

# JSA Interviewing Good Practice

## Introduction

1. The aim of a Work Focused Interview (WFI) is to achieve Jobcentre Plus objectives by working through customer interests and needs. Working with the customer gives you the best chance of success whilst pressurising or 'hard selling' is likely to be less effective.
2. Having a structure to an interview will:
  - make the most of the time you have available to spend with customers;
  - focus on individual needs;
  - draw up appropriate, realistic and achievable Jobseeker's Agreements (JSAs);
  - gain customer commitment to a particular course of action; and
  - ensure the customer is available for and actively seeking employment.
3. Although discussions vary depending upon the customer's circumstances and the type of interview, the process is similar in most interviews.
4. WFIs:
  - are organised;
  - purposeful; and
  - go through distinct stages.

## Jobsearch competences

5. You should be able to recognise and, if necessary, help customers develop the competences needed for successful jobsearch. The required competences and qualities can be listed in three levels:

- **Level 1 - essentials**
  - well defined, personalised and realistic work goals; and
  - knowledge of the 'world of work'.

These will always be your starting point and will be discussed during even the shortest interviews.

- **Level 2 - basic competences and qualities**
  - desire or motivation to find work;
  - self-confidence and self-esteem;
  - positive and constructive attitude and expectations; and
  - commitment to work goals.
- **Level 3 - more complex issues**
  - self-awareness and/or willingness to accept and act upon feedback and guidance from others;
  - social and presentational skills needed for interviews and to perform well in the chosen job goal;
  - communication skills needed;
  - ability and willingness to plan;
  - ability to adapt and cope with change;
  - ability to manage effectively any employment limitations related to health or disability; and
  - persistence, determination and resilience.

6. Level 3 issues are likely to require a close working relationship and more time before you can discuss them openly. Deal with these issues sensitively

when you feel you have established enough rapport to allow you to do so supportively and safely.

7. All the competences and qualities above could be adversely affected by personal circumstances, for example:

- domestic, or geographical circumstances;
- economic or financial circumstances;
- psychological state;
- a health problem or disability;
- personal characteristics, for example:
  - age;
  - gender;
  - culture;
  - race; or
  - religion;
- education and training;
- past life/work experiences.

8. Focus on things that can be changed, for example, the customer's jobsearch competences. Customers who do not have the necessary competences will need more help. WFIs will help you assess and decide upon what kind of help customers need.

## **Stages involved in a well-structured Interview**

9. A Work Focused Interview has the following stages;

- preparation.
- introduction.
- defining the job goal.
- exploring and evaluating.
- planning.
- follow-up.

## **Preparation**

10. Preparing properly for your interviews will help ensure you cover relevant issues and make best use of time available.

11. Before each interview familiarise yourself with the customer and determine the starting point. For example, find out about:

- work goals;
- what they have done previously to find work;
- barriers to employment;
- health problems or disability;
- additional requirements needed to aid communication, for example:
  - someone with hearing impairment may need a private room or an interpreter;
- action previously agreed; and
- specifics that need to be covered or followed up.

12. Prepare for each interview differently, for example, at:

- New Jobseeker Interviews use:
  - the Labour Market System (LMS); and
- Jobsearch Reviews or main advisory interviews, look at:

- the Jobseeker's Agreement; and
- details on LMS from previous interviews.

## **Physical environment**

13. There are many environmental factors which could adversely affect your interview or add to any anxiety the customer may be feeling, for example:

- interruptions by colleagues;
- telephone calls;
- background noise;
- poor layout of the room/furniture;
- uncomfortable temperature; and
- poor lighting.

14. Also, ensure:

- there are clear signs inside and outside the building to let the customer know where to go;
- there is an obvious reception point;
- customers are dealt with promptly;
- customers have somewhere comfortable to sit if they have to wait - ensure they do not feel 'in the way' or exposed;
- there are facilities available to meet the needs of customers with disabilities, for example:
  - appropriate versions of leaflets for customers with visual impairment;
- there is something for customers to do while waiting, for example:
  - direct them to jobpoints;
  - have leaflets and posters available;
- writing materials are available if customers need to fill in any forms before their interview.

15. Take particular account of the needs of customers with disabilities. For example;

- do they have access to the office?
- do they need a private room?
- will someone with a hearing impairment need an interpreter.

## **Privacy**

16. Interviews will normally take place in an open plan setting. They may cover matters of a personal nature or subjects which customers may find upsetting or uncomfortable.

17. Arrange interviewing stations so that as little sound as possible travels between them. Wherever possible, make a private interview room available for customers who ask for one or for sensitive interviews.

## **Introduction**

18. The first few minutes will set the tone of the interview. Put customers at ease and establish rapport as soon as possible by:

- introducing yourself;
- explaining what your role is;
- explaining how long the interview will take;
- being:

- positive;
  - welcoming;
  - polite;
  - courteous; and
  - helpful;
  - not using jargon;
  - establishing any additional requirements needed to help customers with a health problem or disability participate fully in the interview; and
  - pitching your interview at the right level.
19. If the customer is entitled to travel expenses for attending the interview, they should be paid before the interview. If not, assure the customer that they will be paid immediately afterwards.

