

In-house Research

How ready is Jobcentre Plus to help people in their 60s find work?

by Andrea Kirkpatrick

Department for Work and Pensions

In-House Research No 11

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Abbreviations used in the text

DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
JSA	Jobseekers Allowance
ESA	Employment Support Allowance
IB	Incapacity Benefit
SPA	State Pension Age
DEA	Disability Employment Advisers
WRAG	Work Related Activity Group
DRA	Default Retirement Age
WCA	Work Capability Assessment
PC	Pension credit
SME	Small and Medium Sized Employers

Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings from a short in-house piece of research considering how ready Jobcentre Plus is to support people in their 60's find employment. The study was commissioned because the Jobcentre Plus caseload is forecast to age over the next decade due to a combination of demographic change and increases to State Pension Age (SPA). For the first time there will be significant numbers of 60+ claimants seeking work. Despite the growing importance of this group, little is known about them and what additional needs they may have.

Aims of the research

The central aim of the research was to consider the *'extent to which Jobcentre Plus was ready to support people in their 60's find employment'*. The context for which was framed by changes being made to State Pension Age, State Pension Age equalisation for men and women, the gradual withdrawal of Pension Credit (PC) eligibility in line with equalisation and the anticipate increase to the number of older people claiming active benefits.

A set of core research questions were developed and used across the six separate strands of the research;

- What are the current experiences of older JSA claimants in searching for work?
- To what extent are older claimants aware of the contextual changes affecting their benefit claims?
- What are the current experiences of Jobcentre Plus Advisers and managers in providing job search support to older claimants?
- To what extent are Jobcentre Plus Advisers aware of the contextual changes affecting the benefits offered to older claimants?

Methodology

The evidence collection exercise was conducted between May and July 2011 and included a number of focus groups with Jobcentre Plus Advisers, a short online survey of Jobcentre Plus staff (311 respondents in total), a small number of telephone interviews with claimants aged 55+ and some additional telephone interviews with a group of large employers. A review of findings from other DWP studies looking at the outcomes and experience of 50 + claimants was also undertaken.

Key Findings

- 60+ JSA claimants are not a single homogenous group, distinct differences exist amongst this age cohort with some claimants being highly motivated and engaged in moving into work, others are less engaged with job search, feel

- There are a number of factors affecting the ability of 60+ claimants to move back into employment, most significantly a lack of modern job search skills, limited IT proficiency and limited experience of searching and applying for jobs online. Other issues affecting a return to employment include unrealistic wage expectation, a narrow focus in terms of job search, outdated qualifications and certification and for many, low levels of confidence and a belief that they are being discriminated against because of their age.
- Good practise already exist in terms of tackling some of the barriers faced by older jobseekers, but many advisers want access to additional provision that focuses on needs of older people, addressing: perception of and attitudes to work, transferable skills, IT skills and knowledge of modern jobs search, provision delivered in age specific peer group sessions, need to update or gain accreditation for existing skills.
- The research suggested that there is low awareness amongst many older JSA claimants about how changes to State Pension Age, State Pension Equalisation and corresponding changes to Pension Credit will affect them personally. Jobcentre Plus Advisers felt they would benefit from additional training on the changes being made to State Pension Age, as this would allow them to more confidently engage in discussion about future benefit eligibility for claimants in their 60's.

Conclusion

Findings from this study illustrate that older claimants and in particular claimants in their 60's can face a range of age related barriers to employment. These issues range from a lack of practical skills, such as IT proficiency and a limited ability to navigate job search and job applications online, to more emotive responses to employment, issue such as confidence, motivation and a belief that employers routinely discriminate against older jobseekers.

There is already provision in place to tackle some of the employment barriers faced by older jobseekers and new flexible approaches to working ¹allow advisers to offer claimants a comprehensive menu of help, including skills provision and job search support. Advisers have the flexibility to judge which interventions will help claimants at the most appropriate point in their job seeking journey, tailoring this to individual need. In addition to the new flexible regime, there have been a number of 'Get Britain Working' measures put in place that will provide active support to all jobseekers.²

¹ Introduced in spring 2011 at the point at which the fieldwork for this study was conducted.

² **Work Clubs** to encourage people who are out of work to exchange skills and share experiences, enabling individuals to take responsibility for planning their own journey back to work with the support of others going through the same experience;

Work Together to help claimants develop work skills through volunteering, with opportunities provided by local charities and voluntary organisations;

Sector-based work academies to offer pre-employment training and work experience placements in sectors with high volumes of current local vacancies.

However feedback from Advisers suggest that further enhancements can be made to provision and support that specifically target some of the age related barriers faced by older jobseekers.

In addition the research has highlighted that there is low awareness amongst older JSA claimants of changes being made to State Pension Age, State Pension Equalisation for men and women and the related impacts this has on the benefit system. Jobcentre Plus Advisers said they would welcome additional training on the implications of these changes, so that they are better able inform and advise older claimants about their benefits and future job search activity.

New Enterprise Allowance to support those looking to start their own business by providing access to finance and valuable support from local business mentors, and **Enterprise Clubs** to offer community based and locally led support for unemployed people who want to start their own business.

1.1 Introduction

The Jobcentre Plus caseload will age over the next decade due to a combination of demographic change and increases to State Pension Age. For the first time there will be significant numbers of 60+ claimants seeking work. At the request of the then Chief Executive of Job Centre Plus³, DWP Redefining Retirement Division (RRD) undertook an, initial piece of research to look at how ready Jobcentre Plus is to meet the needs of claimants seeking work in their 60s.

Despite the growing importance of this group, little is known about them and what additional needs they may have. In order to develop a better understanding of their particular needs, a rapid evidence collection exercise was conducted between May and July 2011. The exercise included a number of focus groups with Jobcentre Plus Advisers, a short online survey of Jobcentre Plus staff, a small number of telephone interviews with claimants aged 55+ and some additional telephone interviews with a group of large employers. A review of findings from other DWP studies looking at the outcomes and experience of 50 + claimants was also undertaken. This short report presents the finding from this study.

1.2 Background

There are a range of factors that will increase the numbers claiming working age benefits⁴ and increase the proportion of older people in the total caseload between now and 2020, these include:

Demographic changes – as the population ages the proportion of older people will increase. (Projections show an additional 1.3 million people aged between 50-64 over the next 10 years to 2020)⁵

Equalisation of State Pension Age– Women’s State Pension age will gradually be equalised with men’s by November 2018. This change also means men and women aged between 60-64 will be unable to claim Pension Credit and will only be eligible for working age benefits⁶.

State Pension Age (SPA) Rises – State Pension age for both men and women is set to rise to 66 years by October 2020. Further increases to SPA are then planned to ensure SPA keeps pace with increasing life expectancy. Under current legislation SPA will increase to 68 years by 2046. These changes will effectively increase the working age cohort by a further 3 years.

Employment Support Allowance (ESA) / Incapacity Benefit (IB)– Changes made to the benefit regime mean increased conditionality for inactive, sick and disabled claimants, of whom approximately 50% of IB/ESA caseload are aged 50+.

³ The then Chief Executive Darrah Singh.

⁴ Working Age Benefits – refer to all benefits available to individuals aged between 16 and 64 year of age

⁵ ONS Labour Market Statistics (UK)

⁶ Jobseekers Allowance is payable until State Pension Age, men can currently claim the benefit up to the age of 65yrs, but women can't (this is changing in line with SPA equalisation). Women over the current female SPA can however still access Jobcentre Plus support if they claim Pension Credit. Access is voluntary since Pension Credit cannot be sanctioned. To provide equal treatment, men can also choose to claim Pension Credit beyond 60 years, rather than JSA. They may continue with voluntary Jobcentre Plus help if they wish.

Removal of the Default Retirement Age– will provide more scope for older people to work for longer and use Jobcentre Plus services.

