



Crisis response to the Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry into the future of Jobcentre Plus

April 2016

Introduction

1. Crisis, the national charity for single homeless people, is pleased to respond to this inquiry into the future of Jobcentre Plus.
2. Crisis is dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change. We believe passionately that for many of the people we work with, finding employment is the best way of making a sustained exit from homelessness. Through our nine Skylight centres across the UK we have a wealth of experience supporting homeless people into work.
3. We believe this inquiry is particularly timely given the important forthcoming changes to Jobcentre Plus, as set out in the inquiry's terms of reference. We believe there are particular opportunities and challenges presented by the roll-out of Universal Credit, the conclusion of the Work Programme and the future co-location of Jobcentre Plus with local authorities.

Summary

4. In this response we set out a number of concerns about the capability of Jobcentre Plus to provide new, tailored services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. We outline our own service delivery model, before providing evidence of the experiences of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness currently engaging with Jobcentre Plus.
5. We make the following recommendations as to how this service could be improved both in the short and long term:
 - a. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) must collect data on movement into work amongst claimants engaging with Jobcentre Plus and monitor performance against this data
 - b. An official assessment framework should be introduced to identify those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
 - c. Jobcentre Plus must collaborate and where possible integrate with other local services to address housing need where this is identified as a barrier to work, including but not limited to those jobcentres which co-locate with local authorities
 - i. Jobcentre Plus advisors and local authority housing and homelessness teams must work together towards shared objectives that centre on the individual to address employability and housing needs, beyond the existing homelessness duty
 - ii. Jobcentre Plus should collaborate better with local voluntary services in order to provide better access to support to address housing need and specialist employment support
 - iii. Those identified as homeless or at risk of homelessness should have the option of being fast-tracked to specialist support delivered outside the jobcentre

- d. Improvements must be made to the training and support provided to Work Coaches, so they are equipped to build supportive, trusting relationships with claimants and provide personalised support that meets their needs
 - i. Improvements must be made to Work Coach training on setting conditionality requirements for vulnerable claimants
 - ii. Work Coaches should receive training to increase their knowledge of homelessness (including hidden homelessness) and how this interacts with other barriers to work
 - iii. Work Coaches should receive training to deal with at least straightforward queries about the housing element of Universal Credit
 - iv. DWP should undertake an assurance process of its training roll-out for Work Coaches
 - v. Specialist advisors should be reintroduced for homelessness and domestic violence. At the very least mechanisms should be put in place for the sharing of knowledge and best practice amongst Work Coaches
 - vi. DWP should undertake a thorough analysis of the staffing levels required to meet current and future demand from claimants, including those who require intensive support
- e. Improvements must be made to the physical environment of Jobcentre Plus, including by providing improved IT access and support
 - i. DWP must commit to providing sufficient computer access to meet demand, including dedicated staff on hand to provide support to those who need it, and should conduct and publish a regular audit of computer availability
 - ii. DWP should explore options for providing private interview rooms for claimants to meet Work Coaches, once the Jobcentre Plus estate comes up for renewal in 2017
- f. The conditionality and sanctions regime must be reformed, to ensure it does not create additional barriers for those who are already vulnerable
 - i. The easement for newly homeless people should be extended to all those who are homeless, not just those who are newly homeless
 - ii. Work Coaches should have the flexibility not to raise a sanction doubt if a sanction is likely to result in homelessness or destitution

Homelessness and employment

- 6. The vast majority of homeless people want to work despite having high support needs; recent research commissioned by Crisis found that 88 per cent said they wanted a job now

or in the future.¹ However very few are in work. During 2012 and 2013 just 2 per cent of Crisis' clients were in full-time work and 5 per cent were in part-time work.²

7. The lack of a stable and settled home makes it extremely difficult for people to find and maintain employment. At the same time homelessness can create or exacerbate a range of other issues, including poor mental and physical health, substance misuse, lack of basic skills and offending behaviour.