### **Agreeing the purpose of the interview**

20. Listen carefully to what the customer says and be sensitive to any nervousness and hostility.
21. Explain that the main purpose of the interview is to:
- see how they are doing in their search for work;
  - see what help, if any, is needed;
  - ensure they remain entitled to JSA by being available for and actively seeking employment; and
  - deal with any changes in their circumstances.
22. The emphasis placed on different elements will depend upon individual customers. For example:
- you could spend time explaining JSA conditionality at a New Jobseeker Interview; or
  - discussing jobsearch activity with those who appear not to be doing enough to satisfy the actively seeking work condition.
23. With others who are clearly doing all they can to find work, you could spend less time on the above issues. Remember, in some cases, too much emphasis could damage rapport and hinder progress.
24. Before moving on, check the customers understanding of the interview and discuss:
- any concerns they have arising from their interview invitation letter;
  - the customers expectations regarding advisory interviews; and
  - previous experience of advisory interviews.
25. Ensure the customer understands that you are not there to force them into an inappropriate course of action. Your role is to help them decide upon an appropriate plan of action. This will help to gain commitment to whatever you agree. Pressuring customers tends to encourage resistance.

### **Defining the job goal**

26. The starting point is the customers main work goal. Ensure they are clear about their goal, for example:
- training is not a work goal, but should be a means to an end.
  - the actual work goal is the sort of job the customer hopes to be able to do after undertaking the training.
27. Ensure the customer does the bulk of the talking. Do not supply ideas too early unless they have none of their own. Many customers will go along with

your ideas, but have no intention of following them through. If supplying ideas, ensure they are relevant to the customer and that they fully understand what is involved.

28. Ensure the job goal is defined as specific job vacancies or job titles, for example:

- industrial cleaner;
- domestic cleaner;
- carpet cleaner;
- office cleaner; or
- street cleaner is better than:
  - cleaner; and,
- lorry driver;
- van driver;
- taxi driver; or
- delivery driver is better than:
  - driver.

### **Exploring and evaluating**

29. This stage of the interview is about:

- ensuring the main goal is realistic, reality testing;
- considering other options;
- identifying needs and barriers;
- giving advice and information; and,
- checking JSA entitlement.

### **Reality testing**

30. Having defined a main work goal, talk through the detail of how it is to be achieved. Ensure the goals are realistic to help you draw up an effective Jobseeker's Agreement.

31. If there are still a number of options to choose from, help the customer place them in priority order.

32. Ensure their aims are realistic. Discuss how they will achieve their work goal. If they cannot do this, with help and guidance from you, discuss setting a more achievable work goal.

33. Ensure the customer's situation lends itself to their chosen work goal, consider:

- health problems; and
- the local labour market.

34. The goal should be one the customer is likely to achieve and which they feel keen to work towards. This part of the interview depends upon you having knowledge of 'the world of work', for example:

- what particular jobs involve;
- what jobs are available;
- what skills are required;
- how employers recruit; and
- travel to work patterns.

### **Considering other options**

35. It is important to consider other options because:

- customers should not rely on one goal which may not work out;
- customers may be limiting themselves through a lack of knowledge or awareness;
- there may be shorter-term goals to aim for;
- the customer may appear unsuitable for their main job goal, for example, their characteristics or personal qualities may be inappropriate. Take care when considering these issues as the customer's appearance or demeanour at an advisory interview may not be indicative of their approach to a job interview or work;
- the customer may lack focus in their jobsearch; or
- they may be needed to satisfy the JSA entitlement conditions, for example:
  - availability; and
  - actively seeking work.

36. Some customers narrow their options too much; while others leave their choices so wide that they have no focus to their jobsearch. Those who say they will do 'anything' rarely mean that. Also, they are less likely to succeed than those who are better focused on a few options.

37. An interest in a few options is the best starting point especially if accompanied by a willingness to be flexible. Best progress is likely to be made by those who are prepared to compromise, take advantage of opportunities and take a step at a time towards their goals.

38. Your role at this stage is to help the customer talk through what they must do to achieve their goal(s). Someone who wants 'office work' would be well advised to consider the different jobs that exist in that area.

39. Encourage customers to pick the goal they think is most suitable and to work just on that one, using the others as 'fall back' options if the first proves unworkable.

40. Customers should also keep in mind that they may initially have to do a job that is not their ideal choice. Having a job may help them get their ideal choice because they will have current work experience and references.

### **Unlocking the goal**

41. If the customer has difficulty identifying alternative or 'fall back' options, a useful way of exploring them is to use the 'unlocking the goal technique'.

42. This involves finding out what customers like about their ideal or chosen goals and using this to explore other options. For example, you may ask:

- what is it about being a dental assistant that particularly interests you?;
- why do you especially enjoy being a care assistant?; and
- what other jobs can you use those skills for?

43. Often, there are several jobs that the customer would enjoy just as much as the one that they have set their heart on, but they are not aware of them. Sometimes, it can be helpful to explore these options.

44. Alternatively, a customer who has decided they must go on a certain training course may not be aware that training could be got 'on the job'. Or they may be aiming for something that is not usually available.

45. Use your knowledge of the local labour market and occupations to suggest other options that the customer might pursue.

## **Identifying needs and barriers**

46. Identify any needs or barriers that the customer has to overcome, for example:

- they may know what they want to do and have the necessary skills, but there are transport difficulties that make it hard for them to get to where the work exists.
- Alternatively, the work they want may not exist in the area in which they are living or willing to travel;

47. The following paragraphs look at a range of issues that can form barriers to a speedy return to work and suggests ways in which you can help customers overcome them.

48. The first four topics might be covered in any type of interview. The rest, noted as 'casework issues' are more complex and probably better dealt with by referring the customer on to a caseload where more time can be spent with them. The topics are:

- Motivation
- Self-confidence and self-esteem
- Positive and constructive attitude and expectations
- Commitment
- Self-Awareness and Willingness to Accept or Act Upon Feedback (Caseload)
- Social and presentational skills (Caseload)
- Communication skills for the chosen job goal (Caseload)
- Ability and Willingness to Plan, be Patient and to Recognise Progress (Caseload)
- Ability and Inclination to Adapt to and Cope With Change (Caseload)
- Energy Levels, Determination and Resilience (Caseload)

## **Motivation**

49. Throughout the interview look for signs of the customers intent and determination to find a job or work towards one. If you feel there is a lack of motivation, do some gentle exploration.