The forecasted results of these changes are that both JSA and ESA ⁷ caseloads of individuals aged 60+ will more than double by 2020. There are currently around 280,000 60-64 year olds claiming IB or ESA⁸ and estimates suggest that this figure is set to increase to around 375,000 by 2020. In addition there are currently around 19,000 60-64 year olds claiming Jobseekers Allowance and this figure is estimated to increase to 39,000 by 2020.

There are also movements between benefits that will have an effect on the JSA claimant figures. Current IB claimants are having their claims reviewed under the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and indicative calculations show that if 40% of those that are deemed to be fit for work at the assessment are likely to move into JSA. JSA numbers could therefore rise by around an additional 75,000.⁹

As well as projected increases to the claimant count, there are other factors that will affect the 60+ claimant group. It is known that older JSA claimants are more likely than younger claimants to experience long term unemployment or become economically inactive. The proportion of 50+ claiming JSA for over 12 months was 32.1% in April 2012. This compares with 27.9% for 25-49 year olds claiming for over 12 months.¹⁰

Changes to State Pension Age (SPA) including the equalisation of men and women's SPA are also likely to have an effect on the JSA claimant count. State Pension equalisation (the gradual increase of women's SPA from 60 to 65) triggers a corresponding removal of Pension Credit eligibility for men aged 60 to 64. Moving to Pension Credit from other income replacement benefits give men age 60+ the same average weekly benefit rate as income-based JSA, but with no requirement to attend the Jobcentre to sign on. Around 215,000 men aged 60-65yrs claim Pension Credit,¹¹ many of whom have the potential for work.

1.3 Provision of Services to Older Claimants

There is evidence from the previous Flexible New Deal regime (JRFND)¹² to suggest that older claimants received less intensive support from Jobcentre Plus than younger claimants. A study analysing interactions between older and younger claimants during work focussed interviews¹³ showed that Advisers dealt differently with older claimants compared to younger ones. Older claimants were submitted to fewer vacancies, had fewer agreed job goals and experienced fewer assisted job searches. The study also suggested Advisers were reluctant to challenge the negative perceptions and behaviours of older claimants towards employment and employers.

⁷ Or equivalent numbers under the forthcoming Universal Credit.

⁸ DWP Information, Governance and Security Directorate: Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study November 2011

⁹ Estimates provided by DWP Forecasting Division May 2011

¹⁰ NOMIS, JSA claimant count May 2012.

¹¹ DWP Information Governance and Security Directorate Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study 2011 November 2011

¹² Adams Oldfield, K et al (2011) Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal Evaluation: Findings from longitudinal customer surveys and qualitative research, DWP Research Report 767
Vergeris, S Vowden, K et al (2010) Jobseekers Regime a Flexible New Deal Evaluation: A report on qualitative research findings, DWP Research Report Series 706

¹³ Exploratory Comparison of the interactions between advisers and younger and older clients during Work Focused Interviews, (DWP 2010, RR 634)

Under the current benefit regime older workers will have access to both the pre Work Programme support delivered by Jobcentre Plus and external support through the Work Programme. It is too early in the life time of the programme to be able to detect specific outcomes for any customer group. However evaluations of both the pre Work Programme and the Work Programme are currently being undertaken and findings will become available from winter 2012.

1.4 Research Aims

The central aim of the research was to consider the *'extent to which Jobcentre plus was ready to support people in their 60's find employment'*. The context for which was framed by changes being made to State Pension Age, State Pension Age Equalisation for men and women, the gradual withdrawal of Pension Credit eligibility in line with equalisation and the anticipate increase to the number of older people claiming active benefits¹⁴.

A set of core research questions were developed and used to frame the detailed enquiry across 6 separate strands of research and analysis:

- What are the current experiences of older JSA claimants in searching for work?
- To what extent are older claimants aware of the contextual changes affecting their benefit claims?
- What are the current experiences of Jobcentre Plus Advisers and managers in providing job search support to older claimants?
- To what extent are Jobcentre Plus Advisers aware of the contextual changes affecting the benefits offered to older claimants?
- What are the views and experiences of employers in recruiting older workers and to what extent do they think Jobcentre Plus helps to promote this age group.

2.1 Methodology

The findings presented in this report come from a short in-house study conducted by the Redefining Retirement Division (DWP) between May and July 2011. The research was composed of a number of strands including both primary data collection and secondary analysis of existing reports. Much of the primary data collection was conducted with a small number of respondents¹⁵, as such the findings should be considered as initial insight, rather than a comprehensive or in-depth picture of experience. However many of the findings presented in the report are

¹⁴ Active Benefits refer to benefits that have full or partial work related conditionality, such as Jobseekers Allowance (full), Income Support (partial) and Employment Support Allowance (partial)

¹⁵ The reader should also be aware that sample sizes for each element of the study are small and cannot be said to be representative of broader populations.

broadly consistent with existing evidence concerning the views, attitudes and experiences of older claimants as detailed in other studies^{16 17}

In order to collate evidence from Jobcentre Plus (Advisers, Adviser Managers and Employer Engagement teams), Jobseekers Allowance claimants and Employers, six separate data collection activities were undertaken, using a combination of methods.

1. Online structured survey of Jobcentre Plus Advisers

The DWP internal intranet site provides a platform for corporate news and access to shared functions across all areas of the organisation. A facility to design and deliver internal staff surveys is incorporated into the site. This function, entitled 'Survey Maker' was used to construct a semi structured questionnaire targeted primarily at Jobcentre Plus Advisers who had an interest in / or knowledge of JSA claimants aged 60+ (the questionnaire can be found in annex one of this report). Details of the survey and a description of the research process were posted as a news story on the online Adviser Knowledge Hub, an area of the site commonly used by front line Advisers. This news posting and survey were run for approximately 3 weeks in April 2011 and resulted in 311 separate questionnaires being completed.

2. Online discussion board 'Speak –Up'

The DWP Intranet site also has a facility for running online discussion forums. This function entitled 'Speak-Up' and requires a set of short and focused questions to be posted, concerning a specific issue of concern. The target audience for this type of discussion is drawn from across the whole of the organisation and can elicit responses from both front line staff and senior managers alike. For the purpose of this evidence collection exercise a series of short questions were posted relating to the provision of services to 60+ JSA claimants. Fifteen separate responses were received and analysed.

3. Structured focus groups with Jobcentre Plus Advisers.

To supplement the findings from the online survey of Jobcentre Plus Advisers, three separate qualitative focus group sessions were held with Advisers in two separate Jobcentre Plus districts. The focus group sessions were attended by approximately 20 Advisers who were asked to consider a series of five core questions relevant to their views and experiences in the delivery of services to older claimants. The focus groups attempted to elicit more detailed and qualitative data by encouraging attendees to freely discuss their personal opinions and experiences.

4. Structured focus groups with Jobcentre Plus Employer Engagement teams

A series of short focus group sessions were held with Jobcentre Plus Employer Engagement staff in a range of locations. Fieldwork was carried out with Jobcentre Plus staff dealing with large national employers as well as with employers from local small and medium sized enterprises. Focus groups included representatives from the JCP National Sales Team, Account Managers (dealing with large Recruiters) Senior Account Managers, JCP National Employer's Relationship Team, JCP Employer Executive Account Managers, JCP External Relations Managers and JCP Account Managers.

¹⁶ Thomas, A and Pemberton, A (2011) *Qualitative Research into Enhanced Jobseekers Allowance provision for the 50+*¹⁶, DWP Research Report series 766.

¹⁷ IFF Research and Policy Studies Institute (2011) *Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal Evaluation: Findings from longitudinal customer surveys and qualitative research*, DWP research report series 767.

5. Semi structured telephone interviews with employers

A small number of semi structured telephone interviews were conducted with Human Resources representatives from large national employers. The sample was generated by the 'National Employers Service Team' who made the initial contact with a group of potential respondents to gauge their interest in taking part in the study. The RRD research team followed up these initial contacts and conducted six separate interviews. Employers were asked to reflect on their organisations views, experiences and practices in respect of employing older workers and specifically any thoughts they had about Jobcentre Plus's ability to promote 60+ JSA claimants to potential employers.

