

JSA sanction targets by Job Centre Plus have ensured that many people live in financial distress and their work ambition is stifled.

**citizens  
advice  
scotland**

## Job Seekers Allowance: Sanctions



A rise of 459% in sanctions against JSA claimants in a 2 year period not only increased hardship for vulnerable people, but created an unprecedented demand on the Scottish CAB Service. Between October 2008 and October 2010, the number of sanctions against JSA claimants increased from 10,700 a month to almost 60,000 as a result of some Jobcentre Plus offices setting targets for sanction referrals for JCP staff to achieve.

Even though targets for sanction referrals have been removed, CAS is still concerned about the impact that JSA sanctions have on vulnerable and young JSA claimants. Bureaux evidence shows that the DWP are interpreting JSA regulations over zealously, and seeing sanctions as the first tool of discipline and not the last.

### Reasons for sanctions

To receive JSA a claimant must enter into a jobseekers agreement with Jobcentre Plus. If a JSA claimant is deemed to have broken this agreement they are liable to have their JSA payments sanctioned. A sanction means your full JSA payment can be stopped for up to 26 weeks and can be imposed for the following reasons:

- Not being available for or actively seeking work, or not signing the Jobseeker's Agreement
- Missing a 'signing on' interview
- Voluntarily leaving work, or refusing a notified vacancy
- Refusing to attend a compulsory scheme/training, or failing to comply with direction.

Contact: Matt Lancashire, Social Policy Officer

t: 0131 550 1000 f: 0131 550 1001 w: [www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk) need advice? [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

Citizens Advice Scotland, Spectrum House, 2 Powderhall Road, Edinburgh, EH7 4GB

The Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux - Citizens Advice Scotland (Scottish charity number SC016637)

# Job Seekers Allowance: Sanctions

Case evidence

## Impact of sanctions on clients

Many individuals and families in Scotland are facing numerous problems in the current economic climate to maintain a level of basic income to feed, clothe and house themselves and their children. This situation is exacerbated when JSA sanctions are imposed. This has left many clients facing continued unemployment, financial hardship and poverty. CAS evidence shows:

- Clients who have been sanctioned for missing a 'signing on' date for a legitimate reason, such as a medical appointment
- Clients who have been sanctioned due to failing to make a job application, despite the job being unsuitable as a result of an underlying medical condition
- Clients who cannot afford to feed themselves or their children, warm their houses and pay their rent due to being sanctioned
- Clients who have been unable to attend job interviews and training schemes due to the imposition of a sanction as they cannot afford travel costs
- Clients who have been sanctioned for not actively looking for work when no evidence has been supplied to support that assertion

## Proposals for change

CAS welcomes the DWP/JCP announcement that JCP offices who had set targets for the number of sanction referrals have now removed them. CAS urges that sanction targets are not imposed again.

We recommend that:

- A sanction is temporarily delayed if a client is attending a job interview or training course, enabling the claimant to attend a job interview or course and fulfil the opportunity of gaining employment
- All JSA claimants are helped to have a full understanding and appropriate information regarding their JSA agreement and made fully aware of the consequences of not complying with it
- A young person's champion is employed at each JCP to ensure young people understand their interaction with the JSA agreement
- Sanctions are imposed as a last resort by JCP and all other disciplinary measures have been used before a sanctions decision is made.

A West of Scotland CAB reports of a client whose benefit was sanctioned for six weeks after failing to attend a job interview which she had not been informed about by JCP. The client had no money for food or utilities. She phoned for a Crisis Loan and was advised that they would not consider her as she was under a sanction.

A West of Scotland CAB reports of client whose JSA has been sanctioned for three months because she has failed to attend a training course. The course venue is 6 miles away and it is too far to walk. JCP say she should have borrowed the money for travel. The client had no-one to borrow money from.

A South of Scotland CAB reports of a client who failed to attend an job interview despite having an underlying medical condition which restricted him from working in that particular role. The client had his JSA sanctioned and received no payment for two weeks.