

Provider-led Pathways: experiences and views of implementation in phase 2 districts

by Rosalind Tennant, Mehul Kotecha
and Nilufer Rahim

Department for Work and Pensions

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A report of research carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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The Authors

Rosalind Tennant is a Research Director for the Qualitative Research Unit (QRU) at the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen).

Mehul Kotecha is a Senior Researcher for the QRU at NatCen.

Nilufer Rahim is a Researcher for the QRU at NatCen.

Glossary and abbreviations

Condition Management Programme (CMP)	One of the services offered by providers to customers as part of the Pathways to Work programme. These services focus on helping customers to manage their health condition.
Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)	Replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on incapacity grounds for new customers from October 2008.
Incapacity Benefit (IB)	Used to refer to the customers on incapacity benefits.
Provider Allocation Tool (PAT)	Where a customer is unable or unwilling to make a choice between providers in areas where there are two, the PAT assigns customers equally between providers.
PL Pathways	Used to refer to the Provider-led Pathways to Work programme.
Providers	Third-party contracted organisations that deliver the PL Pathways programme.
Work Capability Assessment (WCA)	The majority of ESA customers attend a Work Capability Assessment to assess their eligibility for ESA and their capability for work-related activity (WRA).
Work Focused Health Related Assessment (WFHRA)	Customers who are placed in a Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) following the WCA also take part in a WFHRA. The WFHRA explores customer views about moving into work, and identifies barriers to work and suitable health-related interventions.

Work Focused Interview (WFI) Interviews between customers and advisers at Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations.

Summary

Introduction and background

Provider-led Pathways is the final, national roll-out of the Pathways to Work initiative that was first introduced in 2003 in seven pilot areas and extended to an additional 13 Jobcentre Plus districts by 2006. In all these areas, the programme was delivered by Jobcentre Plus on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). In the extension to the remaining 31 districts in Great Britain (the 15 phase 1 districts in December 2007 and the 16 phase 2 districts in April 2008), the programme is delivered by private companies and third sector organisations and called Provider-led Pathways to Work (PL Pathways).

This report presents findings of a study carried out in 2009 which explored experiences and views of the implementation of PL Pathways in phase 2 districts. In doing so, this study sought to add to the findings from an early implementation study conducted in phase 1 districts. The study was commissioned by DWP and led by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) in collaboration with the Policy Studies Institute (PSI). The study was qualitative in nature and comprised in-depth interviews and group discussions with staff delivering the programme as well as customers of the programme. Interviews were conducted with 36 Incapacity Benefit (IB) recipients, 50 staff from provider organisations and 30 staff from Jobcentre Plus.

Experiences of Jobcentre Plus advisers and Third Party Provision Managers

Jobcentre Plus advisers and Third Party Provision Managers (TPPMs) expressed a number of concerns relating to the design of the PL Pathways programme. These concerns centred around customers' contact with multiple parties throughout their experience of PL Pathways, the potential for this to be confusing for them, and the contribution this made to the length of the programme. Jobcentre Plus staff also questioned the suitability of commercial organisations to deliver the Pathways programme, querying their expertise and ability to meet the needs of

customers with complex needs who were further away from the labour market. Although the black box contract design was seen to afford providers flexibility to offer a diverse range of services, it was also felt to underpin a lack of detailed knowledge of the exact nature of the services delivered by provider organisations among Jobcentre Plus advisers. The design of the programme, in which Jobcentre Plus advisers have no caseload, led Jobcentre Plus advisers to feel that their skills and knowledge were not being fully exploited and to a lack of job satisfaction for them.

Discussion of the management of the PL Pathways contract focused on the working relationships of TPPMs with Contract Managers (CMs) and provider managers. TPPM relationships with CMs were characterised by a lack of clarity among TPPMs in the differentiation between their respective roles. Relationships appeared to vary in their efficacy but poor relationships were compounded by poor communication between CMs and TPPMs, or by TPPMs feeling that CMs were too removed from the local context (both geographically and figuratively) to be able to manage the contract effectively. TPPMs' relationships with provider managers were generally felt to have improved since the start of the programme. Whilst the communication problems identified in the evaluation of the phase 1 districts appeared to have persisted, they were improving, in part due to the efforts of provider managers and TPPMs to organise Provider Engagement Meetings (PEMs) and other, regular face-to-face meetings.

Questions about the expertise of provider staff in working with customers with complex needs were raised. Jobcentre Plus staff understood that provider staff had diverse employment histories and that this could mean that some had no experience of working with the relevant customer group. They identified a need for further training for provider staff to better equip them to help PL Pathways customers. Providers' failure to meet job outcome targets was attributed to some being unprepared for the volume of customers referred to them and the complexity of their needs, as well as the fact that fewer vacancies existed because of the economic climate at the time. Jobcentre Plus staff did however have confidence in providers' job-focused approaches to working with customers and that this was effective in helping job-ready customers into work.

The transfer of information between Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations during the referral process was reportedly inhibited by the lack of health assessment information available to Jobcentre Plus advisers at this point. In the absence of this, Jobcentre Plus advisers felt the information they could pass to the provider organisation was limited. However, advisers did explain that without feedback from providers as to the usefulness of the information contained within the PL Pathways referral form and customer action plans, they were unable to reflect on the efficacy of the process or make useful amendments. The non-receipt of a customer's Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and the Work Focused Health Related Assessment (WFHRA), or poor quality information contained in the WFHRA, also impacted on Jobcentre Plus advisers' ability to make decisions about deferrals and to prepare properly for the Jobcentre Plus Work Focused Interview (WFI).

Contact between Jobcentre Plus advisers and the provider organisation was limited to the transfer of information contained within the PL Pathways referral form and customer action plans, although PEMs were beginning to address this perceived communication gap. There was little reported contact between Jobcentre Plus advisers and customers following their referral from Jobcentre Plus to the provider and, where there was contact, it was limited to referrals to or enquiries about other disability employment programmes, benefits, and better-off calculations. Despite a desire to know more, Jobcentre Plus advisers had limited awareness of the progress made by individual customers following referral. PEMs and monthly and quarterly meetings between providers and Jobcentre Plus were felt to be supporting better communication about customer progress.

Experiences and views of provider advisers and managers

Provider staff felt the handover of customers from Jobcentre Plus was challenging for a number of reasons. Some providers reported that they were receiving a higher than expected volume of referrals from Jobcentre Plus staff, which they attributed to the current economic climate, and the receipt of inappropriate referrals following delays to the receipt of the WCA result and the information contained within the WFHRA. These delays resulted in customers being referred to providers who may otherwise have been deferred by Jobcentre Plus or deemed ineligible for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). These challenges were felt to be compounded because provider organisations had limited scope to defer.

Provider advisers were recruited from a range of backgrounds, but included some staff recruited on the basis of their experience of working with the relevant customer group. Providers offered some form of basic induction to new staff and some advisers received specialist training in working with the specific customer group. Despite the training offered, provider advisers felt that they sometimes lacked formal training on how to work with customers and/or that they felt ill-equipped to deliver advice to customers on such issues as benefits. Provider organisations that had lost staff early in the implementation of the programme had done so because staff had found the customer group challenging to work with or were not used to working in a target-driven environment.

The interventions offered by providers ranged from support to help customers acquire paid employment to follow-up support delivered to customers once they were in the labour market. The evidence suggests that providers preferred using in-house provision wherever possible for a number of reasons, including a desire to retain customers to impact positively on targets and to minimise the bureaucracy associated with referring customers to sub-contractors. Sub-contractors were used in the provision of CMP and, in some cases, to undertake WFIs with customers with specific needs. Providers reported having good working relationships with both sub-contractors and other provider organisations, including in Customer Choice areas. Frequent communication, as well as an appreciation of how other providers' and sub-contractors' services complemented their own service provision, helped to facilitate good working relationships between organisations.

Provider advisers had mixed views about the job outcome targets they were required to work towards achieving. On the one hand, staff felt that the targets helped to encourage them to motivate customers to enter paid employment; on the other, there was the view that the targets were unrealistic, given the current economic climate and the complex barriers to paid employment customers were facing. Advisers also felt that the targets were not set up to recognise the work they did in helping customers achieve 'soft' outcomes, such as building their confidence or changing their orientation to work.

Experiences and views of customers

At the time of the research interview, customers occupied a range of positions in relation to the labour market and how close they felt to entering employment. The customer sample included people not in employment and in receipt of benefits and people in employment, working either part- or full-time. Whilst different types of customers expressed a desire to move into work, some felt closer to the labour market than others prior to their first WFI with the provider organisation.

Positive experiences of the Jobcentre Plus WFI were underpinned by the clarity of information from advisers about the PL Pathways programme and about the provider, as well as the feeling that customers were being treated as individuals by advisers. Customers' choice of provider organisation reflected a range of concerns not necessarily related to an appraisal of the services offered by the providers, including the geographical location of the provider organisation and available transport links. In Customer Choice districts, some customers felt that they had insufficient information or were not given enough guidance by Jobcentre Plus advisers about providers, and therefore felt unable to make an informed choice.

The process of referral to the provider appeared unproblematic. Customers were, however, frustrated by long referral periods, which caused them to feel disengaged with the programme, or referral periods that were too short, which meant that customers felt they had insufficient time to prepare for the first provider WFI.

Customers reflected positively on the location of providers and their premises, highlighting that they were accessible and offered privacy. Any criticisms were centred on being referred to a provider that was some distance from their home (especially where another office was closer), and security procedures in operation where providers shared offices with other organisations. Comparisons between Jobcentre Plus offices and provider premises favoured the provider's offices which were felt to afford more privacy, and to be more comfortable and welcoming.

Positive experiences of the first provider WFI were underpinned by the clarity of information given about the programme and the support offered by the provider. The adviser's approach was also important, with customers reflecting favourably on advisers who were friendly, knowledgeable and appeared to tailor their approach to the customer's individual circumstances. For subsequent WFIs, customers valued continuity: this was achieved by having the same adviser for every WFI and feeling that each WFI built upon the action plan developed at the previous WFI.

Customers in this study had seldom missed more than one provider WFI and so had little exposure to sanctions. Their attitudes towards sanctions ranged from accepting them without question as a necessary incentive to attend the programme, to viewing them as unnecessary and even inappropriate for customers with health conditions.

The support customers had received from the provider was valued by some, including support that was specifically employment-related, as well as less formal emotional support and support for customers' soft skills, such as motivation and confidence. Some had moved into work since completing the mandatory elements of the PL Pathways programme and these customers attributed this, in part at least, to the help provided by the programme. A need for continuing support was identified, not only for those still looking for work or requiring help to move towards employment, but also for customers in work to help them deal with employment-related issues.

Discussion

In exploring experiences of the implementation and delivery of the PL Pathways programme in phase 2 districts, this study has raised a number of issues for consideration by DWP in the ongoing development and delivery of the programme.

Division of roles and responsibilities

- Jobcentre Plus advisers felt the loss of their caseloads keenly. Whilst PEMs are providing a useful avenue via which Jobcentre Plus advisers can receive updates about customer progress, the findings from this study suggest that more opportunities to hear about customer successes and general progress would be welcomed.
- To address the challenges faced by provider organisations in working with PL Pathways customers, provider organisations should be encouraged to revisit training for their advisers in working with customers with complex needs. There may also be a more prominent role for Jobcentre Plus advisers in providing training or ongoing advice to provider organisations about disability and financial support to help customers move from benefits into work.
- The findings from this study suggest there may be a need for some more explicit communication to TPPMs from the Department about the respective roles of TPPMs and CMs. Consideration of TPPMs' suggestion that they should perform some aspects of the contract management role may also be warranted.

The exchange of information and administrative processes

- There is a need to revisit the training that Jobcentre Plus advisers receive about the provider organisation so that they feel better informed and are better able to provide information to customers, as well as the guidance given to Jobcentre Plus advisers in Customer Choice districts about their role in facilitating choice between providers. The advantages of co-locating Jobcentre Plus advisers with the provider organisation is also worthy of consideration.
- There is a need for timely and detailed information about customers' health conditions – work to clear the backlog of WCAs will go some way towards addressing this. A review of the opportunities for advisers at Jobcentre Plus and providers to communicate might help to address the challenges in the exchange of information about individual customers.
- Both Jobcentre Plus staff and advisers suggested revisiting channels for the transfer of customer data, arguing that the facility to complete and send paperwork electronically would reduce the burden of paperwork and facilitate timely transfer.

Provision of customer choice

- A number of barriers to customer choice were identified. Steps to address these barriers could include training for Jobcentre Plus advisers in the services offered by providers and ensuring customers receive information about providers prior to their Jobcentre Plus WFI.
- In the light of findings from this study about the factors customers take into account when choosing a provider – location, previous experience, recommendations of other customers – it may be helpful to reflect on the kind of choice facilitated by the current model and the extent to which the original aims of providing customer choice are being achieved.

Failure to attend and sanctions

- Some customers felt that the threat of sanctions could undermine messages about the benefit of the programme. The need for early communications about the programme to mandatory customers to emphasise both their obligation to participate and the potential benefits of the programme is clear.
- Provider staff indicated that whilst the reported use of sanctions was low, providers were beginning to reassess their use of sanctions for failures to attend (FTA). There was some evidence that providers felt more frequent use of sanctions, and increased severity of sanctions, would consolidate their efforts to reduce FTAs.

Provider staff knowledge and skills

- Both customers and Jobcentre Plus staff raised questions about providers' knowledge of specific health conditions and their understanding of appropriate work-focused activities, job roles and sources of external support for customers with these conditions. A revision of training for provider advisers may address these issues without losing the advantages gained from employing provider advisers from a range of professional backgrounds.

Meeting customers' needs for support

- Providers should be encouraged to consider the support they offer to customers who retain a contract of employment, feel they are far removed from the labour market because of the severity of their health condition(s), and with professional backgrounds, and use the flexibility afforded by the black box contract to adjust their provision to ensure all customers' needs are met. A revision of the targets structure to recognise soft outcomes as well as job outcomes might provide an incentive for this.
- A re-emphasis to providers of their targets for sustained job outcomes may provide an incentive for providers to offer in-work support and for provider advisers to encourage customers to take it up.

Tensions between job outcomes and providing appropriate support

- To ensure that support is provided to all PL Pathways customers, provider managers felt that the role of targets for providers should be revisited and modified to reflect not only tangible job outcomes but also work aimed at helping customers move closer to the labour market.

1 Introduction and background

This report presents the findings from the qualitative study of the implementation of the second phase of the Provider-led to Work (PL Pathways) programme. It explored the delivery and experiences of the programme from the perspectives of incapacity benefit recipients, staff at provider organisations, and staff at Jobcentre Plus offices. The study was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and led by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) in collaboration with the Policy Studies Institute (PSI).