6. Semi structured telephone interviews with JSA claimants aged 55 +

Claimant research was carried out by *DWP Insight* who drew small random sample of JSA claimants aged between 55 and 65 from DWP records. Despite the study being focused on 60+ individuals, it was felt that a customer sample should be drawn from a slightly wider age cohort. Previous research evidence suggested that there is a discernable shift in opinion about work and retirement from the age of 55. This is particularly the case for women, who until recently received their state pension at 60 years of age. It was also felt that the sample should focus solely on JSA claimants who are subject to full work related conditionality, rather than drawing in other benefit groups, who are either not subjected to any work related conditionality, or only partial work related activity.

The claimant sample was issued with an invitation to take part in a short semi structured telephone interview. It was made clear in this communication that participation in the survey was entirely optional and they were free to opt out of the process at any time. The interviews lasting approximately 20 minutes were carried out with 25 claimants. The semi structured questionnaire focused on claimants' experience of job search activity, the support provided by Jobcentre Plus and their knowledge of the State Pension Age reforms.

Analysis of Background Literature

In addition to the primary data collection process, secondary sources of data were drawn from both internal DWP analysis and external research. In particular one key study undertaken in 2010/11 was referenced specifically: *Qualitative Research into Enhanced Jobseekers Allowance provision for the 50 +*¹⁸. This study included data specific to 50+ JSA claimants and had direct relevance to the research agenda.

3.1 60+ Claimants, views, attitudes and behaviours.

The evidence from the combined strands of research underlines the fact that older JSA claimants cannot be viewed as a single homogenous group. Distinct differences exist within the group, such as work history, length of claim, health and educational attainment, all of which affect job search behaviour and levels of motivation. There were, however, some common themes to emerge in terms of sub group views, attitudes and behaviours and this section of the report explores these differences in more detail.

¹⁸ *Qualitative Research into Enhanced Jobseekers Allowance provision for the 50 +* (2011) DWP research report series 766

3.2 Winding down to retirement

The evidence suggested that there was a firmly held view amongst some older claimants that they were no longer interested in looking for work or full time work and that they had reached a state of semi retirement. Advisers felt this view was most strongly expressed by claimants who were in closest proximity to State Pension Age. These claimants were willing to go through the motions of job search, but were in effect 'winding down towards retirement' and were content to live on JSA until they became eligible for either State Pension or Pension Credit.

'60 really is the magic number – its when claimants really do change their mind set and stop thinking about work, or at least full time work, although there are many who still want to use their skills and experiences to help others, but not necessarily in work' (Adviser Comment – Online Survey)

This attitude was considered to be particularly prevalent amongst older claimants who were only interested in making a claim for 26 weeks worth of contributory JSA¹⁹. Advisers suggested that these claimants often questioned the logic of conditionality for their age group, suggesting it was more relevant for younger claimants. Advisers noted that claimants in this position were extremely difficult to motivate and even more difficult to match to suitable jobs.

Despite increases to State Pension Age and Pension Credit eligibility, there was a prevailing view amongst claimants that '60' was the point at which individuals should begin to wind down. This was often indirectly encouraged by the actions of advisers. Respondents to the adviser focus groups stated that they would suggest that older claimants should contact the Pensions Service to investigate their eligibility for Pension Credit. The assumption being that Pension Credit for men aged 60+ would remove them from JSA conditionality.

Findings from a DWP study looking at the experiences of 50 + claimants²⁰ mirrored some of these findings. Advisers felt that this mind-shift towards retirement was difficult to argue against and that there were no obvious incentives to keep a claimant seeking work if their inclination was to sign off and the financial pressures on them to work were not an over-riding factor in their employment decision making.

However, a number of advisers were of the opposite view and stated that they routinely challenged the 'winding down ' mentality of older claimants and actively encouraged them to maintain their job search activities.

They [Older job seekers] need to be challenged, especially if they are fit and active, there is no reason they cannot move back into work , they just need some convincing. (Adviser Comment, Online Survey)

3.3 Confidence, Motivation and a Willingness to Engage.

Advisers noted there are many older claimants who were highly motivated and enthusiastic about re-entering the labour market. These claimants were said to be

¹⁹ Contribution-based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) is awarded for up to six months for people who have been working and have paid enough National Insurance contributions within the last 2 year period, this benefit is not mean tested.

²⁰ Thomas , A and Pemberton, A (2011) Qualitative Research into Enhanced Jobseekers Allowance provision for the 50+²⁰, DWP research report series 766

strongly motivated by financial concerns and did not consider their age, or their proximity to State Pension Age as being a factor in their job search activities. This view was mirrored in a number of the interviews carried out with claimants, who felt their age was not a detrimental factor in them returning to work. A number of these respondents were highly engaged and confident about finding employment in the near future.

“I’m not too worried, I don’t look my age and I’m fit and active, no reason why employers should not take me on, I have knowledge and skills and experiences and if I get a job I would stay, not like younger people who only want work experience and then leave” (Claimant Interview)

This highly engaged sub group of the wider 60+ claimant group appeared to fall into two distinct groups:

- 1) **The higher educated self starters** - highly motivated with advanced job search skills and links to professional / career based networks. This group of claimants required little direct support from Jobcentre plus and were most likely to move quickly back into employment.
- 2) **The highly motivated but lacking skills** - again individuals who expressed a desire to move quickly back into employment but were thwarted by their lack of modern job search skills, or narrow job search criteria. This group often lost confidence and commitment to job search activities the longer their claim continued.

3.4 Confidence and Length of Claim

The correlation between declining confidence and length of claim was an issue that arose across all strands of the research. Advisers noted that claimants were more likely to be positively disposed to employment at the beginning of their claim but would become increasingly pessimistic about their employment opportunities as their claim continued.

Older claimants often concluded that their inability to secure employment was as a direct result of their age, assuming employers had a natural preference for recruiting younger people. Once formed this perception of age discrimination tended to directly affect levels of motivation. Individuals assumed age discrimination would be difficult to challenge and therefore their chances of securing employment would be low.

Some Advisers noted that claimants often hit a crisis point in their claim, once they realised they were not getting the feedback from employers that they had first anticipated. It was at that point that many claimants started to voice negative statements about their age and job prospects, *‘Nobody want me at my age’* and *‘I’ve already done my done my bit’*. This pessimism about the job market often led directly to the conclusion that self imposed early retirement was a more rational and acceptable state to be in. This was even more directly expressed by claimants who said they were only signing on to receive their 26 weeks worth of contributions based entitlements.

3.5 Only the right job

Advisers identified an additional sub group of older claimants who wished to re-enter employment but only on their own specific terms. These individuals tended to value

the quality of the job more highly than the financial remuneration and held a strong preference for either part time, or highly flexible employment. To an extent this group were in effect winding down to retirement, but were also willing to engage in employment for its social benefits. This group tended to be less hindered by financial concerns and were more likely to be in good health.

Having undertaken work with claimants across the region, I noticed that many older claimants displayed a different attitude in their search for work. They wanted a job but only if it was the right job for them. They worried about being stuck in job that would make them unhappy. These people seemed not to be motivated by money or prospects, more on quality of life and being able to work with nice understanding colleagues' (comment posted to online 'Speak Up' Forum, Jobcentre Plus Manager)

3.6 The legacy of a long term stable work history

Advisers highlighted that many older claimants have a good range of work based skills and experience gained during many years of long term stable employment, often within the same job or industry. It was however noted that this history of employment stability could in itself cause of range of quite specific problems once individuals faced unemployment.

Some claimants have worked in the same job for decades and cannot conceive of doing anything else. (Adviser comment – Online Survey)

Claimants often felt quiet strongly that their job search activity should be focused exclusively on their previous job type or industry. This preference effectively narrowed their job search focus and limited the extent to which they were willing to explore other alternative avenues of employment. Advisers also noted that these older claimants were often unable to comprehend how they could transfer their particular skills sets to a new industry. One adviser used the example of 56 year old claimants, who had recently been made redundant as an accountant in an engineering firm,

"When asked about his job search criteria, he said the only types of job he could consider applying for were accountancy jobs in engineering firms. He had an inability to see how his highly numerate skills and management experience could be used in a whole range of other job roles".(Comment posted to online 'Speak up' Forum, JCP Adviser)

Some Advisers also suggested that stable work histories particularly for skilled workers or those in managerial positions lead directly to unrealistic wage expectations. Many older claimants felt that any new job they applied for should pay the same as their previous position and they were not willing to accept any drop in salary. This preference for a specific job paying a specific salary level again had the effect of narrowing the job search focus.

