

“My husband has received a letter inviting me to attend a compulsory interview at the job centre so they can match my skills to a full time job. When would I fit this job in to my daily schedule of care?”

Background

Jobcentre plus is a new service being introduced in certain parts of the UK with the intention of extending it everywhere by 2006. It is designed to integrate work and benefit services for all benefit claimants of working age, including carers. This means that in areas where Jobcentre plus exists, claims for many benefits – including Carer’s Allowance – now involve what is called a work-focused interview. Since April 2004 partners of people claiming certain benefits also have to attend a work focussed interview. This has meant that some carers are being asked to attend interviews.

My partner claims benefits – will I get called for an interview?

- If your partner receives a specified benefit that includes an amount for you, you can be called for a work-focused interview.
- Benefits that require an interview are Income Support, Jobseeker’s Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance.
- You will not be asked to attend until the benefit has been paid for at least 6 months.
- You will not be called if either you or your partner is over 60 or under 18.
- You do not need a work-focused interview if you work at least 16 hours a week and don’t get Income Support.
- The work focused interview will usually be repeated every 3 years.

What happens if I don’t go?

- You must co-operate with the work-focused interview or your partner will lose benefit. If you don’t attend, your partner’s benefit will be reduced by £11.13 a week (at 2004/5 benefit rates), unless you have a good reason for not attending.
- Good reasons can include, for instance, illness, a domestic emergency or a job interview. Benefit is restored if you attend a work-focused interview later.

My caring role means that work just isn’t an option for me. What do I do?

- If caring responsibilities, or other circumstances, make it difficult to attend the interview, you can ask for it to be deferred to a later date, or ask for it to take place in your own home.
- If you think there is no prospect of you being able to work in the foreseeable future, you can ask for the interview to be waived indefinitely.
- If the Jobcentre Plus adviser refuses to waive or defer the interview you must attend or your partner’s benefit will be reduced.
- You cannot appeal against a refusal to defer or waive the interview, but either you or your partner can appeal against any decision to reduce benefit because you did not have a good reason for failing to attend the interview.

What if I attend but don’t agree with their advice?

- You must go through the interview process, but you don’t have to follow the advice given.
- You must respond to questions and provide details of your employment and educational experience. However, you do not have to apply for any job they tell you about or take any other action that they recommend.

Resources

Jobcentre Plus : www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

Carers UK : www.carersuk.org

CarersLine 0808 808 7777 Wed-Thu 10am-midday and 2-4pm