This study builds upon the findings of the early implementation study¹ which explored experiences and views of early implementation in phase 1 districts. A wider programme of research has been commissioned to evaluate the impact of the PL Pathways programme and will deliver findings throughout 2010.

This introductory chapter sets out the policy and operational background for the PL Pathways programme, including drawing out the specific operational context for the phase 2 districts included in this study. It goes on to outline the aims of the study and the research questions it set out to address, the research design and methodology, and finally provides an overview of the structure for the report.

1.1 Policy and research context

1.1.1 The Provider-led Pathways programme

Pathways to Work is a package of rights (to support and encourage customers to return to work) and responsibilities (to attend and participate in Work Focused Interviews (WFIs)) for people claiming incapacity benefits. The programme targets barriers to work and comprises a number of central components:

- mandatory WFIs;

¹ Nice, K., Davidson, J. and Sainsbury, R. (2009). *Provider-led Pathways: Experiences and views of early implementation*. DWP Research Report No. 595.

- voluntary Work Related Support (flexible, tailored support based on individual needs); and
- a Condition Management Programme (CMP).

PL Pathways is the final, national roll-out of the Pathways to Work initiative that was first introduced in 2003 in seven pilot areas and extended to an additional 13 Jobcentre Plus districts by 2006. In all these areas, the programme was delivered by Jobcentre Plus on behalf of DWP. In the extension to the remaining 31 districts in Great Britain, the programme is delivered by private companies and third sector organisations and described as Provider-led Pathways.

PL Pathways was introduced in 15 of the remaining 31 Jobcentre Plus districts in December 2007 (phase 1) and in the final 16 districts in April 2008 (phase 2). The national coverage of the Pathways programme is therefore now complete.

In PL Pathways districts, the Pathways to Work service is available to all incapacity benefits customers who make a new or repeat claim on or after the introduction of PL Pathways. Under PL Pathways, Jobcentre Plus conducts a first WFI with the customer in the ninth week after the initial date of claim. The customer is informed at this stage that from completion of this first WFI onward, they will be referred to the PL Pathways provider in their area.

Under PL Pathways, provider organisations have been given a large degree of autonomy in how they deliver the central components of the Pathways programme – generally known as the ‘black box’ approach. Contracts between DWP and provider organisations stipulate that a series of WFIs is carried out with clients and that each provider must offer some form of **CMP**. Providers must also offer tailored, work-focused support alongside a personal action plan. However, apart from these requirements, provider organisations are largely free to decide what services they offer within the ‘black box’, including having the freedom to sub-contract services².

1.1.2 About phase 2 of the programme

In all phase 1 districts, PL Pathways was provided by one prime provider. However, Customer Choice operates in three of the 16 phase 2 districts: this refers to the appointment of two prime providers in each participating district. During the Jobcentre Plus WFI, PL Pathways customers are expected to make their choice between the prime providers based on written information provided to them before the WFI and discussion with the Jobcentre Plus adviser during their meeting. The Jobcentre Plus adviser remains impartial during the decision-making process, however, where a customer is unable or unwilling to make a choice, they are allocated to a provider using the Provider Allocation Tool (PAT). The PAT assigns

² Organisations that hold the contract with the DWP and Jobcentre Plus to deliver PL Pathways are called ‘prime’ providers; those they sub-contract to are referred to as ‘sub-contractors’.

customers equally between providers and is designed to maintain Customer Choice and keep an even flow of customers (within the 60:40 limits³) to both prime providers for as long as possible.

1.1.3 Provider-led Pathways contract design and management

The DWP holds outcome based contracts with private PL Pathways provider organisations. This aims to raise performance and provide value for money, whilst encouraging innovation, flexibility and responsiveness to customers⁴. Providers are paid in three ways:

- a 'service fee' for taking people onto their caseloads;
- a job outcome payment when a customer starts work; and,
- a 'sustained employment' payment when a customer maintains work for 26 weeks.

The responsibility for overseeing PL Pathways contracts lies with DWP Contract Managers. Contract Managers monitor the performance of providers against contractual and legislative requirements, and where necessary take appropriate action. Delivery of the programme is also aided by Third Party Provision Managers (TPPMs) who oversee the administrative processes that transfer customers between Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations. This involves liaison with Jobcentre Plus adviser managers to inform them of available provision; promotion of the PL Pathways through the media or local marketing material; receipt of and response to complaints from PL Pathways customers; and working with employer engagement and local partnership staff to identify the provision required to meet the needs of local employers.

1.1.4 The Provider-led Pathways process

All new claimants of incapacity benefits (including Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) from October 2008) are required to engage actively with Pathways to Work. This typically involves:

- an initial WFI with a Jobcentre Plus adviser;
- referral to the local provider organisation operating in the district (or to one of two providers in districts operating Customer Choice);
- up to five further work-focused interviews with the provider organisation.

³ These limits state that each provider should receive at least 80 per cent and not more than 120 per cent of their total volume share of customers. Where one provider exceeds 120 per cent, provider choice is suspended.

⁴ A separate study of the outcome-based contracting model was published as Hudson, M., Phillips, J., Ray, K., Vegeris, S. and Davidson, R. (2010). *The influence of outcome based contracting on Provider-led Pathways to Work*. DWP Research Report No. 638.

Jobcentre Plus guidance states that the purpose of the initial Jobcentre Plus work-focused interview is for an adviser to tell the claimant about the PL Pathways programme, introduce the provider organisation(s), and explain the requirements that they would need to meet in order to continue their eligibility for benefit. This initial WFI results in a formal, written referral to a provider that includes an initial work-focused action plan. Customers then attend up to five further work-focused interviews with the provider organisation. In these interviews, provider advisers and customers discuss opportunities for employment, training or condition management support to which the adviser can refer the customer.

1.1.5 Employment and Support Allowance

From October 2008, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on incapacity grounds for new customers. The majority of ESA customers attend a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to assess their eligibility for ESA and their capability for work-related activity. Customers deemed fit to undertake some work-related activity are placed in the Work-Related Activity Group. These customers also take part in a work-focused health-related assessment (WFHRA) as part of the WCA, which explores their views about moving into work and identifies any barriers to work and suitable health-related interventions. The report from this assessment is shared with the customer's personal adviser at Jobcentre Plus. These customers are mandated to take part in the Pathways to Work programme. Customers who are assessed as being unable to undertake any form of work-related activity enter the Support Group. They are not required to take part in a WFHRA or any other work-related activity but may volunteer to take part in Pathways to Work or other work-related activity.

1.1.6 The study context

This study was commissioned in early 2009. Fieldwork with staff was conducted between April and July 2009, and with customers between April and September 2009. PL Pathways had been operating in phase 2 districts for approximately one year when fieldwork with staff began. It is important to note that this represents a longer period of time between programme operationalisation and research interview than for the phase 1 study. PL Pathways was operational in phase 1 districts from December 2007 and fieldwork for the phase 1 study began in June 2008. It may, therefore, be the case that the staff included in this study were more experienced in the delivery of PL Pathways than the staff included in phase 1, and that their views and experiences presented here reflect this. This should be borne in mind in interpreting the findings presented here.

A further important contextual factor for this study is the economic climate in which the fieldwork was undertaken. The UK entered a period of recession in

January 2009⁵ and remained there for the duration of fieldwork for this study. This context was a key issue for both the staff and the customers interviewed for this study. There are references to this economic context, where relevant and where raised by participants, throughout this report.

1.2 Research aims

The purpose of this study was to provide feedback on the delivery and experience of PL Pathways in phase 2 districts, from the perspective of both provider and Jobcentre Plus staff, as well as customers. A separate set of research objectives was developed for each of the respondent groups included in the study and these are outlined below.

Pathways to Work customers

- Explore experiences of Jobcentre Plus, the initial WFI and referral to the provider, to include:
 - understanding of requirements to attend WFIs at Jobcentre Plus and the provider organisation;
 - experiences of the initial WFI at Jobcentre Plus, and of the referral process to the provider organisation, including how a choice was made between providers in Customer Choice areas;
 - experiences of ongoing contact with Jobcentre Plus.
- Explore experiences of PL Pathways provision, to include:
 - experiences at the provider organisation, in particular the WFIs, any support offered and the extent to which this support met customer needs;
 - perceptions of work readiness, work motivations and support needs;
 - factors underlying engagement with support components and the role of the provider adviser, nature of support provision, liaison between the adviser and other support providers;
 - experiences and understanding of deferral and sanctions.

⁵ Data released by the Office for National Statistics on 23 January 2009 (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/gdp0109.pdf>) confirmed that UK Gross Domestic Product fell by 1.5 per cent in the last quarter of 2008 following a 0.6 per cent drop in the previous quarter, meeting the criteria for the definition of recession of two consecutive quarters of negative economic growth.

Staff in provider organisations (personal advisers and managers)

- Explore contractual arrangements and experiences, to include:
 - the combination of services offered, sub-contracting arrangements, methods of delivery and management, and any changes from what was contracted with DWP;
 - understanding of the programme and policy design and how this relates to delivery;
 - contract management issues arising from the first year of implementation;
 - monitoring of provision.
- Explore experiences of working with Jobcentre Plus, including:
 - hand-offs from Jobcentre Plus;
 - information sharing and liaison with Jobcentre Plus around sanctions, deferrals and failures to attend, and access to services.
- Explore experiences of delivering the PL Pathways service, including:
 - WFs, the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and Work Focused Health Related Assessment (WFHRA) process, deferrals, sanctions and failures to attend, home visits;
 - in districts where there are two provider organisations: experiences of customer choice between providers and any contact between provider organisations;
 - experiences of working with clients;
 - training, skills and experiences and fit between these and working with the customer group;
 - experiences of targets and their implications for working practices;
 - barriers and facilitators to effective service provision and implications for future provision.

For Jobcentre Plus staff (advisers and TPPMs)

- Explore contractual experiences and management, including:
 - experiences of ongoing contact arrangements with provider organisations;
 - contract management issues arising from the first year of implementation.
- Explore experiences of working with PL Pathways providers and customers and delivering PL Pathways, to include:
 - liaison with provider organisations, including over referrals and sanctions, perceptions of appropriateness of provider service delivery (and staff skills), and differences between providers and impacts for management in working with multiple providers in Customer Choice areas;
 - the facilitation of Customer Choice;
 - the impact of PL Pathways on Jobcentre Plus staff roles, skills and workload;

- understanding and views on the WCA and WFHRA process;
- barriers and facilitators to effective service provision and implications for future provision.

1.3 Research design and methods

This study employed a design similar to that used for the early implementation study in phase 1 districts (Nice *et al.*, 2009). It comprised fieldwork in six phase 2 PL Pathways districts with:

- PL Pathways customers;
- managers of provider organisations and personal advisers from each provider organisation; and
- TPPMs and personal advisers from each Jobcentre Plus district.

An overview of the approach to sampling, data collection and analysis is provided here – more detail, including detail about the recruitment processes, can be found in Appendix A. Copies of the recruitment and fieldwork materials can be found in Appendices B to L.

1.3.1 Sample

Six phase 2 PL Pathways districts were selected by DWP to participate in the research to include diversity in terms of the provider organisation, type of location (e.g. rural, urban), and geographical spread, and to include some districts offering Customer Choice.

Customers

Two samples of customers were drawn from referrals between July and August 2008 of new Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants⁶ and from administrative data returns from provider organisations in the six selected Jobcentre Plus districts. A total of 36 customers were interviewed. A breakdown of the achieved customer sample is provided in Table 1.2.

Jobcentre Plus and provider staff

The study aimed to speak to managers and personal advisers in provider organisations, and Third Party Provision Managers (TPPMs) and personal advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices to offer different perspectives of the implementation and delivery of the PL Pathways programme in phase 2 districts. A total of eight provider managers, 42 provider advisers, six TPPMs and 24 Jobcentre Plus advisers were included in the study. A breakdown of the achieved Jobcentre Plus and provider staff sample is provided in Table 1.3.

⁶ These were customers making new claims for IB before the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) in October 2008.

Table 1.1 Achieved customer sample

Characteristic	Number of customers
Primary sampling criteria	
Gender	
Male	18
Female	18
Age	
18 to 34	11
35 to 54	18
55 and over	7
Health condition	
Physical	19
Mental	9
Physical and mental	8
Secondary sampling criteria	
Ethnicity	
Asian	2
Black	1
Mixed	0
White	33
Other	0
Work orientation	
Working full-time	2
Working part-time	4
Looking for work	2
Unable to work at present	28
Number of WFIs attended at provider*	
1	4
2	5
3	3
4	3
5	10
6 or more	11
Total number of customers	36

*This information was collected during the screening exercise and also during the interview. The figures presented here are taken from the interviews with customers.

Table 1.2 Achieved Jobcentre Plus and provider staff sample

District	TPPM	Jobcentre Plus adviser	Provider manager	Provider adviser
A	1 interview	4 interviews	1 interview	1 group discussion
B	1 interview	4 interviews	1 interview	1 group discussion
C	1 interview	4 interviews	1 interview	1 group discussion
D	1 interview	4 interviews	1 interview	1 group discussion
E**	1 interview	4 interviews	2 interviews	2 group discussions
F**	1 interview	4 interviews	2 interviews	2 group discussions
Total	6 interviews	24 interviews	8 interviews	8 group discussions

**Customer Choice district – two providers operating.

1.3.2 Data collection

Customers

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with customers in order to explore individuals' circumstances, experiences and views in detail. Interviews lasted approximately 1.5 hours each. Each participant was given £20 as a thank you for their time. A topic guide was developed which focused on customers' experiences of PL Pathways and their views on the programme as a whole. Fieldwork with customers took place between April and September 2009.

Jobcentre Plus and provider staff

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with TPPMs and Jobcentre Plus advisers from each selected district, and with provider managers from each of the eight provider organisations operating in those districts. Group discussions were conducted with provider advisers. Interviews with TPPMs and provider managers lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours each, interviews with Jobcentre Plus advisers approximately one hour, and group discussions with provider advisers up to two hours each. A separate topic guide was developed for each of the staff participant groups to focus on different aspects of their experiences of implementing and delivering PL Pathways. Fieldwork with Jobcentre Plus and provider staff took place between April and July 2009.

1.3.3 Analysis

All interviews and the group discussions were digitally recorded with participants' permission and later transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts were analysed using 'Framework', a method developed by the Qualitative Research Unit at NatCen.