50. For example, a customer may say:

- 'I'm hoping to get a job as a secretary because that's what I really like doing and I can't see any point in looking for any other job.'

51. At this point the goal might seem fine. However, if there are plenty of secretarial jobs available, but the customer has been unemployed for nine months, you may doubt that they actually intend getting this, or any, type of work.

52. Your response might be:

- 'That seems like an appropriate goal for you and there are plenty of jobs to apply for. Perhaps the thing we need to get to grips with is what might be getting in the way of finding a secretarial job'

53. This may show that the customer is in fact motivated, but there are other problems. Alternatively, it may result in a number of excuses that suggest he or she does not want to make the necessary effort.

54. If you feel motivation is a problem say something like:

- 'I may be wrong, but I'm getting the impression that you are not really convinced that you do want secretarial work'.

55. This should open up the opportunity to discuss what the customer does want and, if necessary, remind the customer of the actively seeking work condition.

56. Another example might be a customer who is unenthusiastic about everything you suggest and who gives you the impression that they do not really mean what they say.

57. Your response might be:

- 'We've talked quite a lot about re-training to become a kitchen-fitter, but I get the impression you feel this may not be right for you. It would help me, and perhaps you too, if we can talk about any doubts that you have'.

58. Sometimes discussing doubts can lead to better options.

59. If a customer appears demotivated or is not seeking work as actively as they could, ensure their job goal and jobsearch activities, as defined in their JSAg, are right.

60. It may be, for example:

- that they are no longer committed to their JSAg and that it needs to be revised.

61. If, however, the JSAg is still relevant and appropriate, other action may be needed, for example:

- the customer might benefit from attending a Restart Course or some other programme aimed at helping build confidence and motivation; or
- a referral to a Decision Maker may be appropriate on the grounds that the customer is not actively seeking work.

62. It may be that the customer's lack of success has nothing to do with a lack of motivation. They may for example, be:

- actively chasing jobs and well motivated, but lack the basic jobsearch skills, for example:
  - interviewing skills; and
  - telephone techniques.

If so, suggest ways of improving these;

- being beaten to jobs by better candidates. If so:
  - encourage the customer to maintain their efforts;
  - help keep them motivated; or
  - suggest that they may wish to consider different goals that are easier to achieve;
- applying for interviews, but not getting them after disclosing a health problem or disability. If so:
  - consider referring to a matching caseload or to a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) for more help.

63. To overcome problems:

- never assume customers do not want a job:
  - find out why they appear to be demotivated and help them overcome the problem;
- help customers see how they would be better off in work:
  - help them see the benefits and rewards; and
  - perform a better-off calculation;



- explain about Rapid Re-claim and the streamlined process this provides, if they are concerned about re-claiming following short-term work;
- help build confidence and identify achievable work goals;
- explore options:
  - give the customer choices to make;
- help customers see that progress is being made;
- help customers replace irrational and demotivating thoughts with more positive and rational ones;
- if necessary, remind customers of the JSA entitlement conditions.

### **Self-confidence and self-esteem**

64. The level of self-confidence and self-esteem is an indication of how customers feel about themselves and their faith in being able to get and keep a job. If self-confidence or self-esteem is low, the customer may appear negative or demotivated.

65. Overcome problems by:

- treating customers with respect and warmth:
  - show an interest and belief in them and their abilities, particularly if they have a health problem or disability which is causing low levels of self-confidence and self-esteem;
- identifying, highlighting and praising strengths and positive qualities;
- highlighting and praising constructive efforts;
- being supportive enough to help customers take steps forward; and
- not patronising customers.

### **Positive and constructive attitude and expectations**

66. Ensure customers see jobseeking in terms of success, the rewards it will bring and the detail of what is involved. An optimistic and practical approach is more likely to succeed, but this may be difficult for customers who are depressed about their inability to find work or the length of time they have been unemployed or finding it hard to cope with the realities of, for example:

- their age;
- health;
- geographical location; or
- the state of the local labour market.

67. Overcome problems by:

- praising any positive or constructive approaches and views;
- gently questioning/confronting any persistently negative approaches or views.
- help customers appreciate the implications of these and replace such ideas with more positive and helpful ways of looking at things;
- not getting 'bogged down' or personally involved with negative attitudes;
- boosting confidence through highlighting strengths and positive characteristics;
- helping the customer focus on ways to overcome health problems or a disability that is forming an employment related barrier; and
- discuss the help available and how to seek work more positively.

## **Commitment**

68. Assess how much customers genuinely want to achieve their work goals:

- are they applying themselves seriously to the steps necessary to achieve their goals?

69. Commitment can be affected by other factors mentioned previously, for example:

- self-confidence;
- a lack of motivation;
- persistence; and
- resilience.

70. Overcome problems by:

- ensuring work goals are:
  - suitable;
  - realistic; and
  - achievable;
- highlighting the benefits of achieving the work goal;
- identifying reasons for the lack of commitment and try to help the customer 'iron them out';
- ensuring they can see how their goals can be achieved; and
- helping them to believe in their own ability to achieve their work goals.

## **Self-awareness and willingness to accept or act upon feedback**

71. Individual awareness of personal skills and qualities can vary considerably. Some customers:

- under-rate themselves;
- over-rate themselves; or
- have no concept of where they stand.

72. Some customers are also unwilling to accept feedback from others.

Always be constructive in your feedback.

73. If the customer lacks awareness of the skills and qualities that they have:

- discuss their work goals; and
- how they plan to sell themselves to potential employers.