3.7 Qualifications, skills and certification

An issue raised specifically at the adviser focus groups was the mismatch between skills and qualifications. Advisers noted that many older claimants had well developed worked based skills, often acquired during an apprenticeship term. Unfortunately many of these trade based skills, were either not supported by formal qualifications, or the qualifications were outdated and had been eclipsed by newer certification. This was

considered to be significant barrier for many older claimants who wished to re-enter the same profession from which they had exited. Older claimants found that many employers required very specific qualification criteria which they deemed to be essential for the posts being advertised. Without being able to produce the necessary proof of qualification, claimants found themselves immediately thwarted, by not being able to satisfy the application criteria.

A construction worker may have worked for 35 years in the industry, he may have even been self employed and now he is being asked for a CSCS card to apply for jobs, he won't get anywhere without this qualification. (Adviser comment Online Survey)

Many Advisers felt frustrated that they didn't have the ability to always address these specific training and certification needs. As a result many claimants were encouraged to broaden their job search into areas which required fewer, if any certified qualifications.

3.8 Lacking modern job search skills

The single most common issue raised across all interview groups, was the problem many older claimants face in understanding and navigating modern job search activities. The term 'Modern Job search' in this context is used to describe a range of skills and processes common to the contemporary labour market. Skills such as IT literacy, word processing, and internet based job searches, submitting online applications, formulating modern CV's writing competency based application forms etc.

Nearly 80% of Advisers responding to the online survey mentioned that a lack of these linked skills and a limited knowledge of modern recruitment practices act as key barrier to older claimants securing interviews and ultimately finding employment.

Advisers noted there are many older claimants who are happy and confident in using online IT based applications, but there are also many others who have very limited IT skills. When it comes to undertaking job search activities these less proficient IT users are restricted to using more traditional job search methods, newspapers, trade magazines, job boards and word of mouth. This effectively limits the number of job vacancies they see and can therefore apply for.

Preparing appropriate CV's and writing competency based applications were also raised as significant issue by a range of respondents.

Advisers speaking at focus group sessions noted that many older claimants had been in long term stable employment and had therefore not applied for a new job for many years. As a result these older claimants had little, or no understanding of what was required in terms of a contemporary CV, or how they should go about completing a competency based application form. It was noted that even when C.V training was provided, many older claimants felt their needs were not being met. They had hoped to leave a training session with a fully prepared (type written) CV in hand. However courses would instead focus on telling claimants 'what they needed to do', 'what the CV should look like' and 'what sort of structure it should comply to'. Many job seekers would then leave training sessions feeling unprepared and unable to confidently take the next step of applying for jobs.

Advisers also focused on the problems many older claimants faced in successfully completing online applications. Even if claimants were able to fill in online forms, they would often submit the wrong sort of information, or omit essential detail such as key words, or essential qualifications. One Adviser noted that older claimants were unaware that their online applications would often be first passed through a programme filter, selecting on key words and phrases. Claimants did not understand that if their application didn't get through this first filter, then it would never be read by an employer. The adviser noted that older claimants would therefore make assumptions as to why they were not being selected for interview and many concluded this was entirely due to their age and that employers have a natural preference for younger workers.

This issue was reinforced by interviews conducted with Employer Engagement Managers who noted that all big employers undertake recruitment online and this is a trend that is unlikely to change because it is cost effective and relatively simple to deliver. Engagement Managers did however accept that this online application process does affectively exclude people with low IT skills. Employer Engagement staff also noted that most employers now require some level of IT proficiency:

“Even manual jobs like warehousing require staff to be able to use IT for booking stock in and out” (Employer Engagement Manager Focus Group)

A large call centre employer reflected on the issue of older employees and IT proficiency, noting that their younger recruits pick up the *“PC training quickly, while older employees can struggle even with 6 or 7 weeks of dedicated training”*. The employer went on to say that older people can be less confident in the training, particularly when they are working alongside younger people. As a result the company tried to address this issue and delivered an over 45's only recruitment and training session, which they considered to be successful.

3.9 Perceptions of employer discrimination

The issue of ageism and employer discrimination was raised across all interview groups and opinion on its extent and even its existence was widely divided.

Amongst advisers the view that employers discriminate against older claimants in favour of younger people was almost universal. Advisers felt employers were able to pick and choose who they employed particularly in the current contracted labour market and that their preference was to pick younger employees who would be receptive to new training and adapt more quickly to a new working environment:

“Employers feel they can't mould older workers, there might not be out and out discrimination but there is definitely a view that older workers are set in their ways, they don't listen and cannot be taught new things” (Adviser comment Online Survey)

Claimants were more divided on the issue, with some believing that their age was the single crucial factor in restricting them from gaining employment:

‘My age is my biggest barrier to getting into work. I can get to interviews (I've had a few) they are all very nice and polite and about my skills and track record , but I never get a job and I know its because of my age. (Claimant Interview)

Others claimants were less concerned about discrimination and believed that their combine skills set and experience was far more important to an employer than their actual age.

The interviews with large employers also provided a range of divergent views and opinions about older workers, focusing largely on their relative abilities. Employers tended to state that they did not have a preference for any one age group and that they aim to employ the best person for the job, regardless of personal characteristics. However when asked to reflect a little more closely on their recruitment practice, employers did mention certain generalised age related characteristics which were either considered beneficial, or detrimental to the business. One respondent representing a large supermarket chain stated that older employees were particularly valued because they tended to be more loyal than younger staff. It was also noted that older members of staff tended to have better interpersonal skills, were better at dealing with customers and had a broader knowledge of the products and services that the company provided. Another respondent representing a large call centre stated that older workers were much more reliable and flexible than younger employees, particularly when it came to organising shift patterns and holidays. Younger employees often had family commitments restricting their shifts to school hours while older workers would happily work evenings and had more flexibility in terms of annual leave arrangements.

However there was also some concern voiced about the ability of older recruits lacking IT skills and struggling with the IT based training required for many jobs. The call centre employer noted that older recruits tended to be less confident in the training sessions, particularly when they felt out of their depth or were working alongside younger people. None of the employer respondents said that these concerns affected their recruitment and selection activities.

Employer Engagement Managers (EEMs) provided some of the clearest insights into the complexities of perceived or actual age discrimination. Once again a mixed picture of experience emerged, with many of the EEMs stating that employers only want to select the best person for the job and was not influenced by age. Other EEMs noted that employers tend to be more discriminatory about younger claimants, who they consider to have low skills, little motivation and limited experience of work.

However other issues emerged when the EEM's were asked to discuss employer engagement and recruitment practice in a little more detail. EEM's noted that employment agencies (acting as the interface between employers and claimants) would often cherry pick younger claimants for key appointments:

“Agencies often work on the assumption that employers have a preference for younger recruits and therefore attempted to make quick win by selecting applicants by age”.

EEM's also noted that it is extremely difficult to prove whether or not an employer discriminates against older job seekers, particularly when so much of the selection process is based on competencies, previous experience and certified qualification:

“ Discrimination is perhaps more indirect many employers have a preference for recruiting people with proficient IT, and word processing skills and as we have already said many older claimants lack these IT skills and therefore do not meet the core requirements for many of the advertised vacancies”. (EEM interview)

3.10 A Dislike of Jobcentre Plus Offices

A common theme to emerge from the claimant interviews and was partially echoed by Advisers, was that older claimants tend to have a dislike of Jobcentre Plus Offices and the initial reception they received from staff. Advisers also felt a claimant's perception of poor service could negatively affect all future engagement with Jobcentre Plus.