1.4 An overview of the structure of the report

The remainder of this report presents findings from the interviews and group discussions with customers and Jobcentre Plus and provider staff. Chapter 2 presents Jobcentre Plus staff's (TPPMs' and advisers') experiences of the PL Pathways programme including their experiences of managing contracts, monitoring performance, dealing with providers, conducting WFIs and referring customers. Chapter 3 presents the views and experiences of provider managers and advisers, including their experiences of conducting WFIs and providing support to customers, and their relationships with Jobcentre Plus and with other providers and sub-contractors. Chapter 4 focuses on customers' experiences of all parts of the PL Pathways process, including the Jobcentre Plus WFI, referral to the provider and, where relevant, their experience of Customer Choice, WFIs at the provider, support from the provider and their overall views of the programme.

Each chapter ends with a short summary of the key findings presented in that chapter. The final chapter, Chapter 5, draws together the overall key findings from the study and presents a number of policy issues for consideration by DWP. It ends with a discussion of the similarities and differences between the findings of this study and the phase 1 study.

2 The experiences and views of Jobcentre Plus advisers and TPPMs

This chapter explores the experiences and views of Third Party Provision Managers (TPPMs) and Jobcentre Plus personal advisers in phase 2 Provider-led Pathways to Work (PL Pathways) districts. It first explores views about the programme design, including the role of Jobcentre Plus advisers (Section 2.1), and then presents views and experiences of contract management including the nature of working relationships between Jobcentre Plus staff and providers, and the views of Jobcentre Plus staff about providers' performance (Section 2.2). Section 2.3 describes Jobcentre Plus advisers' experiences of delivering the first Work Focused Interview (WFI) and of the process of referring customers to a provider. The final section of the chapter, Section 2.4, summarises the findings presented.

2.1 Programme design

The first section of this chapter discusses the views of TPPMs and Jobcentre Plus advisers of the design of the PL Pathways contract and their experiences of the programme during the first year of implementation.

2.1.1 Reflections on programme and contract design

In reflecting on the design of the programme and the contract, Jobcentre Plus staff raised three key concerns about the way in which the programme and contract design were influencing the delivery of the programme. These concerns involved the number of different parties involved in the delivery of the programme, the involvement of commercial organisations in the delivery of the programme and the 'black box' contract design, and these are discussed in turn below.

The parties involved in the delivery of the PL Pathways programme are numerous and include Contract Managers (CMs), TPPMs, staff at Benefit Delivery Centres, Jobcentre Plus advisers, provider organisation staff, sub-contractor organisations,

and staff who conduct the Work Capability Assessments (WCAs)⁷. Jobcentre Plus advisers perceived that this represented too many parties and that it impacted upon the delivery of the PL Pathways programme in a number of ways: First, it contributed to the programme being longer and more drawn-out for the individual customer than necessary. For instance, the first WFI at Jobcentre Plus takes place in the ninth week after the initial ESA claim, and the series of provider WFIs begins after an additional referral period of a month⁸. The number of delivery parties can also necessitate a number of organisational hand-offs, for example from Jobcentre Plus to the provider and from the provider to their sub-contractor. This was seen to be potentially confusing for the customer (although this was not reflected by the customers included in this study). Jobcentre Plus advisers also suggested that customers who also regularly see staff from other agencies, for example for support around their medical condition or housing, and are required by them to provide personal details and attend appointments, may find the PL Pathways process even more frustrating.

Advisers suggested that the solution to this lay in one party conducting all the WFIs, although there was no consensus about where those interviews should take place and who should conduct them. One view from Jobcentre Plus advisers was that Jobcentre Plus staff were better at providing ongoing support to PL Pathways customers and that Jobcentre Plus should deliver all of the WFIs, referring to providers for specialist support only. A different view was that the provider, and its sub-contractors, should deliver the entire programme to customers. The possibility of delivering WFIs from a single site was being considered in one district which planned to locate the Jobcentre Plus adviser within the provider office to conduct the first WFI. This is in line with the views of TPPMs who, in general discussions about their views on provider premises, expressed a preference for provider sites on the assumption that they were not associated with the same stigma as Jobcentre Plus offices, mirroring the opinion of customers (see Section 4.4). A final concern about the number of parties involved in the delivery of PL Pathways related to the complexity of the associated administrative process. Advisers felt that an already burdensome process was made more so where information had to be transferred between multiple groups.

A further concern about the design of the PL Pathways programme concerned the suitability of commercial organisations to deliver it. TPPMs contrasted Jobcentre Plus' approach to rehabilitating customers and 'hand-holding' them to a point where they felt they were ready to work, with providers' more job-focused approach. Some felt that provider organisations' commercial drive, to reach targets and be profitable, provided a useful incentive to place customers in

⁷ These are healthcare professionals from an organisation contracted by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to conduct WCAs.

⁸ Views on the implications of the length of this referral period for customers' engagement with the programme and on failure to attend (FTA) rates is discussed in Section 2.3

work. An alternative perspective from Jobcentre Plus staff was that, unlike public agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, commercially driven organisations did not have the resources to provide the long-term care and support that many of the Pathways customers need, nor were they likely to place such an emphasis on prioritising the needs of the customer. Concerns were also raised about the bidding process where organisations submitted competitive tenders to deliver the programme. This process was seen to encourage competition between providers and there was a perception that as a result they were less willing to work together and to share resources and information such as employer networks.

As described in Chapter 1, contracts to deliver PL Pathways are 'black box' in that they give a large degree of autonomy to providers in how they support customers. Required components are a series of WFIs carried out with clients and the offer of some form of Condition Management Programme (CMP). Providers must also offer tailored, work-focused support alongside a personal action plan, although the form this support takes is not specified. This autonomy and flexibility appeared to cause some uncertainty among Jobcentre Plus advisers as to the precise nature of the services offered by individual providers. They felt that the nature of the black box contract and a lack of training about the provider meant they were unclear about exactly what kind of support and services were on offer. This had implications for the information Jobcentre Plus advisers were able to pass on to customers (this issue is discussed in more detail later in this chapter – see also Section 3.1 for a discussion of the providers' perspectives of this).

2.1.2 The role of Jobcentre Plus advisers

One of the key differences between PL Pathways and Jobcentre Plus-led Pathways to Work is that the responsibility for WFIs and case management sits with provider staff rather than Jobcentre Plus staff. Previously, Jobcentre Plus advisers in PL Pathways districts would have dealt with voluntary customers and have had a role in referring them to relevant support. The report of the findings from the study of PL Pathways implementation in phase 1 districts (Nice *et al.*, 2009) highlighted that Jobcentre Plus advisers felt that their level of job satisfaction had decreased as a result of this and that they felt their expertise in working with Pathways customers was being wasted. Jobcentre Plus advisers interviewed for this study expressed similar concerns. They reported having the same workload and seeing the same volume of customers under the PL Pathways programme as they had previously, however, they no longer thought their work was interesting, describing it as monotonous and boring because they were only referring people. They described their new role as selling a product – the provider – and felt, therefore, that their knowledge of working with Pathways customers was not being sufficiently utilised and that they were effectively being de-skilled. Some advisers described feeling that their jobs had been downgraded because they were no longer working directly with customers in an advisory or supportive capacity. Key to advisers' dissatisfaction was that the removal of their caseload meant they were no longer able to fully engage with customers, develop a relationship with them, and monitor their progress.

The issues raised in this discussion of TPPMs' and Jobcentre Plus advisers' views about the programme and contract design have implications for the remainder of their views and experiences of working with provider organisations and the quality of the service delivered to customers presented in this chapter. For example, questions over the suitability of organisations delivering the PL Pathways contract are returned to in Section 2.2 in the discussion of performance monitoring and perceptions of provider practice in prioritising customers for support. Jobcentre Plus advisers' lack of knowledge about providers' services has implications for their explanations of the programme to customers and their facilitation of Customer Choice and this is discussed in more detail in Section 2.3.

2.2 Contract management

This section looks at TPPMs' experiences of contract management and, in particular, the roles of, and working relationships between, TPPMs and CMs, and between TPPMs and provider managers⁹.

2.2.1 TPPMs' working relationships

Two aspects of TPPMs' working relationships are explored in this section: their relationships with CMs; and their relationships with staff at provider organisations. These relationships are discussed in turn.

Relationships with contract managers

TPPMs described their role in delivering PL Pathways as including responsibility for:

- following the customer experience and dealing with customer complaints;
- acting as the intermediary between Jobcentre Plus, the adviser managers, the advisers, the CMs and the providers, and resolving any problems arising;
- organising Provider Engagement Meetings (PEMs); and
- exploring issues affecting providers' performance¹⁰.

They perceived that CMs, on the other hand, had overall control of the contract and owned responsibility for ensuring the quality of service¹¹. Whilst there was, therefore, some awareness amongst TPPMs of the difference between their role

⁹ Note that the relationship between Jobcentre Plus advisers and provider staff is explored separately in Section 2.3.

¹⁰ This appears to be a misunderstanding on the part of TPPMs because monitoring providers' performance and holding contract review meetings are solely the responsibilities of CMs.

¹¹ Contract managers were not interviewed for this research following indications from the phase 1 study (Nice *et al.*, 2009) that TPPMs work more closely with provider staff on a daily basis and that CMs are relatively more remote from delivery of the programme, which was the main focus of this study.

and that of CMs, some questioned the need for separate roles or expressed confusion about elements of the two roles that appeared to overlap. For example, some TPPMs questioned the rationale behind CMs' control of the contract when TPPMs themselves felt they had a clearer picture of customer experiences, were more aware of what was happening in provider organisations, and had a better understanding of administrative processes, and were, therefore, better placed to make decisions about the contract. One TPPM commented that whilst he met regularly with the provider manager to talk about performance improvement, he was unable to discuss and revise performance targets with him.

There was also some confusion about the division of responsibility for monitoring provider performance. Some TPPMs felt it was part of their role but were reportedly frustrated that they received information only about 'soft' outcomes from providers and that only the CM received information about 'hard' outcomes, such as quality reports. TPPMs felt this was hindering their ability to monitor provider performance, something they perceived was an important part of their role. A suggestion from TPPMs to assist them in various aspects of their role was that they have sight of the contract between DWP and the provider organisation to give them a better sense of what they are working to achieve.

The nature of relationships between TPPMs and CMs, as described by TPPMs, appeared to vary, perhaps partly depending on perceptions of overlap between their roles, but also on the level of communication between the two parties. TPPMs characterised good relationships by regular communication, and where CMs were readily available. Where CMs were not easily contactable or could not meet with TPPMs regularly, TPPMs could feel that they did not receive sufficient support for carrying out their responsibilities. This was particularly the case where CMs were based in distant locations and perhaps struggled to attend meetings such as PEMs, although there were examples of CMs who, despite being located in a distant office, apparently maintained a good level of communication via telephone and email.

Relationships with provider managers

TPPMs described some historically difficult relationships between PL Pathways provider organisations and Jobcentre Plus. These were characterised, TPPMs said, by providers not answering e-mails or responding to telephone messages, not relaying messages from Jobcentre Plus to others within the provider organisation, and not informing TPPMs about staff leave and alternative contacts. In one district, these communication problems became so severe at one point that an emergency provider manager was brought in. At the point of interview for this study, TPPMs reported that a number of these issues had been resolved, following a period of intensive work on the part of TPPMs in encouraging providers to be more proactive in keeping Jobcentre Plus informed of progress or problems. TPPMs reported that providers were starting to understand and respond to the expectations Jobcentre Plus had around communicating progress and that they also seemed more open and willing to doing so. Regular meetings such as PEMs,

operational management group meetings (which occurred every two months), as well as one-to-one meetings between operational provider staff and TPPMs, were thought to have helped to improve communication between Jobcentre Plus and providers. Some communication issues were, however, ongoing. A key concern for TPPMs was the practice of 'yessing', whereby provider staff informed TPPMs that specific actions had been taken when they had not, for example claiming to have called customers who failed to attend WFIs when they had not.

As well as reporting success in communicating with prime provider organisations, TPPMs also felt that their relationships with sub-contractors had improved over time. TPPMs said that they were initially advised not to have contact with sub-contractors, however, they had learnt, during the ongoing process of reviewing provider performance, that providing direct support to sub-contractors could in turn help to improve provider performance.

Relationships between TPPMs and providers in Customer Choice areas were complicated by TPPMs' wish to remain impartial and to be seen to favour neither one over the other. Meetings with both providers were reportedly difficult and TPPMs said their need to appear impartial could impede their ability to build rapport with either organisation. This difficulty was exacerbated where one provider organisation needed more support than the other, due perhaps to a lack of previous experience of working with Jobcentre Plus on delivering welfare to work programmes or a lack of general experience with the customer group.

2.2.2 Jobcentre Plus staff views of provider delivery

This section looks at TPPMs' and Jobcentre Plus advisers' views of the way in which providers delivered the PL Pathways programme.

Provider staff

Whilst there were both negative and positive views held about provider staff, the general view amongst Jobcentre Plus staff was that provider staff skills and knowledge had improved as the contract had progressed. At issue, however, were the employment histories and experiences of staff recruited to the provider organisation: although a large proportion of the staff at some provider organisations had joined the provider under the Transfer of Undertakings legislation¹² and were, therefore, familiar with the customer group, provider organisations had also recruited staff from sales and recruitment backgrounds (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of provider recruitment). Jobcentre Plus staff felt that the usual induction and training period at provider organisations of one to two weeks was not sufficient to introduce provider staff to the customer group and equip them

¹² This legislation protects the rights of employees in a transfer situation, enabling them to enjoy the same terms and conditions, with continuity of employment, as offered under their previous employment. This legislation covered staff of organisations delivering services under contract to Jobcentre Plus, where these services were taken over by the Pathways contractor.

with the skills necessary to work effectively with customers – some also suspected that this training was focused on learning about the provider organisation and not the PL Pathways programme. Their lack of knowledge of the benefits system was a further, ongoing problem, although Jobcentre Plus staff did acknowledge that these skills would be acquired over time and as provider staff gained more front-line experience. Indeed, the skills of provider staff were felt to have improved significantly from the start of the phase 2 contracts. Jobcentre Plus staff also described how providers had responded to gaps in staff skills by introducing specialist staff teams, for example with specific knowledge of health conditions, to which provider personal advisers could refer customers as necessary.

Support offered

As might be expected, TPPMs' knowledge of the support providers were contracted to deliver was generally good. This contrasted with Jobcentre Plus advisers' knowledge of what providers offered customers which appeared limited and was characterised by a lack of understanding of the exact details of this support and the interventions. A number of reasons for this are apparent: First, and as mentioned previously, the 'black box' contract design gives providers a certain level of freedom to provide a wide variety of services and support, and there was no provider 'template' – that is, no list of 'core' provider services – that Jobcentre Plus advisers could consult. There also appeared to be a lack of communication between Jobcentre Plus advisers and provider organisations (which is further explored in Section 2.3) and the training for Jobcentre Plus advisers in provider services and support was also criticised for being minimal (providers themselves raised this issue and made some suggestions about positive steps to address this – see Chapter 3).

