

# Manchester Evening News

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Picture taken on a jobseekers mobile phone.

### Jobseekers treated 'like cattle'

March 24, 2008

JOBSEEKERS claim they are being 'treated like cattle' by government contractors employed to help them find work.

Scores of people have revealed a catalogue of shortcomings in job-searching facilities and health and safety on training courses delivered by Action 4 employment - A4e - a private skills firm paid by the Department for Work and Pensions. Job hunters say up to 200 of them are crammed into premises in Minshull Street, Manchester, where they have two computers, and no telephone access, for job searching and just one toilet each for men and women. They have presented photo evidence claiming to show that many have to stand through training sessions due to lack of classroom space and that there are poor standards of cleanliness.

The government pays A4e up to £194 per customer per week, withholding 30 per cent of the fee until the participant is placed in full time employment that meets its conditions.

DWP requires certain people to attend the courses, lasting between four and 26 weeks, as a condition of receiving Jobseekers' Allowance.

Many said they were scared to speak out for fear of having their benefits cut but more than 60 people signed a petition documenting problems including overcrowding, blocked fire exits, poor ventilation and "filthy" toilets. It was show to A4e and DWP representatives.

Bosses at A4e, a £120 million skills company based in Sheffield, have now said they are working to rectify the situation while DWP says it will review the contract.

Father-of-one Mark Jones, 45, from Gorton, who was placed on the course after recovering from illness, said: "I was told that it was an intensive programme of training and job searching. In six weeks I did absolutely nothing all day, every day. No training was offered, no job search facilities made available and no work-experience placements arranged."

#### Herded

"We've been herded in like cattle." He said up to 40 people were being squeezed into small classrooms and had to go into city centre bars to use a clean toilet.

Steven McDonnell, 44, from Salford, who was made redundant from a construction job, said: "The conditions are inhumane. They've people who want work but the course is more of a hindrance than a help. I've not been

Education, Employment & Workplace Relations  
Committee

Supplementary Budget Estimates 09-10

DEEWR

Tabled Document No. 2

Date: 21/10/09

By: Senator Ronaldson

able to use the internet for weeks."

One man has contacted his local MP for Altrincham and Sale West, Graham Brady, who has agreed to meet with him about the problem.

An A4e spokesman said the firm took "any complaint extremely seriously" and bosses had met with jobseekers. She added: "We undertook a complete survey of the matters raised and we have already embarked upon a programme of work to rectify these issues. Extra space and toilets were already in the process of being secured before it was brought to the press's attention. We endeavour at all times to deliver the best possible service and to make sure our usual high standards are achieved."

The courses are also delivered at premises in George Street, in the city centre.

A DWP spokesman said some of the problems were a result of moving people to the additional Minshull Street site, following an increase in referrals. He said some issues had been "quickly resolved" and added: "There remain some additional improvements to be completed which could not be undertaken during the week when courses are being run.

"Further discussions are being held by DWP senior contract management with A4E managers to establish why standards of delivery appeared to have fallen short in this instance, thereby failing to meet both DWP and our customers' expectations. DWP will continue to monitor the situation and work closely with our contractor and customers to ensure any lessons that can be learnt for future premises transfer are learned and embedded into planning considerations, alongside a full review of the delivery of this contract."

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This is sad for the people who are genuinely hoping for jobseekers to help them, & yes those people do exist! It's yet another government sub-contract that hasn't been vetted properly, happens all the time :| Lisa moore, have you ever had to look for a job.... Or suddenly found yourself unemployed?

**LookingForLogic, Stockport**

25/03/2008 at 01:48 [Offensive or Inappropriate?](#)

All they see is 194 Quid on two legs. This sounds better than the I.L.A scam. It should be brought back into the public domain

**gato**

24/03/2008 at 21:20 [Offensive or Inappropriate?](#)

who cares if it is uncomfortable find work do something for yourself

**derick**

24/03/2008 at 19:50 [Offensive or Inappropriate?](#)

Careless Whisper - most of these people don't want a job anyway, they have to attend these courses in order to keep their benefits!

**jomov, Manchester**

24/03/2008 at 18:21 [Offensive or Inappropriate?](#)

No wonder people are not coming off benefits. This just proves that it is more degrading actually looking for work than not bothering at all.

**Careless Whisper**

24/03/2008 at 17:38 [Offensive or Inappropriate?](#)

Poor use of public funds again. I note that the owner of A4e has made it on to the rich list in her campaign to help others get work. Maybe we should windfall tax businesses like this?

**M C Spanner**

24/03/2008 at 12:31 [Offensive or Inappropriate?](#)

I wonder how people got jobs years ago without computers or telephones??could it be that old thing called a newspaper and walking.

**ace, manchester**

24/03/2008 at 10:10 [Offensive or Inappropriate?](#)

The New Labour fascists aren't interested in finding jobs for their own people just in making fat cats rich from cheap overseas labour.

**Grief Tourist, Tameside**

24/03/2008 at 09:08 [Offensive or Inappropriate?](#)