Group Session Guidance

Purpose

1. This guidance is designed to help in setting up, running and ensuring group sessions are effective. With the introduction of flexible advisory delivery Districts can opt to utilise group sessions in any way they wish. This guidance aims to provide all the relevant information in one place.

Introduction

2. Customer group advice and interview sessions have been a feature of Jobcentre Plus business for some time, mainly involving collective advice sessions with optional formal interviews included.
3. As the introduction of group sessions has become more widespread, this has resulted in a number of issues being raised. These may be covered by guidance in other policy areas e.g Health and Safety/Lone Parent Guidance.
4. The principles outlined in this guidance are intended to supplement that detailed guidance.

What you need to think about?

5. The list below covers the main areas you need to consider before embarking on group sessions.

- Why Group Sessions?
- Design Specification/ Principles
- Risk Assessment
- Previous Types of Group Sessions
- People Issues
- Quality Assurance
- Customer Considerations
- Alternatives for Customers
- Support Material
- Customer Support
- Travelling Expenses
- Presentational equipment
- Maximising Attendance
- Setting up Group Sessions on LMS

Why Group sessions?

6. Group sessions can be used to deliver key elements needed in moving forward a customer. Group sessions can be used to cope with higher volumes of customers moving through the intervention regimes (primary Jobcentre Plus benefits). Specific customer groups and characteristics can also be targeted to deliver identified outcomes and improvements in off flow.
7. There are different types of group sessions, these are Information and Mandatory. Under the new pre work programme there are no mandatory group sessions as part of the offer.

- **Information sessions-** are clearly able to be delivered more efficiently within group environments but issues arise around customer attendance and if there is any mandating of customers to other activity. Customer choice is usually a relevant factor when selecting this type of intervention;

- **Mandatory group interview sessions** -present different constraints but can have a positive impact upon ensuring delivery of the relevant regime and to some extent can make customers feel less isolated due to others with similar circumstances.

8. Group sessions have been divided between in-house delivery and external providers, using Jobcentres and external premises. This gives flexibility in delivery, attendance and ensuring standards are met. Using this flexibility can give different operational outcomes and relieve pressure from premises and interview space. It also allows more detailed information to be given.
9. With the introduction of flexible delivery within districts and the Pre Work Programme Regime from April 2010 there are no mandatory reasons why a customer should attend a group session.
10. Because of an increased use of this type of intervention, monitoring and evaluation is an increased feature, particularly where in house staff, deliver sessions. A specific Group Session QAF has been developed.
11. Other strategic considerations have been in utilising administrative support to ensure enough customers are referred and any follow up activity is undertaken.
12. Key attendance levels ensure effective use of personnel and premises and this needs careful consideration to take into account customer needs and operational efficiency.

Design Principles and Facilities

13. The link below provides information on principles of design and appropriate equipment.

Group Sessions Design Specification

Risk Assessments

14. Before setting up group sessions a risk assessment process must be followed.
15. The risk assessment should be conducted into all aspects of running the sessions; the assessment should be conducted in consultation with Trillium specialists and Regional Health and Safety representatives.

Trillium Off Site Risk assessments

Internal delivery

16. Group Sessions operated within Jobcentres use the existing Public Facing Jobcentre Plus Risk Assessment process-

Link to Internal Risk Assessment process

External delivery

17. A separate risk assessment process is in place for external delivery of group Sessions.

Link to External Risk Assessment process

Personal Risk Assessments

18. In addition to the above risk assessments the suite of individual risk assessments should also be carried out and regularly reviewed by management.

Link to Personal Risk Assessment

Previous Types of Group Sessions

19. Below is a link to the previous types of group session which have taken place with relevant information attached. This is designed to give Districts a clear idea of the issues involved when continuing to operate group sessions. None of the group sessions form part of the Get Britain Working and Pre Work Programme Regime.

Click here to access information about previous group sessions.

People Issues

20. Effective management of staff undertaking Group Sessions work is essential to maintain the benefits of operating this type of intervention.
21. Staff working off site need to maintain regular links with the jobcentre and have good communication channels.
22. Effective backup plans for covering the group sessions need to be in place with deputies and cover for support staff a key requirement.
23. Where staff have IT access outside the jobcentre adherence to policy should be observed.
24. Staff running the session must have completed the facilitator and presentation courses.

Link to out stationed IT/Telephony guide

Quality Assurance

25. Quality assurance activity should be undertaken for staff carrying out Group Sessions, any feedback and reviews should be held outside of the sessions. Quality improvement of staff and support mechanisms should form part of regular planning activity as well as obtaining customer feedback on the delivery and content of the sessions. The use of customer reactionaries and questionnaires can give ideas for improvement and feedback on facilitator

performance. A specific Group Session Quality Assurance Framework has been developed to assist managers and advisers with this task.