A number of respondents to the customer interviews mentioned that their first experience of a Jobcentre was poor. Issues that were specifically highlighted included a perceived unwelcoming reception from door staff, a seemingly chaotic atmosphere, confusion over processes and the limited time available to talk with Advisers and to discuss individual needs. This attitude may in part be a reflection of claimants having had little previous experience of the Jobcentre Plus service and reflects the confusion many feel when entering a new environment. However what makes this finding of relevance to the age of the claimant is that older claimants assumed their age and their previous work experience would afford them some degree of status and preferential treatment. Claimants were often dissatisfied when they realised that they would be treated in the same manner as younger claimants:

On visiting a Jobcentre 'I dread it, I get cold sweats the night before I need to go in and I feel sick at the thought of it (Claimant Interview)

There was also the expectation from a number of older claimants that they would receive support and advice from day one of their claim and were disappointed that they did not qualify for any support until they had been unemployed for some time:²¹

Jobcentre Plus should offer more courses, particularly on improving you're skills when they are out dated, but they don't offer anything at my age and you feel like your on the scrap heap' (Claimant Interview)

Advisers noted that this dislike of Jobcentre Plus offices could lead older claimants to limit their contact with the Jobcentre, reduce their use of Job Points and be less willing to attend voluntary training and job search provision. One Adviser responding to the online survey noted that:

' You have to feel confident and comfortable with your surroundings before you can really get to grips with job search activities and many older claimants just simply feel ill at ease in the Jobcentre.(Adviser Comment Online Survey)

However a number of claimants also reported some very positive experiences of the support that they received from individual advisers, noting that they made great efforts to develop an understanding of their individual needs and presented them with a range of support options:

When I first saw an Adviser he was really good. I wanted to start my own business and run a mobile Karaoke service. The Jobcentre were really good and helped me as much as possible in trying to set this up (Older JSA Claimant)

²¹ Under new rules allowing local office flexibility, support and provision from day one of a JSA claim can be given, if this is deemed appropriate by the adviser.

3.11 Ill health and caring responsibilities

Concerns about ill health and caring responsibilities were considered by many advisers to be a key barrier facing many older claimants.

It was noted that for many older claimants, their long standing health condition had often been managed effectively by their previous employer. The employer had made the necessary adjustments to suit the employee and was willing to accept certain limitations. This type of support wasn't always available from new employers who had less time to get to know the employee or to adjust to their particular needs. One respondent to the online Speak Up forum describes the experiences of an older jobseeker with health concerns:

'I helped a butcher with 30 years experience find a new job, unfortunately he only lasted four weeks. He found it increasingly difficult to work in the cold store as it affected his joints and general mobility. In his previous job his colleagues were understanding and covered for him. However in the new post he had to earn his stripes and his condition put him in a difficult and uncomfortable position, he had to leave' (Comment to online Speak Up forum, JCP Adviser)

Advisers noted that in an effort to better manage health concerns many older claimants expressed a preference to work part time, or to find more flexible employment. However this preference for reduced hours could limit their job search parameters. The preference for part time and flexible employment was also common to older claimants that had to balance their job search activities with caring for grandchildren, a spouse, or elderly relative.

4.1 What works and what more needs to be done?

Respondents from each strand of the study were asked to reflect on what sort of provision and support currently works for older claimants and to consider what more can be done to support their particular age related barriers. The section below reflects on these findings.

4.2 Broadening job search criteria

Assisting older claimants in broadening their job search criteria was an issue raised across a number of research strands. Adviser in particular felt that many older claimants tended to focus their job search activities around jobs and industries in which they had previous experience. Very few claimants had a real grasp of how their particular skills set could be used within a different work context. As one Employer Engagement adviser noted:

Jobcentre Plus should have role to play in broadening peoples horizons, in older manufacturing areas many men (in particular) don't see shop work as proper work, they think of work as manufacturing, engineering etc. But not all these types of job are still available or even suitable for them now. (Adviser Comment Online Survey)

A number of Advisers felt that the support they could offer to older claimants was limited by the time they could allocate to each claimant. It was noted that older claimants would often need greater amounts of Adviser time to talk through the details of their job search activities. The research was conducted at the point at which flexible delivery had only recently been introduced. Many Advisers had yet to experience the full extent of the flexibility regime and how this might have implication for their time management.

Respondents felt that there was already a lot of good practise in place in terms of assisting with job search. Advisers mentioned their ability to provide support which included CV preparation, interview techniques, and realistic job goals and careers advice. The value being able to offer one to one support with claimants was also noted. One to one sessions allowed Advisers to build up rapport and trust with a customer which helped them in tackling some of the more difficult conversations relating to job search criteria. This issue of time and rapport building was considered to be patricianly important for older claimants, who seem to respond better to longer and more thoughtful discussions.

4.3 Developing Modern Job Search Skills

The need to develop modern job search skills amongst older claimants was a significant issue for many Advisers. It was felt that some current provision was not targeted appropriately or did not provide enough depth and details to meet the needs of older claimants.

Advisers suggested, that training in basic IT was required, which focused on some core principals and skills – such as word processing, how to search the internet, how to find suitable job search sites, how to make online job applications and how to send and respond to emails. It was suggested that much of this training should be provided in small group settings, possibly with one to one support. The issue of mixed age group session was raised as potential problem, as older claimants would get left behind in the training, by the more IT capable younger claimants.

Having IT support available within the Jobcentre Plus offices was also raised as a potential benefit to older claimants. Advisers suggested that if the issue of IT skills was raised during an interview, then it would be useful if some form of immediate in-house support was available. Even if this support was limited to having access to a computer, claimants could still benefit.

It was also suggested that training sessions be developed that focus on some of the key basics of modern job search. Sessions that provide an explanation of why it's important to

- conduct online job search across a number of different sites,
- to be proficient in submitting online applications,
- understand how many employers operate online application filters and make their selection of online applicants.

This focused training could also incorporate some of the available provision which focuses on the development of competent and contemporary CV preparation. Advisers felt the development of a competent well-crafted CV is an essential element in the job search tool kit and that many older claimants need additional support in developing an effective CV.

The timing of training was considered to be crucial, with many Advisers noting that early access (even from day one of a claim) would be particularly beneficial for older claimants. It was suggested that if job search barriers are not tackled at the beginning of a claim then there is the danger that many claimants quickly become disillusioned or lose confidence with the whole job search process. This is an issue of particular pertinence with older claimants who may assume their lack of job search success is a result of employer discrimination. This was a view echoed by a number of Claimants, who had initially assumed that they would receive support from the beginning of their claim and were disappointed that much of this provision was withheld until they had been claiming JSA for 6 months²²:

“A job search mentor who can guide them through internet websites, encourage them to focus on what they can do rather than what they can't do when it comes to job descriptions (Adviser comment Online survey) “

4.4 Single Age Group Sessions

Another common theme to emerge quite strongly from the adviser focus group session was the potential problems older claimants face when asked to participate in mixed age group training sessions. Advisers noted that older claimants often feel nervous or alienated from a group that has a mixed age profile, especially if the behaviour of other claimants is disruptive. Advisers noted that grouping older customer together on training sessions seems to elicit better results. The success of the 50+ support contracts²³ was cited as good practice in this respect, where only claimants aged 50+ attended and could discuss issues they felt were relevant to them. It was also noted that older claimants expect a certain level of respect and have higher expectations of the services they receive. Advisers noted that it can be

²² This finding is likely to relate to the previous Jobseekers Flexible New Deal regime where day one access to provision was not available; under the new flexibility regime day one access to provision for JSA claimants is available at the discretion of advisers

²³ 50+ Support Contract is a 50+ jobseekers one day training programme, designed to address some of the key age related barriers to employment. Attendance is voluntary and it's at the discretion of the local offices to decide whether the training should be offered.

beneficial in matching older claimants to older advisers. Claimants often assume an older Adviser will be more knowledgeable about their individual needs and have a better understanding of the job search requirements:

“Meeting with this customer group on a face to face basis may be the best way for them to realise that most people in this age group do not conform to stereotypes. In fact this age group grew up in the sixties one of the most radical cultural eras in our history”(Adviser Comment Online Survey)

4.5 Knowing the local area and building links with local employers

Encouraging Jobcentre Plus to develop a more detailed knowledge of local employers and the local labour market was an issue raised by both Employer Engagement and Jobcentre Plus Advisers. It was suggested that by developing greater links with employers, the benefits of employing older workers could be promoted, the negative perceptions about older people challenged and more effective job and sustainable job matching could be achieved.

