

NO JOB FOR THE CENTRE

The case for devolving employment support

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ABOUT RE:STATE

Re:State is established as the leading Westminster think tank for public service reform. We believe that the State has a fundamental role to play in enabling individuals, families, and communities to thrive. But our vision is one in which the State delivers only the services that it is best placed to deliver, within sound public finances, and where both decision-making and delivery is devolved to the most appropriate level. We are committed to driving systemic change that will deliver better outcomes for all.

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After a decade of disruption, the country faces a moment of national reflection. For too long, Britain has been papering over the cracks in an outdated social and economic model, but while this may bring temporary respite, it doesn't fix the foundations. In 1942 Beveridge stated: "a revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching." 80 years on, and in the wake of a devastating national crisis, that statement once again rings true. Now is the time to fix Britain's foundations.

Re:State's programme, 'Re:Imagining the State', puts forward a bold new vision for the role and shape of the State. One that can create the conditions for strong, confident communities, dynamic, innovative markets, and transformative, sustainable public services.

'Re:Imagining Welfare' is one of the major work streams within this programme.

ABOUT RE:IMAGINING WELFARE

This paper is part of the 'Re:Imagining Welfare' work stream. Revolutionary at the time, Britain's social security system has evolved in ways that would be unrecognisable to its founder, William Beveridge. The system is no longer, primarily, a temporary safety net; the contributory principle has been eroded to such an extent that it barely exists; conditionality is applied to an ever-diminishing proportion of claimants; and costs are spiralling. Those with the greatest needs are often underserved because the caseloads are too high to enable greater generosity. And the approach to support is impersonal, top-down, and distrusted.

This report will examine Britain's approach to employment services, focusing in particular on whether the Jobcentre Plus model is fit for purpose, and will explore the case for devolving employment support.

ABOUT RE:IMAGINING THE LOCAL STATE

This paper is also part of the 'Re:Imagining the Local State' work stream. English local and regional government stands at a turning point. There are signal opportunities for local innovation, close community engagement, and ambitious devolution of powers and responsibilities from the centre. There are also unprecedented challenges, driven by years of fiscal retrenchment, rocketing service demand, and a growing democratic deficit. This programme will develop policy ideas for the future of devolution, the role of communities, and the structures, practices, and leadership of local government itself.

Re:Imagining the Local State Advisory Group

Re:State is grateful to the expert members of the 'Re:Imagining the Local State' Advisory Group who provide invaluable insight and advise on the programme. Their involvement does not equal endorsement of every argument or recommendation put forward.

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Interviewees

We would like to thank all four interviewees for giving their time and candid insights to support this research paper. The list of interviewees is as follows:

- Matthew Ainsworth, Director for Skills Work and Inclusive Economy, Salford City Council
- Stephen Evans, Chief Executive, Learning and Work Institute
- Dan Finn, Professor Emeritus, University of Portsmouth
- Darra Singh OBE, Strategy Partner, Newton Europe

And three interviewees who wished to remain anonymous.

The arguments and any errors that remain are the authors' and the authors' alone.

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Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Government should scrap Jobcentre Plus (or the new combined Jobs and Careers Service, as it is becoming) and move to an entirely new model for delivering employment support and benefits administration.

Recommendation 2: The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should design a digital employment support platform with tools such as AI-enabled work coaching, CV improvement, and interview practice. This should be universally accessible, but targeted primarily at assisting those who are less likely to be at risk of long-term unemployment.

Recommendation 3: Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) in England should take on responsibility for providing specialised employment support for working-age individuals who are claiming income-related benefits such as Universal Credit (UC). As stewards of the subnational public service system, MSAs should be responsible for setting a Regional Plan which includes a place-based strategy for public service reform and delivery that integrates employment services with other areas of provision and connects to local labour market conditions and economic growth strategy.

They should have the flexibility to experiment with different approaches to provision, tailored to their region. The goal should be a mixed model that better joins up with other services, carries less stigma, and caters more effectively to those with complex needs. These powers should also be devolved to the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

Recommendation 4: Local authorities should ensure that in- person assistance with social security applications and administration is available for those that need it.

Recommendation 5: A more sophisticated, digitally-enabled triaging process should be established to be used at the point an individual begins a claim to help identify their distance from the labour market and complexity of need. An assessor from the relevant MSA's employment support service should complete a claimant assessment informed by the digital triaging process to determine the appropriate level of support. Those considered to be at lower risk of long-term unemployment would initially be expected to engage with the national digital support service. Those considered to be at higher risk would be expected to engage from the outset with the local employment support services provided by the MSA. After six months, if the status of those using the national digital support remains unchanged, they too should be required to engage with the employment support service.

Recommendation 6: Those in receipt of UC should continue to agree to a 'Claimant Commitment' detailing tailored engagement and activity requirements. DWP should remain responsible for the administration of sanctions if these requirements are not being met.

For those directed to the digital offer, the Commitment should consist of engagement with the online support provided by DWP, monitored directly by the department. For those directed to local provision, it should consist of engagement with the support services overseen by their MSA, with the specific requirements following the direction given at the initial conversation and tailored to the needs of the individual. MSAs should be required to provide information to DWP on whether a claimant has taken up the support offered. Where they have not, they should be able to provide information to DWP on relevant circumstances and make a recommendation on the appropriate action. Decisions on whether to sanction a claimant should continue to sit with DWP.

Recommendation 7: Central government should provide an intelligence, research and steering function, with a significant emphasis being placed on evaluation and the building of a 'what works' evidence base from different devolved approaches. There should also be a retained expectation that central government may step in and take a more national approach in the context of an economic shock or emergency.

Recommendation 8: Central government should set a baseline for regional employment support services involving requirements around public reporting of performance metrics and minimum guaranteed access for both claimants with work-related requirements and those without who may have more complex needs, like disabilities or long-term conditions. Design and delivery detail should stay locally determined, but the centre should also play an active role in gathering and disseminating 'what works' evidence, so that lessons from local innovation are systematically captured and circulated.

Recommendation 9: Each MSA should be apportioned the JCP budget (minus the costs of the functions that will remain with DWP) for their area, with this rolled into the employment support and skills theme of the Integrated Settlement, where these are present, or otherwise in the form of a specific central government grant. Outcomes associated with the provision of employment support to working-age benefit claimants should form part of the Integrated Settlement outcomes framework agreed between MSAs and central government. Where an area is taking on these responsibilities but does yet not have an Integrated Settlement, these targets should be included in a specific 'labour market outcomes agreement' with DWP.

Given the moral hazard involved, this should be underpinned by a clear mitigation and escalation process in the event of underperformance. This should range from closer engagement with the 'what works' evidence base in the first instance to, in the most serious cases, the appointment of an external commissioner or clawback of funding.

Recommendation 10: The funding model should change when fiscal devolution to MSAs takes place. At this point, Integrated Settlements should be replaced and MSAs should be able to retain a large enough portion of locally raised revenues such as income tax and business rates to cover all of their functions, including employment services. When this occurs, outcomes agreed with central government should become more high-level. However, this should be accompanied by a maximum transparency approach, with areas required to publish data on the performance of their employment support systems, with central government facilitating high-quality research and evaluation.

Fiscal devolution should ensure that places retain a meaningful share of the gains from improved employment outcomes, so that responsibility for reducing inactivity and increasing employment is matched by an incentive to succeed. To strengthen the incentive, MSAs that successfully reduce the benefit caseload through their employment support policies should receive a share of the resulting central government savings.

Recommendation 11: Employment support should be devolved directly to Established MSAs. Elsewhere, the Government should establish larger 'labour market geographies', repurposing existing Jobcentre Plus regional operating structures where appropriate and redrawing where not, and governed jointly by relevant local institutions. These should form the basis of a consistent future regional tier, with other major public services expected to align over time.

1. Introduction

The British welfare state was built for a different era, one with very different demographics, labour markets and technologies. Yet despite widespread recognition that a bureaucratic, centralised model is no longer fit for the complexities of the modern world, many elements remain much as they were designed in the last century. The Jobcentre is one such example – an institution that in many ways still resembles the labour exchanges that were established in the 1910s.

Created by bringing together job support and benefits offices in the 1980s, Jobcentre Plus now has more than 600 locations – physical outposts of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) – across Britain. They are the locations that many claimants must attend as a condition of their benefits to engage with work coaches in order to move closer to, and into, work.

For some who end up in this position due to a short period of unemployment, the existing system can feel archaic and unnecessarily burdensome.

By contrast, there are many others, with more complex needs and who are further from the labour market, that the employment support system either fails to effectively help or fails even to reach.

The UK’s growing crisis of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), for example, is well documented – with it estimated that there are over a million now in this position.¹ Alan Milburn, who has been tasked with examining this crisis, has identified what he refers to as “a record of failure”, with one of the most “troubling” findings being the number of young people who “are hidden from the very systems meant to help them”.²

The proportion of people who have been in the out of work “Searching for work” conditionality group in Universal Credit (UC) for a year or more has almost doubled compared to pre-pandemic (from just over 20 per cent to just under 40 per cent), a shift which DWP’s analysis links to the first Covid-19 lockdown.³ The longer people are unemployed, the less likely they are to move into work.

The number of people claiming UC Health or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) due to a disability or health condition has increased from just over 2 million pre-pandemic to 3.7 million by mid-2025, the vast majority of whom are not in work, and not required to take action to move closer to work.⁴ Last year’s *Pathways to Work Green Paper* noted that 200,000 claimants feel they could work now with the right support, and a further million believe they could in the future with improvements to their health, yet fewer than 1 per cent of those placed in the “No Work Requirements” group move into work each month.⁵

¹ Office for National Statistics, *Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), UK: May 2026* (2026).

² Alan Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2026).

³ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper: Analytical Annex* (2024).

⁴ Department for Work and Pensions, ‘Benefit Expenditure and Caseload Tables’, 2026.

⁵ Department for Work and Pensions, *Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper* (2025).

The UK is the only G7 country with a lower employment rate than before the pandemic.⁶

This all points to a welfare system that is no longer fit for purpose, and the one-size-fits-all approach to employment services is a key part of that. In general, JCP services have struggled to reach and support those with complex, tricky, and varied needs. The hardest cases often never reach the system, get parked because they are too difficult, or end up passed between different agencies that fail to effectively join up their efforts. As a result, the State is failing to enable some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged to live their fullest lives.

Embracing the devolution revolution

The current moment provides a significant opportunity to do things differently. The pace of devolution in England is accelerating under Andy Burnham's premiership. Devolution offers a new approach to supporting people into work, one that is more tailored to place and the specific circumstances that people find themselves in. A devolved model can be properly integrated with other services, such as skills, health, and education, and embedded in the regional labour market and the needs of local employers.

Most importantly, it can unleash a wave of innovation and experimentation, with initiatives and approaches that reflect levels and types of need, as well as opportunity, in an area. Through transparency and rigorous research and evaluation, increased flexibility can enable the evidence base on what works to be built up, helping places learn from one another.

At the same time as devolution offering an opportunity to deliver more tailored services for those with complex needs, there is a major opportunity presented by advances in digital technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to more efficiently support those who are at low risk of long-term unemployment. For this group, technology can streamline their interactions with the State and provide lighter touch, yet still personalised, support to enable a quick return to the labour market.

At the moment, we have a national institution – Jobcentre Plus (JCP) – that is failing to make the most of either opportunity. Current reform efforts, focused on merging JCP with the National Careers Service, and encouraging better partnership with local and regional authorities, are a distraction. Retaining JCP amid the devolution revolution simply retains the fragmentation that has prevented genuinely integrated, citizen-centric services from addressing big public service challenges.

The Cabinet Statement on *Rewiring the State* explicitly commits to “devolve employment support to mayors to ensure provision reflects local need, including giving local areas the power to procure and provide tailored and specialised support for the long-term unemployed.”⁷ Retaining a national JCP model would be incoherent in this context.

This paper calls for the abolition of JCP, and the full devolution of employment support functions to mayoral authorities across England, and to the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales, where this isn't already the case. This should be supplemented by a new universal digital offer that makes the most of the possibilities of AI.

