

## What can you do if you are sanctioned?

- ▶ Contact the Jobcentre straight away to resolve the problem
- ▶ Contact your local authority to update your Housing Benefit / Council Tax benefit claim
- ▶ Ask the Jobcentre for a **hardship payment** using the form JSA10
- ▶ **If you are unsure, take independent advice immediately (see back of leaflet).** It is essential to establish quickly whether you have been sanctioned appropriately. Sometimes you may be able to show that you have done enough to look for work even when there are certain things on your Claimant Commitment or Jobseeker's Agreement that you have not done.
- ▶ You can also ask the Jobcentre to **reconsider** their decision (called Mandatory Reconsideration). You can do this over the phone but it is best in writing. Do it straight away and explain why you disagree. You need to contact the Jobcentre **within one month** of the date of their decision letter. So if you do it over the phone make sure you take the name of the person you speak to and note the date and time. If you post your request, ask the Post Office for a free certificate of postage.
- ▶ If you are still unhappy with their decision, you can **appeal** using an appeal form from the Jobcentre or [www.gov.uk/appeal-benefit](http://www.gov.uk/appeal-benefit). **Do not delay** as there are time limits.

## Useful Contacts

A Directory of Advice & Support Services is available at:

[www.northumberlandadvicenetwork.org.uk/directory](http://www.northumberlandadvicenetwork.org.uk/directory)

### Further benefits advice:

Citizens Advice Bureau Tel. 03444 111 444

### Jobcentre Contacts:

To cancel or change an appointment: **0345 604 3719**

To find out why a decision was made: **0345 608 8545.**

To find out about hardship payments: **0345 608 8545.**

### Northumberland County Council:

Housing & Council Tax benefits: 0845 600 6400



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## Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) Sanctions & How to Avoid Them

Jobseekers Allowance has 'work related activity' rules. The aim is to help you find work and get closer to being able to work. If you do not comply with those rules, your benefit may be stopped or reduced – this is called a 'sanction'.

### This Leaflet explains:

- ◆ how they can be avoided
- ◆ what to do if you are sanctioned
- ◆ where to go for help



## TOP TIPS FOR AVOIDING SANCTION

**M**ake sure that your **claimant commitment / JSA Agreement** is as **realistic** as possible and takes into account:

- ▶ any specific health or disability related limitations you have
- ▶ any family commitments that you have, such as childcare
- ▶ any other issues that might impact your ability to work or look for work such as ongoing legal proceedings, domestic abuse, drug/alcohol issues
- ▶ where you live, in terms of transport links, bus times, internet access.

**R**emember it's **your** Claimant Commitment: if you know something won't work in your situation, tell your adviser – take a friend, relative or support worker if it would help you. **You have the right to ask for a Private Room.**

**D**on't assume that your adviser or **Work Coach** has any knowledge about your health conditions, disabilities or personal circumstances, even if you have previously been on another benefit. Instead, give full details of your circumstances and the effect they have on your ability to work and look for work.

If you cannot reach agreement with your adviser, **you have the right to ask for another Work Coach to review it.** If you still cannot reach agreement, seek independent advice immediately (see back of leaflet).

**D**o all that you can to comply with the Claimant Commitment that you have agreed. Keep a record of the steps you take.

If your **circumstances change** and you are finding it difficult to stick to the Claimant Commitment, contact the Jobcentre and **ask for a Review** straight away.

**I**f you live in a rural area and need to use **public transport to attend appointments, try to get this reflected in your claimant commitment.** Make an arrangement for reporting problems with public transport or bad weather that may lead to being late for appointments.

**Try to get to every appointment early.** People are sanctioned just for being a few minutes late.

If you know that you are **not going to be able to keep appointment** and there is a good reason (childcare or medical emergency, job interview etc.) **let the Jobcentre know immediately** and keep a note of who you speak to.

**I**f something is agreed over the telephone, **always ask for the name of the person you are speaking to and make a note of the date and time. Then, write or email confirming it (keep a copy).** When you write confirming what has been agreed, ask for an immediate response if your understanding is not correct.

**A**lways ask for everything in writing, where possible.

**Keep every bit of paper, text and email you receive together in a folder.** You might need them as evidence in the future.

**If there is a good reason ('good cause') why you have not done something in your Claimant Commitment,** your explanation has to be taken into account when deciding whether to impose a sanction. **Do not wait to be asked for an explanation, contact your work coach or employment scheme provider and offer your account of what happened straight away.**

**You have to report your good reason within 5 working days.**

Good reason could include, for example: a medical appointment/emergency; caring responsibilities; transport problems; unreasonably high travelling or childcare costs if you did as required.

**I**f something is made compulsory or 'mandatory' in your Claimant Commitment, even though you will struggle with it because of sickness or disability, or if Jobcentre refuse to make reasonable adjustments to your Claimant Commitment, get advice about this immediately – don't delay. **This could be discrimination. It's vital that you get advice as early as possible.**