There was also a great deal of consensus between the two interview groups in respect of what activities could be implemented to develop greater links with local employers and generally improve Adviser knowledge of local labour markets:

- Better use of Job Fairs – with the possibility of hosting age specific or age positive events. Employer Engagement Managers noted that they had already successfully run Business Breakfasts at which the benefits of older were promoted to local employers,
- Sector orientation days – where the needs of particular employers and/or local sectors could be addressed and the skill profiles of older claimants matched to the skill requirements of employers,
- Agency Promotion Days – where Agency Reps are encouraged to promote older claimants,
- Developing more good news stories about the achievements of older claimants – to inspire Advisers to maintain enthusiasm and support for older workers,
- Encourage older claimants to take up voluntary opportunities – to increase their skill base and to show potential employers how proactive and engaged with work they can be,
- Develop mechanisms through which greater engagement with local SME's can be achieved, rather than focusing solely on the larger employers.

4.6 Better training and support for advisers.

A number of advisers suggested improved Adviser training was required to better understand and support the needs of older claimants. Many Advisers were adamant that any such training would most usefully be delivered in short group sessions and not as desk based, self guided study. Desk based study seemed to be universally disliked by Advisers. Some Advisers suggested that they would benefit from additional training on CV preparation, allowing them to more confidently offer practical tips and support to claimants. More general support and guidance on navigating through Directgov.com sites was also requested. Advisers were aware that the site offered lots of useful applications and points of information relevant to older claimants but that they were often unable to locate the right pages at the right time.

It was also suggested that there should also be consideration given to Developing specialist adviser roles, where individuals would deal exclusively with older workers and build a detailed knowledge of their needs and barriers. This type of Specialist role would mirror the work of Disability Employment Advisers (DEA's) who have successfully built up specific skills to deal with disabled claimants.

4.7 More Support to convert claimant skills and qualifications

Advisers at the focus group sessions raised the issue of outdated certification. It was explained that older claimants really needed additional support in helping them to convert their often obsolete qualifications into certification that had relevance for modern employers. This was considered to be a particular issue amongst skilled trade professions. It was suggested that more funding should be available to allow claimants access to conversion courses allowing them to more effectively compete for jobs in their chosen profession.

4.8 Work trials, work experience and work Incentives for employers.

Being able to effectively promote older claimants was a key concern amongst advisers and it was suggested that work trials²⁴ and work experience were important mechanism for doing so. One adviser suggested that:

Work trials give older people a real foot in the door with employers, it gives them the opportunity to say 'look how useful I am, looks at my skills and abilities'. This all helps to combat employer discrimination. (Claimant interview)

This sentiment was echoed by respondents at the Employer Engagement focus groups, who also noted the value of work trails and work experience, stating that they benefited both the employer and the customer and helped to alleviate some of the fears employers felt about employing older workers.

There was however some concern voiced that the opportunities for offering work trails were limited. One district suggested that their ability to run work trials had been removed and they felt that this was detrimental to getting older claimants back into work. Alongside these discussions, the issue of providing employer subsidies was also raised. A number of adviser felt very strongly that employers should be incentivised (for short periods) to take on board older claimants. This would be helpful in allowing employers to see how beneficial the skills and qualities of older workers could be for their business. There was no additional discussion about what form these incentives should take, or how they could be practically implemented.

²⁴ A Work Trial must relate to a specific vacancy that an employer is actively trying to fill and be offered to a claimant on a strictly non-competitive basis. This means that for the duration of the trial, the person taking part is the only person under consideration for the vacancy in question i.e. the job is theirs if **both** they and the employer are satisfied following a trial period.

4.9 Greater JCP flexibility

It is important to note that at the time the fieldwork for this study was conducted, the Jobcentre Plus flexibility regime, 'Get Britain Working' measures and the Flexible Support fund (refer to Annex One for further detail) had only just started to be implemented across the Jobcentre Plus network. As a result many advisers who responded to the study had yet to experience the potential benefits of greater autonomy and flexibility.

However at the time the research was conducted the importance of having greater adviser flexibility in terms of decision making and resource allocation was raised at both the adviser focus groups and the online survey. There was a wide range of suggestions about how increased flexibility would assist the role of the adviser and better support the needs of older job seekers. Some of the most commonly suggested activities are detailed below:

- **Better contact with providers** - it was suggested that better communications with providers could result in better outcomes for claimants. A closer working relationship would mean that advisers could talk to providers in order to discuss in detail the needs of a particular claimant. Joint strategies could then be formulated to more closely address the barriers individuals face. It was also suggested that advisers should be able to build stronger links with non contracted provision in their local area, such as the courses and provision provided by other agencies and charities,
- **Age specific open days** – a number of comments were made about the potential benefits of bringing older claimants and providers together to discuss skills needs, training requirements and preferred teaching methods. One specific comment posted on the online 'Speak Up' board suggested that Jobcentres should, *Host open days that target older claimants. These sessions could act as an introduction point for provider's local employers and claimants to discuss the requirements of training, skills development and vacancy filling.* (Adviser comment Speak Up forum)
- **Longer Adviser interviews** - Many Advisers suggested if they had greater flexibility over their time, they could offer the option of longer interviews to the claimants they felt had the greatest needs. It was felt that older claimants in particular would benefit from having longer and more in depth discussions with advisers:

"Fewer restrictions on advisers would allow them to offer a better service to all claimants, including older people in particular who respond well to longer sessions where a rapport can be developed" (Adviser Comment Online Survey)

- **Job brokering** – Both Advisers at the focus group sessions and Employer Engagement staff mentioned that direct job brokering activity would assist in better job placement rates for older claimants. It was suggested that the old system of ringing an employer to recommend a particular claimant should be revived. This so call 'warm hand off' had the benefit of breaking down some initial barriers between the employers and the claimants. It also gave the Adviser the opportunity to build up the profile of a claimant and to explain to the employer how the individual's particular skills and experience would match their vacancy:

“Ringling employers to introduce them to claimants, especially older claimants could really help. Employers are less likely to ignore them if they have a personal introduction from and Adviser” (Adviser Comment Online Survey)

- **Specialist Advisers** – A number of Advisers mentioned the importance of building up specialist skills relevant to a particular sub group of the claimant population. The success of Disability Employment Advisers (DEA’s) was cited by a number of respondents and the suggestion made that there should be a specialist Advisers working solely with older claimants. The issue of specialist teams was also mentioned as a potentially positive way of restructuring services in a more flexible environment.

4.10 Contacts with providers

Many advisers from both the focus group sessions and the online survey mentioned the problems they experienced in not being able to communicate with providers. It was suggested that there were currently restrictions in place that limited this contact.

Advisers however felt that having an open dialogue with local providers could produce real benefits in assisting the skill development of all claimants and in particular older claimants. Such a dialogue would help Advisers understand the role and structure of provision in more detail, helping them decide what provision is better for individual claimants, and also allowing them to track and monitor the progress of individual claimants.