Jobcentre Plus advisers' reflections on what they understood providers could offer were generally positive. In particular, they saw interventions aimed at building soft skills as essential, especially for customers with more complex needs. For example, advisers valued the availability of support from work psychologists, believing this to be of benefit to customers with low levels of self-confidence. Advisers' perceptions of the approach providers took in 'pushing' customers to pursue employment (a perception based on what Jobcentre Plus advisers knew about who the provider organisations were and their employees' likely employment history) were mixed however: whilst some favoured this approach and saw it as effective, others felt it would not be appropriate for customers with complex needs and demonstrated a limited understanding of how to support Pathways customers effectively.

The actual support offered by provider organisations within the districts selected to participate in this study is explored in detail in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.

Provider administrative processes

The quality of providers' paperwork was described as problematic by some TPPMs where providers were either failing to complete forms in full, or to complete them at all. TPPMs reported that as a result, some providers were missing out on potential revenue. In one case, a provider had reportedly lost referral documents that should have been sent to DWP following customers' first WFs. Because Jobcentre Plus had not received the referral document, they were unaware that customers had later been placed in jobs and were therefore unable to pay job outcome fees to providers. Providers were also reportedly failing to document voluntary starts, and by failing to reconcile nominal referrals with starts one provider organisation failed to contact more than 600 customers – by the time this was known, a proportion of these customers had moved off qualifying benefits and so the provider had missed out on potential revenue. These problems were experienced towards the beginning of the phase 2 contracts and therefore, may simply be teething problems associated with early implementation. However, they do reflect providers' more general frustration with the volume of paperwork associated with the PL Pathways programme (explored in Chapter 3), and this may suggest that the volume of required paperwork remains problematic and deserves review.

Providers' use of deferrals and sanctions

Since October 2008, under the new ESA regime, customers cannot be waived, either by providers or Jobcentre Plus. Providers may defer customers but must seek approval for deferrals from TPPMs. TPPMs felt that this deferral process was working well and, indeed, worked better than Jobcentre Plus' own process (where Jobcentre Plus advisers have the authority to defer without the TPPM's involvement) because TPPMs were able to take the final decision about a deferral and were able to consider the reasons for deferral themselves. In contrast, some TPPMs perceived that deferrals at Jobcentre Plus were inconsistent and that customers who should have been deferred by Jobcentre Plus were not.

TPPMs felt they were well informed about failure to attend (FTA) rates and sanctions because they were either involved in approving them, or in monitoring them. They also received feedback about FTA rates at PEMs. The level of FTAs was not consistently discussed with all TPPMs, however, where there had been problems with high FTA rates (up to 50 per cent at one provider), the TPPM attributed this to the provider not calling customers to remind them of their appointments or to follow up missed appointments. They perceived that the use of sanctions varied between different providers and had changed over time. Providers had initially favoured a '*softly softly*', '*three strikes, you're out*' approach and had not previously imposed sanctions for every FTA. However, the use of sanctions was thought to be increasing because providers had realised that not sanctioning would result in higher FTA rates, something that was monitored by Jobcentre Plus and formed part of the targets providers had to meet as part of their contractual obligations.

Jobcentre Plus advisers appeared to be less well informed about whether individual customers had failed to attend provider interviews and about whether or not providers had imposed sanctions. They reported finding out about FTAs and sanctions through customer complaints that were mistakenly directed by customers to Jobcentre Plus advisers. This supports the view of Jobcentre Plus staff (outlined in Section 2.1) that customers are confused about the roles of different parties involved in delivering PL Pathways.

2.2.3 Jobcentre Plus staff views of provider performance

Meeting targets

According to TPPMs, providers were not consistently meeting job outcome targets for mandatory customers¹³ and gave a number of explanations for this: First, a delay in receiving the outcome from WCAs had meant that customers who may otherwise have been placed in the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Support Group and deferred by Jobcentre Plus, or whose ESA claim would be unsuccessful, were being referred to provider organisations. This was creating a larger volume of referrals to providers than perhaps had been anticipated¹⁴. When the WCAs were later received, customers who had been assessed as not fit for work were then taken off the PL Pathways programme and this meant performance figures comparing customer registrations against job outcomes looked weak. The economic climate was also posited as a contributing factor to providers not meeting their targets. It was thought that the recession had led to fewer vacancies and this was making it difficult for providers to place customers in employment, which in turn affected their job outcome figures. A third suggested factor, not related to circumstantial factors or administrative problems, was some providers' lack of experience of working with customers with as complex needs as the Incapacity Benefit (IB)/ESA claimant group. Some TPPMs and Jobcentre Plus advisers thought providers perhaps did not fully understand the nature of the barriers to work being faced by this customer group and were not therefore fully equipped to help customers overcome them.

Despite the fact that this was not formally part of their remit, TPPMs reported closely monitoring provider progress and held regular contract review meetings in which they discussed ways to improve performance with providers. Since providers were regularly not meeting the job outcome targets, one TPPM suggested that targets would simply continue to be informally revised downwards, as they had been for a number of providers. Because no further tendering processes were anticipated, TPPMs did not imagine that this, or failure to meet targets, would cause any provider to lose their contract. TPPMs suggested that providers in some areas may be finding it difficult to gather evidence of job outcomes because

¹³ TPPMs reported that job outcomes for voluntary customers were generally better and cited their positive work orientation as an explanation.

¹⁴ This was not, however, the case in all districts – in some, referrals had been lower than expected. The TPPM view here was that this was advantageous whilst the provider was finding it difficult to place customers in work.

customers are reluctant to tell employers that they have been participating in a health-related work programme – they suggested considering paying providers on the basis of off-benefit checks as an alternative.

In spite of concerns about providers not meeting targets and a suggestion that this was due, in part, to the way providers were approaching working with this customer group, both TPPMs and Jobcentre Plus advisers did feel confident that providers' job-focused approach was effectively meeting the needs of job-ready customers. However, a concern was raised that providers were 'cherry-picking' these customers in an attempt to meet job outcome targets and simultaneously neglecting to provide the long-term support and attention needed by customers who were less job-ready and faced more complex barriers to work. Because the target structure had been designed to reward providers for job outcomes and did not take into account 'soft' outcomes, such as building confidence and motivation, this created a disincentive to work with the hardest to help customers who were furthest away from work. It also, they felt, undervalued the importance of building customers' soft skills and helping them take small steps towards work. TPPMs suggested a review of the target structure to reward soft outcomes for hard-to-help customers as well as job outcomes¹⁵.

Monitoring customer feedback

TPPMs described their responsibility for dealing with customer complaints, collecting customer and adviser feedback, and relaying these to providers at performance reviews and PEMs. A variety of methods for collecting customer complaints was employed: some TPPMs relied on receiving letters from customers whilst others took a more proactive approach and conducted telephone or face-to-face feedback interviews with a proportion of customers.

Complaints received by TPPMs from customers revolved around five key issues. These were:

- customers' perceptions of their eligibility for PL Pathways: complaints had been received from customers who felt their health condition should preclude them from having to participate in the programme;
- a related group of complaints came from harder-to-help customers who perceived that their provider was only able to support job-ready customers, and that advisers were not understanding of their barriers to work;
- the distance customers were required to travel to provider appointments: TPPMs explained that where providers had several local offices, in order for customers to be seen as quickly as possible appointments might be booked at a provider office some distance from a customer's home. Some customers had complained about this and had suggested that they would have preferred to wait for an appointment at a more convenient provider office;

¹⁵ This issue is discussed in greater detail in Hudson, M., Phillips, J., Ray, K., Vegeris, S. and Davidson, R. (2010). *The influence of outcome-based contracting on Provider-led Pathways to Work*. DWP Research Report No. 638.

- a lack of training funds and information on funding options: customers had registered complaints about a lack of funds available via provider organisations to attend training courses, and a lack of information from providers about different training options and the availability of alternative sources of funding, such as career development loans; and
- in Customer Choice areas, TPPMs reported that a high proportion of complaints came from customers who wished to switch to receive support from the other provider.

There were different views about the level at which customer complaints should be received and dealt with. One view from TPPMs was that complaints should be dealt with at a lower level, by Jobcentre Plus advisers, and only reported to TPPMs if they could not be resolved. In contrast, Jobcentre Plus advisers felt that because their role no longer involved contact with customers following the referral to the provider, their involvement in customer complaints would be inappropriate. Where Jobcentre Plus advisers had been approached by customers with complaints, they had advised them to raise them with the provider organisation. It is not clear whether or not this reflected a lack of understanding that it is the TPPM's role to deal with customer complaints or advisers' reluctance to be involved in the complaints process, albeit as merely a conduit for information between customer and TPPM.

2.3 The work-focused interview at Jobcentre Plus and the referral process

This section explores Jobcentre Plus advisers' experiences of conducting the first WFI at Jobcentre Plus and the process of referring customers to the provider.

2.3.1 Overview of the Jobcentre Plus WFI

The format of WFIs conducted at Jobcentre Plus appeared to follow a very similar format across districts. Before the WFI, advisers would prepare by reading customer files and checking background information about the customer. Advisers then described three distinct parts of the WFI. The first comprised explanations of the PL Pathways programme, including information about the referral process, the series of provider WFIs and the support offered by the provider organisation (for customers in Customer Choice districts, provider choice was also explained here). The second included discussion of the benefits of the programme including permitted work, Return to Work Credit, and tax credits, and in some cases better-off calculations were carried out. Sanctions for failing to attend WFIs were also outlined here. Finally, advisers described discussion with customers of their health condition and their feelings about work. At this point, advisers prepared an action plan detailing customers' previous work experience, personal circumstances, health conditions, and aims and action points.

2.3.2 Explanation of provider and provider choice

Advisers admitted that their lack of understanding of the provider organisation meant they found it difficult to provide accurate descriptions of the provider to customers. Some explained that they had received little information or training about the provider at the outset of the programme, and felt that a lack of feedback about customers they had referred to the provider was a further contributing factor. Local meetings between Jobcentre Plus advisers and provider advisers, 'refresher events' and opportunities to shadow staff at the provider or Jobcentre Plus were planned in some districts aimed at addressing Jobcentre Plus advisers' lack of knowledge of the provider's offer.

There was also evidence that advisers held different views about their role in providing information about the provider. The view that describing the provider's services to the customer was not within advisers' *'remit'* was expressed, whilst others expressly described listing the provider's services to the customer. A consistent view, however, was held that Jobcentre Plus advisers played an important role in attempting to present the provider offer in a positive light, emphasising the opportunities presented by the PL Pathways programme and reassuring customers that they would not be forced into work or expected to return to work immediately. Advisers did, however, identify a tension between 'selling' the programme and the provider organisation without raising customers' expectations too highly. Providers' views that they are working with customers who present with unrealistic expectations of the provider's offer (see Section 3.1.4) suggests that Jobcentre Plus advisers are perhaps not striking the right balance here.

In Customer Choice districts (where two prime providers operate), customers either receive provider information materials by post prior to the Jobcentre Plus WFI, or are given material by the adviser at the WFI. Having read the material, usually leaflets devised by the provider organisation, the customer is invited to make a choice of provider. Where customers are unable or unwilling to choose, a Provider Allocation Tool (PAT) is used to select a provider on the customer's behalf. Once a provider has been selected, the Jobcentre Plus adviser makes the referral.

The need to appear remain impartial, emphasised by TPPMs in their descriptions of their working relationships with providers, was also apparent in Jobcentre Plus advisers' accounts of facilitating customers' choice of provider. Advisers were keen that they did not appear to favour one provider over another and explained that they would give only limited, general information about providers when asked by customers (although it is likely this was also a feature of their sometimes limited knowledge of provider services). Again, this approach is perhaps reflected in providers' perspectives of customer expectations of the programme and customers' accounts of choosing a provider (see Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, for further discussion of this).

Despite reporting that they did not routinely give customers information about the provider themselves, Jobcentre Plus advisers criticised providers' information

leaflets for not representing the reality of the provision. For example, advisers understood that opportunities to access training courses via providers were limited and that there were limited funds for customers to attend external training, yet provider leaflets promised opportunities to re-train. This apparent discrepancy between the support advertised by providers and the support made available by providers is reflected in customer complaints to Jobcentre Plus about a lack of training opportunities (see above). A more fundamental criticism by some Jobcentre Plus advisers was of the concept of customer 'choice' when they perceived that providers essentially delivered the same suite of services. These advisers suggested that a simpler format would be for one provider to deliver the programme in each district: this would enable advisers to learn and better understand provider provision to be able to describe it to customers, without concerns about partiality.

2.3.3 Referral rates and making referrals

This section explores the process of making referrals, including the use of deferrals and sanctions by Jobcentre Plus advisers, and the transfer of information between Jobcentre Plus and the provider organisation.

Waivers and deferrals

It was apparent from the interviews with Jobcentre Plus advisers and provider advisers that there was not consistent understanding that the ability to waive WFIs was removed with the introduction of ESA in October 2008. Some Jobcentre Plus advisers explained that there were no hard-and-fast rules about waivers, others were clear either that waivers should be kept at a minimum or that they should not waive at all. The understanding that only providers could waive and that Jobcentre Plus advisers could not was also held. Advisers who understood that they could not waive WFIs said they would have appreciated more discretion to defer customers for longer than six months.

Approaches to deferrals appeared similarly inconsistent and differences in practice were evident from advisers' accounts. A number of reasons for this were apparent. Some advisers appeared to understand that they were required to be selective in deciding to defer customers whilst others understood that they had no power to defer at all. Approaches to dealing with particular groups of customers also differed. For example, advisers took different approaches to customers who would be able to return to their previous job following the period of ill-health, with some advisers reporting they would defer these customers and others reporting that they would refer them to a provider. The non-receipt of health assessment information was clearly also a factor in some decisions to defer – it appeared that advisers would take a view about customers' health in the absence of the WCA and defer some customers having assessed them as unable to participate in the programme at that time. In some cases, this was in response to temporary circumstances, for example, where customers were waiting for a hospital appointment or were booked to have an operation, but other examples appeared to involve customers with longer-term health conditions.

The implication here is that advisers felt these customers should not be mandated to take part in PL Pathways and were deferring them whilst their WCAs were completed. The severity of a customer's health condition and the specialism of the local provider organisation were also important factors – where advisers saw that the providers' expertise lay in helping customers with a specific health condition, advisers were less inclined to defer a customer on the basis of this health condition and instead expected that the provider would be well placed to support them. This inconsistency of approach was recognised by TPPMs (and also reflected in providers' accounts of the referrals they were receiving – see Section 3.1) and training was planned in some districts to address this.