Crisis Skylight

8. Crisis Skylight centres offer employment services and learning opportunities embedded within a holistic model that offers support across a whole range of issues. We work with those who are currently homeless, those at risk of homelessness and those with past experience of homelessness.
9. The employment service is delivered through a coaching model, with each client allocated their own trained coach to provide tailored support to overcome the individual's barriers to work. Clients can also access support from a housing coach to secure access to adequate and affordable housing, and from a progression coach to focus on goal-setting and to address other support needs including mental health and well-being. We have outlined our service delivery model in more detail in previous responses to the Committee.³
10. In 2015 we worked with 8,545 homeless and vulnerably housed people across nine centres, supporting a total of 681 into employment. Of these, 557 had engaged with our employment services, giving our employment offer a success rate of 28 per cent. In addition, 498 clients volunteered, and 1,300 gained at least one qualification, module or certificate.
11. We are independently funded, giving us a significant degree of freedom to innovate and determine what works in supporting the hardest to help jobseekers. Clients engage voluntarily but we also receive referrals both through formal contracts and informal service level agreements with other agencies. This has included a number of projects funded through the Jobcentre Plus Flexible Support Fund, most recently a tailored, intensive, pre-employment support programme for single homeless people and those at risk of homelessness in the East London boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham and Hackney.

Case study: Crisis and Jobcentre Plus joint working through the Flexible Support Fund

Jon⁴ was referred to Crisis Skylight London by his Jobcentre for employment support. Despite having a good employment background and holding recognised qualifications, his confidence was low and he was in a precarious housing and financial situation. He worked with his Crisis Job Coach to produce a CV that reflected both his past IT experience and his future goal of progressing his skills and experience within the construction industry. He also attended and successfully passed several accredited and non-accredited Employment Services short courses including First Aid at Work, GOALS, Preparing to Volunteer and 'Build a Bike'. This led to a renewed self-belief, and taking actions which led him to his ultimate goal of finding employment in construction in his specific field of Crane Supervising. He has now been in a well-paid role for three months and regularly talks to his Crisis coach about progress.

¹ Batty, E., Beatty, C., Casey, R., Foden, M., McCarthy, L. & Reeve, K. (2015) *Homeless people's experiences of welfare conditionality and benefit sanctions*. London: Crisis

² Pleace, N. & Bretherton, J. (2014) *Crisis Skylight, An Evaluation: Year One Interim Report*. London: Crisis

³ See for instance our response to the Committee's inquiry into DWP's contracted welfare-to-work provision

⁴ Crisis client (not his real name)

12. A recent independent evaluation of Crisis Skylight found that the service delivers progression towards education, training, volunteering and paid work for single homeless people, as well as towards better health, social supports and self-esteem. This is in spite of our clients facing multiple barriers to work. The evaluation identified that one-to-one coaching and access to specialists in mental health, housing and employment are instrumental in delivering positive outcomes.⁵

Experiences of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness using Jobcentre Plus

13. Crisis welcomes the Government's vision to provide a 'flexible and personalised service delivery model' through Jobcentre Plus that delivers 'a personalised, individually tailored approach to job seeking'.⁶ We are concerned, however, that Jobcentre Plus is not currently providing the personalised service that is required to effectively support homeless people into work.
14. Research commissioned by Crisis into homeless people's experiences of conditionality and sanctions has identified examples of Work Coaches instead adopting a 'one size fits all' approach to setting job search requirements, and failing to either respond to individuals' own aspirations or help them address their personal barriers to work.⁷ This research and our own casework with clients has identified examples of Work Coaches actively discouraging claimants from exploring work, training or volunteering opportunities in the industries where they have the most chance of securing work.

Case study: Jobcentre Plus discouraging claimants from meaningful training opportunities

Ben⁸ became homeless after separating from his partner and was living in hostel accommodation. He wanted to find full time employment in construction but he did not have any recent work experience and his construction skills (CSCS) card had expired. Jobcentre Plus was unable to fund this so Ben registered with Crisis Skylight Birmingham who funded the renewal of his card and referred him to a two week placement at a construction company with the future possibility of paid employment. However, when he notified Jobcentre Plus about this opportunity his advisor stated that he had to instead attend an appointment and training course with a Work Programme provider. Ben tried to make the case that the placement would increase his chances of finding construction work but was unable to convince his job advisor. When he approached the Work Programme provider about this directly, with the help of his Crisis job coach, they were more understanding and allowed Ben to complete the placement and signed him off their course. Ben found the placement enjoyable and rewarding and successfully signed up with two construction agencies as a result. When he told Jobcentre Plus, his advisor was displeased that he had not completed the Work Programme training and challenged him when he didn't get work immediately. Ben felt very disheartened and believed he was not getting the support he needed to get his life back on track. Ben has since been offered work on a major city centre development project with the construction company he undertook his placement with.