74. Without mentioning at this stage, any discrepancy between what the customer thinks they can do and what you see in their behaviour:

- ask about how they got on at previous interviews or in past jobs, and about any feedback that they received from these;
- give them the opportunity to diagnose their own problems;
- ask rather than tell;
- feedback where it is necessary, but in a constructive and sensitive way;
- support where feedback is difficult to accept;
- help customers see how the impression they give can have an undesired effect, and,
- help customers see how trying to change something about themselves, their work goals or their activities could help them find work.

75. If the customer seems to be too aware or self-conscious:

- help them to see the irrational aspects of overemphasising characteristics that others will probably not consider that important; and
- highlight their strengths and ability to succeed.

## **Social and presentational skills**

76. It is important that customers behave and appear in a way that will be acceptable to an interviewer or employer. This includes how they interact with others and how they dress.

77. Clearly, in some jobs, for example:

- manual jobs:
  - this requirement will be much lower or less important than, for example:
  - management jobs or jobs with people involvement.

78. Overcome problems by:

- ensuring you cover social and presentational skills when discussing the suitability of work goals;
- asking customers how they feel they will cope with the job requirements and at interviews;
- highlighting the social and presentational skills the interviewer will be looking for;
- asking the customer how they will convince the employer that they are the right person for the job;
- exploring the options available to help customers if their communication skills are affected by a health problem or disability; and
- giving feedback honestly and tactfully if you think the customer does not have the necessary:
  - aptitude;
  - characteristics;
  - skills; or
  - abilities for their chosen work goal.

## **Communication skills for the chosen job goal**

79. Customers must have communication skills that match the expectations of the employer and the job. These skills will vary depending upon the kind of work the customer is looking for.

80. For example, many manual jobs require modest communication skills, but jobs involving:

- telephone work;
- customer contact;
- meetings;
- presentations; or
- written work;

will require good communication skills. The interview is one way in which the employer will assess communication skills.

81. Overcome problems by:

- covering communication skills when discussing the suitability of work goals:
  - ask the customer how they feel they will cope with the job requirements and interviews;
  - highlighting the kind of communication skills that the interviewer is likely to look for;
  - ask the customer how they will convince the employer that they are the best candidate; and

- giving feedback honestly and tactfully; and
- as a last resort if you think the customer does not have the necessary communication skills for their chosen job goal.

### **Ability and willingness to plan, be patient and to recognise progress**

82. Some customers lack the organisational skill to work out all the things they need to do to achieve their job goals.

83. Since success cannot always be achieved instantly and many goals need a good deal of work or effort before they can be achieved, customers must be prepared to make progress one stage at a time, and be prepared to wait for the ultimate reward.

84. Some customers give up too easily, become depressed or cynical because one or two interviews did not work out very well and need reasons and encouragement to keep trying.

85. Overcome problems by:

- breaking down suitable work goals into chunks or sub-goals, for example:
  - checking details of the job content;
  - reviewing technical information;
  - taking a correspondence course;
  - reading a book;
  - doing some voluntary work;
  - finding people to give them references,
  - finding out which employers to contact;
- ensuring the benefits and rewards for each task are clear;
- ensuring the customer understands that each step builds on the last; and the idea of building towards the ultimate goal;
- ensuring customers put 'failure' at an interview into perspective and understand that this is no reason to give up. Not succeeding at interviews can be for a variety of reasons, some of which are outside the customers control;
- encouraging customers to undertake training or strive for short term goals that will help lead to their ultimate work goal;
- helping customers with a health problem or disability to identify barriers to employment and to plan a way around them; and
- reminding customers of their obligation to actively seek work.

### **Ability and inclination to adapt to and cope with change**

86. Customers may need to be able and prepared to make changes to their behaviour, attitudes or plans in the light of experience, new events or evidence, without being demoralised or stressed.

87. Deal with problems sensitively and tactfully, as some customers may feel uncomfortable about change.

88. Overcome problems by:

- identifying what is not working in the interests of the customer;
- exploring options and helping the customer find more constructive ways of looking at things so that they do not continue with ways that stress them or block progress;
- being:
  - positive;

- logical;
- reasonable; and
- factual;
- not expecting too much change too quickly; and
- remembering that change can be threatening and frightening for some customers and that they may need support throughout this process.

### **Energy levels, determination and resilience**

89. Looking for work requires considerable persistence, determination and resilience. It also means being able to take set backs and overcome them without being thrown off course. It is less likely to be problematic if, for example:

- self-confidence is high;
- work goals are realistic; and
- the customer's approach is positive and constructive.

90. Overcome problems by:

- ensuring work goals are realistic and achievable;
- identifying the benefits of success;
- identifying ways of making progress one step at a time, and by highlighting the benefits along the way;
- ensuring motivation, confidence and skill levels are high;
- discouraging a lifestyle that will lessen energy and hinder the customer's ability to cope or achieve their work goal; and
- encouraging customers to do things for themselves and ensuring you praise or acknowledge their efforts.

### **Giving advice and information**

91. Throughout the interview, ensure you allow the customer to make his or her own decisions. Give advice when it is needed, the ideal kind of advice being that which influences, but allows them to make their own decisions.

92. This leaves control and responsibility with the customer and is described as a 'pulling' style of influencing.

93. For example, a customer wishing to do a particular course of engineering may not have, and may not be aware that they need, a certain level of mathematical ability. Knowing this may help them focus on a more achievable work goal. The customer may, of course, still want to do the course, but will need to obtain the prerequisite skills.

94. Sometimes, your advice may need to be more persuasive, particularly if someone is not taking positive action to find work, and they are putting their entitlement to JSA in doubt. If so, it is probably in the customers best interests to 'nudge' them into something that brings them a step closer to a job.