Sanctions for failures to attend Jobcentre Plus WFIs

Jobcentre Plus advisers reported that sanctions for non-attendance at Jobcentre Plus WFIs were rarely imposed and that sanctioning was generally unheard of. This did not, however, correspond with low FTA rates and advisers supplied a number of explanations for this: First, advisers suggested that sanctions were being used as a last resort after they had taken measures to prevent FTA, such as calling customers to remind them of appointments, arranging appointments at convenient times of the day for individual customers, making home visits for eligible customers. Second, Jobcentre Plus advisers preferred to avoid sanctions because they found the regulations relating to their use (and similarly for deferrals) overly complicated and the volume of paperwork involved too arduous. Indeed, some advisers suggested a need for clearer guidelines that explained the rules surrounding sanctions (and deferrals) more simply. Finally, advisers expressed doubts about the appropriateness of sanctioning for certain, specific customer sub-groups, such as those with mental health conditions. They questioned the fairness of applying FTA sanctions in these circumstances because it was difficult to know whether or not customers were deliberately missing scheduled appointments.

2.3.4 Transferring information

This section explores the transfer of documents as part of the handover process including referral documents and action plans, and the receipt of WCAs, and highlights some problems with the current system such as the lack of feedback to Jobcentre Plus by providers on the content of action plans and the delayed receipt of documents.

Referral documents and action plans

As part of the process of referring customers to the provider organisation, two key documents are transferred from Jobcentre Plus to the provider: the PL Pathways referral form; and the customer's individual action plan. These are delivered to the provider organisation via their contact centre, without direct contact between the Jobcentre Plus adviser and provider adviser. Jobcentre Plus advisers reported that they received no feedback from providers as to the usefulness of the information contained within these forms and therefore, felt unable to reflect on whether or

not this process worked well. In fact, provider advisers commented that these forms often lacked sufficient detail – this is discussed in Section 3.1.

In addition to the referral form and action plan, and in the absence of information from the health assessment, one adviser was also completing a ‘client assessment tool’, a tool adopted from other functions within Jobcentre Plus. This included information about the customers’ health condition as well as the Jobcentre Plus advisers’ subjective view of the customer based on the first WFI. That this adviser felt this was necessary supports the view of TPPMs and Jobcentre Plus advisers that a lack of health assessment information is impacting negatively on the ability of advisers at Jobcentre Plus and in the provider organisation to perform their role as effectively as they might.

Work Capability Assessment and Work Focused Health Related Assessment

Both TPPMs and Jobcentre Plus advisers identified the delayed receipt of the WCA as a key challenge in the referral process. As already mentioned, the impact of Jobcentre Plus advisers not having received the result of the WCAs, and the Work Focused Health Related Assessments (WFHRAs), in time for the Jobcentre Plus WFI was that they did not have information upon which to base a decision to defer a customer. This meant that customers who might otherwise be deferred or who were ineligible for ESA, were being referred on to the provider. Jobcentre Plus advisers themselves recognised this and were frustrated that they felt obliged to refer customers whom they felt would not benefit from the programme or whom they expected would not be required to complete the programme following the results of their WCA. The implications of this on providers’ targets have already been discussed.

As well as feeling that making the decision to defer was difficult or impossible, advisers also identified that the delayed receipt of the WFHRAs also had impacts for the quality of service received by the customer. Where the WFHRA was available prior to the Jobcentre Plus WFI, Jobcentre Plus advisers used this to prepare for the meeting and tailor the first WFI to the specific needs of the customer – they described approaching delivery of the WFI differently for customers with different health conditions, for example those with mental health conditions and those with physical health conditions. Without the WFHRA, advisers were not able to prepare in this way, nor were they able to highlight these needs in their referral communication with the provider. This issue also arose where WFHRAs were received but contained insufficient information about the customer’s health condition. Jobcentre Plus advisers who did report receiving the WFHRA information in time for the Jobcentre Plus WFI reported that it contained only general information about health conditions and lacked detail of the severity of the condition.

Advisers made some suggestions for improving the process for receiving and using the information contained in WFHRAs. They suggested that the first WFI at Jobcentre Plus, and the decision about referring or deferring a customer, should

be delayed until the WCA was completed and this would reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to providers and make full use of the information contained within the WFHRA.

2.3.5 Post-referral contact with providers and customers

Contact with providers

Contact between Jobcentre Plus advisers and the provider organisation was limited to the transfer of information contained within the PL Pathways referral form and customer action plans. However, since this contact was via provider contact centres, there was no obvious opportunity, at this stage, for Jobcentre Plus advisers to speak directly with the relevant provider adviser, for example to impart information about the customers' circumstances, needs or health condition that was perhaps difficult to capture on paper. Jobcentre Plus advisers reported that their perspective on the need to remain impartial in areas where two providers were operating also inhibited their contact with provider advisers. PEMs did appear to be working well in improving communication between advisers and provider organisations as they provided an opportunity for advisers to meet, discuss any issues arising about paperwork, and for problems to be dealt with quickly. Some Jobcentre Plus offices were also planning 'refresher events' where Jobcentre Plus advisers and provider advisers would come together to share views and experiences of the programme and tackle any difficulties in delivering the programme.

Contact with customers

There was little reported contact between Jobcentre Plus advisers and customers following their referral from Jobcentre Plus to the provider. Customers were informed that from this point onwards, their point of contact should be the provider. Indeed, Jobcentre Plus advisers recalled referring customers back to the provider manager when they re-contacted them about something within the provider's remit. Post-referral contact with customers appeared to be limited to occasions where customers were referred to other programmes delivered by Jobcentre Plus such as Work Preparation, to enquire about other benefits such as the travel to interview scheme, or were referred to residential training colleges. Some advisers had seen customers who had returned to them for better off calculations – it was understood that these customers either lacked confidence in the providers' benefit knowledge or were making comparisons between the Better Off Calculation at the provider and the Jobcentre Plus office to help them understand their financial position regarding being in work. That advisers were not receiving many queries from customers suggested to them that customers were satisfied with the provision by providers although, as described below, the formal channels for receiving information about customer progress were limited.

Knowledge of customer progress

In general, Jobcentre Plus advisers' awareness of the progress made by individual customers participating in PL Pathways following referral to the provider was very

limited, despite a desire amongst advisers to know more. In part, this desire was rooted in Jobcentre Plus advisers' dissatisfaction with their involvement only in customers' first WFI and the removal of their caseloads. They reportedly received no information about attendance rates and based their assumptions about how well the programme was working for customers on their knowledge of customer feedback and complaints, and on contact with customers for benefit queries (as described above) and through informal channels. A lack of direct contact between Jobcentre Plus advisers and provider advisers further exacerbated this knowledge gap. It should be noted that it is not the intention of the PL Pathways programme design that advisers should keep in touch with or monitor customer progress, however, the communication channel provided by the PEMs, and provider and Jobcentre Plus monthly and quarterly meetings in some districts, were felt to be supporting better communication about customer progress.

Although Jobcentre Plus advisers were unaware of the FTA rates for provider WFIs, they held strong views about what affected client attendance at provider WFIs. The gap between the referral from Jobcentre Plus and the first provider WFI was posited as one reason. Some Jobcentre Plus advisers felt this time period was too long and weakened the message that attendance at WFIs was mandatory whilst also allowing customers to forget appointments. An alternative view was that this time period was a useful one in which customers could digest information given to them about the provider and prepare for their first provider WFI. Poor previous experiences of providers, for example when customers had participated in other DWP schemes such as the New Deal for Disabled People with the same provider, were also felt to affect customers' willingness to attend WFIs with specific providers.

2.4 Summary

Jobcentre Plus advisers and TPPMs raised a number of issues regarding the **design of PL Pathways contracts**. These concerns centred on the potential for customers to be confused because the programme involves contact with multiple parties and because the process was perceived to take longer than would otherwise be necessary. Jobcentre Plus staff also questioned the expertise and, therefore, the ability of commercial organisations to meet the needs of customers with complex needs who were further away from the labour market. The black box contract design was seen to afford providers the flexibility of offering a diverse range of services to customers but also to cause Jobcentre Plus staff to lack detailed understanding of the exact nature of the services delivered by provider organisations. The **design of the programme**, in which Jobcentre Plus advisers no longer retain a caseload, led Jobcentre Plus advisers to feel that their skills and knowledge were not being fully exploited and to a lack of job satisfaction for them.

Discussion of the **management of the PL Pathways contract** focused on the working relationships between TPPMs and CMs, and TPPMs and provider managers. TPPM and CM relationships were characterised by a lack of clarity in

the differentiation between their respective roles, and dissatisfaction with the level of control TPPMs felt they had over the contract and the information they received about the contract. Relationships appeared to vary in their efficacy but poor relationships appeared to be compounded by poor communication between CMs and TPPMs or TPPMs feeling that CMs were too removed from the local context (both geographically and figuratively). TPPMs' relationships with provider managers, whilst variable, were generally felt to have improved since the start of the programme. Whilst the communication problems identified in the evaluation of the phase 1 districts appeared to have persisted, they were improving, in part due to the efforts of provider managers and TPPMs at PEMs and other regular face-to-face meetings.

Some concerns were raised about the **delivery of PL Pathways** by providers because of questions over the experience of provider staff to deal with customers with complex needs. This stemmed from Jobcentre Plus staff perspectives of provider staff's diverse employment histories and their being without necessarily any experience of working with the relevant customer group. This led Jobcentre Plus staff to identify a need for further training for provider staff to better equip them to help PL Pathways customers. Another concern was raised about providers' failure to meet job outcome targets because, amongst other things, they were unprepared for the volume of customers referred to them and the complexity of their needs (this failure was also ascribed to the economic climate and the fewer vacancies available during this time). Jobcentre Plus staff did however have confidence in providers' job-focused approaches to working with customers and that this was effective in meeting the needs of job-ready customers and helping them into work.

The transfer of information between Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations during the referral process was reportedly inhibited by the lack of health assessment information often available to Jobcentre Plus advisers at this point. Without this, Jobcentre Plus advisers felt the information they could pass to the provider organisation was limited, however, they explained that without feedback from providers as to the usefulness of the information contained within the PL Pathways referral form and customer action plans, they were unable to reflect on the efficacy of the process or make useful amendments. The non-receipt of a customers' WCA result and the WFHRA also impacted on Jobcentre Plus advisers' ability to defer customers and prepare properly for the Jobcentre Plus WFI. Suggestions for overcoming these challenges included delaying the Jobcentre Plus WFI until the WCA was completed and reviewing the available channels for the transfer of customer information.

Contact between Jobcentre Plus advisers and the provider organisation was limited to the transfer of information contained within the PL Pathways referral form and customer action plans. Opportunities for Jobcentre Plus advisers and provider advisers to meet were limited although PEMs were beginning to address this. There was little reported contact between Jobcentre Plus advisers and customers

following their referral from Jobcentre Plus to the provider, limited to referrals or enquiries about other disability employment programmes, benefits, and Better Off Calculations. Despite a desire amongst advisers to know more about customers' progress, Jobcentre Plus advisers' awareness of the progress made by individual customers participating in PL Pathways following referral to the provider was very limited. Again, PEMs and provider and Jobcentre Plus monthly and quarterly meetings, were felt to be supporting better communication about customer progress.

3 Experiences and views of provider advisers and managers

This chapter draws on data from the interviews with provider managers and the group discussions with provider advisers to explore their experiences and views of the Provider-led Pathways to Work (PL Pathways) programme. The chapter first considers the handover from Jobcentre Plus to the provider (Section 3.1), then explores provider delivery (Section 3.2), and finally describes provider views and experiences of their performance monitoring and customer feedback (Section 3.3). The chapter ends (Section 3.4) with a summary of the key findings from the fieldwork with providers.

3.1 Handover from Jobcentre Plus to provider

This section explores providers' views and experiences of the handover of customers from Jobcentre Plus to the provider, focusing on those elements of the process that were perceived to be working well and those thought to be working less well.

3.1.1 Volume of referrals

The views of provider managers and advisers about the level of referrals they were receiving from Jobcentre Plus were mixed. Some felt that the volume of referrals was larger than they had expected. This had made caseloads harder to manage and led to difficulties providing consistent and focused support to customers, retaining staff and meeting targets – all of these issues are explored in more detail later in this chapter. A number of reasons for this high volume of referrals were posited, including Jobcentre Plus referring customers that were not appropriate (who perhaps should have been deferred) or eligible (whose Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claim would later be unsuccessful) for PL Pathways (this is explored in more detail in the following sub-section). However, other provider managers felt that the volume of referrals they were experiencing was achievable

and that they had sufficient staff in place to deliver the programme. The reasons for these different views are not immediately clear from the study data and may be related to local factors, such as staff recruitment and retention issues, and/or the specific nature of providers' contracts and targets which differ between providers.

3.1.2 Appropriateness of referrals

As mentioned above, providers felt that a proportion of the referrals they were receiving from Jobcentre Plus were not appropriate: that is, they included customers who should not be mandated to participate in the PL Pathways programme. Provider advisers reported receiving referrals for customers who were awaiting operations (and were unable to work in the interim), who were very heavily pregnant, with severe mental health conditions, embarking upon detox programmes and, in some cases, were terminally ill. Providers did, however, feel they understood the reasons for these referrals. They attributed this problem to the delays in the receipt of the WCA result and the information contained within the Work Focused Health Related Assessment (WFHRA), an issue also raised by Jobcentre Plus staff (see Section 2.3), which meant that customers who might otherwise be deferred by Jobcentre Plus were being referred to providers. Because Jobcentre Plus advisers were having to make a decision about whether or not to refer a customer where no assessment information was available, providers felt this led to inconsistencies in the types of customers referred by different advisers. There was also a suggestion that the ESA system of allocating customers to the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) and Support Group may not be working effectively and that Jobcentre Plus advisers might be under pressure not to defer customers.

Provider advisers were frustrated by the time they reported spending with customers who were not ready, nor open to, taking steps to move into work, and felt this impacted detrimentally upon the resources available for other, more work-ready customers. They also noted the associated frustration for customers who felt that they had been referred inappropriately and described how distressing Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) with these customers could be both for customers and advisers. As well as impacts for the individual provider and customer, there were also impacts for the provider organisation as a whole. Customers who were eventually placed in the ESA support group or not eligible for ESA, and so not mandated to participate in the PL Pathways programme, had often already begun their series of WFIs with the provider. In these situations, providers' caseloads were being reduced without providers having the opportunity to help customers and this affected their performance figures. In order to avoid this, providers suggested that referrals should only be made once information relating to a customers' health had been received by the Jobcentre Plus adviser.