15. Rather than working with claimants to address their personal barriers to work, Crisis job coaches report that Jobcentre Plus staff are instead focused on 'checking up' on claimants, as part of an administrative process that largely centres around implementing the

⁵ Bretherton, J. & Pleace, N. (2016) *Crisis Skylight, Pathways to Progression: second interim report*. London: Crisis

⁶ House of Commons (2014) *Role of Jobcentre Plus in the reformed welfare system: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2013–14*. London: The Stationery Office Limited

⁷ Batty, E., Beatty, C., Casey, R., Foden, M., McCarthy, L., Reeve, K. (2015) *Homeless people's experiences of welfare conditionality and benefit sanctions*. London: Crisis

⁸ Crisis client (not his real name)

conditionality and sanctions regime. This is supported by our research, which found that homeless people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance are twice as likely to be sanctioned as the general claimant population.⁹ The sanctions imposed were found to often be the result of conditionality requirements being set that claimants were not capable of meeting. This does not illustrate the tailored setting of conditionality requirements and support for vulnerable claimants that is promoted by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Case study: Jobcentre Plus advisors focusing on sanctions rather than support into work¹⁰

I seen this one [Work Coach] one day and he was virtually reading the jobcentre rule book, if you don't do this you'll be sanctioned, if you don't do that you'll be sanctioned, and I said 'yes but I am doing it so why are you talking about sanctioning?' Others, they're more easy. (Dennis)

16. Given that the majority of claimants will in future engage with Jobcentre Plus for two years before receiving any more intensive support, Crisis believes a significant culture shift is required if Jobcentre Plus is to effectively deliver tailored support that helps people move into or towards employment during this time. This is especially the case for those with significant barriers to work, including homelessness, for whom the current emphasis on sanctions is pushing them even further from the labour market. Sixty per cent of participants in our research who were sanctioned said it had a negative effect on their ability to look for work.¹¹ Crisis believes **DWP must collect data on movement into work amongst claimants engaging with Jobcentre Plus and monitor performance against this data.**
17. **Improvements must also be made to the training delivered to Work Coaches, in relation to setting conditionality requirements for vulnerable claimants.** Crisis is aware that DWP has recently updated guidance on this and was pleased to be consulted on a draft. The findings of our research suggest however that existing guidance is not being followed. While the Claimant Commitment is designed to be a flexible document which is tailored to the claimant's personal circumstances, many vulnerable claimants do not realise this and few respondents to our research recognised it as the product of a conversation.¹²
18. Training on vulnerability for Work Coaches should also include detailed information about the easement rules for newly homeless people, which allow Work Coaches to lift work-related conditionality requirements while claimants look for accommodation, and to extend this beyond four weeks at their discretion. More broadly, **Crisis wishes to see the easement extended to all those who are homeless**, not just those who are newly homeless, given that people may not disclose they are homeless until they have been homeless for some time. Crisis also believes **Work Coaches should have the flexibility not to raise a sanction doubt if a sanction is likely to result in homelessness or destitution**, given that 21 per cent of sanctioned respondents in our survey said they became homeless as a result of a sanction.¹³
19. Crisis has particular concerns that Work Coaches currently have very little capability in identifying that someone is homeless or at risk of homelessness, and the impact this may have on their ability to move towards or seek work. This is illustrated by the low volume of referrals received from Jobcentre Plus for the East London Flexible Support Fund project mentioned above. Crisis met its contract target of supporting 32 per cent of participants into work, but the majority (54 per cent) of eligible referrals were identified by Crisis job coaches from their existing caseload, not by Jobcentre Plus. Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches often

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

failed to identify those who were 'hidden homeless' (sofa surfing or living in hostels or temporary accommodation), identifying primarily those who were visibly rough sleeping.