95. If you have to do this, be open and honest about what is being done and why. Discuss the situation and reach agreement on what they will do, taking into account their circumstances. This is known as a 'pushing' style of influencing.

96. Bear in mind is that whatever action is suggested, it must be clearly in the customers interest or likely to satisfy what they see as their needs.

Otherwise, they will be unlikely to agree to it. Also ensure the customer

understands the reasons for doing what you suggest, otherwise they will have little commitment to following it through.

### **Checking JSA entitlement**

97. Bear in mind, especially during the exploring and evaluating stage of the interview that customers must be available for and actively seeking work to receive JSA.

98. Ensure the customer understands that part of your job is to ensure they have a reasonable chance of finding the work they are looking for and are not reducing their chances because of unreasonable limits on, for example:

- the type of work they are willing to do;
- the days and hours they are willing to work; and
- where they are willing to work.

99. These are important considerations when discussing work goals and the steps needed to achieve them.

### **Planning**

100. The final stage of the interview is planning, you must:

- agree how the work goal is to be achieved;
- be specific; and
- clarify, review and summarise to check understanding and agreement.

101. Having agreed the most appropriate work goal and discussed how this is to be achieved, ensure the Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg) is meaningful and appropriate. This involves deciding:

- what needs to be done, including who to contact;
- where it needs to be done;
- how it should be done; and
- when it should be done.

102. Ensure the customer leaves the interview with a clear understanding of what they need to do if they are to find work in their chosen field. The way that planning is done will depend upon the individual. The more competent and able the customer, the more straightforward this will be.

103. With others you may need to spend more time, keep the plan simple and short, and explain anything about which the customer is unclear.

104. The main goal and the steps to achieve it will be set out in the customers JSAg. The number of steps will vary depending on the capacity and needs of the customer.

105. More able customers will be able to cope with a longer list of steps, say 4 or 5. Less able customers will be better off with a shorter list. However, the content of the JSAg, if followed, must be sufficient to meet the actively seeking work and availability criteria.

### **Follow-up**

106. Ensure the customer is clear about what will happen next. Be open and honest and let the customer know what to expect. What you do will depend upon the sort of interview you have undertaken and what you have agreed with the customer.

107. For example:

- at a New Jobseeker Interview tell the customer;

- that they will be seen fortnightly to discuss how they are getting on in their search for work;
- see if any further help is needed; and
- to ensure they remain entitled to JSA;
- that if they remain unemployed, they will be interviewed after 13 weeks; or
- if they have one, at the end of the permitted period, to review their JSAG and see if it is still helpful or needs to be changed;
- if referring them to a DEA:
  - why the referral is being made;
  - how they will be notified of the interview; and
  - what will be covered.
- if you intend to take the customer on to your caseload:
  - tell them when you would next like to see them and why;
- at other advisory interviews tell the customer:
  - we will maintain an interest in them through Jobsearch Reviews.

## **Interviewing techniques**

108. This section gives general advice on interviewing techniques in the following areas:

- Generating commitment
- Persuasion
- Mirroring
- Active Listening

### **Generating commitment**

109. Gaining commitment is crucial if customers are to see their Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAG) as a useful aid to jobsearch. There are three key principles to apply when trying to gain commitment:

#### **Understanding the customer's view:**

- if the customer feels you are trying hard to understand their situation, concerns and problems in getting back to work, they are more likely to have confidence that the options you are suggesting will meet their needs. Agreeing the purpose of the interview helps the customer to understand that you are there to help and not just to check that they satisfy the conditions for receipt of Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA).

#### **Being a positive influence:**

- ensure customers feel that you are interested in and positive about them and their situation. For example:
  - focus on their strengths;
  - praise any indications of effort or success;
  - use positive language, such as:
    - 'Tell me what you are doing to find work.' rather than:
    - 'Are you doing anything to find a job ? '
  - find positive aspects in what the customer says to you. For example if they say they are too old to find another job, highlight the qualities older workers can often offer:
    - experience;
    - loyalty;

- flexibility;
- drive;
- innovation; and
- good work record;

### **Leaving control with the customer.**

- Consider the following:
  - the more control customers have over what is in their JSAg, the more likely they are to be committed to it, and the more confident they are likely to be about their abilities and themselves.
  - do not make lots of suggestions too quickly. Customers will often readily agree, but be less committed to following through what is 'agreed'.
  - do not confuse control with structure. You control the structure by outlining the purpose of the interview and by influencing as necessary to keep the discussion relevant. The customer should be in control when discussing interests and work goals. Let them make their own choices.

### **Persuasion**

110. To gain customer commitment to a course of action, persuade them effectively. There are two styles of persuasion:

- A 'push' style:
  - is usually characterised by you:
    - taking too much control;
    - making too many suggestions too early; and
    - by giving too much information.
  - it also occurs if you are thinking only of outcomes you want, rather than considering what the customer wants and what is appropriate for them. Generally, this results in low levels of commitment. Even if customers appear to go along with your ideas, they may not follow them through.

**Note:** Generally, the 'push' style of persuasion is unhelpful. However, it may sometimes be in the customer's best interests to 'nudge' them in a certain direction.

- A 'pull' style:
  - involves the use of carefully structured and specific questions to draw out the customer's views and build upon their ideas;
  - this approach is much more likely to gain the customer's commitment, while still allowing you to achieve office targets.

### **Mirroring**

111. By looking at people talking together, you can spot those who have a good rapport by their non-verbal behaviour.

112. Those with a good rapport will usually be sitting in the same way, for example:

- leaning forward;
- sitting back; or
- adjusting their posture at the same time.