⁶ Louise Murphy, *A U-Shaped Legacy: Taking Stock of Trends in Economic Inactivity in 2024* (Resolution Foundation, 2024).

⁷ Cabinet Office, *Rewiring the State – Cabinet Statement* (2026).

Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) would take on responsibility for the majority of outcomes linked to employment support, along with most of the JCP budget.

Aligning incentives

Devolution of a portion of income tax, which is due to come into effect in April 2028, will hugely sharpen the incentives for strategic authorities to take actions that will increase the tax take in their regions.⁸ Moving more people into work (as well as helping them progress up the earnings ladder) is key – along with creating the conditions for businesses to invest and create jobs. Giving areas full control over the budget and services targeted at unemployed and economically inactive claimants helps enable this.

Nevertheless, it is the case that the devolution of employment-related provision, without devolving the costs of failure, can mean misaligned incentives and moral hazard.⁹ In other words, it is the Treasury that will pick up the tab, in the form of increased benefit expenditure, where strategic authorities fail to move claimants from welfare into work.

It is also the case that the design of social security benefits themselves (eligibility, payment levels and conditionality) play a significant role in claimants' behaviour, and devolving support services does not address this.

Future *Re:State* work will explore both the design of the benefits themselves and the misalignment of incentives they can create, and the potential for devolving the costs of the welfare system to create a better alignment between revenue and spending.

However, given the current NEETs and economic inactivity crises, and the clear need for a more tailored, locally contextualised approach to addressing these generational challenges, the potential benefits of full devolution of employment support outweigh the risks.

⁸ Cabinet Office, *Rewiring the State – Cabinet Statement*.

⁹ Ben Dobson et al., *Stepping up, Breaking Barriers. Transforming Employment Outcomes for Disabled People*. (Reform Think Tank, 2016).

2. A failing system

The employment support system is often discussed as though it were a single, coherent whole. In practice, it is a loosely connected set of programmes and institutions with no common goal, owner or data. Its principal weaknesses are not located in any particular scheme (or the need for a new one) but in how the parts fit together, or more often, how they fail to.

The system is asked to do several things at once that do not always align. Two aims are central: moving people into work and reducing welfare spending by lowering the number of people on benefits. Around these sit more targeted goals such as supporting people with health conditions and disabilities, helping young people move from school into work, and lifting the overall employment rate toward 80 per cent.¹⁰

In practice, these aims can pull in different directions: the fastest route to lowering the caseload, for example, is not the same as the route to helping those furthest from work. Where they conflict, it is the hardest to help who lose out. People with more complex needs take longer, need more relational support, and offer a slower and less certain return in terms of the welfare bill.

This is in part a result of how the system is designed. For those in the “Searching for work” UC conditionality group in particular, there is little systematic attempt to determine the level of support that individuals will require, beyond assessing the length of time they have been claiming benefits. Individuals who are likely to be able to find employment quickly and without significant support are treated largely the same as those who are likely to struggle to find work in any timeframe at all. Critically, there is no significant effort to determine which category an individual might fall into as they first enter the system. While various support programmes do allow for early entry, those who have been referred early generally account for a small portion of participants, and these referrals operate on a largely ad hoc basis.¹¹

The problem is exacerbated by institutions working alongside each other rather than together, each seeing only part of the picture and answerable for only part of the outcomes.¹² People fall through the gaps created by the failure of services to join up. This chapter examines various features of this institutional landscape and the way in which they contribute to a system that is not working.

2.1 An incoherent landscape

Even as devolution of powers has grown in many areas, the benefits system and many aspects of employment support have remained notably centralised, contributing to a landscape that is increasingly confused.

¹⁰ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper* (2025).

¹¹ Department for Work and Pensions, *Work and Health Programme Official Statistics to February 2026* (2026).

¹² Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*.

2.1.1 A short history

A 2010 review for DWP concluded that “full devolution of responsibilities is largely absent in the British context in any developed sense”.¹³ However, the 2010s saw the development of the mayor-led combined authority model as an institutional mechanism for decentralising certain spending responsibilities. While much of the focus in this context was on city-region growth, some areas saw their role more expansively than this from the outset, arguing that this would need to go hand in hand with public service powers to maximise the opportunity for devolution to improve outcomes.

This was especially important to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), which secured the co-design, procurement and delivery of a locally orientated version of DWP’s Work and Health Programme as part of one of its early ‘devo deals’.¹⁴

Yet despite this precedent, two new schemes launched in the context of the disruption to the labour market caused by the pandemic – Kickstart and Restart – defaulted to a centralised model, and received criticism from the Work and Pensions Committee for neglecting local and regional government.¹⁵

Nevertheless, as devolved governance in England has evolved and matured, fitful efforts have been made to move towards a less centrally directed employment support system. The new Labour Government’s 2024 *English Devolution White Paper* promised a “devolution revolution” and proposed multiple core areas of competence for Strategic Authorities (SAs), one of which would be employment support and skills.¹⁶ In line with their expanding strategic responsibilities, SAs were charged with producing local “Get Britain Working Plans” focused on reducing economic inactivity, as well as having “a role” in the co-design of any future employment support programmes.¹⁷

The Government’s *Get Britain Working White Paper*, also published in 2024, announced a new employment support programme in the form of ‘Connect to Work’ – a DWP grant focused on those who have a disability or long-term health condition but would like to work.¹⁸ A combination of local and strategic authorities are responsible for delivery in their area, in line with a framework set by DWP. The Government described this as “an important first step towards the future devolution of employment support”.¹⁹

This was coupled with support for the more advanced MSAs to go further in the form of a series of “trailblazers”, and experiment with new ways of reducing economic inactivity through approaches that join up work, health and skills and create better pathways into employment.

Seven MSAs currently receive their funding in the form of an Integrated Settlement – a single pot, with improved flexibility around how that money can be spent across different areas of

¹³ Ian Atkinson, *Governance Structures and the Devolved Delivery of Employment Outcomes* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010).

¹⁴ ‘Working Well: Work and Health Programme’, Web Page, Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

¹⁵ House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, *Plan for Jobs and Employment Support Eighth Report of Sessions 2022-23*, HC 600 (2023).

¹⁶ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *English Devolution White Paper* (2024).

¹⁷ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *English Devolution White Paper*.

¹⁸ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper*.

¹⁹ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper*.

policy. These MSAs now receive their Connect to Work funding in this way, meaning they have more discretion over how it can be used.

In general, there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of localised, place-sensitive interventions when it comes to tackling some of the significant employment challenges currently facing the UK – particularly around ill-health and disability, and young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

2.1.2 Recent developments

In November 2025, Alan Milburn was commissioned to look into economic inactivity among young people, especially those experiencing inactivity due to sickness and disability.²⁰

Milburn's interim report on youth inactivity aptly identified "no shortage of programmes, pilots and initiatives", many of which have helped change lives and helped individuals into work. Yet, "none has altered the architecture that produces sustained disengagement."²¹

He highlighted the strong case for locally-led efforts, due to the inherently local nature of labour markets, transport, employment relationships, and the context-dependent barriers that face people getting into work. But his conclusion was that despite the advances in English devolution, so far it had "created partial responsibility without full control". In general, "there is an unresolved constitutional question about who is responsible for what and where decision-making best rests between the local and the national." These statements could just as accurately be applied to the whole system, not just the parts relating to young people.

2.2 Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus is the spine of the employment support system, and the place where its structural problems are most visible. There are 646 jobcentres across Great Britain²², and for most people this is the way into state-provided employment support, whether directly from a JCP work coach or by being referred on to other programmes.²³

The service itself is centred on the work coach appointment, alongside help managing UC claims where individuals are unable to do so online. Alongside this core sits more recent additions such as careers advice, job-search terminals, health and disability advisers, a youth offer and a recruitment service for employers.

2.2.1 Back to the future

It is striking how little has changed. State labour exchanges were established under the Labour Exchanges Act 1909, and unemployment insurance followed in 1911. In the 1920s, the test for benefit access was formalised, with conditionality applied to claimants found not to be genuinely seeking work, operating on a model not that dissimilar to the current approach.

The underlying tension was visible almost immediately. Reviewing the exchanges on their twenty-first anniversary in 1931, the International Labour Office observed that the payment of

²⁰ Pippa Crerar, 'Alan Milburn Launches Major UK Review into Rising Inactivity among Young People', *The Guardian*, 16 December 2025.

²¹ Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*.

²² National Audit Office, *Supporting People to Work through Jobcentres* (National Audit Office, 2025).

²³ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper*; House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, *Plan for Jobs and Employment Support Eighth Report of Sessions 2022-23*.

unemployment insurance benefits had come to obscure the importance of the exchanges' other activities.²⁴

That diagnosis was eventually acted upon, with jobcentres advertising vacancies but not processing benefits after 1973. However, rising long-term unemployment in the 1980s made benefit conditions an attractive lever, and the two functions were re-fused before Jobcentre Plus formalised the merger in 2002.²⁵

From 2002 to 2011, JCP was run as an executive agency. This gave it some operational independence, although DWP was the sponsoring department and its Chief Executive was answerable to DWP ministers. From 2011, JCP ceased to be an executive agency and since then its functions have been delivered directly by DWP.²⁶ This means that despite having hundreds of locations across the country, JCP is not institutionally separate from central government, and its staff are DWP officials.

The contemporary approach continues to fuse social security and employment support on the premise that entitlement is verified by attendance, and that attendance is also where direct employment support is offered. DWP's own assessment is that the core of the service is still built around face-to-face appointments every week or fortnight, much as it was more than a quarter century earlier.²⁷

2.2.2 The challenge of combining benefits and employment support

Benefits and employment support are both delivered through JCP, based on the rationale that the department paying the welfare bill should also run the support intended to reduce it. In practice, being responsible for processing benefits has a significant impact on how people feel about engaging in the support offered by an institution that also polices their payments. 34 per cent of the general population and 39 per cent of disabled people and those with long-term conditions say they do not trust DWP to take their needs into account.²⁸

The two jobs require different approaches. Benefit administration is a payments and compliance function that assesses eligibility, makes payments, and confirms conditions have been met, requiring consistency, control and oversight.

Employment support is developmental and relational, and depends on flexibility and a relationship that supports rather than polices. Housing them in the same building, and frequently in the same interaction, means support that ought to be easy to reach is accessed through an assessment designed to be restrictive.²⁹

The work coach is central to this overlap. They operate as both a careers adviser and a benefits processor, applying compliance requirements in the same appointment in which they

²⁴ International Labour Organisation, *The Use of the Employment Exchange Service in Great Britain as a Labour Clearing House* (International Labour Review, 1931).

²⁵ Dan Finn, *The Role, Organisation, and Services of the British Public Employment Service -Jobcentre Plus*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.23841.76645>.

²⁶ Department for Work and Pensions, *Government Announces Organisational Changes to Jobcentre Plus and the Pension, Disability and Carers Service* (2011).

²⁷ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper*.

²⁸ Department for Work and Pensions, *Perception of the Department for Work and Pensions: Wave 3* (2026).

²⁹ Ben Paxton et al., *Designing and Delivering Employment Support* (Institute for Government, 2026).

are meant to build trust.³⁰ It has also been argued that tying support to benefit administration leaves people less willing to seek it out.³¹ The result is that jobcentres are read as places that enforce rules rather than places that can help.³²

A work coach carries around 100 unemployed claimants and sees each for as little as ten minutes a week or fortnight, during which time they must review what the person has done, check compliance, and set the next round of activity.³³ Building relationships of trust in this context is extremely difficult. The monitoring alone has been costed at £350 million and 13 million work coach hours a year.³⁴

2.3 One size fits no one

This system fails to adequately differentiate on two dimensions: between people and between places. At present, nothing at the point of claim assesses employability, or the likelihood that someone will still be claiming in a year. Sorting is instead being done by earnings, circumstances (such as whether an individual has caring responsibilities or a health condition), and benefit status.