Link to Group Session Quality Assurance Framework

Customer Considerations

26. In most cases there will be minimal risk of customer problems in inviting them to Group Session type gatherings. However it can be clear prior to selecting some customers that there could be problems or issues which need consideration before an invitation is issued.
27. Previewing customers due to attend group sessions is an integral part of managing risk to staff and customers. Previewing can avoid embarrassing situations where facilities and resources are not able to meet customer's needs.
28. It would normally be the Diary Admin and Support Officer (DASO) or Assistant Adviser who undertakes customer reviews before sending out appointment letters. Consideration to make alternative arrangements should be given to Potentially Violent (PV) customers, or lone parents who could have child care issues when attending a session. Group Sessions are often unsuitable for people with a mental health condition or learning disability, such as autism. The DEA could be a useful source of information and support prior to booking the customer on a session.
29. Also language barriers will need to be assessed in case interpreters are needed. It may be cost effective to group together certain customers if possible or to adjust times of sessions to fit with school hours.
30. In general customers who have demonstrated unacceptable behaviour should not be included within group sessions.
31. Where mandatory obligations are required it is important that numbers of customers are refined to allow FTA and objections to the mandating element.
32. Optimum numbers are 10 attendees with a maximum of 20 invites. (Assume 50% drop out)
33. Consideration should also be given to the handling of sensitive customers and an assessment by the office manager would be needed prior to any group session being selected. These customers could also include Sex Offender and MAPPA cases known to the office.

Alternatives for Customer Groups

34. We cannot mandate a customer to a group session, although we can issue a Jobseekers Direction to attend.
35. Given this customers can object to being dealt with in a group environment and this must be respected. Alternatives to the group session should be available where requested for JSA customers only.
36. Certain Work- Focused Interviews contained within a Group Session should be available at the Jobcentre if the customer does not want to partake in a group session.

- **Disabled Customers**— where group sessions are being delivered in Jobcentres initial assessments on premises use will have taken account of disability issues. There may however be individual locations where all disabilities cannot be accommodated and this may be more applicable when using external premises due to limited availability in the locality.

37. Selection of customers will need to take account of the above restrictions and alternatives should be arranged within the Jobcentre.

Support Information

38. Supply mechanisms should be reviewed in the light of delivering Group Sessions to customers, in some situations external premises will be used and transporting bulk literature and forms can present a health and safety risk.

39. Care should be taken to ensure correct posters and support material are suitable and relevant to the customer group being handled. If the facilities are being used by more than one customer group, a compromise or removal process should be adopted to cater for each group.

Customer Support

40. Customer experience of group sessions will vary for each individual type of session; however there are standard support elements that need to be factored into provide customers with a fulfilling experience.

- **Language barriers** are now common due to our diverse customer base; consideration should be given where possible to supplying interpreters and also grouping together customers with the same language needs at a session. Where it is known that language barriers exist consider extending the length of the group session;
- Literature should also support the range of customers where possible.

41. In some situations relatives or friends may attend the group session as an interpreter see the guidance link below to relevant policy. This may be useful in the group session or any one to one interview.

Link to Interpreter Guidance

- **Individual Privacy –** Many customers express the need for privacy when discussing personal issues and this where possible should always be considered at any one to one type discussions;
- **Customers travel costs** where applicable to attend the session should be accommodated when requested, but this may present issues where the session is held outside of a Jobcentre in terms of making payments. **Staff should not transport money from the Jobcentre to the external group session site,** and alternative arrangements need to be put in place to cover these situations.
- Asking customers to claim travel costs on their next usual visit to the Jobcentre is the preferred option, but others can include paying customers via the Local Payment System (LPS) with appropriate controls in place.

Travelling Expenses

- **Session in the Jobcentre**—Normal travel to interview process should be followed for customer fares but grouping payouts to customers at a particular time should be paramount to avoid individual staff continually attending to pay. Structuring admin tasks should be factored in to ensure best delivery of the sessions activities. Often the adviser delivering the sessions holds money for this purpose in conjunction with finance colleagues.

- **Sessions out of Jobcentre**— There are various options available and this depends upon support mechanisms at the location;
- Advise customer to attend their jobcentre to claim the expenses (preferably at next intervention or FJR);
- Set up a secure transfer by post of customer claims to be paid by Local Payment System (LPS) through customer's bank account. (A template should be used for this containing personal details and bank account including a signature for the claim);
- Fax through a template for payment through a bank account as above and ensure destruction or return template to customer.

42. In every case a list of customers attending should be available to cross check payment entitlement.

43. **Under no circumstances should staff courier documents containing full customer details (including Bank Accounts) from the session to the Jobcentre for payment.**

44. Scheduling Group Session attendance on signing days will remove much of the need to pay out travel expenses, but customers should be made aware of the ability to claim costs, usually by their invitation letter.

Link to payment of customer's travelling expenses guidance.