113. To listen to them, you are also likely to notice they are:



- speaking at the same pace; and
  - using the same kind of language.
114. Use 'mirroring' during interviews to help establish rapport, for example:
- if the customer leans back and looks relaxed, do the same;
  - if they speak slowly, do likewise.
115. There will, of course, be times when 'mirroring' is unhelpful. For example, if the customer is angry, it would be unhelpful to mirror all aspects of their behaviour. However, by looking serious and by using small movements of the head you can mirror the pace at which the customer is talking and, by using active listening skills, show that you understand their feelings without necessarily agreeing with them.
116. Adopting this approach will help you diffuse the situation and encourage a more constructive discussion.

### **Active listening**

117. Active listening means showing that you understand what the customer is saying. This will help you and the customer understand the situation. It will also help ensure the discussion is customer focused.
118. Skills involved in active listening are:
- paraphrasing;
  - reflecting feelings;
  - clarifying;
  - summarising; and
  - silencing.

### **Paraphrasing**

119. This involves repeating back to the customer what they have just said, but in a slightly different way. It shows that you have been listening and that you understand what the customer has said. It also gives customers the chance to correct any misunderstanding you have about what they have said, for example:

- **Customer:**
  - 'I don't know how I'll ever find a job. I'm too old.'
- **Adviser:**
  - 'So you think your age is making it difficult for you to get a job?'

### **Reflecting feelings**

120. This is more than paraphrasing as it involves repeating to the customer the idea or feeling of what they have said. To do this, look 'behind' what the customer has said and take into account their non-verbal behaviour.

121. Doing this will help you expand the discussion and draw out the meaning of what the customer has said, for example:

- **Customer:**
  - 'I don't know how I'll ever find a job. I'm too old and just cannot see what I can do.'
- **Adviser:**
  - 'So you cannot see any way back into work?'

122. This encourages more information from the customer and allows you to emphasise positive aspects. If the customer is being negative about their

situation, wait for a natural break in what they are saying and get them to look at their situation in a fresh light, for example:

- **Adviser:**
  - 'I can see your difficulties, but let's look at the qualities you have as an older customer, for example, experience, good work record, drive, flexibility, innovation and reliability. These are things that employers look for'.

### **Clarifying**

123. Check that you have understood what the customer has said by asking probing questions, for example:

- **Customer:**
  - 'I don't know how I will ever find a job. I'm too old.'
- **Adviser:**
  - 'What makes you think you are too old to get a job?'

124. If this does not encourage the customer to expand on their feelings, use supplementary questions, for example:

- **Adviser:**
  - 'Is it because you think employers feel you have little to offer?' or
  - 'Do you think you are too old to consider other types of work?'

125. At other times you may be uncertain about something because the customer has said so much. If so, admit this, for example:

- **Adviser:**
  - 'I'm sorry, I have not quite followed what you have said. I was with you until you mentioned your qualifications, but I'm not sure why you feel you need further training. Would you take me through that again, please?'

126. It is better to admit to being confused rather than wait and hope that you will understand later.

### **Summarising**

127. Summarise at various stages during the interview. This will help ensure there is a common understanding of the situation and it will help you make appropriate suggestions. It will also clarify what has been done so far and what the customer needs to do next, for example:

- **Summarising:**
  - 'Let's recap on what we've discussed. You feel it's going to be hard for you to get a job because the work you have normally done is no longer available. Is that right?'
- **Course of action:**
  - 'So you may wish to consider re-training in the future, but right now you want to explore alternative jobs you could do now.'

### **Silencing and pacing**

128. Choosing the right time to speak and the right time to listen is important. Silences give customers time to think and answer - do not rush customers if an answer does not seem forthcoming.

129. If you rush them they may agree just to keep you happy, but they will be less likely to do what they say they will. Wait as long as possible for an answer, but say something if the customer seems lost for words.

130. Pacing your interview is also important. Be observant. Check the effect of your speed and change it if the customer seems to be struggling to keep up. Try and pace your speed to match the customer's and their mood.

## **Questioning techniques**

### **Closed questions**

131. These are questions which require very simple, often one-word, answers, for example:

- 'Did you enjoy that job?'
- 'Are you seeing the Disability Employment Adviser?'
- 'Do you like office work?'
- 'Do you prefer working outdoors?'

132. Such questions are useful when you want quick and simple information. They help narrow a conversation when the customer is being vague or speaking in general terms.

### **Open questions**

133. These kind of questions are useful for getting information, views and comments from customers, for example:

- 'What did you like about the job?'
- 'What kinds of work do you like doing?'
- 'What do you think about joining a Jobcentre Plus Support Contract provision?'
- 'How do you feel your health problem/disability limits you in finding work?'

### **Three levels of questions**

134. Another way of thinking about questions is in terms of what kind of information is required. This information can come at three levels:

- **Facts**
  - 'How many job applications did you make last week?'
- **Opinions**
  - 'How do you think you did at the interview?'
- **Feelings**
  - 'How would you feel about joining a Jobcentre Plus Support Contract provision?'

135. Listening to and interpreting answers is as important as asking the right questions. Clues to opinions and feelings can come from not only what the customer says, but how they say it.

### **Influencing**

136. Creating a positive, problem solving, optimistic approach and trying to understand the customer's view is the basis of convincing them that their problems can be overcome, and ensuring they are committed to their Jobseeker's Agreement.