3.1.3 Deferrals

Since the introduction of ESA in October 2008, the option to waive WFIs has been removed from the Pathways programme. Provider organisations are however able

to defer customers twice for up to six months at a time if customers' health conditions prevent them from fully participating in the programme. Despite this, advisers understood that they were not meant to defer often, given that the customers referred to them had already been deemed fit to participate in the PL Pathways programme by Jobcentre Plus advisers (although they felt this rule was complicated by the delays in the receipt of WCAs). Whilst providers suspected that Jobcentre Plus advisers were deferring some customers in the absence of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), whom they felt should have been deferred, referrals for customers whom providers felt should not be mandated to participate in the PL Pathways programme were being received. This may be a product of referrals made to providers without the WCA or a reflection of providers' experience of mandatory ESA customers as harder to help than anticipated (see also Section 3.3.2). Where provider advisers were making use of their power to defer customers, they were frustrated at the lack of flexibility afforded to them. Advisers explained that they were only able to defer customers for two six-month periods and felt they should have more discretion to defer individuals for longer periods of time where their circumstances demanded it. The time consuming nature of the deferral process, and the need for provider advisers to check their decisions to defer with Third Party Provision Managers (TPPMs), exacerbated this frustration, especially where advisers deferred the same customer more than once.

3.1.4 Perceptions of Jobcentre Plus advisers' explanation of 'provider'

Based on their experiences of customers at the first provider WFI, providers' perceptions of how Jobcentre Plus advisers were explaining their role and describing their provision were poor. In some cases, providers perceived that the information provided to customers at the Jobcentre Plus WFI, and before, was insufficient and this was reflected in customers arriving at the first provider WFI with no clear understanding of the PL Pathways programme and the provider's role in it, nor any sense of the support the provider could offer. Other provider staff felt that a lack of information about them from Jobcentre Plus advisers had the effect of allowing customers to form unrealistic expectations of the provider provision, resulting in customers later feeling that the provider was not meeting their needs.

As well as a feeling that customers did not receive sufficient information about providers before their first provider WFI, there was also a perception amongst providers that information, where it was given, was often inaccurate. In particular, providers described seeing customers who had reportedly been informed that providers would meet the costs of all their course fees, and who were subsequently disappointed that this was not the case. To avoid this, providers suggested that it might be helpful for Jobcentre Plus advisers to complete basic training on the provider organisation and its services. Some also promoted the advantages of provider advisers working with Jobcentre Plus advisers at Jobcentre Plus offices to introduce customers to the provider organisation.

The way in which Jobcentre Plus advisers explained the nature of the PL Pathways programme to customers was also questioned by provider advisers. Some felt that Jobcentre Plus advisers placed too great an emphasis on the obligatory nature of the programme, and the potential for sanctions following failures to attend WFIs, rather than the help and support that the programme offers. They felt this left customers with the impression that they would be forced into work, whatever their circumstances, and that this could affect customers' subsequent engagement with the programme. They felt that Jobcentre Plus advisers could more successfully 'sell' the programme to customers by highlighting its potential benefits and reinforcing the role of the provider in helping customers to prepare for work, as well as to find work.

3.1.5 Transferring information

Timeliness

As noted previously, a considerable reported problem in the transfer of information across all Jobcentre Plus districts has been the delayed receipt of the result of the WCA. As well as impacting upon the appropriateness of the referrals providers receive, there are also implications for the support providers themselves can offer to the customer. Provider advisers reported that they were not receiving potentially useful information about customers' health conditions that could help them to devise a package of appropriate support. They also reported that it could sometimes be difficult for provider advisers, who often lacked training in helping customers with specific health conditions, to encourage customers to talk about their health conditions; therefore, delays in receiving this information could mean that providers did not have the full picture of a customer's condition until after their first provider WFI.

Quality

Having waited some time to receive the information contained within a customer's WFHRA, provider advisers reported that they sometimes questioned the usefulness of them when they were received. Their concerns revolved, in part, around the level of information contained within the WFHRA, particularly the specificity of the description of the customers' health conditions, and the perceived reliability of the assessments – because they did not consult customers' GPs, provider advisers questioned the extent to which assessments were a true reflection of customers' health conditions. This concern about quality was also related to providers' views about the way in which the WCAs are conducted – there was a feeling that the assessments were too heavily oriented towards customers with physical health conditions, for example focusing on customers' ability to bend and lift, and much less on any mental health conditions. Providers also reported hearing customers complain that the questions asked of them during WCAs did not always relate directly to their health condition, and therefore did not allow them to explain their condition and its implications in full. This led to concerns amongst providers that customers were not being allocated to the correct ESA group (i.e. the WRAG or the Support Group).

Similar criticisms were levied at the quality of the action plans drawn up by Jobcentre Plus advisers with customers at the Jobcentre Plus WFI. Provider staff from all provider organisations felt that the quality of action plans received from Jobcentre Plus was poor. As well as the forms often being delayed, they also regularly lacked information or were incomplete. For example, provider advisers described forms that were missing information about customers' benefit receipt, or important information about customers' circumstances such as how appropriate it would be to visit customers at home. Where action plans lacked detail, this could make the first provider WFI unnecessarily long – providers perceived that this frustrated customers who had already provided these details to their Jobcentre Plus provider and possibly, on numerous other occasions, to other service providers (and this is reflected in customers' accounts – see Chapter 4).

3.1.6 Working relationships between provider advisers and Jobcentre Plus advisers

Provider advisers had different interpretations of what constitutes the appropriate level of contact between provider advisers and Jobcentre Plus advisers following the referral of a customer from Jobcentre Plus to the provider. Some advisers cited the Provider Guidance¹⁶ which they understood discouraged provider advisers from making contact with Jobcentre Plus advisers. Others felt that Jobcentre Plus advisers would not welcome contact from provider advisers, whom they felt had 'stolen their jobs'. This is supported by similar findings from Jobcentre Plus advisers (see Section 2.1) about losing their caseloads to provider organisations. Furthermore, there was a perception amongst provider advisers that Jobcentre Plus offices had been very busy recently, in part due to the higher volume of benefits claims during the economic recession. Whilst other provider advisers did not appear to share the same perceived barriers to contacting Jobcentre Plus advisers, and felt they shared a good working relationship, they, nonetheless, described a limited set of circumstances in which they would make contact.

Generally, contact between provider advisers and Jobcentre Plus appeared to be infrequent. Provider advisers reported making contact to clarify information contained within customer action plans including clarification of terminology used in Jobcentre Plus communications to the provider. Although one provider described having access to a glossary of these terms provided by Jobcentre Plus, they said it was not always possible to refer to this during the working day and wished that information sent to provider organisations by Jobcentre Plus were easier to understand. Provider contact with Jobcentre Plus also included chasing missing paperwork, referring customers to Disability Employment Advisers at Jobcentre Plus, and requesting information about Local Employment Partnership employers. Where communication between provider advisers and Jobcentre Plus did take place, provider advisers did not always feel that the communication

¹⁶ Pathways to Work Provider Guidance document (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/supplying-dwp/what-we-buy/welfare-to-work-services/provider-guidance/plpcontents.shtml>)

channel was appropriate – for example, one provider adviser commented that they were required to fax queries to Jobcentre Plus when they would have found it quicker and easier to pick up the telephone.

Provider managers recognised the lack of communication and feedback between provider advisers and Jobcentre Plus, in particular regarding customer progress and some were taking steps to address this. One provider manager described regular local meetings with Jobcentre Plus advisers to discuss the PL Pathways programme and customer progress, and another had created opportunities for advisers in the provider and Jobcentre Plus office to shadow one another.

3.2 Provider delivery

This section explores aspects of provider delivery including staff recruitment, retention and training, models of delivery, the conduct of WFIs, the provision of customer support, and finally working relationships with other providers, sub-contractors and Jobcentre Plus.

3.2.1 Models of delivery

The report of the findings from the phase 1 study (Nice *et al.*, 2009) described two models of delivery by which providers organised customers' routes through the programme and staff responsibilities were shared. The first was the **case manager model**, where one, generalist adviser was responsible for managing the customers' progress through the programme, conducting WFIs and suggesting and signposting appropriate interventions and support. The second, the **multi-adviser model**, described a model in which no one adviser was responsible for tracking the progress of an individual customer throughout the programme.

The providers included in this study appeared to have been operating versions of the case manager model, with customers experiencing five WFIs with the same adviser. In some provider organisations, these WFIs were conducted in-house. Other provider organisations had contracted out a proportion of their caseload; one provider, for example, sub-contracted an organisation with specialist experience in helping customers from specific ethnic groups and another with expertise in helping customers with disabilities. Some sub-contracted organisations conducted WFIs and provided additional specialist support and interventions on behalf of some prime providers; other providers conducted all WFIs and sub-contracted only specialist provision.

3.2.2 Staff recruitment, retention and development

Recruitment

Staff had been recruited to provider organisations from a range of backgrounds. Providers had typically recruited some staff with experience of working with the relevant customer group. This included people who had worked with the provider on other government contracts and were transferred to the PL Pathways team

when the contract was won, as well as those who had been employed at Jobcentre Plus or other Welfare to Work organisations, or had joined the provider under the Transfer of Undertakings (TUPE) legislation¹⁷. Other professional backgrounds that were represented were the prisons service, health services (including mental health), mentoring, sales and private sector recruitment. Whilst some provider managers described a majority of staff with experience of working with unemployed people and those with specific health conditions, others had specifically targeted their recruitment at people without prior knowledge of the relevant issues in the hope that they would bring no preconceptions of disability and unemployment and therefore approach all customers in an even and systematic way.

In addition to favouring particular professional backgrounds, managers described searching for staff with specific skills or competencies to work as advisers. Some desired skills were tangible, for example relevant foreign language skills. Others related to people's personal and emotional characteristics – managers described searching for candidates who could demonstrate empathy for the customer group, general people skills, listening skills, diplomacy and a calmness in their approach to working with customers. A further set of valued attributes appeared closely aligned to how comfortable people were with a culture of meeting targets for securing job starts and sustained job outcomes for customers. Provider managers also looked for drive, confidence and the ability to understand and differentiate between customers' differing barriers and needs. In appointing managers and team leaders, providers appeared to have looked for staff with proven management experience, leadership skills and good communication skills.

Retention

Provider managers described two reasons for losing a proportion of their staff early on in the implementation of PL Pathways in their organisation. The first related to provider advisers finding it difficult to work with PL Pathways customers because of the needs and barriers to work they presented. The second was articulated specifically in relation to personnel who had joined providers under the TUPE legislation. Provider managers explained that some of these staff had left the provider organisation because they were unable to get used to working in a target driven environment with a more corporate feel. Indeed, one provider manager reported losing 60 per cent of staff recruited via TUPE for this reason. Despite this, and in contrast to the findings from the phase 1 study, provider managers did not report significant concerns about under-staffing. It is unclear from the data as to why this was not an issue at this phase when it had been during the implementation of the programme at phase 1 (see Nice *et al.*, 2009).

¹⁷ This legislation protects the rights of employees in a transfer situation, enabling them to enjoy the same terms and conditions, with continuity of employment, as offered under their previous employment. This legislation covered staff of organisations delivering services under contract to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), where these services were taken over by the Pathways contractor.

Training and development

Provider managers described running induction training for provider staff at the outset of the contract. Reports of the length of induction training ranged from one day to two weeks. One adviser had reportedly spent two-and-a-half months training before encountering their first customer, although it was not clear whether this period was spent entirely in formal training. Early induction and 'basic' training had included introductions to the provider organisation, to the PL Pathways programme generally, and to the specifics of providers' individual contracts with DWP. Staff were also introduced to the PL Pathways to Work Guidance¹⁸, required PL Pathways paperwork, and provider IT systems. At some providers, this early instruction also included training in interview techniques, disability awareness, Better Off Calculations and sub-contractor provision in their induction training. One had also arranged training from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust on lone working and another provided opportunities for staff to shadow others in the provider organisation following basic training. All staff within the same provider organisation appeared to receive similar basic or induction training; for advisers who would work with specific customer groups, this was then followed by further relevant training. This included, for example, training in working with customers with alcohol dependency, with a history of violence, or with specific mental health conditions. Some advisers were also studying for NVQs in Information, Advice and Guidance. Provider managers also described opportunities for ongoing and 'refresher' training and development, with training needs identified via line management structures and individual development plans.

Despite this programme of training, both provider managers and advisers identified some skills gaps. Some advisers felt they had been ill-prepared in terms of their understanding of the benefits system and of other resources in the community, for example voluntary and third sector agencies, to which customers could be signposted, or that their development had been too reliant on 'on the job' training without sufficient formal training in the PL Pathways programme and working with customers, particularly those with specific conditions, such as mental health conditions, and specific needs. Some managers acknowledged that the training for advisers had not been as robust as they had hoped and were revising and re-delivering some basic training in response to this. This included training in benefits, dealing with customers with complex needs and training in how to understand and challenge customers' perceptions of their barriers to work. The latter was mentioned specifically by one provider manager in relation to staff from a non-recruitment or sales background and who it was therefore felt were not sufficiently target-driven for PL Pathways work.

¹⁸ Pathways to Work Provider Guidance (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/supplying-dwp/what-we-buy/welfare-to-work-services/provider-guidance/plpcontents.shtml>)

3.2.3 Conducting WFIs

The WFI format

Providers reported that customers typically attended the five WFIs at the provider on a monthly basis. The first of these tends to involve gathering and confirming information about the customer, revisiting and reviewing the customer's action plan, and sometimes arranging the dates of future appointments. Providers discussed the use of customer assessment tools, or 'triage' systems, alongside the customer's action plan at the first WFI which were designed to classify customers in terms of their orientation or readiness to work. Two systems were described: a 'traffic light' system whereby customers are categorised into red, amber and green sub-groups indicating the least, medium and most work-ready customers respectively; and, a Personal Progress Indicator which classifies customers from A to E, where A is considered the most job-ready.

Based on their classification, customers are referred to different PL Pathways provision, with those in category E or the red group perhaps being referred to specialist provision. The remainder of the provider WFIs appear to emphasise work-focused support and job search, and action plans are reviewed regularly. Following the five WFIs customers are asked whether or not they wished to remain on the programme and those who do may be transferred to work with job match advisers who focus on helping customers to find work.