20. Crisis is concerned about the broader and future implications of Jobcentre Plus advisors' failure to recognise homelessness, beyond those relating to setting appropriate conditionality requirements. As Universal Credit rolls out, Work Coaches will also play a critical role in identifying vulnerable claimants, including those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, who could benefit from an Alternative Payment Arrangement, enabling their housing element to be paid directly to their landlord. Crisis has already identified cases of Work Coaches failing to identify that individuals are homeless, when determining eligibility for the live service of Universal Credit.
21. **It is vital that Work Coaches receive training to increase their knowledge of homelessness (including hidden homelessness) and how this interacts with other barriers to work.** This should include the ability to ask questions about a claimant's housing situation in an appropriate way to encourage disclosure. The team responsible for developing Alternative Payments Arrangement under Universal Credit has already begun to deliver training for Work Coaches in this area, which covers how to build trust and rapport with claimants and encourage disclosure of difficult personal circumstances. This should be provided to every Work Coach, with take-up monitored and refresher training provided.
22. Key to encouraging disclosure is the availability of private interview rooms where claimants are more likely to feel comfortable disclosing difficult personal circumstances. **The Department for Work and Pensions should explore options for providing private interview rooms with Work Coaches, once the Jobcentre Plus estate comes up for renewal in 2017.** Where jobcentres are co-located with local authorities, there may be scope to use existing facilities. This could also draw on any learning taken from the Department's pilot of co-locating an IAPT service with private rooms on site.
23. Crisis is concerned that most queries about the housing element of Universal Credit will be expected to be dealt with centrally by the Universal Credit service centre. Some vulnerable claimants may seek face-to-face support from their Work Coach to resolve any issues related to the housing element of their claim, given their ongoing relationship to manage other aspects of their claim. Crisis believes **Work Coaches should receive training to deal with straightforward queries about the housing element of Universal Credit at the very least,** and should be able to support claimants to call the service centre together to resolve any issues if necessary. It's important that training covers any new flexibilities applied to the housing element of Universal Credit by the Scottish Government in future.
24. Crisis is keen to make clear that our research and our Crisis job coaches have identified examples of good practice in Jobcentre Plus, where dedicated advisors have succeeded in establishing a trusting and supportive relationship with vulnerable claimants. Typically this involves support that recognises emotional needs.¹⁴ What is clear, however, is that delivery across the Jobcentre Plus estate is inconsistent, and examples of good practice are sometimes dependent on individual advisors being prepared to 'go the extra mile' to support claimants.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Case study: Jobcentre Plus advisor successfully building trust and rapport with a claimant¹⁵

She really helped me this woman [officer at the jobcentre], I were panicking, she calmed me down and she said 'we'll make sure you get your money' and she really persisted and were really good... (Maggie)

25. Crisis Skylight coaches report that they generally see a better, more personalised service in smaller job centres that are more integrated within the local community and have lower staff turnover. In contrast, busy jobcentres with high staff turnover not only lead to lack of consistent support for individual claimants, but also mean that expertise is lost. Job Coaches across our Skylight centres report a lack of expertise amongst Jobcentre Plus staff around basic aspects of jobsearching (including how to write a CV or knowledge of popular jobsearch websites), benefit rules (including entitlements for EEA migrants), or how to make better off calculations. This is largely not the fault of advisors but the result of a lack of adequate and regular training.
26. Where staff knowledge and understanding is higher, this is often due to advisors having held previous specialist roles in areas such as mental health, disability, substance misuse, or housing and homelessness. Crisis regrets that much of this specialism has been lost and **supports the introduction of specialist advisors for homeless jobseekers and domestic abuse survivors**. Crisis is concerned that considerable expectations will otherwise be placed on Work Coaches in terms of requiring specialist knowledge across a huge range of areas. **At the very least mechanisms should be put in place for the sharing of knowledge and best practice amongst Work Coaches**. Coaches should be encouraged to seek support from colleagues if they lack knowledge or need additional support, within an environment that encourages a process of continual learning.
27. The Minister for Employment has confirmed that 'all Jobcentre Work Coaches complete learning that has been designed specifically for their role. This learning combines the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to coach claimants effectively so that they are able to identify for themselves what they need to do to find work and how best to do it.'¹⁶ Crisis is yet to see any evidence that Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches have developed coaching skills and will be interested to see how this model develops as Universal Credit and the Work Coach delivery model is rolled out. **The Department for Work and Pensions should undertake an assurance process of its training roll-out** to ensure Work Coaches have the skills they need to effectively support claimants with all aspects of their jobsearch. Work Coaches could benefit from shadowing job coaches from strongly performing external providers, particularly those that specialise in homelessness. Crisis would be very willing to welcome Jobcentre Plus staff to shadow our job coaches at Crisis Skylight.
28. Crisis is concerned however that the appointments claimants have with Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches are too short to deliver any meaningful coaching support. Crisis job coaches report that clients typically see their Jobcentre Plus advisors for ten minutes at a time and have no access to them outside of these appointments. Crisis supports the Department's long term plans to structure Work Coaches' time more flexibly by reducing face-to-face contact with those who are the most self-sufficient, in order to offer longer appointments to those who require more intensive support. **It's vital that the Department undertakes a thorough analysis of the staffing levels required to meet both current and future demand**, in order to allocate resources most effectively and to ensure sufficient face-to-face support is available for those who need it.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ HC Deb 17 June 2015 cW