137. In addition to listening and asking questions, influencing strategies include:

- presenting options

- confronting issues
- the 'think about it' approach
- giving prescriptions for action
- miscellaneous influencing
- advocacy
- dealing with distress
- dealing with difficult customers

### **Presenting options**

138. Present options by:

- demonstrating how they will help the customer address their problems, for example:
  - if the customer says they have a problem finding jobs, tell them how Jobclub can help identify employers that they might apply to:
  - this is using the 'pull' style of influencing and it is more helpful than selling Jobclub on 'free stamps' - sell options in relation to customer needs;
- listening to the customer and encouraging them to expand upon any doubts. Doubts can be allayed more effectively if you clearly understand them;
- presenting information in small chunks;
- describing how they have helped customers in the past; and
- letting customers decide for themselves.

### **Confronting issues**

139. This means bringing issues into the open for discussion:

- do this when important issues appear to be hidden or being avoided;
- do it clearly, but carefully, particularly if the issue is about actively seeking employment;
- be calm and maintain a positive, helpful attitude;
- say what your concern is;
- show concern by explaining the consequences of the customer's actions, or lack of them.

140. Pay attention to what the customer is saying, for example:

- 'From the things you have said, I get the impression that you have other concerns about finding work. I'm wondering if your health is causing problems which may affect the work you could do.'
- 'From some of the things you are saying, I get the impression that you might not really be looking for work.'
- 'I see you are looking for a wage of £300 per week. Do you think you will be able to get that kind of wage for the work you are looking for?'

**Note:** say the above in a supportive and understanding way, rather than accusingly. Try to maintain rapport so that the issue can be discussed calmly.

### **The 'think about it' approach**

141. This can be very useful for encouraging customers to think things through for themselves, for example:

- 'What do you think an employer would think about the experience you have?'
- 'How many jobs like that have you seen advertised in the last month?'

### Giving prescriptions for action

142. Only tell the customer what to do as a last resort. Prescriptions which may prove useful include:

- 'I want you to talk it over with your partner and come back on Thursday to let me know your decision.'
- 'You want to continue looking for work on your own, but this does not seem to be working out. I suggest if you are not successful in the next month you should join a Jobclub to get more help. Is that reasonable?'

143. If you feel the customer ought to take a course of action, which they are refusing to do, you may wish to issue a Jobseeker's Direction.

### Miscellaneous influencing strategies

144. There are other verbal strategies which you can use to 'chip away' at negative thinking or indecision, for example:

Customer	Adviser
'I <b>cannot</b> do that'.	'It sounds more like you <b>do not want</b> to do.....'
'I <b>know</b> it will go wrong.'	'You <b>think</b> it will go wrong'.
It is impossible.	'You <b>think</b> it is impossible.'
I'd like to, <b>but</b> .....	'You'd like to <b>and</b> .....'
Customer is anxious and will not make a decision because of what <b>may</b> go wrong.	'What is the worse thing that could happen?' 'Would that be so bad?'
Customer is not receptive to change.	Explain how things could be different and better.
Customer seems to be 'bottling' things up.	'What would you like to say/do?'
Customer finds fault with everything.	I'll leave you to think about it for a while.

### Advocacy

145. Some customers will not be able to do things for themselves, for example those with:

- low ability;
- a severe lack of confidence:
- very low self-esteem: or
- extreme shyness.

146. If you feel this is the case, you may need to do more for that person than would ordinarily be required. This may even mean taking action for the customer, which they would normally be expected to take themselves. This kind of support may be particularly appropriate to some customers with a health problem or disability.

147. Ensure you do not take over completely. Customers must feel that they are doing something for themselves and making some progress. For example:

- if a customer wants to go to Jobclub, but they are too shy to go alone;
- arrange for the Jobclub leader to meet the customer or get another member to accompany them.

148. In extreme cases, you may think it appropriate to take them yourself. In other cases it may be enough to phone the leader, explain the situation and put the customer 'on the line'.

149. Seek an appropriate balance between what you will do and what the customer will do and encapsulate this in the Jobseeker's Agreement. Offer the minimum support needed. Encourage the customer to do as much for themselves as possible as this will build confidence and help them be more resourceful.

### **Dealing with distress**

150. If a customer shows signs of distress, for example:

- they are angry;
- appear worried; or
- are close to tears, deal with their emotional state. Do this by:
  - acknowledging the problem;
  - stopping the interview if you have started it;
  - showing empathy;
  - working to understand why the customer is angry or upset;
  - explaining things clearly and calmly if the reason for the customer's distress is related to something you have said; and
  - give them time to compose themselves.

151. Do not continue with the interview until they are in a more composed state.

### **Difficult customers**

152. Few customers are actually unpleasant or unmanageable. There will, however, always be some customers who are more difficult than others. This can be for a number of reasons, for example, some customers may:

- have personal problems:
  - be anxious;
  - be defensive;
  - be depressed; or
  - be stressed;
  - be sensitive or ill and less able to cope with daily events;
- appear not to be seeking work and react aggressively when approached about this;
- have an appearance which is not suited to their job goal and they may take exception to being challenged about this;
- may not be prepared to take the steps necessary to achieve their work goal.

153. When difficult situations arise, it is likely to be the customer's reaction to the situation they are in. In the main this will relate to discussions about unrealistic job goals or an apparent failure to satisfy the actively seeking work or availability conditions. However, it may also be a reaction to your behaviour or that of others in the office.

154. Report to your manager:

- actual physical assaults;
- any other instances where you feel threatened by a member of the public, either inside or outside the office, and it is in connection with your work. This includes threatening behaviour and verbal abuse.