In the OECD's classification, Britain is a country that applies rules-based profiling – which is to say, it sorts people primarily by how long they have been claiming rather than by any assessment of what they need.³⁵

A significant proportion of any caseload is transitory. For those who start in the “Searching for work” group, 42 per cent are in work or have transitioned off UC within six months.³⁶ Analysis of Labour Force Survey data by the Learning & Work Institute found that 33 per cent of unemployed people (not all of whom will be claiming benefits) are in work six months later.³⁷ While active labour market policies, including the use of conditionality, are well evidenced as a tool in keeping welfare rolls down, it should be obvious that allocating the same time and resources to these individuals as those with more complex needs is wasteful and counterproductive.³⁸

Most comparable countries handle this differently. Statistical profiling, in which administrative data is used to estimate an individual's risk of long-term unemployment at the point of registration, has been standard practice across much of the OECD for two decades. Examples range from Australia's Job Seeker Classification Instrument, in use since 1998 and

³⁰ Philip Whyte, *Working Wonders: The Role of Employability in Tackling Poverty* (Institute for Public Policy Research Scotland, 2024).

³¹ House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, *Plan for Jobs and Employment Support Eighth Report of Sessions 2022-23*.

³² Whyte, *Working Wonders: The Role of Employability in Tackling Poverty*.

³³ Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*; Alexander Iosad et al., *Governing in the Age of AI: Reimagining the UK Department for Work and Pensions* (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2024).

³⁴ Dan Tomlinson, *‘Work First’ Can Work Better* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024).

³⁵ *Statistical Profiling in Public Employment Services: An International Comparison*, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers no. 224, vol. 224, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1787/b5e5f16e-en>.

³⁶ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper: Analytical Annex*.

³⁷ Stephen Evans, *The Benefit Trap* (Learning and Work Institute, 2025).

³⁸ OECD, *Connecting People with Jobs: Activation Policies in the United Kingdom* (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014).

determining which service stream a jobseeker enters, to the Dutch Work Profiler and equivalents in Sweden, Flanders and Canada.³⁹

These approaches are designed to direct the most intensive and expensive assistance towards the most disadvantaged, and to minimise ‘deadweight’ by better targeting support to need.⁴⁰ Ireland is the closest parallel, having used the same rules-based approach as the UK before replacing it with a statistical profiling tool, explicitly to reduce the number of people incorrectly identified for intervention and to save public money.⁴¹ In the British context, the existing system makes little initial effort to distinguish based on potential need.⁴²

Get Britain Working describes support as insufficiently personalised and too focused on the specific detail of benefit compliance, which degrades the Claimant Commitment – the conditions the recipient of benefit payments agrees to meet – and leaves it inconsistently applied.⁴³

Conditionality itself has a legitimate role. Expecting people who can work to take reasonable steps towards doing so in return for financial aid is fundamental to the system and its legitimacy in the eyes of those funding it. Evidence also shows it can help jobseekers.⁴⁴

However, the existing system lacks flexibility. Requiring someone in the “Searching for work” category who is highly qualified and motivated to find a job to attend fortnightly work coach meetings is not a good use of resources.

Someone assessed as having Limited Capability for Work and Work-Related Activity is released from all such requirements, and any further engagement is voluntary.⁴⁵ Nearly 85 per cent of young people who have completed a work capability assessment and are on the ‘Health Journey’ are placed in this group.⁴⁶ Only one in ten people who are out of work due to a disability or long-term health condition are taking up the offer of employment support.⁴⁷

There is some space between these two categories: someone assessed as having Limited Capability for Work is placed in the work preparation group, which involves taking reasonable steps towards future work but does not involve actively searching for it (unlike the full conditionality group). However, the OBR concludes that the relatively sharp distinction between the incapacity and non-incapacity parts of the welfare system, and between the less and more severe incapacity groups, is likely to have contributed to the growth in health-related claims, and of the more severe group in particular.⁴⁸

Only those claiming benefits can book an appointment with a JCP work coach, leaving those who aren’t claiming cut off from this kind of support altogether.⁴⁹ As of 2023, there were 3.9 million people not claiming benefits, not in paid work, and not students. While a substantial portion of this total will be people with independent means, there is likely to be a still significant

³⁹ *Statistical Profiling in Public Employment Services*, vol. 224.

⁴⁰ *Statistical Profiling in Public Employment Services*, vol. 224.

⁴¹ *Statistical Profiling in Public Employment Services*, vol. 224.

⁴² *Statistical Profiling in Public Employment Services*, vol. 224.

⁴³ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper*.

⁴⁴ Paxton et al., *Designing and Delivering Employment Support*.

⁴⁵ Paxton et al., *Designing and Delivering Employment Support*.

⁴⁶ Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*.

⁴⁷ Evans, *The Benefit Trap*.

⁴⁸ Office for Budget Responsibility, *Welfare Trends Report* (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2024).

⁴⁹ House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, *Plan for Jobs and Employment Support Eighth Report of Sessions 2022-23*.

group who could benefit from employment support but are on the whole shut out of the JCP system.⁵⁰

Get Britain Working concluded that Jobcentre Plus is too centralised, has too little scope to tailor provision to local labour markets, and does not sufficiently value collaboration with local partners, producing a one-size-fits-all approach to conditionality and support that pays insufficient attention to local disparities in unemployment.⁵¹

Work coaches' knowledge of local job roles and labour markets can itself be thin,⁵² and employers make very little use of the system (one of the few ways in which it has changed significantly since the early labour exchanges). Of those who had recruited or tried to recruit in the previous year, just 14 per cent had used Jobcentre Plus and 15 per cent were aware of it or of DWP work trials.⁵³ And while employer advisers, free advertising and work trials are all on offer via JCP, those who do engage criticise the 'any-job' model, which results in large volumes of unsuitable applications, adds to their recruitment costs, and produces shortlisted candidates who fail to turn up.⁵⁴

2.4 Fragmented, unaccountable, poorly designed

For the individual attempting to navigate this system, a lack of connection between institutions creates gaps it is easy to fall into. One example is the cliff edge as young people leave school at 18 and councils' duties to track and support them fall away. In 2023-24, around 314,000 18- to 24-year-olds not in employment, education or training (NEET) in England were not claiming benefits – close to half of all NEET young people that age.⁵⁵

This cohort does not form part of the caseload and is not the responsibility of any particular institution. They are both the fastest-growing group and the one that is the least engaged in the system.⁵⁶ Similarly, roughly 30 per cent of individuals on incapacity benefits say that they have never been contacted by DWP or a work coach since their claim began.⁵⁷ Some will not be able to work, but some may with support, and the existing system cannot properly assess when that is the case.

For many of the people making use of employment support, the experience can be hard and dispiriting, with the effort of navigating a fragmented system falling on those least equipped to manage it. Having to tell the same story to multiple services is itself a barrier for someone anxious or short on confidence. Support is then largely matched to the category a person is assessed into, rather than their individual needs.⁵⁸

The way funding works often compounds this, with money following activity rather than outcomes. Payment-by-results has tended to reward providers for picking off the easiest

⁵⁰ Tomlinson, *'Work First' Can Work Better*.

⁵¹ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper*.

⁵² Whyte, *Working Wonders: The Role of Employability in Tackling Poverty*.

⁵³ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper*.

⁵⁴ Whyte, *Working Wonders: The Role of Employability in Tackling Poverty*.

⁵⁵ Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*.

⁵⁶ Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*.

⁵⁷ Iain Porter, *Unlocking Benefits: Tackling Barriers for Disabled People Wanting to Work* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024).

⁵⁸ Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*.

cases. The National Audit Office, for example, found that the Work Programme incentivised a focus on those simplest to place.⁵⁹

The House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee has noted that rigid eligibility rules for programmes have in the past meant that money has been left unspent while people who may need support – such as those who are economically inactive but outside the social security system – are turned away.⁶⁰

Within six months, 33 per cent of the unemployed move into work but among those inactive through ill health or disability, the figure is 1 per cent.⁶¹ The programmes meant for this group are also small and sporadic compared to the scale of the problem. At its 2021 peak, the Work and Health Programme took referrals equal to only about 3.5 per cent of the people out of work through ill health that year.⁶²

Unsurprisingly, accessibility plays a role as well, with almost 80 per cent of those out of work due to a health condition or disability saying they would be more likely to take up support if it were closer to home.⁶³

Funding also tends to be time-limited, which prevents programmes being durably built even where they have shown early promise. New initiatives are set up and then closed in what Milburn calls a “build, evaluate, defund, forget” cycle – so infrastructure that would sustain a successful response never takes root.⁶⁴ There is a reluctance to back anything unproven at scale, even for the groups existing approaches have clearly failed.⁶⁵

Some recent provision has seen a promising shift in direction, with more effort to allow for local commissioning of programmes, and integration with local health services. Connect to Work in particular is delivered through multi-year grant agreements with local accountable bodies rather than national payment-by-results contracts – although the programme still comes with detailed design requirements set out by DWP.⁶⁶

Beneath all of this sits a problem of accountability: “No one owns the individual's journey from end to end”.⁶⁷ Education answers for attainment, welfare for benefit flows, health for treatment, and nobody for the whole person's experience of the system. Where duties do exist, they are weak and unevenly enforced, so what people get reflects local capacity more than deliberate design: the share of 16- to 17-year-olds who are NEET or “not known” runs from around 1 per cent in Barnet to 21.5 per cent in Dudley.⁶⁸ While this is partly a result of the significant variation in how well local authorities track this cohort, that is itself part of the problem. Where councils do not know where young people are, they cannot support them at all.

⁵⁹ National Audit Office, *The Work Programme* (National Audit Office, 2014).

⁶⁰ House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, *Plan for Jobs and Employment Support Eighth Report of Sessions 2022-23*.

⁶¹ Evans, *The Benefit Trap*.

⁶² Paxton et al., *Designing and Delivering Employment Support*.

⁶³ Paxton et al., *Designing and Delivering Employment Support*.

⁶⁴ Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*.

⁶⁵ Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*.

⁶⁶ Department for Work and Pensions, *Connect to Work: Grant Guidance for England* (2026).

⁶⁷ Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*.

⁶⁸ Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*.

Relevant data is scattered across departments, and programme transparency is weak, so the system runs with little information on the outcomes it is intended to improve, and therefore little basis for correcting course.⁶⁹

Employment support in the UK has historically focused primarily on the traditionally unemployed – those that find themselves out of work and on income-replacement benefits. In recent years, there have been growing efforts to widen this support to those facing more complex and varied barriers to participating in the labour market. Providing better support to these individuals will be crucial if the UK is to reach 80 per cent employment and reduce its welfare spending. But these efforts have continued to emanate largely from DWP and exist within a top-down, siloed structure, which has hampered the potential for integration with other services and constrained potential effectiveness.

2.5 A pledge to change

The urgency of the challenge and the insufficiency of existing approaches are increasingly acknowledged. Various new policies and reform efforts have been initiated. As well as Connect to Work and the economic inactivity trailblazers, the Government has funded a ‘Youth Guarantee’, involving paid work placements for young people on UC as well as new work experience, training placements and apprenticeship support.⁷⁰ It has also deployed 1,000 ‘Pathway to Work Advisers’, situated in every JCP to provide support to those who have been assessed as having Limited Capability for Work and Worked-related Activity.⁷¹ After being piloted in 15 areas, WorkWell – a combined work and health support programme focused on early, less intensive intervention and led by Integrated Care Boards – is due to be rolled out across England.⁷²

The *Get Britain Working White Paper* identified reform of JCP itself as one of its core pillars, arguing that the current model was not working. The headline change is a merger with the National Careers Service to create “a genuine public employment service”.⁷³ The Government published an update in July 2026 on progress made so far towards creating the combined “Jobs and Careers Service”. It reiterated a familiar diagnosis: that JCP has been too narrowly focused on one particular group, that fragmented services inhibit alignment of employment support with health and skills, and that the way in which support is provided has not kept pace with technological developments and changes in the labour market.⁷⁴

The ongoing reforms contain positive elements. The principle that support will be “digital where possible and human where needed”, with an enhanced universal digital offer the “first port of call” for individuals who are closer to the labour market – and more bespoke and intensive support for those facing more significant barriers – is welcome.⁷⁵ Likewise, it is right to try and

⁶⁹ Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*; House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, *Plan for Jobs and Employment Support Eighth Report of Sessions 2022-23*.

⁷⁰ Department for Work and Pensions, ‘Employment Lifeline for Young People across the Country as Government Offers 300,000 New Work Experience and Training Placements’, Press Release, Department for Work and Pensions, 29 May 2026.