There was also a degree of scepticism and even suspicion voiced by advisers about the quality of some local provision delivered by local providers. Some of these feelings appeared to have developed simply because there was little dialogue between providers and Advisers and no independent information about the quality or content of their services. Often the only feedback Advisers received was from claimants who had poor experiences to report. As one Adviser at a focus group Session noted:

“We don’t get to hear about the positive experience or the good outcomes, because those claimants leave benefits and move into work” (Adviser Focus group)

4.11 Self employment support

A number of Advisers suggested that many older claimants have a strong preference for self employment and this route out of benefits should be strongly supported. It was suggested that older claimants often have the confidence and skills to take forward their own businesses and the self management and opportunities to work part time or flexible hours are particularly attractive propositions. Advisers were less specific about what form the additional support should take but references were made to better training provision for both claimants and advisers and the potential to extend working tax credits to people in their 60’s (need to check this is correct)

4.12 Other benefit groups

The research was primarily concerned with the current JSA case load, but also had a broader interest in understanding the potential problems that might arise if the 60+ caseload increased. In particular there was a focus on the extent to which Advisers felt they were equipped to deal with older claimants who had previously claimed Incapacity Benefit, who were currently claiming Employment Support Allowance and had been assigned to the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) or who would have previously been eligible for Pension Credit at the age of 60.

Claimants currently receiving ESA and who are assigned to the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) are required to attend one or more work focused interviews as determined by their adviser, and also have access to Jobcentre Plus services. There may also be increasing numbers of people who have previously claimed IB, have had their claims reviewed under new ESA criteria and subsequently have been assessed as fit for work. An option for such individuals, who have not secured employment, is to make a new claim for JSA.

In addition the equalisation of men and women's State Pension Age at 65, has had a corresponding impact on men's eligibility to Pension Credit. Previously men could make a claim for Pension Credit at aged 60 (aligned to women's State Pension Age) A shift to Pension Credit from JSA effectively removes any work focused conditionality. However with the gradual equalisation of men and women's State Pension Age, the eligibility for Pension Credit is also reduced. This means JSA claimants reaching the age of 60, will not be eligible for Pension Credit, but will still be subject to the conditionality of the JSA regime. It is anticipated that these combined changes to the benefit and pension structure will lead to increasing numbers of 60+ claimants claiming JSA.

In light of these potential changes to the case load Advisers were asked to reflect on how ready they felt Jobcentre Plus was equipped to deal with the needs of older claimants from other benefit groups. Advisers from both the online survey and the focus group sessions responded to these questions and raised a number of potential concerns:

- **Harder to help**- Advisers suggested that claimants who had previously claimed IB, some of whom may have claimed for many years, would be far from being work ready and would require additional intensive support. It was noted that this issue would be compounded by the age of the claimant. The suggestion was made that many older claimants in the 55+ age bracket may have assumed that they would never work again. Bringing such individuals back to a state where they could successfully search for employment was considered by many advisers to be extremely difficult task.²⁵
- **Increased Volumes** – a number of Advisers also mention the issue of increased volumes of claimants, particularly those from hard to help groups. There was some confusion amongst Advisers about the extent to which Jobcentre Plus would be affected by this increase. At the time the research was conducted the Work Programme had only recently been introduced and the number of referrals to the programme from different benefit groups was limited.

²⁵ Many claimants falling into hard to help categories, who have previously claimed IB, or are part of the Work Related Activity Groups for ESA will be referred directly to the Work Programme for specialised support.

- **Increased DEA caseload** – A number of advisers suggested that there may be additional pressures on DEA's to provide specialist support to claimants with current or previous disability or ill health concerns:
- **Additional adviser training** – Taking account of the potential additional needs of ex IB and ESA claimants, many Advisers felt that they would require additional training to enable them to provide an appropriate service. Specifically training which focused on the needs of long term inactive claimants, guidance on Pension Credit changes and SPA reform was mentioned.

4.13 Awareness of State Pension Age changes

Throughout all strands of the research respondents were asked about their current understanding of the changes being made to State Pension Age and Pension Credit eligibility. It was felt that that the recent changes and planned for additional increases to State Pension Age would have an immediate effect on the 60+ JSA claimant count and that understanding these changes would be a necessity for both Advisers and claimants.

Responses to the Adviser online survey suggested that there was a high level of awareness amongst advisers that State Pension Age for women was gradually being equalised with men's, that there were corresponding changes to Pension Credit eligibility for men aged 60 to 64 and that State Pension Age overall would start to be increased from 2018. There was also broad awareness that the Default Retirement Age was being removed, allowing people to work beyond the 65 if they chose to. However Advisers felt that claimants had a much more limited awareness that these changes were taking place, 59% of advisers felt that customer had a very limited understanding of the changes being made to State Pension Age and Pension Credit. This view was supported by the responses given by the majority of older claimants, when they were asked to reflect on their knowledge and understanding of the changes being made to State Pension Age. Many respondents felt they had a vague understanding that changes were being made but could not definitively say how these changes were likely to affect them personally.

A number of advisers reflected that they would benefit from additional training on the nature of the changes being made to the State Pension Age and how this was likely to affect individual claimants. This would then allow them to more confidently engage in discussion about future benefit eligibility for claimants in their 60's. Many respondents also stated that they currently advise claimants to speak to the Pensions service about their Pension related queries and their potential eligibility for Pension credit. Respondents at a one focus session candidly admitted that they encouraged 60+ claimants to make claims for Pension Credit as this counted towards JSA off flow targets.

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

This rapid research exercise was conducted to address the question of 'how ready Jobcentre Plus is to support people in their 60s find employment'. It was anticipated that changes being made to both the benefit regime and the State Pension Age would have an effect on the number of individuals age 60+ claiming Jobseekers

Allowance. Evidence was collected from Jobcentre Plus Advisers, Employer Engagement staff and a small number of large employers to determine their views attitudes and behaviours in respect of older claimants. Additional interviews were conducted with JSA claimants in an effort to understand their opinions and experiences of being an older jobseeker.

A central finding from the analysis was that older claimants are a diverse population with different experiences, views and attitude about job search and their future role in the workplace. However there are number of discernable sub groups within the broader 60 + population which can be defined by shared experience, behaviour and attitude. These groups can perhaps be most usefully summarised into the following four broad categories:

- **Self Starters**- A group of motivated and skilled individuals, who have up to date qualifications and experience of successful job search. This group feel confident that they will quickly move back into employment and do not perceive their age as being a barrier. This group feel they need limited support from Jobcentre Plus.
- **Motivated but lacking skills** – A group of individuals who are initially motivated to move back into employment but are thwarted by limited flexibility, a lack of modern job search skills, and a limited knowledge of IT or competency based job selection. This group struggle to transfer skills to new settings and are likely to have previously been in long term stable employment. This group may also perceive that their lack of success in moving back into employment is largely due to age discrimination. This group perhaps requires additional tailored support from Jobcentre Plus to meet their specific job search barriers.
- **Hardest to help** – A group of individuals who may have previously claimed Incapacity Benefit or Employment Support Allowance as a result of ill health, are more likely to become long term unemployed and have perpetuating health concerns. This group of older claimants may also have limited qualifications, low skills and limited IT literacy. Very low levels of confidence and motivation mean they require lots of support from Jobcentre Plus to move them back into employment.
- **Winding down** – A group of individuals who at the age of 60 feel very strongly they are winding down to retirement, they have a preference for part time and flexible work and they lack the motivation to move back into full time employment. Financially this group are willing to fund their early retirement using Pension Credit and feel they need only limited support from JCP.

The research also helped to define key issues facing 60+ claimants. A lack of modern job search skills and limited IT proficiency was a significant issue raised throughout the research process. This lack of ability was considered by many Advisers to be the single greatest barrier faced by older job seekers when facing a job search environment dominated by on line searches, online applications and competency based applications. Limited qualifications and outdated certification were also a concern amongst older claimants, who felt their ability to secure employment, was affected by their inability to provide proof of their work based skills. The research also found that claimants with a previously long term stable work history often had a narrow view of the types of jobs they were capable of undertaking. There was often little understanding of how transferable their particular skills set could be, which had the direct effect of limiting their job search criteria.

Attitudes and perceptions of the current labour market were also a significant factor in determining older claimant's job search activities. There was a strong perception amongst many claimants and Advisers that employers discriminate against older people, as such their ability to move back into employment was limited. However this view was challenged by both employers and Employer Engagement staff, who suggested that the age of a potential recruit is of less relevance than their ability, attitude and demeanour.