## Preventing incidents

155. Try and avoid difficult situations by:

- treating all customers impartially and with respect;
- showing empathy (understanding) rather than sympathy (showing concern and sharing the problem in some way);
- being:
  - helpful;
  - friendly;
  - polite; and
  - considerate;
- being sensitive to the customer's feelings;
- listening carefully to what customers say to you;
- explaining things carefully and in plain English;
- preparing properly for your interviews;
- being:
  - honest;
  - open; and
  - frank;
- being positive, not patronising;
- ensuring what you tell customers is:
  - right;
  - accurate; and
  - up to date;
- referring to your line manager if a customer refuses to accept your explanation;
- not getting involved personally in the customer's feelings or situation. Understand it, but do not get entangled in it;
- keeping calm and unruffled, but responding rather than seeming to ignore;
- not being judgmental. When giving feedback do not be aggressive or too insistent;
- explaining things clearly and indicating why a problem exists;
- calling for help if a customer becomes aggressive; and
- telling your manager if you have reason to believe a customer is potentially violent.

156. If none of this works:

- make clear to the customer the conclusion you are reaching. Use evidence to explain and describe the consequences that could result;
- encourage the customer to take responsibility for themselves;
- you may need to be more directive and start making suggestions or giving advice based on what you have heard;
- ensure the customer understands the problem that they have and the consequences of failing to resolve the issue or problem, particularly if there is a risk of losing benefit;
- tell customers what you are obliged to do if the issue or problem cannot be resolved; and
- give the customer every opportunity, at all stages of the process to resolve the issue or problem.

## **Safety in the workplace**

157. Business Managers are responsible for ensuring local instructions are available for:

- measures to minimise the likelihood of assault in their office(s) and in places where their officers are outstationed; and
- what action to take if an incident appears to be developing or if an assault takes place.

158. The preparation and introduction of such instructions is a legal requirement under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992. The instructions must contain:

- a policy statement and responsibilities;
- guidance on customer handling;
- guidance on how to make the physical environment safe;
- guidance on what to do if an incident is developing;
- guidance on what to do if an incident develops;
- guidance on what to do following an incident; and
- details of how instructions will be updated and reviewed

159. Do not:

- share confidences with customers regarding your personal life or other members of staff;
- give the impression that you are available for lengthy casual conversation;
- attempt to give advice where referral to another organisation would be more appropriate;
- put yourself at risk by reacting aggressively or by being judgmental. If a customer is rude or uncooperative they may just be nervous;
- do not take an agitated customer into a private room unless you have a colleague with you and have made other colleagues aware of it;
- continue to deal with a customer if they make you feel uncomfortable or upset - refer on to your line manager;
- discuss customer details openly in the public area or with family or friends;
- enter into 'deals' outside work with customers, for example:
  - lend money;
  - buy things off them; or
  - sell things to them;
- accept personal gifts from customers as this could compromise your professional rapport with them;
- raise false hopes. Be realistic, do not make promises you cannot keep;
- give lifts to customers;
- leave loose objects around which could be used as a missile or a weapon;
- interview alone a person who is known to be:
  - potentially violent; or
  - who appears to be under the influence of drink or drugs;
- keep customers waiting longer than necessary;
- try to arrest or detain an assailant;
- retaliate by word or action.



# **POLICY**

## **Interviewing/advising friends and relatives**

160. Unless unavoidable, never interview or advise:

- friends;
- close acquaintances;
- relatives; or
- customers you know personally, for example:
  - neighbours, if knowing them could affect the outcome of the interview or compromise your position.

161. In such situations it may be difficult to be objective and could lead to accusations of unfair treatment. Tell your manager about any customers you feel you should not interview.

## **Third parties**

162. Some customers will ask for a third party to be present at their interview, for example, if they:

- need an interpreter due to language or hearing difficulties;
- lack confidence and need someone there for support;
- prefer to have a parent present; or
- wish to have a witness there.

163. In such circumstances, explain the purpose and confidentiality of the interview in a reassuring and helpful way. If the customer feels they cannot cope alone, do not object to a third party being present. Refusing to agree to a third party could provoke hostility and be counter productive.

164. Remember, however, that it is the customer who should receive and respond to advice given, direct questions at them, not the third party. Treat the third party with respect and courtesy, but do not let them control the interview.

165. If a claimant's command of English, or Welsh, is not good enough for you to deal with them properly or the claimant is deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired and it is in the Department's interest, you may arrange for an interpreter to be present. Further information about our Interpreting policy is available in the Department's Interpreting Services Guidance.

## **Partners**

166. In certain circumstances it can be useful to invite the customer's partner to the interview. By partner we mean a person who is married, a civil partner of someone or living with someone as if they were married or civil partners. Their presence may allow you to tackle objections to attending a programme or taking up a job.

167. Also, many customers are concerned about the consequences of transferring from benefits to a job or training allowance. They could be concerned about the loss of related benefits, for example:

- Council Tax Benefit; or
- Housing Benefit.

168. Involving the partner directly gives you the opportunity of explaining how the transition can be made easier. It also gives the customer and their partner a chance to discuss and fully consider the options available.

### **Tape recording interviews**

169. Exceptionally, a customer may ask for their interview to be recorded. Ask them politely why and ensure the customer understands that as an alternative to tape recording the interview they can:

- bring a friend to the interview;
- take notes during the interview.

170. If they insist on recording the interview, ask your manager for guidance. Ordinarily, the manager should not refuse the request. If you are still not confident about undertaking the interview, ask another adviser or your manager to do it.

171. If you think that the recording may be used for purposes other than the customer's own use, seek advice from your District Manager (DM). If your DM needs further guidance, they will seek it from regional office.

### **Disclosure of information**

172. When asked to disclose information relating to a customer, only disclose that information to the customer or a person who has their written consent. There must be no variance of this, except, as in accordance with the law, for the prevention of crime, or protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

173. You may disclose:

- information to the other member of the couple in the joint claim only when that information directly relates to a claim in which both customer are or were participants; and
- details about a disallowance against a customer from a previous claim, if that disallowance now affects the joint claim.