Case study: Jobcentre Plus unable to deliver the intensive support required

Kristina¹⁷ had previous experience working as a driver but was claiming Jobseeker's Allowance after a long period out of work. She was supported by her Jobcentre Plus advisor to obtain professional driving qualifications and to update her CV. However, she lacked confidence and was very anxious, requiring more intensive support than her Jobcentre Plus advisor was able to offer. She was living in an overcrowded house with eight other people, occasionally sleeping on a friend's kitchen floor. She did not see herself as homeless and was afraid of mentioning her housing situation to her Jobcentre Plus advisor because she was illegally subletting. She heard about Crisis Skylight London through her local church group and approached us for help. We were able to provide intensive coaching support, as well as training on how to speak to employers and support to create an email account with a member of staff present. In December 2013 she volunteered as a mini bus driver for Crisis at Christmas and the following month started work as a minibus driver for a local community transport service. She now works as a school bus driver and is looking for work as a London bus driver.

29. One challenge for Jobcentre Plus that is likely to put significant strain on staff time is the digital nature of Universal Credit. While many people with experience of homelessness are proficient in using a computer, 38 per cent of St Mungo's clients in 2015 did not have the necessary digital skills to complete an online form.¹⁸ Crisis job coaches report that there is very little support available within Jobcentre Plus for those who need support to conduct their jobsearch or manage their claim online.

Case study: lack of IT support within Jobcentre Plus¹⁹

There should be more IT, not training, tutors, more IT tutors for people that... cos when you go and sign on and see a worker they're just sitting at a desk typing but they should have separate workers that should be able to sit down and if you're not sure on a computer they should be engaging instead of having to wander round the jobcentre going to look for somebody to help cos that's frustrating. (Adam)

30. Lack of digital skills is compounded by a lack of access to computers in some jobcentres, with Crisis job coaches reporting that even where computers *are* available, access is sometimes restricted to one hour timeslots. Crisis' research into homeless people's experiences of conditionality and sanctions found that, of those who reported difficulties meeting their conditionality requirements, 67 per cent reported needing, and not having, regular access to the internet. Only a small minority of participants mentioned using Jobcentre Plus computers to undertake their jobsearch.²⁰
31. With many libraries having closed, there is an increasing reliance on the voluntary sector to provide computer access to enable claimants to look for jobs online and meet the conditions of their Claimant Commitment. **The Department for Work and Pensions must commit to providing sufficient computer access to meet demand, including dedicated staff on hand to provide support to those who need it, and should conduct and publish a regular audit of computer availability.**
32. Even where computers are made available within Jobcentre Plus, Crisis job coaches report that claimants are often turned away from the jobcentre if they do not have an appointment

¹⁷ Crisis client (not her real name)

¹⁸ St Mungo's (2015) *Client Needs Survey*. Unpublished: more information available on request

¹⁹ Batty, E., Beatty, C., Casey, R., Foden, M., McCarthy, L., Reeve, K. (2015) *Homeless people's experiences of welfare conditionality and benefit sanctions*. London: Crisis

²⁰ Ibid.

with an advisor. Claimants are typically questioned by security guards on arrival, which can be particularly intimidating for our more vulnerable clients and undermines the assertion that computers are available across Jobcentre Plus offices for general use.²¹ In contrast, our building-based Skylight centres in London, Oxford and Newcastle serve a vulnerable and sometimes chaotic client group without employing security. Instead we employ highly trained reception staff who are skilled in de-escalating conflict.

33. **The Department for Work and Pensions should take advantage of the opportunity presented by the renewal of the Jobcentre Plus estate in 2017 to improve the physical environment of Jobcentre Plus**, in order to encourage positive engagement. People with complex support needs are likely to respond more positively to an open space that offers a calm and tidy environment. This will be particularly important once more claimants are required to spend more time at Jobcentre Plus completing online jobsearch requirements in future. Jobcentres that co-locate with local authorities should take advantage of the opportunity to undergo a significant rebranding exercise in order to encourage greater engagement amongst more vulnerable claimants.

