

Increasing digital channel use among digitally excluded Jobcentre Plus claimants

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Summary

For digitally excluded claimants to start using Jobcentre Plus digital services, the most immediate requirements are for more user-friendly job search facilities, providing online security could be assured. The 80 digitally excluded claimants we interviewed stated that their key requirements are:

- access to bookable, private internet-enabled Personal Computers (PCs) at the Jobcentre, library or external providers; and
- access to IT training and support, both face-to-face and telephone.

Staff would require training, internet access, less restrictive data security requirements and support from digital champions and digital partners.

Background and methods

Eighty face-to-face interviews with the claimants of the four main benefit types, 35 with Jobcentre Plus staff and five external digital partners were undertaken and analysed thematically, to explore how to encourage digitally excluded claimants to use Jobcentre Plus digital channels.¹

Key findings

Awareness and use of digital services

Digitally excluded claimant awareness of current Jobcentre Plus digital services was low. Of those who had used the services, online job searching was

¹ These claimants are defined as individuals who never access the internet, or do so no more than three times a month and lack confidence in their internet skills.

the most enthusiastically received. However, those uninterested in finding employment or with health issues (mainly IS, IB or ESA) expressed minimal interest.

Attitudes towards extending the Jobcentre Plus digital offer

Digitally excluded claimant views towards potential future digital services, were generally coloured by their views on internet security and the perceived value. Reactions to creating a claimant account and entering personal and financial information online were therefore mixed. The ability to create, save and print CVs held some interest, with options to contact advisers, change personal details, report fraud or undertake better-off-calculations online of little interest.

Digitally excluded JSA claimants interested in looking for work and those ESA claimants who believed that work was a viable option, positively viewed the capability to access more services via the internet. Those claimants who regularly visited a Jobcentre Plus office expressed a preference for on-site, internet-enabled PCs rather than Job points, if they allowed greater internet connectivity and greater privacy. There was little enthusiasm for digital channels other than through a PC, Job point or kiosks located with an external provider.

Supporting Jobcentre Plus claimants

JSA claimants, in particular, were keen for an assessment of their digital skills and training. Training desired included: how to use a PC, emailing and using an internet browser. A group would be preferred by more confident users, and one-to-one training sessions for those less confident. Local

Jobcentre Plus offices were thought to be ideal training venues. Depending on prior experience, training offered through external providers was also welcomed.

Jobcentre Plus staff confidence ranged from an unwillingness to even suggest to try online services; through to those who were sufficiently confident to provide a quick demonstration of an internet browser. Their restricted ability to provide support, due to a lack of internet access and data security requirements, were highlighted.

To raise claimants' awareness of Jobcentre Plus digital services, provide reassurance about the security of the website and ongoing support, staff thought that they needed basic 'digital awareness' training. Digital Champions and digital partners were seen as a vital resource for claimants with more specialised needs or requiring intensive, long-term support. However, digital partners' support was limited by an inability to access digital services on a claimant's behalf.

Once online, claimants were likely to continue to require support. For all but the most internet-literate, for whom online help in the form of simple FAQs would be sufficient, these claimants felt that they would require face-to-face support in the Jobcentre, supplemented by telephone support. Telephone support was required from early morning to early evening, with some weekend provision.

Conclusion

In terms of their focus on finding work and their interest in using digital services, claimants can be classified into one of four types:

- **Unaware:** mainly recently unemployed JSA or ESA claimants, with some experience of using the internet – their key barrier was a lack of awareness.
- **Unready:** longer term unemployed, mainly in receipt of JSA or ESA and with little or no internet experience. Their key barriers were a lack of awareness, little or no internet access, minimal IT skills, and a lack of confidence. Access to the internet coupled with tailored computer and internet training and face-to-face support would enable this group to use digital services.
- **Uninterested:** long-term unemployed JSA claimants, those nearing State Pension age, and those with health problems. They generally had minimal internet experience, and no interest in learning. Persuasion or compulsion, coupled with training and support would be required.
- **Unable:** generally these are long-term unemployed claimants in receipt of IS, IB or ESA for whom work was a very distant goal. They had multiple barriers, including poor literacy and English language skills, and health problems limiting mobility. This group would need persuasion about the value of the internet, alongside long-term, personalised support.

Claimants varied considerably in their 'distance' from using the internet, the amount of support needed and amount of time before they become digitally active. This is likely to require strategies that operate over the short, medium and longer term.

In the **short term**, there is a need to embed the digital message with claimants who regularly use Jobcentre Plus but are **unaware** of its digital services. This could be achieved through local marketing activities such as: posters and television screens in Jobcentre Plus sites, and reference to digital services at all points of contact. For the unaware group, the most immediate requirements are more user-friendly job search facilities. Providing online security can be assured, a secondary focus is on registering online, creating an account and making and tracking a benefit claim or appeal. To provide support, staff required training to familiarise them with digital services, along with a development plan objective to encourage staff engagement.

In the **medium term**, there is a need to enable **Unready** claimants who have little or no internet experience and for whom digital services are perceived to be of little relevance. They require training in how to use a computer (e.g. internet browser, email) along with reassurance on online security. Such training requires bookable, private, internet-enabled PCs, at the Jobcentre or external locations (e.g. libraries, external providers). Telephone and online support would generally suffice; but for those with lower confidence, face-to-face support is required.

Claimants with multiple barriers (**Unable** claimants) will require **longer term**, personalised support. In addition to basic computer and internet training, and ease of internet access, these claimants are also likely to require literacy and English language training. Training will need to be long term and supported by Jobcentre Plus staff or external training providers to build up claimants' confidence in using the internet generally and Jobcentre Plus digital services.

Uninterested claimants are a varied group. Some would need relatively little computer training; others are likely to require longer-term training and support. However, they will require persuasion or compulsion before they will use digital services, possibly with the threat of a benefit sanction for non-use.

To provide this more intensive support, staff would require additional training. In addition, digital partners were viewed as a vital support. However, relationships and communications would need strengthening to include:

- a better understanding of the types of services that each organisation offers;
- a more structured system of claimant referrals;
- more effective follow-up of claimant referrals; and
- access to Jobcentre Plus digital services.

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