The research also reflected on what works for older claimants in terms of support and provision and what more can be done to tailor Jobcentre Plus provision to better meet the needs of older claimants. Advisers were very clear that a key priority in improving provision should be a greater focus on developing modern job search skills. It was noted that provision already exists, but that it should be focused more specifically on the needs of older claimants, many of whom have a very poor understanding of some of the key modern job search skills, such as internet based job searches, online applications and compiling competency based applications.

Advisers also noted that older claimants training needs are often better met through single age group sessions. Such sessions can tailor the tone, content and pace of the provision to better meet the requirements of an older claimant group.

Many Advisers felt that older claimants required additional support in broadening their job search criteria and developing an understanding of how transferable their particular skills set could be. This was considered to be particularly pertinent to claimants who had previously worked in the same job or industry for many years. This issue was also integrally linked to the desire of many Advisers to build more constructive networks with local employers through which they could better match older claimants to local vacancies.

Greater flexibility in delivering and designing age related provision was also a desire voiced by many Jobcentre Plus Advisers, who felt that they should have the ability to tailor their approach to individual claimants to better meet their needs. Much of the research for this study was undertaken in the summer of 2011, at which time policies to allow great autonomy and flexibility were just being introduced to the Jobcentre Plus network. As a result many of the Advisers and Employer Engagement staff interviewed had yet to experience the full benefits of local level flexibility.

ANNEX ONE

Get Britain Working Overview

The Government is aiming to make work pay by reforming the benefit system and introducing Universal Credit. In return people on out-of-work benefits need to take the opportunities available to them to move away from welfare dependency into sustained work. Claimants who do not meet their responsibilities face financial sanction

Jobcentre Plus support – for people closer to the labour market

- DWP are doing away with one size fits all employment programmes. People need more tailored support to find work. Employers will benefit from having a wider pool of job ready candidates to recruit from.
- To get Britain working staff in Jobcentre Plus, service providers, local authorities, further education colleges, training providers and employers of all sizes are coming together in their communities to find new and innovative ways to support people back to work.
- DWP are modernising the way Jobcentre Plus delivers its services and handing responsibility back to Jobcentre Plus advisers who work with claimants on a daily basis. Advisers assess the individual needs of people, offer the support they think is best, and are focusing more on results.
- Advisers are now able to offer claimants a comprehensive menu of help including skills provision and job search support. They have the flexibility to judge which interventions will help claimants at the most appropriate point in their job seeking journey, tailoring this to individual need.
- To support this new regime a single Flexible Support Fund has been created that allows local resources to be aligned to the needs of the locality, to tackle local worklessness and multiple barriers to employment in a holistic and joined up way.
- The flexible support that Jobcentre Plus District Managers are putting in place is bolstered by a number of Get Britain Working measures whose success depends strong local partnerships and the active support of employers. The Measures can include:
 - **Work Clubs** to encourage people who are out of work to exchange skills and share experiences, enabling individuals to take responsibility for planning their own journey back to work with the support of others going through the same experience;
 - **Work Together** to help claimants develop work skills through volunteering, with opportunities provided by local charities and voluntary organisations;
 - **Work Experience** to help young unemployed people get valuable work experience through a placement with a local business. This can help them build their CVs and make them more marketable to potential employers. Work experience also provides young unemployed people with a potential new route to getting onto an apprenticeship;

- **Sector-based work academies** to offer pre-employment training and work experience placements in sectors with high volumes of current local vacancies.
- **New Enterprise Allowance** to support those looking to start their own business by providing access to finance and valuable support from local business mentors, and
- **Enterprise Clubs** to offer community based and locally led support for unemployed people who want to start their own business.
-
- As part of the flexible offer of support, where Jobcentre Plus Advisers feel that a person would benefit from a short period of activity, they are able to refer them to a Mandatory Work Activity placement that lasts for 4 weeks focused on delivering benefit to the local community.

ANNEX TWO – Online survey

Older JSA and ESA claimants - Online Survey JCP Adviser June/ July 2011

Q1 –_In your experience do claimants aged 55+ have particular job search needs?

....

Q2- What are the particular job search needs of 55+ claimants?

Q3 – What sort of support do 55+ claimants need the most?

Q4. In your experience what particular support works well for 55+ claimants?

Q5: In your opinion what particular support doesn't work well for 55+ claimants?

Q6: What additional support (if any) does former ESA/IB claimants aged 55+ require?

Q7: In your opinion what restricts 55+ claimants in finding employment?

Unfamiliar with modern job search methods (Internet/Job points)	
Employers unwilling to employ older workers	
Lack of confidence	
Lack of suitable jobs in local area	
Lack of appropriate skills	
Lack of appropriate qualifications	
Lack of motivation	
Other	

Q8: In your experience are the majority of 55+ claimants interested in returning to work?

Q9: Are you aware that State Pension Age for women is gradually increasing?

Q10: Are you aware that the age at which people become eligibility for Pension Credit is gradually increasing in line SPA?

Q11: Are you aware that people claiming Pension Credit can have full access to JCP services and provision (without conditionality)?

Yes	
No I wasn't aware	
Not sure	

Q12: Are you aware that the Default Retirement Age will be phased out from April 2011, giving people the freedom to work beyond 65?

Yes	
No I wasn't aware	
Not sure	

Q13: To what extent do you think claimants understand these changes and how it will affect their benefits?

There is some limited understanding	
There is very little understanding	
Most people seem to understand	
Don't know	

Q14: Do you feel you have enough information to help you explain these changes to claimants?

No but I know where to access the information	
Yes I have enough information	
No and I wouldn't know where to find the information	
Don't know	

Q15: What sort of working pattern are the majority of 55+ claimants most interested in?

Part Time	
Full time	
Any	
Flexible work	
Don't Know	
Temporary	

Q16. To what extent do you think Jobcentre Plus is equipped to deal with the needs of older claimants?

Not Equipped	
Adequate - to a degree - could do better	
Good - Well Equipped	
Don't know	

Q17: How well do you feel you serve the job needs of former ESA/IB claimants who are transferred to JSA?

Badly - not well equipped to help	
Adequate - fairly well	
Good - Well equipped (mainly advisers or specialists answered positively)	
Don't know - not my job - no experience with these claimants	

Q18: How useful is the information and guidance you receive that relates to older workers? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least useful and 10 being the most useful.

Q19: In your opinion are 55+ claimants aware that they can work past State Pension Age if they want to?

Some are aware/some aren't	
Yes the majority are aware	
No the majority are not aware	
Don't know	

Q20. What do the majority of 55+ claimants who leave JSA go on to do?

Claim Pension Credit	
Don't know	
Retire & stop claiming Working Age benefits	
Move into work	
Claim ESA/IB	
Other	

Q21: Where a 60+ male customer chooses to move from JSA to Pension Credit, do you try and persuade them to remain in the JSA regime (without conditionality)?

No	
It depends on the individual	
Don't know	
Yes	

Q22: Do you feel you have the skills you need to help older claimants?

I have some skills but would like more training	
I have the majority of skills I need	
Yes	
No	
Don't know	

The Jobcentre Plus caseload will age over the next decade due to a combination of demographic change and increases to State Pension Age. For the first time there will be significant numbers of 60+ claimants seeking work. At the request of the then Chief Executive of Job Centre Plus, DWP Redefining Retirement Division (RRD) undertook an, initial piece of research to look at how ready Jobcentre Plus is to meet the needs of claimants seeking work in their 60s.

Despite the growing importance of this group, little is known about them and what additional needs they may have. In order to develop a better understanding of their particular needs, a rapid evidence collection exercise was conducted between May and July 2011. The exercise included a number of focus groups with Jobcentre Plus Advisers, a short online survey of Jobcentre Plus staff, a small number of telephone interviews with claimants aged 55+ and some additional telephone interviews with a group of large employers. A review of findings from other DWP studies looking at the outcomes and experience of 50 + claimants was also undertaken. This short report presents the finding from this study.

If you would like to know more about DWP research, please contact:

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<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

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