⁷¹ Department for Work and Pensions, ‘Tens of Thousands of Sick and Disabled People Nearer to Work with Government Support’, Press Release, Department for Work and Pensions, 25 March 2026.

⁷² Department for Work and Pensions, *Get Britain Working: An Update on the Jobs and Careers Service* (2026).

⁷³ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper*.

⁷⁴ Department for Work and Pensions, *Get Britain Working: An Update on the Jobs and Careers Service*.

⁷⁵ Department for Work and Pensions, *Get Britain Working: An Update on the Jobs and Careers Service*.

identify those with higher levels of need when they enter the system and provide additional support immediately – rather than waiting for six months, as is currently the case.

Yet despite *Get Britain Working* acknowledging that JCP is too centralised, with insufficient scope for tailoring to local labour markets, and a lack of collaboration with local partners, on this the prescription is weaker: a pledge to make JCP more locally responsive – and to align JCP boundaries with MSA geographies to enable more effective partnership working. The aim is to “build a national service that is fundamentally local at heart”, through development in partnership with mayoral authorities, local authorities, and the devolved governments.⁷⁶ This is a fudge, a fundamentally local service is designed and delivered locally by local people.

There is a deeper question at play: who has ownership of the employment support system? It is hard to see how the growing shift towards devolution is compatible with the continued dominance of a core delivery mechanism that continues to be run directly from a central government department – and whose outcomes are entirely dependent on local infrastructure, labour markets and services.

In short, the Government’s aspirations for a more locally responsive employment support service, one that is tailored to local labour markets, and integrated with other key policy areas such as skills, health, and economic development, cannot be achieved through the JCP model.

The British approach is also considerably more centralised than in many other countries. As ambitious conversations about a radically different, more decentralised, operating model for the British state gather speed, the UK cannot continue to cling to a one-size-fits-all institution as the backbone of its employment support system.

Fundamentally, the remedy is not a better-designed national service, but a different answer to the question of who designs and delivers employment support in the first place.

⁷⁶ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper*.

3. A new model

3.1 The case for devolution

The previous chapters have shown that the way the UK provides employment support – in particular through JCP – is not working, and the modifications currently in progress are unlikely to change that. A new model is needed.

Among other things, a more devolved system can enable:

- Better integration of employment support with other public services
- More personalised employment support, tailored to individual circumstances
- A system that intervenes earlier and is more geared towards prevention
- Closer relationships with local employers and greater responsiveness to regional labour market conditions
- Clearer accountability and ownership of relevant outcomes

This is a policy problem that is fundamentally linked to place, and employment support rarely succeeds on its own. People's chances of finding and keeping work are shaped by the way in which employment support interacts with health, skills, housing, transport, and other local services. Many people do not face a single barrier to work, but a bundle of overlapping problems, such as poor health, caring responsibilities, housing instability, transport constraints and weak skills.

Consider someone whose work prospects are held back by a combination of anxiety and a lack of recent work experience. Under a more devolved model, a local employment lead could work with a GP or work and health service, a college, and a local employer to build a joined-up plan that addresses the person's actual barriers and is orientated around the local vacancies that exist. It is unlikely a job would be the first step, but rather a series of interventions would move that individual onto a sustainable path to employment. In essence, devolving employment support should mean better coordination around both real lives and labour markets.

In Greater Manchester, the Working Well programmes have focused on developing a locally led, one-to-one key-worker model – rather than a one-size-fits-all offer – with support that is sequenced and tied into the wider public services ecosystem. A DWP evaluation of an early Work Well pilot in Greater Manchester – focused on the long-term unemployed with a health condition – found greater success at sustaining employment among those helped into work compared to conventional JCP support.⁷⁷

Approaches that involve a personal key worker – where one person helps draw in the right interventions, sequence them appropriately and maintain continuity as circumstances change – can be especially important for people facing multiple disadvantages, where transactional programme delivery is least effective.

⁷⁷ Learning and Work Institute, *Greater Manchester Working Well: Early Impact Assessment* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2018).

Local knowledge enables better tailoring to place and local patterns of need and demand. Local leaders are better placed to convene and collaborate with local employers, colleges, NHS partners, housing bodies and community organisations.

Localisation means that signals can be spotted earlier, enabling support to start at an earlier stage than it would otherwise. Devolved systems are also closer to the points where disengagement first becomes visible – with greater proximity to schools, colleges, GP practices, housing teams, youth services and employers. That makes them better placed to identify risk earlier and act before people become long-term inactive, at which point it is much harder to support them into work. Local leaders are also closer to the on the ground costs of failure across health, social care, homelessness and economic inactivity, generating strong incentives for this kind of early intervention.

Furthermore, more fully devolving functions can help turn a patchwork of separate schemes into a single local pathway, making it easier for users to move through the system without repeatedly telling their story to different agencies.

Devolution can be about more than just helping people into jobs. It can support and deliver oversight of progression into sustained and better-quality work as local institutions will be more able to align employment support with local vacancies, sectors and training pipelines – making progression a more attainable and coherent policy goal.

This is where local models such as Greater Manchester's MBacc are instructive. The MBacc, which is still in its early stages, is designed to align technical pathways with the needs of the local economy, helping young people move into routes that connect to the jobs and sectors present in the city region.⁷⁸

Labour markets differ sharply across England – ONS regional labour market data show wide differences in employment, unemployment and inactivity rates across regions.⁷⁹ Sectors, vacancies, commuting patterns, levels of low-paid work and the prevalence of inactivity or exclusion are all greatly variable. While central government can set common rules and overarching policy, it is less well placed to adapt quickly to the actual shape of opportunity and constraint in each place. Devolution allows the policy to fit the problem rather than forcing the problem to fit the policy.

⁷⁸ 'MBacc: A 2030 Vision', Web Page, Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

⁷⁹ Office for National Statistics, *Labour Market in the Regions of the UK: August 2026* (2026).

Case study 1: Denmark

Denmark's employment system is now among the most devolved in Europe. Municipalities hold responsibility for design, planning and delivery of active labour market policy, and for employer engagement, matching jobseekers to vacancies and training opportunities in their local labour markets. Since a reform agreed in April 2025, they are no longer required to run jobcentres at all: the obligation has been removed, and municipalities decide for themselves what form the service takes, while still enforcing certain benefit conditions. Requirements are lighter for those thought likely to return to work unaided.⁸⁰ A national agency, 'STAR', is responsible for supporting the coordination of the Public Employment Service system. It has regional offices – that support municipalities rather than deliver services – and oversees minimum service standards. Crucially, it plays a fundamental role in amassing and disseminating relevant evidence and publishing transparency data on service outcomes, including the performance of different areas.

This reformed approach reflects the results of a policy review of the earlier, more prescribed devolved system established in 2009. Under the previous approach services were devolved to municipalities, with jobcentres as the core delivery unit and one-stop shop for jobseekers. This approach to delivery, which involved the sorting of citizens into 13 target groups with diverse rules and regulations, was centrally mandated. Effectively, this approach devolved responsibility without fully allowing local tailoring of design and delivery, resulting in increasing costs as rules and requirements were added.

The case for change rested on a direct assessment of how that arrangement was performing. A government report in 2024 found that provision had become too expensive, micromanaged and rule-bound, and that many of those dealing with jobcentres found the process undignified, or more concerned with the rules of the system than with their own need for work. It concluded that jobcentres in their current form should be discontinued, and that provision could be made cheaper and simpler without weakening employment outcomes, potentially saving up to 3 billion krone (approximately £344 million).

Source: Michael Barrett, 'Danish Government Announces Major Reform of Unemployment System', *The Local DK*, 9 April 2025; Dan Finn, Written Evidence from Professor Emeritus Dan Finn to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2024); University of Copenhagen, Expert Group Proposes Major Reform of Employment Programmes (2024).

As we have seen, in the current system, there are varying degrees of responsibility for employment support at different levels, which makes it difficult to identify who is responsible for outcomes in any one place. A more devolved approach would allow a local or regional institution, such as an MSA, to act as the visible owner of employment outcomes in a place, which would in turn make accountability clearer with a stronger democratic line of sight between local conditions, local action and local results.

Finally, it is worth noting that many other countries approach the provision of employment support very differently. Partnership working and service coordination in the UK are patchy, and subnational authorities have very limited influence over the design of JCP provision and the way in which resources are used to meet local needs. This is not the case in many

⁸⁰ Michael Barrett, 'Danish Government Announces Major Reform of Unemployment System', *The Local DK*, 9 April 2025.

countries in Europe and the OECD, in which there has been a notable trend towards the devolution of employment services.⁸¹

3.2 The end of JCP

While the UK has made some movement towards a more devolved approach to employment services in recent years, the core of its offer remains highly centrally driven and controlled. At the same time, it is facing major challenges. The scale of youth disengagement in particular risks creating a ‘lost generation’ whose prolonged absence from the labour market could permanently diminish their prospects.⁸² Beyond the personal toll, this represents a significant drag on the wider economy – likewise with the growing levels of economic inactivity.

We know that our current way of supporting people into work is not up to the task. It suffers from a lack of flexibility, a poor offer for employers, a focus on benefits enforcement over advice, and a conveyor belt attitude. This is coupled with a service that is closed off to some who might make use of it but ill-suited to many of those who are required to do so, and cultural baggage that makes many of the individuals in this category feel ashamed and distrusted.

The existence of traditional jobcentres is ingrained in our perceptions of the social security and employment system. Despite calls for more local control over the provision of employment support, very few have suggested radical reform to the institution that sits at its heart – with most accepting the existence of this intrinsically centralised delivery vehicle while at the same time accepting the need for a more devolved system. This is incoherent.

It is time to move towards a new model – one that combines place-based public service reform with new digital solutions. The first step in forging this new approach must be the abolition of Jobcentre Plus. From this starting point, this chapter moves to explore what should replace the JCP model and how the new system should be organised, funded, and governed.

Recommendation 1: The Government should scrap Jobcentre Plus (or the new combined Jobs and Careers Service, as it is becoming) and move to an entirely new model for delivering employment support and benefits administration.

3.3 A universal digital offer

In 2018, Hilary Cottam wrote in her book *Radical Help* that successive efforts to reform employment support have amounted to “tinkering with an analogue model in the age of the digital”, concluding that “the operating framework is still that of mass production: process the claim, get people into a job, pretend that the job will last”.⁸³ Almost a decade on and this

⁸¹ Dan Finn, *Written Evidence from Professor Emeritus Dan Finn to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee* (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2024).

⁸² Milburn, *Young People and Work: Interim Report*; Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper: Analytical Annex*.

⁸³ Hilary Cottam, *Radical Help: How We Can Remake the Relationships Between Us and Revolutionise the Welfare State* (Virago Press, 2018).

remains true. Jobcentres may now have computers and help claimants search for work online, but they are far from making the most of the opportunities that new technologies offer.

The Government has recognised this. The 2024 Autumn Budget allocated £55 million for 2025-26 to support the JCP and National Careers Service merger, with £20 million to fund investment in new digital prototypes. In March 2026, DWP issued a commercial notice inviting tech companies to shape procurement plans in this area, with the call out intended to provide an understanding of the technology and AI products available across career advice, career planning, skills gap analysis, financial planning, career coaching, learning and training, job discovery, job market insights, CV support, job application support, application tracking, and interview support.⁸⁴ This engagement is in its early stages – the consultation ends on 30 September 2026 – with the shape of actual procurement still to be determined.

