Group sessions: Guidance

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Introduction

Group sessions allow a group of claimants to attend the jobcentre at the same time to receive information and support.

The purpose of these sessions is usually to promote awareness and to provide generic information or guidance to claimants on specific work-related tasks or activities such as how to write a CV.

What are group sessions

Group sessions are facilitator-led and may cover a variety of subjects. They can be voluntary or mandatory.

Attendance to group sessions will usually be voluntary for claimants but they can be mandated to attend a group session where it has been recorded and agreed in their Workplan as part of their Claimant Commitment. For attendance to be mandated, there must be a tangible outcome to the session that will move the claimant closer to work.

Group sessions should not replace one-to-one appointments, for example, Work Search Reviews. Agents must NOT use this appointment type to meet in house targets and/or Weekly and Fortnightly Mandatory Attendance (WFMA).

Claimants can be mandated to a group session as long as the purpose of the session meets one of the following criteria:

- checking compliance with work-related requirements
- assisting the claimant to comply with work-related requirements, or
- imposing new work-related requirements

Therefore, the claimant must have an objective on their Workplan that is being met by the group session to justify mandatory attendance.

Group sessions without a tangible outcome for the claimant to move into work must be marked as voluntary. This could include sessions covering:

- health and wellbeing
- supporting claimants in using their Universal Credit account
- support with childcare costs
- retirement planning
- exploring the skills and strengths of a specific target group or occupation
- supporting the claimant with suitable career options

A group session may be one way where needs can be met with a group of people who also have the same need. An improved CV will enhance the claimant's prospects of getting paid work.

Each session is facilitated by district champions who will ensure that:

- sessions start and end on time
- presenters are introduced properly
- claimant's opinions are shared
- claimant's questions are heard and answered
- attendance is recorded on the Service

The group session can be tailored to include presentations from external parties such as:

- partnership managers
- employment advisors
- external local providers

Group sessions cannot be used for any appointment type including Work Search Reviews, Work Focused Interviews or Claimant Commitment meetings.

For more information, refer to the Working Age guidance on group sessions.

Booking a claimant onto a group session

Claimants can only be booked onto 1 group session at the same time. For example, if they are booked to attend a group session at 10:00am they cannot be booked onto a Work Search Review at 10:00am as well.

Agents should be aware that some people are more comfortable than others in group situations. If a claimant expresses an objection to attending a group session, they must be offered an alternative group session such as a face-to face appointment.

Mandating through the Workplan

A claimant should only be mandated to attend a session when it will improve their prospects of finding work. The details of the session (name, time and date) must also be added to their Workplan or Claimant Commitment for the session to be mandatory after this has been discussed with them.

A mandatory group session must be cancelled if any details of the group session (for example, location, time or date) changes and the agent is unable to contact the claimant to confirm an alternative location, date or time. Claimants will receive an automated to-do notifying them of this cancellation.

If the agent makes contact, the claimant can be rebooked on to the new session. The Workplan must then be updated in discussion with the claimant to reflect the new details and they will be mandated to attend.

Identifying suitable or eligible claimants for a group session

Careful planning by the work coach in selecting appropriate claimants for invitation to a group session is an integral part of managing risk to both staff and claimants.

Understanding the claimant’s situation can avoid embarrassing situations where facilities and resources are not able to meet their needs. Check if the claimant has any:

- additional needs
- safety measures
- Multi Agency Public Protection (MAPPA) arrangements in place

Claimants who have demonstrated behaviour that is concerning and may compromise a future safe interaction or have restrictions or safety measures are not suitable for group sessions.

Agents must follow the instructions on the Keep Customer Interactions Safe (KCIS) service.

Claimant cannot attend before the mandated group session has taken place

If a claimant provides a reason why they cannot attend a group session before it has taken place, this must be referred to a decision maker. The agent must raise a referral for ‘Failure to participate or comply’ for the decision maker after the group session was originally scheduled.

The claimant can then be booked onto a different session unless their circumstances have changed and the session is no longer appropriate. This must be discussed with the claimant and updated in their workplan and claimant commitment after discussion.

See related content link to the ‘Spotlight on Failure to participate and comply’ for details of the timescales that claimants have to advise us when they cannot attend a group session.

Claimant fails to attend after the mandated group session has taken place

A referral for ‘Failure to participate or comply’ to the decision maker should be made if the claimant fails to attend or fails to participate in the mandated group session. The agent must record any reasons the claimant has provided when referring to the decision maker.

This is because the claimant has failed to comply with a mandatory requirement detailed in their Workplan.

They must not be referred for Failure to Attend.

Further information on failing to attend or participate in a group session can be found on The Workplan

See also Mandatory appointments: Spotlight for examples of reasons that are acceptable as good cause

Further information

Further information on what should be considered before organising a group session can be found on the Working Age pages under the headings:

Where should the group session be conducted?

Customer considerations

What you need to think about