Recommendations for the future: an integrated model to address employability and housing need

34. Crisis believes that, for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness to be effectively supported into work, support must be provided to address their housing need. Without such support, housing need will continue to act as a barrier to finding and sustaining work. The future co-location of Jobcentre Plus and local authorities presents a useful opportunity to better integrate services and ensure claimants have access to a range of support to address both employability and housing needs. However, co-location is not a means to effective integration of services in and of itself. **Jobcentre Plus advisors and housing and homelessness teams must work towards shared objectives that centre on the individual and their particular needs.**
35. Universal Support may offer a useful framework through which to deliver such wrap-around support. For such support to be meaningful, however, **it's vital that it is sufficiently funded and offers more than simply signposting to existing statutory services.** Most single homeless people are not considered to be a 'priority', meaning that their council has no legal duty to find them housing. Mystery shopping research conducted by Crisis found that in 29 visits out of 87, single people presenting to their council as homeless were simply turned away without any help or the opportunity to speak to a housing advisor.²² Support to help future Universal Credit claimants address housing need must therefore include support to access and sustain accommodation, as well as prevention work for those at risk of homelessness.
36. **An offer of housing support within the Jobcentre Plus model will be reliant on an official assessment framework that identifies those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness**, including those who are hidden homeless. This will require regular reviews to ensure that people's support needs are met as they change over time. As outlined above, this will in turn be reliant on highly trained Work Coaches who are able to recognise vulnerability and encourage disclosure. It will also be reliant on a culture shift across Jobcentre Plus so that claimants see it as a place for accessing meaningful support rather than for carrying out a simple administrative function.

²¹ HC 24 November 2015 cW

²² Dobie, S., Sanders, B. & Teixeira, L. (2014) *Turned Away: the treatment of single homeless people by local authority homelessness services in England*. London: Crisis

37. **Jobcentre Plus should also collaborate better with local voluntary services in order to provide better access to support to address housing need and specialist employment support**, both as part of such a framework of wrap-around support, as well as outside it. Crisis job coaches report that Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches rarely signpost to local voluntary services if they are not included on the LMS system. As outlined above, failure to identify the support needs of individual claimants results in referrals not being made even where there is a formal referrals mechanism in place. This fails to make best use of local resources. Jobcentre Plus offices should map local specialist services and strengthen links with them, including by providing a named point of contact and making referrals where appropriate. Homeless Link has produced a useful toolkit for homelessness organisations, promoting joint working with Jobcentre Plus.²³
38. Where claimants are making positive efforts to improve their employability by accessing support, courses or volunteering through the voluntary sector, Work Coaches should support and accommodate this activity. Research commissioned by Crisis has found that unfortunately Work Coaches sometimes instead impose requirements that leave claimants with no time to pursue meaningful training or support outside the Jobcentre.²⁴
39. In areas with devolved responsibility for commissioned employment support, including Scotland and those city regions that will be co-commissioning employment programmes, it's also vital that Jobcentre Plus is sufficiently joined up with local services to ensure that Jobcentre Plus complements that local provision.
40. Crisis is interested in the Government's proposal to offer employment support to school pupils via Jobcentre Plus advisors. This could present a useful opportunity to educate young people about the realities of housing and homelessness, in order to prevent them becoming homeless in future. In 2014 Crisis delivered workshops to Year 10 and 11 students in schools across South Yorkshire, in partnership with local councils and theatre in education organisation Collingwood Learning. As well as communicating the impact of homelessness on later life chances, the workshop encouraged young people to think about the realities of living independently, emphasising the importance of financial independence. An evaluation of the project found that the number of students who could recognise the term 'hidden homelessness' increased by 74 per cent as a result of this intervention and the number who felt they knew who to turn to for help increased by 35 per cent.²⁵
41. While Crisis believes there is much that can be done to improve the Jobcentre Plus offer for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, we ultimately have serious concerns about the agency's ability to enact the culture change required to offer the best intervention for this vulnerable client group. For this reason we also believe that **those identified as homeless or at risk of homelessness should have the option of being fast-tracked to specialist support delivered outside the jobcentre**. One solution could be to offer voluntary access to the new Work and Health Programme to homeless jobseekers from day one of a benefits claim, with homelessness providers contracted to provide support within that programme.

For further information, please contact:

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²³ Homeless Link (2014) *Working Together Toolkit: Developing relationships with Jobcentre Plus*

²⁴ Batty, E., Beatty, C., Casey, R., Foden, M., McCarthy, L., Reeve, K. (2015) *Homeless people's experiences of welfare conditionality and benefit sanctions*. London: Crisis

²⁵ Unpublished evaluation