The Government anticipates these new digital employment support tools forming part of a suite of online services which includes an enhanced UC portal for claimants to record their activity and the Find a Job platform. An early version of this online “Work Hub” includes an AI conversational tool, an action plan tool, and a CV builder, with further digital options being tested.⁸⁵

These initial efforts represent a good starting point for a universal digital support system, but many other countries are further ahead when it comes to integrating AI tools. The Tony Blair Institute (TBI) identifies Estonia and South Africa, among others, as examples of where AI tools are already being used effectively.⁸⁶

Estonia – long a trailblazer in digital government – uses a decision-support tool powered by AI that draws on a host of metrics about each unemployed person, pulled from across various datasets. From this, the system predicts an individual’s risk of long-term unemployment and suggests to the caseworker which services are most likely to help them.⁸⁷ In South Africa, digital tools are being used to help tackle youth unemployment. The Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator maps how close individuals are to jobs and transport links through geolocation, and AI assesses suitability and helps build the candidate’s CV – with evidence suggesting a positive impact on getting young people into the labour market.⁸⁸

TBI previously proposed introducing a digital employment assistant for every claimant that provides personalised support towards securing work and career progression, based around their CV and a digital-learner ID that gathers a full picture of the individual’s skills. AI would be used to analyse skills and experience and match to opportunities that might be realistic now, but also in the future with training, as well as suggesting possibilities for upskilling linked to future career plans. It could also help with CV and cover letter tailoring and interview practice.⁸⁹ Although there is still some way to go, this bears some similarity to the AI work assistant and CV builder currently being rolled out and tested as part of the online Work Hub.⁹⁰

An additional AI tool, DWP Ask has been developed with a focus on improving work coach advice about navigating the benefits system, rather than supporting the jobseeker directly with

⁸⁴ Department for Work and Pensions, ‘Employment Support Products for JCS’, Find a Tender Gov.UK, Web Page, 24 March 2026.

⁸⁵ Department for Work and Pensions, *Get Britain Working: An Update on the Jobs and Careers Service*.

⁸⁶ Iosad et al., *Governing in the Age of AI: Reimagining the UK Department for Work and Pensions*.

⁸⁷ Iosad et al., *Governing in the Age of AI: Reimagining the UK Department for Work and Pensions*.

⁸⁸ Iosad et al., *Governing in the Age of AI: Reimagining the UK Department for Work and Pensions*.

⁸⁹ Iosad et al., *Governing in the Age of AI: Reimagining the UK Department for Work and Pensions*.

⁹⁰ Department for Work and Pensions, *Get Britain Working: An Update on the Jobs and Careers Service*.

employment support. In this sense, it is applying, albeit potentially valuable, digital capability on top of the analogue model.

If AI tools are simply layered onto the traditional model of face-to-face work coach engagement, with its primary focus on benefit administration, then they are unlikely to make the difference that is needed.

A new digital offer is essential, and central government has a vital role to play in designing, commissioning and delivering it nationwide. For many that find themselves temporarily on UC, a digital platform for support as well as monitoring and benefit administration can provide much of what they require. Making better use of technology in this way can help free up resources for those that require more intensive, personalised support. Digital technology can also play a valuable and enhanced role in identifying those most likely to be in this group. To work, it must be possible for this cohort of UC recipients to report and have verified their engagement with the digital employment support platform, which will require some level of integration with an individual's online UC account. However, these tools should also be available more widely – not just to those that find themselves within the benefits system. Through this, employment support can be made more accessible, at low cost, and less tied to a jobcentre.

The next section details the devolved model that should accompany this new national digital offer.

Recommendation 2: The DWP should design a digital employment support platform with tools such as AI-enabled work coaching, CV improvement, and interview practice. This should be universally accessible, but targeted primarily at assisting those who are less likely to be at risk of long-term unemployment.

3.4 A system of bespoke local support

As this report has shown, from a relatively low base, there has been increasing experimentation in England with more decentralised approaches to employment support. These have mostly focused on contracted and grant funded programmes and efforts outside of the core JCP offer.

Greater Manchester in particular has been at the forefront of efforts to demonstrate that devolution of employment support can work effectively in practice.

This started with the co-design and commissioning of DWP's Work and Health Programme. Practitioners interviewed for this report highlighted pressure during this early stage to show that devolution could be beneficial, and to demonstrate this quickly. This is likely to have led to a degree of risk-aversion, with GMCA contracting two of the big private welfare-to-work providers to deliver the programme. However, these early efforts evolved into Working Well – an umbrella for the city region's approach to supporting those facing complex barriers to work, including long-term unemployment, health conditions and low confidence

GMCA's approach has matured further since this initial phase, with the Integrated Settlement unlocking a more genuinely experimental, place-based approach. Rather than focusing on

providing proof-of-concept to central government, GMCA has since been providing more of a stewardship and framework-setting role, with constituent local authorities responsible for much of delivery, and working in a more bottom-up way.

From a local authority perspective, this shift has meant less complexity. Previously, local authorities delivering employment support programmes had to manage a patchwork of separate funding agreements, each with its own reporting requirements and eligibility criteria.

The MSA now provides stable and flexible funding in this area, enabling longer-term planning than was previously possible. The shift was described by one practitioner as “a breath of fresh air,” which has made a big difference to how things operate on the ground. There is more opportunity now for local authorities to work closely with local community groups, charities, and social enterprises, and for services to reflect input from those that use them.

In Salford, for example, the local authority has established the Salford Employment Hub, which is open to all individuals and businesses, with no eligibility criteria attached. This coupled with the fact that it also supports people who are already in work means there is less stigma attached to making use of its services than JCP. The Hub has become normalised as the place where people go when they need this kind of support, with its role consequently far less directly tied to benefit status than Jobcentre Plus.

Similar initiatives have been established by other local authorities in England, with Camden Council, for example, establishing Good Work Job Hubs which offer free and universal employment support to residents at various community locations, or via a phone or video call. Camden Council has also been experimenting with a pilot offering bespoke financial support for young people covering particular expenses, such as interview clothing and travel, to help them secure a job, with individuals referred by Good Work Camden’s job hub advisors.⁹¹

GMCA has been pulling the city region’s approach to public services into an overarching model it refers to as ‘Live Well’, which is aimed at breaking down the barriers between services and intervening earlier through neighbourhood teams and Live Well Centres that operate across work, family support, housing, health, and crisis response.⁹² While it builds on previous initiatives, Live Well is still relatively nascent – GMCA has been designated as a ‘Prevention Demonstrator’ by the Government, which will involve a 10-year programme of evaluation.⁹³ There is, however, a broader existing evidence base supporting the benefits of joined-up preventative initiatives.⁹⁴ This includes the Wigan Deal, which among other things pioneered a more collaborative commissioning model with voluntary and community organisations as partners as opposed to just providers. Since 2012, Wigan has managed to make savings while also improving outcomes⁹⁵, and the council’s way of doing things has served as an inspiration for the wider GM approach. While it still lacks clarity in many respects, the envisaged role for MSAs in public service reform and innovation has been expanding. MSAs can be seen as the

⁹¹ “‘Personalised Employment Grants for Young People’ Pilot”, Web Page, We Make Camden, October 2025.

⁹² Thomas Johnson, ‘The Radical Rewiring of the State: What Devolution Must Deliver’, *Institute for Government*, July 2026.

⁹³ Ruth Robertson, ‘24-Hour Prevention People: How Is Greater Manchester Putting Prevention into Practice?’, *The King’s Fund*, September 2026.

⁹⁴ Stuart Hoddinott et al., *A Preventative Approach to Public Services: How the Government Can Shift Its Focus and Improve Lives* (Institute for Government, 2024).

⁹⁵ Chris Naylor and Dan Wellings, *A Citizen-Led Approach to Health and Care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal* (The King’s Fund, 2019).

custodians of the local state, operating at a scale that enables a strategic and cross-cutting view, setting strategy for the wider region, coordinating and convening key stakeholders.

In many areas, the MSA's direct delivery role is likely to be minimal, but this strategy-setting function should apply to devolved public services as well as economic development. Through the institutional stewardship of the regional economy, the MSA will be well-situated to draw on knowledge of the labour market and relationships with major local employers in setting the direction for devolved employment support, and coordinating its interaction with local growth plans, and other public services across the wider place.

MSAs have already been fulfilling this function for some employment support programmes that do not form part of JCP – especially where this funding is part of the Integrated Settlement. With JCP abolished, they should take on responsibility for the provision of employment support for individuals who are claiming income-related benefits such as UC and require more support than the universal digital platform can provide.

This should be part of an MSA's integrated public services strategy. As recommended previously by *Re:State*, this should form part of a wide-ranging Regional Plan that incorporates and expands upon the various 'plan' documents that are currently published. Regional Plans should encompass economic strategy as well as the integration and improvement of local services and be co-produced with constituent local authorities and other key community actors. This can ensure the alignment of the wider system behind a vision for the region, allowing the various institutions within it to contribute.⁹⁶

In this context, MSAs should hold the budget and ultimate accountability for employment support related outcomes. What they do with this flexibility should be largely up to them, with experimentation encouraged. However, MSAs have several options for how they might go about fulfilling their responsibilities in this area.

They might commission private or not-for-profit providers for certain aspects of provision, commission local authorities directly, or 'double devolve' commissioning responsibility down to local authorities themselves. These councils are likely to play a key role in effective engagement with voluntary and community organisations, since they should have strong knowledge and experience of working with these groups on the ground.

The JCP estate is extensive, consisting of 646 buildings across Great Britain.⁹⁷ Some of these buildings are rundown and unappealing, while others are more modern and state of the art. Devolution would mean discretion for local leaders on whether to maintain something akin to the jobcentre model, or move towards a different approach entirely – one that does not focus on the jobcentre at all, as typically conceived.

The option should be available to MSAs to take on the leases of existing JCP buildings, where they wish to do so. Devolved authorities with less maturity and experience delivering employment support programmes may opt for a degree of continuity at first, while they experiment in a targeted way with new delivery models that can then be scaled up.

⁹⁶ Dr Simon Kaye et al., *What Powers Where? Achieving the 'Devolution Revolution'* (Reform Think Tank, 2024).

⁹⁷ National Audit Office, *Supporting People to Work through Jobcentres*.

There are currently over 16,500 work coaches employed by DWP across the country.⁹⁸ These individuals do important work within a system that creates multiple challenges – including, for example, high caseloads and reductions in the amount of time with each claimant.⁹⁹ When local institutions first take on full responsibility for employment support, they may wish to retain the existing workforce in their area if they plan on continuing with an approach that is similar to the JCP model. In instances where MSAs wish to pursue something wholly different, this may lead to redundancies for existing JCP staff. These costs should largely be absorbed by DWP as part of the transition to a devolved system, with supplementary funding from the Treasury where necessary.

For those continuing to operate a similar service, this may count as a “relevant transfer” under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, which exists to protect employees from dismissal due to a change in employer, limiting contract changes when certain statutory conditions are met. However, for those areas that decide to move to a new system, where the nature of service delivery is materially different, these provisions are less likely to apply.¹⁰⁰

Devolved governments in Scotland and Wales

The functions of JCP have remained reserved to the UK Government despite devolution to Scotland and Wales (arrangements for employment support and social security in Northern Ireland are distinct and do not follow the same model). Since 2016, contracted employment support has been fully devolved to the Scottish Government. The Scottish example highlights both some of the benefits of devolution in this policy area, as well as the constraints that arise from only doing so partially. The initial approach was a nationally commissioned programme, Fair Start Scotland, which ended referrals in March 2024. Provision is now delivered through No One Left Behind, under which local authorities, supported by Local Employability Partnerships, hold responsibility for commissioning and delivery, funded through grant rather than contract – while the Scottish Government sets the national framework.¹⁰¹

These partnerships bring together public, third and private sector providers to identify local need and align employment support with health, justice, housing and advice services. Support is open to people regardless of age or background, and participation is entirely voluntary.¹⁰²

The impact of this approach nonetheless remains constrained by the fact that Jobcentre Plus, as the core of the employment support system, remains reserved – limiting the reach of No One Left Behind. Over the last quarter, starts on No One Left Behind accounted for less than 3 per cent of individuals who were out of work or want to work.¹⁰³ Because JCP remains reserved, the Scottish Government’s devolved services are unable to operate on a wider scale and cater for significant cohorts of those in need, such as individuals receiving UC.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Phil Leake and Munaza Rafiq, ‘Stretched Job Centre Staff Struggling to Get Disabled People into Work’, *BBC News*, October 2025.

⁹⁹ National Audit Office, *Supporting People to Work through Jobcentres*.

¹⁰⁰ Anne Morris, ‘TUPE Meaning UK: What It Is & When It Applies 2026’, Web Page, David Morris, January 2026.

¹⁰¹ Whyte, *Working Wonders: The Role of Employability in Tackling Poverty*.

