services need to follow the impartiality requirements of career development professionals – to be client-centred and, while utilising knowledge of the labour market, ensure they offer advice and guidance that is based on the needs of the individual and current and future training and employment opportunities.

Reform of the Jobcentre needs to start with clarification of its strategic role – how it supports the industrial and skills strategies - and who it is there to serve. It needs to be significantly repositioned as a client-centred service that offer careers and employment support to all. The government should publish an employment and careers strategy that supports the industrial and skills strategies and sets the framework for support across the UK.

### **To what extent does JCP have an “image problem”? How might this be addressed?**

To become a broader jobs and careers service the Jobcentre needs to overcome a significant image problem. It needs its new purpose to be clearly articulated and promoted widely to all groups. The current image of Jobcentres will deter people from engaging with the support available and those most in need are least likely to seek help – the CDI Valuing Careers research identified 20-30% of the adult population with multiple barriers to their careers who are least likely to seek support with their career.

The image needs to reflect a purpose that is designed to support the development of an individual's skills and confidence, alongside meaningful engagement with employers, rather than punish or push individuals into taking any job. This can only happen with a clear client-led approach supported by increased communication with businesses.

As well as a redefined image, the service needs to be heavily promoted, so it is clear what support is available, where it can be found and be accessible where people can most easily reach it. The CDI Valuing Careers research found that, despite 75% of UK adults having career aspirations and 80% citing barriers to achieving these, only 15% had accessed employment or careers support in the past five years.

To support the image required, the Jobs and Careers Service should have a strong commitment to professionalism among its staff. All those providing careers guidance should hold a level 6 or level 7 career guidance qualification that meets the [occupational standard](#) and should be required to be on the UK Register of Career Development Professionals, requiring them to abide by the Code of Ethics and commit to continuous development.

Those offering employment support should be qualified to meet the [level 4 occupational standard](#) and also undergo continuous professional development.

**What should be the role of JCP in getting those who have been out of the workforce in the long-term ready to begin a journey into work?**

Some individuals may know what they want to achieve as a next step, have the required skills and need limited support to help them make their next move – this is core employability support as currently offered by the Jobcentre.

Others may need more help defining the work they want to move into, identifying how their skills match their ambition and understanding the routes to gain those skills. This is the remit of the careers service. In such cases, rather than move into work immediately, it may be most appropriate for these individuals to receive support to help them make decisions about their next steps and gain skills before moving into work, so they are more likely to remain in longer term employment.

Others still may be further from the world of work – experiencing significant barriers including lack of skills, low confidence, caring responsibilities, ill health and more that means they need greater support to overcome such barriers and move towards the world of work. The CDI's Valuing Careers research identified a number of these barriers affecting many UK adults, and that those facing multiple barriers were least likely to access the support available. Employment and careers services need to work with other agencies to help individuals overcome such barriers while developing a sense of the careers that may be possible.

The reformed Jobcentre, with integrated employability and careers support, needs to take a key role in helping all individuals overcome barriers and secure meaningful employment, working with employers and other support services where necessary to meet the needs of each client.

**What change should a new jobs and careers service prioritise to move beyond the support currently offered by JCP and the National Careers Service? How can a new jobs and careers service support people to progress in their careers?**

While there are handover procedures from the Jobcentre to National Careers Service in place, it is unclear how to access services and services are focused on those not currently in work. There is very little support available to individuals not in receipt of benefits. In order to tackle economic inactivity support needs to be accessible to those who are in work or economically inactive and therefore to those who are not claiming benefits<sup>iv</sup>. Support needs to be available for all those who seek to develop their careers, including those looking to increase their skills and move into better work and those seeking career changes that reflect changes in their life circumstances or aspirations. This change should be a priority.

A reformed Jobcentre with integrated careers and employment services, centred on client need, could grow the overall skills base to support a growing economy as it enables individuals to develop skills and move into areas of demand. As a by-product it would reduce the benefits

bill as more people move into, and stay in, work that utilises and develops their skills, reducing the skills gap.

To provide an effective service, careers staff need a detailed understanding not just of the job market, but also of the pathways through education and training to gain new skills. Different pathways will suit different individuals based on their career aspirations, capabilities and personal situation. Informed careers services can help clients understand these, provide information on the appropriate pathways and empower the client to move forward.

In doing so, the Jobcentre needs to recognise that there will be cases where it is better for an individual to remain on benefits or out of work to give them space to gain those additional skills that will enable longer-term, sustainable employment.

To achieve this, the Jobs and Careers Service needs an effective ‘front door’. The Demos report [‘Open Door Policy’](#) recommends creating a ‘digital front door’ to make it as easy as possible for people to access careers and employment support. This would be a cost-effective way to identify the needs of individuals and offers an accessible service. It is of course important to note that digital services are not accessible to everyone, which is important for policy makers to bear in mind.

Staff receiving initial contact from individuals seeking support need to be trained to understand the person’s needs and direct them to the right service or combination of services. This is a critical role to enable people to access the right service to meet their needs and requires coaching skills to elicit the underlying needs of the individual. Currently, there is no prerequisite qualification for the DWP job coach role, so we welcome the proposal in the White Paper for a ‘coaching academy’<sup>v</sup>.

### **To what extent will the new jobs and careers service anticipate future skills gaps, and take action to address those gaps before they are realised?**

While the reformed Jobcentre needs to be client-centred, it will only be able to offer informed guidance if staff are aware of the latest local and national, current and projected vacancy and skills gaps and opportunities. However, if the role of the Jobcentre becomes defined as being to fill those gaps regardless of the client’s preferences, it cannot be client-centred and will retain the image problem and limited service it currently has. Instead, by offering information, advice and guidance that is informed by jobs data, staff are able to share where opportunities lie to help clients make an informed decision. This will naturally lead to more people seeking work in growing areas and attract more employers to connect with the service.

Staff offering careers guidance must provide impartial and informed support to comply with their professional Code of Ethics, else they could be removed from the professional register. So any move to wholly focus careers provision on the needs of the economy or employers would put their professionalism at risk. Instead, this same requirement for impartiality should be extended to all Jobcentre services.

The Jobcentre should also have a role in providing insight from the skills, capabilities, aspirations and barriers of their clients to feed into the work identifying skills gaps, so that

solutions can be developed based on an informed understanding of the challenges facing potential employers and individuals in moving to areas requiring additional skills.

**Are there any international examples that the Department should draw on for the new jobs and careers service?**

The ICCDPP and the World Association of Public Employment Services published the results of a survey of career guidance provision in 48 public employment services around the world. Career guidance had a high presence in all services though was focused on increasing job search efficacy – reflecting the services’ aim to help people find employment as soon as possible. 75% offered self-help, 75% offered counselling to vulnerable groups and 58% supported school provision. <https://www.iccdpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/ICCDPP-WAPES-2025-fin-Career-guidance-in-PES-report.pdf>

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<sup>i</sup> IES (2024) *Working for the Future - Launch Report for the Commission on the Future of Employment Support* <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Working%20for%20the%20Future%20-%20Launch%20Report.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> DWP (2024) *Get Britain Working White Paper* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-white-paper/get-britain-working-white-paper>

<sup>iii</sup> [Oral Answers to Questions - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

<sup>iv</sup> House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee Plan for Jobs and employment support <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmworpen/600/report.html>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-white-paper/get-britain-working-white-paper>