Dear Colleagues,

Following the publication of the Welfare Reform Bill in February 2011, the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus have been negotiating the future role of JCP in supporting customers with substance misuse problems. This is being considered as part of the ‘offer’ that JCP will extend to each of the customer groups prior to their entry into the new Work Programme, which is due to be rolled out nationally from the summer of 2011. To support this timescale, DWP has extended the Progress2work contracts up until the end of June 2011, with no new referrals to the schemes after June 1st 2011.

Colleagues will be aware that funding for the JCP district drug coordinator posts comes to an end this month. This has created some uncertainty amongst commissioners and treatment providers about the role of JCP in supporting this client group from April onwards. Although JCP are not currently in a position to clarify what their ‘offer’ will consist of, the NTA, DWP and JCP have agreed the following position for communication to partnerships:

- There will be a transitional period from the start of the new financial year and up until the full JCP ‘offer’ is agreed, during which the partnership work between JCP and treatment providers will continue under the principle of “business as usual”. For treatment providers this includes the TPR1 process, the TPR2 processes and the continued implementation of the Joint-working protocol with JCP ([http://www.nta.nhs.uk/uploads/joint-workingprotocolwithjcp.pdf](http://www.nta.nhs.uk/uploads/joint-workingprotocolwithjcp.pdf)). Commissioners/providers and Jobcentre Plus at a district level are encouraged to work together to decide how best to implement the protocol at a local level.

- District Managers are to be given greater operational flexibility in the way that JCP delivers some of its services from April 2011, therefore there are likely to be some changes to personnel and/or some changes in the way the partnership work is carried out locally. District Managers will be responsible for deciding how they wish to deploy their internal resources on any equivalent specialist posts.
Where there are changes to personnel, JCP districts managers will ensure that there is a proper handover of partnership working relationships between existing drug coordinators and new personnel so that in each drug partnership, NTA local teams, commissioners and treatment providers are all clear about who their “lead contact” is within JCP. It will remain an expectation that the nominated leads continue to engage with partnerships at a strategic commissioning level.

During this transitional period, the JCP delivery model will become clearer and may result in changes to internal JCP guidance, such as that supporting the JCP/NTA Joint-working protocol. Any changes that impact on treatment providers will be communicated via the NTA local teams to commissioners and providers.

In light of the changes to the JCP drug coordinator arrangements and the transitional period ahead, it becomes all the more important that partnerships maintain the focus on employment, training and education within their treatment systems and do not interpret the scaling back of dedicated drug coordinator resources within JCP as a reduced interest in this policy area as this may create a significant risk to the recovery focus of the drug strategy. Whereas previously, JCP drug coordinators have played a key role in raising awareness of employment issues within treatment providers, commissioners will need to be confident that treatment providers are working closely with JCP.

We appreciate that the lack of certainty regarding the role of Jobcentre Plus in supporting drug users around their employment-related needs at a time when partnerships are being urged to ensure that their systems are recovery focused, is challenging. JCP have made it clear that they are committed to maintaining as much of the business as usual as is possible until their new operational model is in place.

We are keen to stress that partnership working with Jobcentre Plus continues and that also it starts to benefit those service users who are already in treatment and who need more coordinated and intensive help to address their employment needs.

Yours sincerely,

Rosanna O’Connor
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NTA