¹⁰² Whyte, *Working Wonders: The Role of Employability in Tackling Poverty*.

¹⁰³ Chief Economist Directorate, *Scotland’s Devolved Employment Services: No One Left Behind Statistical Summary August 2026* (2026); Chief Economist Directorate, *Labour Market Trends: April 2026* (2026).

¹⁰⁴ Whyte, *Working Wonders: The Role of Employability in Tackling Poverty*.

With JCP abolished, the Scottish and Welsh Governments should also take on responsibility for providing employment support to those claiming UC (in addition to the employment provision that they are already responsible for delivering).

Recommendation 3: MSAs in England should take on responsibility for providing specialised employment support for working-age individuals who are claiming income-related benefits such as UC. As stewards of the subnational public service system, MSAs should be responsible for setting a Regional Plan which includes a place-based strategy for public service reform and delivery that integrates employment services with other areas of provision and connects to local labour market conditions and economic growth strategy.

They should have the flexibility to experiment with different approaches to provision, tailored to their region. The goal should be a mixed model that better joins up with other services, carries less stigma, and caters more effectively to those with complex needs. These powers should also be devolved to the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

It is also important that for those who are unable or would struggle to make a benefits application online, in-person assistance is available. In some instances, this may be located alongside the kind of local employment services offer described above, or housed in other local government facilities. However, regardless of the form regional employment support takes, local authorities should be responsible for ensuring there are locations that can be accessed for those in need of this kind of social-security related support.

Recommendation 4: Local authorities should ensure that in-person assistance with social security applications and administration is available for those that need it.

3.5 Eligibility and conditionality

The current system rations support based largely on how long an individual has been claiming, as well as the kind of benefit they are claiming. Those who remain in the full conditionality “Searching for work” group for longer become eligible for, and are required to access, more intensive support, while everyone typically receives broadly the same offer at first.

Where similarly crude rule-based approaches have been evaluated elsewhere, they have been found to perform only marginally better than chance, with one such model in use in Belgium assessed at an accuracy of around 0.58.¹⁰⁵ No equivalent assessment of the approach used in Great Britain has been published. The consequence is that, for the first few months of a claim, an individual who is likely to quickly find work without assistance is generally treated in much the same way as someone who will struggle to find work over a long period of time.

¹⁰⁵ Sam Desiere and Ludo Struyven, *Using Artificial Intelligence to Classify Jobseekers: The Accuracy-Equity Trade-Off* (Journal of Social Policy, 2020).

This results in attention being dedicated to people who would have found work without it, wasting resources unnecessarily. Simultaneously, for those facing more significant barriers to work, which the system makes no effort to identify, the early period of a claim, when support is likely to be most valuable, is wasted – skills erode and detachment from the labour market calcifies. Danish evidence from a large, randomised controlled trial (RCT) of early and intensive activation found significant improvements in employment outcomes, with the effects driven principally by contact early in the claim rather than by later programmes.¹⁰⁶

In the UK, by the time the system recognises that an individual might require more intensive help, the point at which it would have been most effective has passed.

Triage at the point of entry is not an untested approach. It has been standard practice across much of the OECD for three decades, beginning in the United States in 1993 and Australia in 1998, and is now used in some form by most comparable public employment services.¹⁰⁷

There has been some limited testing of these approaches in the UK in the past. DWP trialled a questionnaire in an attempt to identify participants who would benefit from more frequent contact with their work coach. An RCT found some improvement in outcomes, although it was not statistically significant and it is also worth noting that assessing who is likely to benefit most from a specific intervention is a different task to assessing overall risk of long-term unemployment.¹⁰⁸

Previously, the UK developed a statistical profiling model which was designed to predict which participants would be likely to still be claiming benefits after a year. This approach proved relatively effective in identifying those at higher risk of long-term unemployment, but was not implemented, with the assessment report concluding that early identification would only be of limited value without an effective intervention which these individuals could be directed to.¹⁰⁹

Australia's Job Seeker Classification Instrument was introduced in 1998 and has been updated with each subsequent generation of the employment programme. At the point of claim, a short questionnaire covering circumstances, work history, skills and barriers produces a score indicating the risk of long-term unemployment. Importantly, the instrument does not simply allocate people on the basis of that score. Instead, it flags where an individual appears to face multiple or complex barriers, and this triggers a fuller assessment carried out by a qualified assessor. The principle is that the instrument informs the assessor's decision for cases where circumstances are more complicated.

As earlier efforts to fully automate this process have demonstrated, no assessment made at the point of claim will be comprehensive. It should not, therefore, solely determine the support an individual is directed towards. Instead, while every claimant would complete an online assessment, they would also initially engage with an adviser from their MSA's employment support service. This adviser would then determine the appropriate level and type of employment support for each individual, informed by the digital assessment.

¹⁰⁶ Brian Graversen and Jan van Ours, *How to Help Unemployed Find Jobs Quickly: Experimental Evidence from a Mandatory Activation Program* (Journal of Public Economics, 2008).

¹⁰⁷ *Statistical Profiling in Public Employment Services*, vol. 224.

¹⁰⁸ Department for Work and Pensions, *Weekly Work Search Review Trial* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2018).

¹⁰⁹ Simon Matty, *Predicting Likelihood of Long-Term Unemployment: The Development of a UK Jobseekers' Classification Instrument* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013).

The direction agreed in this conversation would then form the content of the individual's Claimant Commitment (which would continue to be enforced and administered by DWP, covered below).

For many individuals, this may involve being required, at first, to engage with the DWP-provided digital job search support service. However, for those assessed as having greater barriers to work, it may involve being redirected by the MSA advisor towards specific employment, skills, or other available services as appropriate. This means that decisions are ultimately taken by an assessor, rather than solely by the digital assessment process, whilst still reducing the volume of direct engagement in cases where this is likely to be of limited value – and therefore freeing up resources to focus on those with more complex needs. What is required of claimants assessed to need more intensive support from the outset will reflect the support actually available locally, rather than a nationally standardised set of activities.

Importantly, the initial assessment should not be treated as permanent. Everyone still claiming after six months should be required to engage directly with the relevant employment support regardless of how they were directed at the outset, so that a misjudged assessment means support arrives later rather than not at all. For those pointed towards the digital support offer for the first six months, DWP should be responsible for monitoring their engagement in searching for work activity through the platform. If during this period they are failing to adequately engage with the digital support without good reason, then DWP should require that they take up the local offer of support before the six-month mark or face potential sanctions. It is equally important that those not *required* to use employment support under current rules (for example, someone in the 'no work-related requirements group', or not in receipt of benefits at all) are able and encouraged to do so. To take one example, the Salford Employment Hub is open to all residents with very limited eligibility criteria and also supports people already in work.

Additionally, a claimant with work-related requirements could use the local employment support services voluntarily if they felt they would be useful, even if they had been assessed as not necessarily needing more intensive support.

Recommendation 5: A more sophisticated, digitally-enabled triaging process should be established to be used at the point an individual begins a claim to help identify their distance from the labour market and complexity of need. An assessor from the relevant MSA's employment support service should complete a claimant assessment informed by the digital triaging process to determine the appropriate level of support. Those considered to be at lower risk of long-term unemployment would initially be expected to engage with the national digital support service. Those considered to be at higher risk would be expected to engage from the outset with the local employment support services provided by the MSA. After six months, if the status of those using the national digital support remains unchanged, they too should be required to engage with the employment support service.

Then DWP Permanent Secretary, in evidence to the Work and Pensions Committee, reported that reducing the length of the initial work coach conversation and moving claimants from

weekly to fortnightly appointments had made no difference to their outcomes.¹¹⁰ If both the depth and the frequency of the interaction can be reduced by half without any effect on whether people find work, the interaction is demonstrably having only a limited impact. The *Get Britain Working White Paper* reached a similar conclusion when it described a service too focused on monitoring benefit compliance, with standardised appointment slots getting in the way of the tailored support work coaches might otherwise provide.¹¹¹

The replacement of this approach with a different requirement that is still prescribed nationally would also undermine the purpose of devolving delivery, since what is asked of an individual is inherently dependent on the way support is designed. Requirements based on attendance at scheduled appointments assume a single model of delivery, and would in practice rule out drop-in provision, group programmes, peer support, sector academies or digital-first coaching.¹¹²

The requirement on the claimant should be to take up the tailored support that is offered, rather than to produce a given volume of applications. DWP should set out what must be evidenced and strategic authorities determine what taking up support means within their own model. This is the same approach taken in Denmark, where municipalities are compared on outcomes adjusted for local conditions, while the method of delivery is left to them. This stands in contrast to Connect to Work, which prescribes the models that may be used and then assures fidelity to them.¹¹³

This means that the direction given during the initial engagement between the claimant and the MSA employment support service assessor would form the basis of an individual's Claimant Commitment, and the basis upon which conditionality is applied.

However, as has been noted, the direct link between employment support and benefit enforcement can undermine the effectiveness of the support services, and a key advantage of the devolved model is the ability to reduce the visible and direct link between the two.

Instead, devolved providers should record whether a claimant is fulfilling their personalised Claimant Commitment. Where they are not, the MSA should be able to provide DWP with details on the relevant circumstances, and to make a recommendation on how the case should be treated. The decision itself on whether non-engagement constitutes non-compliance should continue to rest with DWP, remote from the service, applying the existing good cause test with the normal route of appeal.

This would be similar to the mechanism used for contracted employment support programmes such as Restart, where providers are able to mandate participants with conditionality to attend certain activities. If a participant continues to fail to engage in the mandated activity, then the provider is expected to raise a compliance doubt with DWP. This involves providing information across a standardised set of areas, which can – if a DWP 'Decision Maker' is satisfied with the information provided – then lead to a sanction.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Work and Pensions Committee, *Get Britain Working: Reforming Jobcentres* (House of Commons, 2025).

¹¹¹ Department for Work and Pensions et al., *Get Britain Working White Paper*.

¹¹² Paul Gregg, *Realising Potential: A Vision for Personalised Conditionality and Support* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2008).

¹¹³ Department for Work and Pensions, *Connect to Work: Grant Guidance for England*.

¹¹⁴ *Restart Scheme Provider Guidance* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2026).

An evaluation of the Restart programme found that this process did not work as well as it could due to low understanding from providers and slow response times from DWP.¹¹⁵ These issues would need to be addressed. With this model, central government retains primary responsibility for the administration of benefits and sanctions. In particular, eligibility, the benefit framework, and the decision to sanction remain with DWP. While this is the case, some standardised rules and criteria around sanctioning, as outlined above, would need to apply. While international systems differ considerably in what they devolve and to whom, almost all retain income-related benefit entitlements, the rules governing them and the broader funding framework at the centre.

Retaining these functions nationally also resolves the difficulty created by allowing SAs to define engagement for themselves. If what is considered to represent taking up support varies between places, the trigger for a sanction will vary as well. But because the decision itself continues to be taken by DWP, applying a single test and a single route of appeal, the consequence of non-engagement remains uniform wherever someone happens to live.

Recommendation 6: Those in receipt of UC should continue to agree to a ‘Claimant Commitment’ detailing tailored engagement and activity requirements. DWP should remain responsible for the administration of sanctions if these requirements are not being met.

For those directed to the digital offer, the Commitment should consist of engagement with the online support provided by DWP, monitored directly by the department. For those directed to local provision, it should consist of engagement with the support services overseen by their MSA, with the specific requirements following the direction given at the initial conversation and tailored to the needs of the individual. MSAs should be required to provide information to DWP on whether a claimant has taken up the support offered. Where they have not, they should be able to provide information to DWP on relevant circumstances and make a recommendation on the appropriate action. Decisions on whether to sanction a claimant should continue to sit with DWP.

3.6 The role of the centre: research, knowledge-sharing, and national standards

When it comes to the design and delivery of employment services, the role of Whitehall will be vastly reduced. However, there will still be a valuable role for central government in this context beyond the function of enforcing conditionality and issuing sanctions.