Challenges

Provider advisers' accounts highlighted three broad challenges of working with customers via the PL Pathways programme: the repetitive nature of some information gathering; challenges associated with working with customers who can become distressed for different reasons; and discussing customers' health conditions. First, provider advisers identified that the need to repeatedly collect the same information from customers left customers feeling frustrated. This was particularly the case where delays in the receipt of information from the WFHRA or action plans meant providers did not have access to information, or where information contained within action plans was insufficient or difficult to understand, and advisers needed to ask customers to re-state that information. As well as being frustrating for customers, this also took up time during early WFIs at the provider which advisers felt could have been better spent helping customers. Where customers have been inappropriately referred to the PL Pathways programme, or believed this to be so because of the nature of their health condition or barriers to work, advisers identified that WFIs can be very distressing. Advisers reported spending a considerable amount of time calming customers down and finding this to be a distressing experience. Advisers noted again that they felt the time spent with customers in these situations was wasted and could be put to better use with more work-ready customers. Finally, provider advisers found the discussion of customers' health conditions challenging, particularly where customers presented what they perceived were serious mental health conditions.

They felt they were not sufficiently well trained in health issues to be able to talk knowledgeably about these conditions or to offer these customers useful advice (although it is helpful to note that these customers would have been likely to be referred on to other, specialist advisers in some provider organisations).

Two groups of customers were identified as being particularly challenging to work with: these were customers with complex needs; and, customers who were less job-ready than providers had anticipated (these groups were not mutually exclusive). Whilst providers said they had expected to be working with customers with numerous and complicated barriers to work, some felt that the severity or multiplicity of some customers' conditions was unexpected. Customers with mental health conditions and those with terminal illnesses were felt to be hardest to work with. Other challenging groups were felt to be those who presented multiple barriers to work, including drug or alcohol addiction, homelessness, the possession of criminal records and those with caring responsibilities; albeit for different reasons. Some advisers felt that these customers should be receiving alternative support and not support focused on employment. Working with these customer groups was felt by advisers to be emotionally exhausting. Customers from white-collar professions were also felt to be particularly difficult to support – advisers reportedly struggled to find support for them that was appropriate for their needs and took into account their skills and previous experience (this is echoed in the responses of this group of customers in this study – see Chapter 4).

In general, providers reported that the customers they were encountering were less job-ready than they had anticipated. In some cases, particularly where providers had been involved in delivering other disability employment programmes to voluntary customers in the past, it appeared that this was a feature of now dealing with a majority of mandatory customers whose orientation to the programme, and perhaps more generally to work, was markedly different. In part, this relates to the multiplicity of complex barriers and needs presented by customers (as outlined above) but also to providers' perceptions of customers' motivations to work. They identified that customers have been, in their opinion, less work-ready since the introduction of ESA – the new WCA may be placing customers in the WRAG who might previously have been considered not fit to look for work, and so mandating them to participate in PL Pathways; added to this, the refusal rate for ESA has meant that customers who might have been easier to help are now being moved to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and therefore, do not make up the ESA caseload. In response to this challenge, provider managers described changing their provision, for example increasing capacity on soft-skills courses such as those on motivation and confidence-building. Others described increasing expectations about the time spent by advisers with each customer and renegotiating contracts and service fees to account for this.

3.2.4 Failure to attend and sanctioning

Provider managers' and advisers' discussions in this study of failure to attend (FTA) WFIs were markedly different from the views expressed in the report of the

findings from the study of phase 1 districts (Nice *et al.*, 2009). That study heard that FTA rates, whilst variable, were improving thanks to the information provided by provider advisers to customers about the programme. Criticisms were levied at the process of sanctioning customers who failed to attend – these included that the process took too long and was resource intensive, requiring advisers to make multiple attempts to contact customers that could have been better spent helping other customers. Providers in phase 1 districts had begun to explore ways of reducing this burden on advisers by transferring responsibility for following up non-attendance to other staff or by contracting it out. The findings from this study of phase 2 districts suggest that this approach had also been adopted by some providers. Some described a process where customers who failed to attend are referred to a Central Data Team responsible for making contact with them. Customers are sent a letter and given another opportunity to arrange and attend the WFI (for customers with mental health conditions, the process is slightly different – customers who fail to attend are first given a home visit before referral to the Central Data Team). For those who do not respond within seven days, the process of sanctioning begins. Provider advisers are not, therefore, required to make multiple attempts to contact and this may explain why views about the process of dealing with FTAs were different in this study.

In general, advisers reported that they were told by their managers to make efforts to keep FTA rates low. Advisers attempted to do this by contacting customers, by telephone or letter, in the period between their referral from Jobcentre Plus and their first WFI at the provider. Whilst there appeared to be an emphasis on limiting the need to apply sanctions, some did express the view that they felt sanctions should be used more frequently in the hope that this would emphasise the mandatory nature of the programme to customers. Similarly, to encourage customers to engage fully with the PL Pathways programme, some felt that the severity of sanctions should increase. They felt that because customers still received some benefit even when sanctioned, the impetus to attend WFIs and engage with the programme was reduced.

3.2.5 Provision of customer interventions

All provider organisations offered a range of in-house provision and support to customers. This commonly focused on ‘job-search’ skills such as courses in compiling CVs, interview skills, and motivation techniques. Prime providers also offered training in basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, basic IT, and English as a second language. Other in-house provision focused on customers’ broader circumstances through debt advice and advice on housing options. A third set of in-house provision was focused on supporting customers once they had found employment: this comprised after-care programmes designed to maintain contact with customers and increase sustainability of job outcomes, as well as education for customers on relevant in-work benefits and credits. There was some evidence amongst advisers of a preference for using in-house provision as far as possible. This appeared to be related to the time taken and paperwork associated with

making referrals to sub-contractor organisations, questions about the quality of sub-contractor provision and a desire to 'hold on to' customers to impact positively on targets.

There were different arrangements among prime providers for providing services in-house and via sub-contracted, local organisations. Some providers had sub-contracted out their Condition Management Programme (CMP) provision to specialist organisations whilst others were providing it in-house. Some were using sub-contractors to deliver WFIs and other support to specific customer groups – these sub-contractors included organisations specialising in supporting people with specific disabilities (including hearing and visual impairment, and mental health conditions) and with alcohol and drug misuse issues. Provision for customers who wanted to become self-employed was also contracted out to specialist providers.

As well as having formal sub-contracting relationships, providers had also established informal links with a range of other local provision. This comprised a range of local training providers, for example, for customers requiring training in elderly care, advanced computer skills, truck driving or English as a second language, the Citizens Advice Bureau, as well as debt management advisers and a similar set of local and voluntary organisations specialising in working with people with disabilities as might be formally sub-contracted. Provider advisers also described referring customers to appropriate NHS services where their own (in-house or sub-contracted) CMP provision was unsuitable. It is not clear, however, whether this represented a formal referral route or more informal signposting of NHS services. Advisers also described making use of the referral route to Jobcentre Plus for WORKSTEP and WorkPrep, for example.

3.2.6 Working relationships

Internal relationships and relationships with sub-contractors

Providers generally reported good relationships, both internally within their organisations, and with sub-contractors. Four activities appeared to underpin these good relationships. The first of these was the **provision of regular opportunities to meet and discuss ongoing issues** relating to the programme and share experiences of specific cases. Provider managers and advisers reported holding regular team meetings at which teams were updated on aspects of the programme that had changed, shared information and views about specific cases, heard customer 'good news' stories, and heard feedback from customer evaluations. Some prime providers also invited sub-contractors to these meetings who, as well as hearing about and discussing customer feedback and specific cases, had the opportunity to meet new team members at the prime provider organisation. Providers also described **activities specifically aimed at engaging with sub-contractors**. Some had monthly or quarterly review meetings to discuss referral rates, caseloads and action plans, as well as review communication channels. They also **shared training** which brought prime provider and sub-contractor advisers together. Finally, these relationships were supported by **frequent e-mail and**

telephone contact between provider managers and sub-contractors, as well as provider advisers and sub-contractors.

The way in which prime providers viewed their sub-contractor also appeared to have a bearing on the nature of relationships between provider and sub-contractor. Those who described the closest relationships also described a view of their sub-contractors as 'extensions' of their own services. There was some feeling that this relationship had improved over time as prime providers had begun to view sub-contractor services as complementary rather than as competition. Finally, the physical proximity of the sub-contractor also appeared to be important in encouraging good working relationships between prime provider and sub-contractor. Where providers and sub-contractors were based in offices near to each other, this was felt to aid the development of good working relationships and encouraged regular contact. Where sub-contractors shared office space with the prime provider, working relationships were even further strengthened.

Despite these generally good relationships, provider staff described some tensions in the relationships between providers and some sub-contractors. These appeared to be rooted in issues relating to the perceived underperformance of sub-contractor organisations whom some advisers and managers felt were not succeeding in securing employment for many customers.

Provider organisations in Customer Choice areas

In areas providing Customer Choice (where two prime providers are operating), relationships between prime providers also appeared to be generally good. In the areas included in this research where two providers were operating, each provider reported a desire to work well with the other provider organisation. In one of these areas, providers reported having regular, monthly meetings with both providers and the TPPM. These meetings focused on discussions of the types of customers being referred, changes to the programme, paperwork and any issues or problems arising. These providers described themselves as 'comparing' their services rather than 'competing' to ensure providers were offering different but complementary services and that customers were presented with real choice¹⁹. Tensions between provider organisations appeared to arise where providers saw themselves as competing for the same customers, a facet perhaps of the outcome-based (target-driven) nature of PL Pathways contracts. Tensions also arose where staff had moved between provider organisations over the course of the contract.

¹⁹ It is perhaps interesting then that Jobcentre Plus advisers, concerned to appear impartial, do not emphasise (or, in some cases, apparently appreciate) these differences to customers.

3.3 Provider performance

3.3.1 Customer feedback

A range of channels for receiving feedback from customers about provider performance was apparent across the sample of providers in this study. Some employed formal feedback methods such as asking customers to complete feedback forms at the end of the first provider WFI²⁰, to complete evaluation forms after every training session, or larger-scale surveys of customer experience on a six-monthly basis. Aggregated customer feedback was shared with advisers at internal provider meetings and at meetings between providers and their sub-contractors. This information was reportedly used to inform changes to provider and sub-contractor provision. There is evidence from the interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff that TPPMs made efforts to share customer feedback they received with providers during regular review meetings with providers. Providers themselves highlighted that the newsletter now distributed by Jobcentre Plus to providers contained information about provider performance and included customer success stories and was a useful source of customer feedback. Not all providers appeared to place such emphasis on pro-actively requesting feedback from customers – for example, one provider described a system of customer complaint and feedback forms that were available for customers’ use as they wished. Providers reported that customer feedback had generally been good. Where they had been criticised, providers reported this had been in relation to customers who had requested expensive training provision which providers had not been able to fund. It is noteworthy that TPPMs’ accounts of the complaints they received from customers about providers were more wide-ranging than this (see Section 2.2.3).

3.3.2 Views about performance

Monitoring staff performance

A feature of the contracts for PL Pathways is that a proportion of providers’ funding depends on them achieving certain outcomes for customers. As well as receiving a service fee for taking customers onto their caseloads, providers also receive payment when a customer starts work and if that work is maintained for 26 weeks. This outcome-based contracting model is reflected in a series of targets for provider advisers. Individual providers have targets that relate to their individual contract with DWP. There are also targets at the district level that are monitored by DWP. Overall targets for individual providers, as well as the way targets were arranged for individual provider advisers, appeared to differ between provider organisations. Some set all advisers the same targets, ensuring all worked with a mixture of red, amber and green customers (i.e. those assessed as closest to,

²⁰ Customer feedback on the first provider WFI appeared to serve two functions: first, to ensure the customer had understood the information they had been given and did not have any outstanding questions, and second to evaluate the quality of the WFI.

and farthest away from, work) for parity. Where targets were explicitly discussed, they varied between 2.2 job starts per month to ten job starts over a period of three months. As well as monitoring job starts, one provider also reported setting a target for sustained job outcomes of 58 per cent of all customers placed. Other providers said they had found 'blanket' targets for all staff to be ineffective and set variable targets for individual advisers. For instance, at one provider, advisers who dealt with customers with complex needs were required to achieve eight job outcomes per month and those working with 'green' customers 12 job outcomes per month. This demonstrates the wide variation in targets for advisers within provider organisations and between different providers.

Provider managers described monitoring staff performance against these targets on a monthly basis in review meetings where targets were reviewed and performance-related bonuses or rewards discussed. Where advisers did not meet targets, some managers described temporarily monitoring outcomes for individual advisers on a bi-weekly basis instead. In other provider organisations, new staff who did not meet targets had their probationary periods extended and received extra support from managers to meet targets. As well as monitoring job outcomes, managers also described auditing action plans and using internal auditors to observe WFIs with customers.

Advisers' views about targets and performance

Advisers' views about such performance monitoring and targets were mixed. Some advisers did acknowledge the part targets played in encouraging them to push customers to consider and find work, something they felt some customers needed. However, advisers also highlighted a number of criticisms of the target structure: first, that targets were not realistic or achievable; second, that they do not account for soft outcomes; and, finally, that they encourage practice which appears to be at odds with the purpose of the PL Pathways programme.

Whilst advisers at some provider organisations reported that their individual targets had been revised downwards in recent months, they were still felt to be unrealistic, particularly in the current economic climate, which advisers felt was making it more difficult for them to place customers. Furthermore, advisers were frustrated that the 'soft' outcomes they achieved for customers – such as building their confidence through securing them voluntary work – were not recognised in relation to targets. Advisers felt this was unfair and did not recognise the importance of such soft outcomes for customers' lives, whether or not they translated into employment.

A third criticism of the target-based system for monitoring performance was that it encouraged a focus on customers who were closest to work, at the expense of those with more complex needs. Advisers described spending time with customers in a way that was 'inversely proportional to their needs' – for instance, advisers in one provider organisation described spending a large proportion of their time with job-ready customers in order to secure a job outcome, but much less time with customers far away from the labour market. Advisers experienced this as a tension between supporting customers and meeting their targets.

Managers' views about targets and performance

Provider managers echoed advisers' views that their job outcome targets were difficult to achieve and posited four reasons for this: First, managers of provider organisations that had previously worked only with voluntary customers made comparisons between meeting targets then and now when they were helping a large proportion of mandatory customers. They felt targets had been easier to achieve where caseloads were comprised of voluntary customers and that mandatory customers were more difficult to work with. The volume of referrals from Jobcentre Plus was also cited as a reason that providers were finding it difficult to meet their targets. One provider, as previously mentioned, reported that planned caseloads for advisers at his organisation had tripled, meaning advisers had less time to work with individual customers and this had impacted upon job outcomes. A related issue was that providers were seeing a greater than anticipated number of customers with complex barriers to work, and who needed intensive support. These customers were assessed as being far away from the labour market and were therefore perceived to be more difficult to achieve job outcomes for. Finally, managers felt that the current recession was making it harder for advisers to place customers in work because fewer opportunities, particularly for unskilled work, existed. However, whilst this was raised as a challenge, it did not appear to be a key concern since managers expected that it would also mean other providers were not meeting their targets either.