Expert and practitioner interviews highlighted strong support for central government to perform an ‘enabling’ role, especially through promoting an emphasis on high-quality evidence and facilitating the sharing of this knowledge base among devolved authorities. It was highlighted that while powers might be passed down, regional authorities would not always innovate or follow best practice. While it would not necessarily be for central government to force them to do so, it can nonetheless encourage places to follow the evidence and ensure that when they

¹¹⁵ Learning and Work Institute and Ipsos, *The Evaluation of the Restart Scheme*, DWP research report no. 1052 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2024).

do try new things, this is properly researched and evaluated. In the 1990s in the United States, for example, a significant number of studies were conducted – including ‘gold-standard’ RCTs – during the process of decentralising employment support.¹¹⁶

DWP has already tended to take an approach to employment support that is evidence-led and has conducted rigorous evaluations of many of its programmes.¹¹⁷ This past good practice forms an evidence base that devolved authorities can draw upon, while at the same time having the flexibility to experiment. The effectiveness of the Individual Placement and Support model for those with mental health and additional issues is well evidenced, for example – and DWP requires adherence to this approach as part of the delivery of the Connect to Work programme.¹¹⁸ Within a more devolved system, central government can continue to encourage the use of these methods, and provide evidence to support them, even though it is no longer required.

The newly-established No 10 North could play a critical role, working closely with DWP and an official-level intergovernmental forum such as the Mayoral Data Council to agree the necessary data-sharing agreements between Whitehall and MSAs.¹¹⁹ This should also build on the recently announced Digital Devolution Programme, aimed at unlocking the potential of government data in the context of devolution and building digital and data capabilities at MSA-level.¹²⁰ In Denmark, for example, the ‘STAR’ agency runs the jobindsats.dk portal which provides dynamic labour market and benefit statistics making it possible to compare performance between the employment services of different municipalities and identify best practice.

There are also circumstances which may substantially alter labour market conditions across the whole country, potentially quite rapidly – such as an external economic shock, or a public health crisis like the coronavirus pandemic. It is likely that even in these cases, the impacts will be felt differently in different places, making a localised response more effective. Nevertheless, there may be instances where a national response in such situations is appropriate, for example, if it requires speed or standardisation in the interests of fairness. The devolution of employment support should not preclude central government’s ability to take a national approach if it is deemed necessary.

Recommendation 7: Central government should provide an intelligence, research and steering function, with a significant emphasis being placed on evaluation and the building of a ‘what works’ evidence base from different devolved approaches. There should also be a retained expectation that central government may step in and take a more national approach in the context of an economic shock or emergency.

While local flexibility and tailoring is essential, there should be a role for the centre in defining and ensuring baseline service requirements – not least given the centre, as discussed above,

¹¹⁶ Rebecca Blank, *Evaluating Welfare Reform in the United States*, no. w8983 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2002), w8983, <https://doi.org/10.3386/w8983>.

¹¹⁷ Paxton et al., *Designing and Delivering Employment Support*.

¹¹⁸ Department for Work and Pensions, *Connect to Work: Grant Guidance for England*.

¹¹⁹ Dr Simon Kaye, *Plan for Government: Building Number 10 North* (Re:State, 2026).

¹²⁰ Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, ‘Whitehall Officials to Be Posted into Mayors’ Offices as PM Marks First Month of No10 North’, Press Release, GOV.UK, 21 August 2026.

retains the benefit bill if an area fails. The emphasis on high-quality research corresponds with a need for transparency. Central government should require subnational authorities to record and make public various performance metrics.

Case study 2: Canada

In the 1990s, the Canadian Provinces and Territories received control of employment services and programmes, as well as social assistance benefits. Further responsibility for previously Federal employment support programmes was devolved from 1996 through bilateral ‘Labour Market Development Agreements’ (LMDAs), which included the transfer of funding, federal staff, and other associated resources. The system now primarily works through LMDAs for the insured unemployed, and ‘Workforce Development Agreements’ for the uninsured unemployed. Together, these systems invest \$3.5 billion a year with the programmes themselves designed and delivered by the Provinces and Territories.

These agreements involve certain expectations around partnership, involving local decision-making, avoiding duplication, and encouraging personal responsibility. They are results-orientated, with reporting on performance and proper evaluation. The bilateralism of the agreements in question means there are differences between Provinces in the nature of their responsibilities for labour market activation policies. Each Province and Territory has its own governance and delivery arrangements, reflecting different political and policy choices.

The devolved system has retained effective evaluation mechanisms, with Provinces required to submit annual reports and work with the federal government to agree an evaluation framework, and commission and sign off on evaluation reports. These evaluation processes found that LMDA programmes improved participants’ labour market attachment relative to non-participants and reduced dependence on benefits and social assistance. Importantly, the evaluations also found that employment assistance had a greater impact on earnings and employment early in a claim (specifically within the first four weeks), helping people back to work sooner. They also found that the agreements acted as a catalyst for Provinces to integrate employment and training provision, and allowed the flexibility to adapt services.

The evaluations also record short-term and some enduring implementation problems requiring adjustments to partnerships, work processes and accountability structures, and note that integration demanded a large investment of time and energy from all involved. This is consistent with broader evidence that organisational reform of this kind has a transitional impact on performance while new systems establish themselves.

Source: Employment and Social Development Canada, Evaluation of the Labour Market Development Agreements (2017); Dan Finn, Written Evidence from Professor Emeritus Dan Finn to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2024).

While the details of provision should be determined by local decision-makers, there should be a requirement for an offer of support for certain groups. Given that many of those on UC will have to engage with local employment services as a benefit condition, there should be a minimum level of provision on offer for this group – for example, a requirement that they can access an employment advisor of some description. In particular, MSAs must provide someone to perform the assessment function outlined above.

However, there should also be a requirement for a level of provision targeted at groups who are in receipt of UC or Employment and Support Allowance without work-related conditions – those with more complex needs, such as disabilities or long-term health conditions. This is the largest out-of-work cohort and the group most likely to benefit from a much more personalised, integrated approach to support. Interviewees for this paper were also clear that a new model must avoid incentivising a focus on the easier to help cases, leaving those further from the labour market parked on benefits.

Recommendation 8: Central government should set a baseline for regional employment support services involving requirements around public reporting of performance metrics and minimum guaranteed access for both claimants with work-related requirements and those without who may have more complex needs, like disabilities or long-term conditions. Design and delivery detail should stay locally determined, but the centre should also play an active role in gathering and disseminating ‘what works’ evidence, so that lessons from local innovation are systematically captured and circulated.

4. Making it happen

There is a strong case for a devolved system of employment support in the UK. This would involve much more local discretion, with services tailored to the specificities of particular places, but with a retained role for central government in ensuring there are minimum levels of provision on offer and building an evidence base that can be drawn on across the country, while also encouraging innovation.

However, there are several structural factors that need to be considered in order to underpin a transition to this reality. Firstly, how would funding and accountability work for this new model; and secondly, how should the governance of this policy area work at subnational level once it has been devolved.

4.1 Funding and accountability

One of the core questions raised by the transition away from the JCP model is that of funding. At present, JCP is funded out of the departmental budget of DWP, which is decided through negotiation with the Treasury and No 10 at each Spending Review.

A second question concerns that of accountability. Currently, the official who leads DWP – its permanent secretary – is the Accounting Officer (AO), which means they are accountable to Parliament (in particular the Public Accounts Committee) for whether value for money is being achieved with the public funds that have been allocated.

With a more devolved employment support system, this structure would need to change. In recent years, other departmental budget lines have been devolved to MSAs. Initially this began as a series of discrete, ring-fenced pots of funding from specific Whitehall departments – with significant conditions attached to how funds could be spent, and extensive central government monitoring.

However, from the 2025-2026 financial year, GMCA and the West Midlands Combined Authority have been in receipt of ‘Integrated Settlements’, which amalgamate these various pots into a single pool with greater flexibility over spending. Seven EMSAs (those MSAs that were granted “established” status) then received multi-year Integrated Settlements from April 2026, which run until April 2029.

Integrated Settlements are divided into thematic policy areas that broadly reflect the areas of competence that were set out for MSAs in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act.¹²¹ One of these policy themes is adult skills and employment support, which includes, for example, the funding associated with Connect to Work.

Each EMSA must agree an Integrated Settlement outcomes framework with central government. This consists of specific measurable targets for scrutiny. When it comes to employment support this typically includes the share of out of work participants to achieve first earnings, and the number of supported employment programme starts.¹²² The accountability

¹²¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *Integrated Settlement: Policy Document* (2025).

¹²² Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, *Integrated Settlement Outcomes Framework 2026/27 to 2028/29* (2026).

arrangements for integrated settlements reflect the fact that funding comes from across various different Whitehall departments.

While the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) AO is the main point of parliamentary accountability (the 'systems AO'), other contributing departments have 'thematic' AOs and are members of a 'programme board', which collectively signs off relevant outcomes and targets, and receives monitoring reports and evaluation data.

Case study 3: Spain

Spain's system of employment support is shaped by a division between national and regional responsibility. The national government retains the overall framework and the administration of benefits, while the Autonomous Communities control active labour market policy and the delivery of employment services. Each region runs its own employment service, and regional governments, local partnerships, training providers and contracted organisations all play a role in shaping delivery on the ground. There is considerable variation in how services are organised, which programmes are offered and how far delivery is contracted out.

The Spanish system also provides for clear structures of accountability across the two levels of government. Annual Plans for the Promotion of Decent Employment set objectives for Spain as a whole and for each individual autonomous community, covering the services and programmes delivered at both levels. A common integrated information system provides shared data which informs these assessments. Regions therefore retain genuine discretion over how support is designed and delivered, within a framework that sets out what each of them is expected to achieve and how it will be measured. This system operates in a country with sharp differences in labour market conditions between regions, and significant political variation between regional governments. Conditionality is also integrated between systems, as claimants are required to participate in actions determined by the regional service and to provide evidence of their activity to both levels.

The OECD's assessment of 38 Spanish programmes found monitoring processes operated effectively, but frameworks for formal impact evaluation were underdeveloped. In particular, ensuring accountability and data reporting is well-established and effectively utilised plays a critical role in ensuring the devolved system operates effectively.

Source: OECD, Improving Active Labour Market Policies in Spain: Lessons from a Qualitative Assessment, Connecting People with Jobs (OECD Publishing, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1787/745e0cdd-en>.

This existing structure can readily accommodate the further devolution of employment support funding. Formulae can be applied (as they are to other budget lines in the Integrated Settlement) to determine an apportionment of the existing JCP budget to MSAs. Some of the funds would be retained by the Department to support the development of the universal digital service recommended above. Where MSAs have, or are set to take on, an Integrated Settlement, this funding should form part of the skills and employment support theme, allowing for some flexibility for movement of the funding between themes, and spending across skills programmes as well as employment support.

Where areas do not yet have Integrated Settlements, this funding should form one distinct funding pot among others (which will, at first, mean less flexibility on how it can be spent). Finally, where areas do not yet have a Strategic Authority, regional ‘labour market geographies’ should be created as a temporary measure to take on responsibility for the spending of these funds (discussed below).

At first, a set of target outcomes for the use of the funds should be negotiated with DWP. As with the existing non-JCP employment support programmes that have been devolved, this could include a target for the number of UC claimants supported into work. However, it should also encompass other key measures such as work sustainment, not just job entry, programme starts, and benefit off-flow.

More broadly, to avoid a situation in which MSAs focus on those that are closest to the labour market, there should be targets aimed specifically at harder to reach groups – for example claimants in the ‘all work related requirements’ group who have been claiming for a year or more and those on ESA or UC health – backed up by outcomes data broken down based on dimensions such as disability, age, and length of time out of work.

Where integrated settlements are in place, these targets should form part of the broader outcomes framework agreed with central government. For areas without integrated settlements, similar targets should be negotiated directly with DWP as part of a specific ‘labour market outcomes agreement’, supported by regular data sharing.

As mentioned above, there are ‘moral hazard’ public spending risks involved with devolving employment support. This should be acknowledged and mitigated against as far as possible. If an area begins to underperform, then the benefits bill will go up – and because this spending sits within Annual Managed Expenditure, there is no cap or backstop: spending rises automatically with need. Given this, it is even more imperative that a mitigation and special measures system is in place if things start going wrong.

Strategic authorities are ‘best value’ authorities, with a statutory Best Value Duty. This means they must show they are carrying out their functions with attention to economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.¹²³ There are various interventions that can be utilised if there are concerns that they are not complying with the duty, including the appointment of commissioners to carry out some of the authority’s functions.¹²⁴

The statutory powers of inspection and intervention apply in relation to the delivery of the Integrated Settlements and a specific ‘matrix of mitigation’ has been agreed between MSAs and Government. This consists of a hierarchy of escalation when concerns emerge about the delivery of the outcomes or there are wider concerns about failure to deliver value for money. At the more extreme end of the spectrum, where an MSA has slipped on most of its indicators causing a major impact on delivery of outcomes, then ‘major mitigations’ may include, among other measures, the withdrawal of funding lines from the settlement or clawback funding.

Where MSAs have integrated settlements, this process of “mitigation, assessment and escalation” will apply in relation to the outcomes related to employment support that have been

¹²³ Local Government Act 1999 (Section 3).

¹²⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Best Value Standards and Intervention: A Statutory Guide for Best Value Authorities* (2024).

agreed. MSAs without integrated settlements should agree a similar process of mitigation and escalation in relation to their specific 'labour market outcomes agreement' with DWP.

Missing targets or underperformance compared to when services were delivered centrally should be monitored as early warning signs that additional measures might be necessary. Initially, this should consist of a requirement to engage more closely with the 'what works' evidence base provided by central government. A specific taskforce of experienced experts and practitioners could be created to be on hand to offer guidance in these situations, to help get an area back on track.

However, if there is no improvement, more advanced interventions might include the appointment of an external commissioner or team to direct the running of the service. In the most extreme scenarios, where significant public expenditure has been incurred in the form of higher social security payments, government may clawback some funding from the Integrated Settlement or make a reduction to an MSA's assigned taxation, in the context of fiscal devolution (discussed below).

Recommendation 9: Each MSA should be apportioned the JCP budget (minus the costs of the functions that will remain with DWP) for their area, with this rolled into the employment support and skills theme of the Integrated Settlement, where these are present, or otherwise in the form of a specific central government grant. Outcomes associated with the provision of employment support to working-age benefit claimants should form part of the Integrated Settlement outcomes framework agreed between MSAs and central government. Where an area is taking on these responsibilities but does yet not have an Integrated Settlement, these targets should be included in a specific 'labour market outcomes agreement' with DWP.

Given the moral hazard involved, this should be underpinned by a clear mitigation and escalation process in the event of underperformance. This should range from closer engagement with the 'what works' evidence base in the first instance to, in the most serious cases, the appointment of an external commissioner or clawback of funding.

Fiscal devolution would create positive incentives for MSAs, including when it comes to delivering employment services, and this will help avoid scenarios like those described above. Previous *Re:State* work has argued that the integrated settlements should be replaced by the retention of a certain portion of the taxation raised in an area – in particular, a share of regionally-generated income tax.¹²⁵ This has now been confirmed as the direction of travel by the Government, with the intention that a new mechanism for retaining income tax and enhanced business rates retention will replace government grants for mayoral authorities in England.¹²⁶

When this takes place, a big enough portion should be retained to cover the non-digital functions of JCP, with this then passing out of the DWP budget and replacing the previous mechanism of grant funding into the Integrated Settlement.

¹²⁵ Alex Walker et al., *Taxing for Take-off: A New Plan for Fiscal Devolution* (Re:State, 2026).

¹²⁶ Cabinet Office, *Rewiring the State – Cabinet Statement*.

Re:State also previously argued that places should be able to retain the growth in their portion of regional taxation over a period long enough to incentivise growth-friendly decision-making – providing a reward for economic performance, and effective policymaking. In a model in which areas have fiscal devolution and control over employment support, they will directly benefit from higher regional receipts if successful at moving individuals into work. For this gain share model to work, the supplementary ‘equalisation’ mechanism that will be required as part of the fiscal devolution model must be designed so that it does not act as a reward for policy failure.¹²⁷ MSAs must stand to gain more from retained tax receipts if they manage to get an individual into work compared to if that person remains inactive or unemployed.

Beyond fiscal devolution, a further positive incentive should be designed: MSAs that are successful in reducing the benefit caseload through their employment support policies should receive a portion of the central government savings that have been made as a result (a corollary to the potential for a clawback mechanism mentioned above if the opposite is the case). This should be assessed over the same timeframes used for retention of income tax growth.

When fiscal devolution takes place, granular targets should become more high-level outcomes focused, for example, on reducing regional inactivity and unemployment rates. However, this should continue to be accompanied by an emphasis on maximum transparency, with granular information on how different regional employment services are performing in relation to different groups, to support public and regional-level technical scrutiny.

This shift towards enhanced flexibility and more high-level outcomes should be supported by the changes the Government has indicated it will make to accountability, with MSA Chief Executives taking on formal Accounting Officer status for their organisations, rather than this continuing to reside with central government AOs.¹²⁸

Recommendation 10: The funding model should change when fiscal devolution to MSAs takes place. At this point, Integrated Settlements should be replaced and MSAs should be able to retain a large enough portion of locally raised revenues such as income tax and business rates to cover all of their functions, including employment services. When this occurs, outcomes agreed with central government should become more high-level. However, this should be accompanied by a maximum transparency approach, with areas required to publish data on the performance of their employment support systems, with central government facilitating high-quality research and evaluation.

Fiscal devolution should ensure that places retain a meaningful share of the gains from improved employment outcomes, so that responsibility for reducing inactivity and increasing employment is matched by an incentive to succeed. To strengthen the incentive, MSAs that successfully reduce the benefit caseload through their employment support policies should receive a share of the resulting central government savings.

¹²⁷ Walker et al., *Taxing for Take-off: A New Plan for Fiscal Devolution*.

¹²⁸ Cabinet Office, *Rewiring the State – Cabinet Statement*.

4.2 Governance arrangements

MSAs are the right institutions to take on primary responsibility for the employment support functions that were previously provided by JCP. Many have already taken on this role in relation to non-JCP programmes. Furthermore, MSAs are intended to cover functional economic areas. They can take a broader, place-based view of employment needs, and coordinate employment provision with other services – stewarding the wider local state ecosystem in a particular direction.

It should therefore be the MSA that takes on the funding, ownership of outcomes, and overarching strategy and design of the employment support system. When JCP is abolished, full flexibility over the support on offer to working-age individuals on income-replacement benefits should pass to MSAs with “established” (EMSA) status (now eleven of them), which denotes their level of maturity. For these authorities, there will be stipulated minimum service standards, but with full discretion over the majority of design and delivery questions.

However, that leaves significant parts of the country not yet covered by a mayoral or non-mayoral strategic authority. The Government’s ambition is for all parts of England to be covered by an SA of some description by the end of the Parliament.¹²⁹ The geographies for these may map onto the spatial development boundaries that have been published by MHCLG.¹³⁰

There is, additionally, a problem of scale. The MSAs that cover England’s largest city-regions are around the right size to pursue coherent and appropriately scaled economic strategies. But as *Re:State* has highlighted, many other proposed and existing MSAs are too small, with the existing approach ill-suited to the strategic governance of places that do not neatly fit into conventional urban geographies.¹³¹

A different form of regional governance – one that encompasses towns, small cities and rural economic centres that sit within an interconnected ‘polycentric’ relationship with one another – is needed. These polycentric governance structures should have target populations of around three million people. This would ensure they are genuinely regional and represent a potential tax base big enough to enable sustainable strategic activity.¹³² Without this scale, many will struggle to take on fiscal devolution, serious economic regeneration and ambitious public service reform.

Smaller MSAs (both those already formally constituted and those soon to come on stream), places with foundation-level SAs, and those without any SA structure on the horizon should form ‘labour market geographies’ that meet the criteria outlined above. In some instances, this may involve a local authority working alongside an adjacent EMSA, which could in time form the basis of its expansion. At present, JCP is currently organised into several layers: five ‘areas’ covering the whole of Great Britain, a series of large ‘groups’, and then smaller ‘districts’ – some of which are now being aligned with MSA boundaries. It is the ‘group’ level that is closest to being regional in scale, but where these do not make sense for future,

¹²⁹ Cabinet Office, *Rewiring the State – Cabinet Statement*.

¹³⁰ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Areas for Producing Spatial Development Strategies* (2026).

¹³¹ Dr Simon Kaye and Sean Eke, *Go Big or Go Home: Governing England’s Polycentric Regions* (Re:State, 2025).

¹³² Kaye and Eke, *Go Big or Go Home: Governing England’s Polycentric Regions*.

genuinely regional-scale governance, the right geography should be created. *Re:State* proposed such geographies in *Go big or go home: governing England's polycentric regions*.¹³³

Boards made up of local authority leaders, the mayor or other representatives from the below-scale MSA (where these are present), and other key public service and community leaders should oversee the employment support system within these regions – similar to the Integrated Care Board model for health. This should be a stepping stone towards the formalisation of governance arrangements at this scale. These ‘labour market geographies’ should form the basis for broader coterminosity of public service boundaries across an area and, in time, the template for a regional strategic tier across the whole of England, and which holds full responsibility for designing and delivering employment support across the area alongside other devolved public services.

However, given that collaborative governance at this level will be a novelty, and additional capacity and new capabilities will need to be built, the flexibility on offer should be reduced at first – with standards more tightly set from the centre compared to the existing EMSAs, and with extra central government support on offer.

Recommendation 11: Employment support should be devolved directly to Established MSAs. Elsewhere, the Government should establish larger ‘labour market geographies’, repurposing existing Jobcentre Plus regional operating structures where appropriate and redrawing where not, and governed jointly by relevant local institutions. These should form the basis of a consistent future regional tier, with other major public services expected to align over time.

¹³³ Kaye and Eke, *Go Big or Go Home: Governing England's Polycentric Regions*.

5. Conclusion

Work is a key ingredient of a fulfilling life, providing meaning through contribution, enabling social inclusion and contributing to an individual's mental and physical health.¹³⁴ Yet too often this is out of reach, with too many people written off to a life on benefits. While the availability of employment opportunities is a function of wider economic conditions, in many instances unemployment and benefit dependency are the result of a misalignment between support, skills, an individual's circumstances, and the needs of employers.

The UK takes a remarkably centralised and uniform approach to better aligning these factors. Continuing in this vein is unlikely to improve the prospects of the UK's young people, and those with disabilities and long-term health conditions, who are increasingly excluded from the labour market.

England in particular is experiencing a “devolutionary turn” in policymaking.¹³⁵ But when it comes to the support provided to those looking for work, there is still a long way to go. The main mechanism for providing this kind of help – Jobcentre Plus – remains a monolithic relic of a different time.

For those able to access this support (because they are receiving certain benefits), it can be rushed, impersonal, and focused primarily on ticking boxes related to conditionality rather than trying to work out what would help the individual move closer to, into and sustain, work. This combination breeds a climate of distrust. And for many others, the jobcentre is a place to be avoided – a depressing place that carries negative connotations.

A fundamentally different way of doing things is now urgently needed.

Abolishing JCP and passing its functions down into communities and the hands of local leaders – along with a suite of other services and economic levers – is the key to a better system.

This can enable an approach that caters more effectively to the particular needs of the individual, offering them proper relational support, rather than an administrative exercise, and in a context that carries less baggage. It can also facilitate better coordination between those providing this support and the needs of regional employers, through a better understanding of the labour market, and closer relationships with local employers.

At the same time, an open and trusted employment support service can work in a joined-up way with other decentralised services – with someone pointed, for example, from neighbourhood health to a work advisor, and by a work advisor towards a skills programme supported by an employer in one of the mayoral authority's priority sectors. Many of these interactions could take place at the same location, breaking down the barriers between different forms of support, and reducing the effort of accessing them.

¹³⁴ Gordon Waddell and A. Kim Burton, *Is Work Good for Your Health and Well-Being?* (TSO, 2007).

¹³⁵ Jack Shaw, 'Five Questions the Government's Rewiring the State Plans Raise about the Future of Devolution', *Notes on Local Government*, August 2026.

England is starting to edge towards this future. But this new form of governance will remain fragmented and partial while DWP continues to maintain its stranglehold on employment support.

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