3.3.3 Suggested improvements

Provider staff suggested a number of improvements to the PL Pathways programme that they felt would improve performance and support customers more effectively. These were to:

- co-locate provider staff in Jobcentre Plus offices (or vice versa) in order to help Jobcentre Plus advisers provide accurate and informative briefings to customers about provider services, ease customer anxiety about what to expect of the provider during the four weeks, and improve working relationships between providers and Jobcentre Plus²¹;
- allow customers to access the services of the alternative provider in Customer Choice areas where they are not satisfied with their first choice;
- revise the screening and assessment process so that customers not appropriate to be mandated to participate in PL Pathways are not referred to provider organisations; and
- review the transfer of information between Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations so that information from Jobcentre Plus is complete and received on time; provide training to provider advisers in interpreting WFHRA forms and information about customers' health conditions.

²¹ Since the field work was completed for this study, Jobcentre Plus have encouraged and rolled-out the use of providers' premises for undertaking the first interview with the Jobcentre Plus adviser. This is now taking place in many of the PL Pathways districts.

These suggestions for improvements are revisited in the final, concluding chapter of this report, which summarises the findings from this study and suggests a number of issues for consideration as the PL Pathways programme is progressed.

3.4 Summary

This chapter aimed to understand provider staff views on the PL Pathways programme through exploring their perceptions and experiences of the customer handover process, the delivery of the programme, and issues relating to managing their performance.

Provider staff felt the **handover process** from Jobcentre Plus was challenging for a number of reasons. First, the volume of referrals from Jobcentre Plus was higher than expected, which provider staff attributed to the current economic climate and the number of inappropriate referrals they received from Jobcentre Plus due to delays in the receipt of the WCA result. These delays resulted in customers being referred to providers who may otherwise have been deferred by Jobcentre Plus or who might not be eligible to participate in Pathways to Work. These challenges were felt to be compounded by provider organisations no longer having the power to waive customers and having limited scope to defer.

The handover process was further complicated by issues relating to the transfer of information, between Jobcentre Plus and customers, and between Jobcentre Plus and providers. These were:

- customers were given insufficient or inaccurate information at the Jobcentre Plus WFI about the services offered by providers;
- the Jobcentre Plus WFI was felt to have emphasised the obligatory nature of the programme over and above the potential benefits of the programme to individuals; and
- the information providers received from Jobcentre Plus in PL Pathways referrals forms and customer action plans lacked detail.

Provider advisers were recruited from a range of backgrounds, but included some staff recruited on the basis of their experience of working with the relevant customer group. Providers offered some form of basic induction to new staff and some advisers received specialist training in working with this specific customer group. Despite the training offered, provider advisers felt that they sometimes lacked formal training on how to work with customers (having to learn 'on the job' as they went along) and/or that they felt ill-equipped to deliver advice to customers on such issues as benefits. Provider organisations that had lost staff early on in the implementation of the programme had done so because staff had found the customer group challenging to work with or because staff were not used to working in a target-driven environment.

The **interventions offered by providers** ranged from support to help customers acquire paid employment (e.g. job search skills) to follow-up support and advice delivered to customers once they were in the labour market. The evidence suggests that providers preferred using in-house provision wherever possible for a number of reasons, including a desire to retain customers to impact positively on targets and to minimise the bureaucracy associated with referring customers to sub-contractors. Sub-contractors were used in the provision of CMP and, in some cases, to undertake WFIs with customers with specific needs.

On the whole, providers reported having **good working relationships** with both sub-contractors and other provider organisations, including in Customer Choice areas. Frequent communication, as well as an appreciation of how the services offered by other providers and sub-contractors complemented their own service provision, helped to facilitate good working relationships between organisations.

Provider advisers had mixed views about the **job outcome targets** they were required to work towards achieving. On the one hand, staff felt that the targets helped to encourage them to motivate customers to enter into paid employment. On the other, there was the view that the targets set were unrealistic, given the current economic climate and the complex barriers to paid employment faced by customers. Advisers also felt that the targets were not set up to recognise the work they did in helping customers achieve 'soft' outcomes, such as building their confidence or changing their orientation to work.

4 The experiences and views of Provider-led Pathways customers

In this final findings chapter, the views of customers taking part in the Provider-led Pathways to Work (PL Pathways) programme are explored. First, customers' orientation to work at the outset of their involvement in the PL Pathways programme are discussed (Section 4.1), their experience of the Jobcentre Plus Work Focused Interview (WFI) (Section 4.2) and the referral to the provider (Section 4.3), as well as their experience and views of the WFIs at the provider and the support offered by the provider (Section 4.4) are described. The chapter also explores customers' experiences of sanctions and deferrals (Section 4.4), as well as their experiences of any ongoing contact with Jobcentre Plus following their referral to the provider (Section 4.5). The chapter concludes with a discussion of customers' views about their future (Section 4.6) and a summary of the main findings (Section 4.7). Throughout it, this chapter draws comparisons with the perspectives of staff at Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations presented in the previous two chapters.

4.1 Customers' orientation towards work

The desire to enter paid employment some time in the future was a recurrent theme throughout the customer interviews for this study. However, prior to their first WFI with the provider organisation, some customers felt closer to the labour market than others – for some, this was closely related to their health condition, although other factors, such as age and caring responsibilities, were also important. Three types of customers emerged from analysis of customers' responses to questions about their feelings about and motivations towards work and presented in Figure 4.1. These reflect the categorisation developed in the report of the findings from the phase 1 study (Nice *et al.*, 2009).

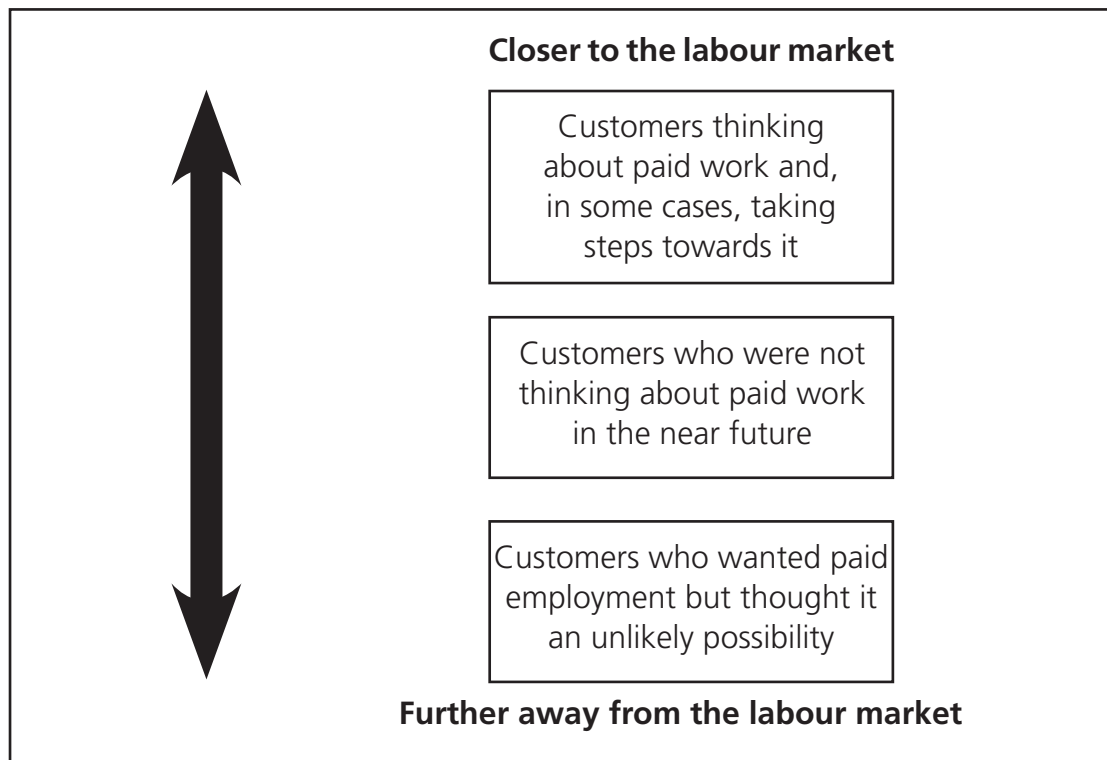
Those closest to the labour market were customers who were keen to find paid employment and had already taken steps towards employment prior to their

first Jobcentre Plus WFI by, for example, conducting job searches or preparing themselves for employment through participating in, or finding out about, training courses. A second group of customers felt that, although their health condition did not permit them to take up paid work in the immediate future, this did not preclude them from joining the labour market at some point in the future. Within this group, customers had different views on whether they would be able to return to their previous job role. Some had contracts of employment which they believed would enable them to return to their role with their previous employer; others felt that their health condition would not allow them to return to their previous employment and therefore, were keen to re-train. The third group of customers were those who seemed to be furthest away from the labour market and who felt that the nature of their health condition, their age and/or caring responsibilities made this an unlikely possibility either in the short- or long-term, even where they expressed a wish to enter paid employment.

At the time of the research interview, customers occupied a range of positions in relation to the labour market and how close they felt to entering employment. The customer sample included people:

- not in employment and in receipt of benefits: these were customers in receipt of Incapacity Benefit (IB) for various lengths of time (ranging from months to years, with some having their IB reinstated after a medical assessment), and people who had moved off IB and were now receiving Jobseeker's Allowance; and
- in employment, working either part- or full-time.

Figure 4.1 Classification of customers based on their orientation towards work



4.2 The WFI at Jobcentre Plus

This section explores customers' experiences of the Jobcentre Plus WFI, paying particular attention to the information customers received about providers, their experience of choosing between providers in Customer Choice districts, and their views about the purpose served by the Jobcentre Plus WFI.

4.2.1 Awareness and understanding of the programme

Customers became aware of the PL Pathways programme via letters from Jobcentre Plus which made it clear that the Jobcentre Plus WFI would include discussion of a programme to help customers prepare for, and/or find, work. A recurrent view amongst customers was, however, that these letters otherwise provided very little information about the Jobcentre Plus WFI, apart from underlining the compulsory nature of attendance. This reportedly led to customers having little idea about why they were attending the WFI at Jobcentre Plus or what it would involve. In some cases, customers had also misunderstood the purpose of the WFI, believing that its purpose was:

- to discuss their IB claim: some customers thought the interview would entail some form of re-assessment of their IB claim, for example, checking that the customer was still eligible for IB and that their health conditions(s) had not changed; or
- only to review the steps customers had taken towards paid employment and the types of work they were capable of doing.

The mention of sanctions in the letter from Jobcentre Plus to the customer introducing the PL Pathways programme was described by some customers as 'threatening'. Although it seemed to cement an understanding of the compulsory nature of the WFI at Jobcentre Plus, it caused a certain degree of anxiety amongst customers who feared losing their benefit entitlement. It also served to foster a view of the programme that emphasised customers' obligation to participate, rather than one that conveyed its potential benefits. Some customers, therefore, appeared to feel resentful towards the programme even before experiencing their first Jobcentre Plus WFI.

4.2.2 Information received about the provider

Customers did not tend to be able to recall receiving any information about the provider organisation prior to the Jobcentre Plus WFI. Those who could recall receiving a leaflet with their letter about the PL Pathways programme could not recall the content of it. Customers did not therefore tend to have any knowledge of the providers prior to the WFI at Jobcentre Plus other than that gleaned from previous personal experience, for example, through previous Jobcentre Plus initiatives in the past or from exploring employment support themselves, or the experiences of others, for example family, friends and other customers.

Customers' main source of information about the provider organisation(s) was, therefore, the Jobcentre Plus WFI, although the level of information they received appeared to vary, a finding that echoes the report of the phase 1 study (Nice *et al.*, 2009). Overall, customers reported having received only very limited information about the provider at the Jobcentre Plus WFI in the form of a leaflet. In some cases this was accompanied by a discussion about the provider with the Jobcentre Plus adviser, although this experience was not consistent across the customer sample and there was a strong sense from customers that they would have liked to hear more about the general role of the provider and the specific types of support that providers could offer. In some cases, customers reported hearing only about the mandatory nature of the provider WFIs and nothing at all about the rationale for the referral or the nature of the support the provider could offer. This chimes with Jobcentre Plus advisers' accounts of providing customers with information about the provider organisations (in Section 2.3). Variation in the level of information received about the provider at the Jobcentre Plus WFI was evident within Jobcentre Plus districts and does not, therefore, appear to indicate differences in the training or approach of specific Jobcentre Plus districts. Rather, it suggests differences in practice at the level of individual Jobcentre Plus advisers in tailoring the content of the WFI for customers.

Customers who felt that they had received clear information about the provider attributed this to the approach of their Jobcentre Plus adviser, whom they felt helped to consolidate their understanding of the provider by:

- being willing to deal with any queries or concerns that they had about being referred to the providers;
- being knowledgeable about the role of provider(s) and sharing information about the support options they could offer; and
- providing written information about the providers that they could take away with them after the Jobcentre Plus WFI.

The importance of the Jobcentre Plus adviser in helping to shape customers' experiences of the Jobcentre Plus WFI will be further explored in the sub-sections that follow.

4.2.3 Experiences and views of provider choice

Customers accessing PL Pathways in areas where two providers were operating did not tend to comment spontaneously on how they felt about having a choice between providers. When prompted, customers tended to express indifference and even those who professed to welcome the choice were unable to explain why it was important to them. This apparent lack of engagement with provider choice may relate to the lack of information customers reported receiving about provider organisations. Customers reported feeling that they were not in a position to make an informed choice between providers for two reasons: First, customers explained that Jobcentre Plus advisers gave little guidance as to which provider organisation

might best meet their needs or understood from Jobcentre Plus advisers that the organisations offered an almost identical service. Whilst it may, anyway, be difficult for customers to differentiate between provider organisations offering a similar range of services, customers felt that a lack of general information or guidance exacerbated this difficulty. There was some acknowledgment amongst customers that advisers may have deliberately avoided giving guidance around the suitability of providers in order not to favour one over another and this reflects the practice of trying to appear impartial described by Jobcentre Plus advisers in Customer Choice areas (see Chapter 2). Customers also found it difficult to digest the written information given to them about the provider quickly enough to make a decision: having sometimes only received this information at the Jobcentre Plus WFI, customers were asked to choose a provider there and then.

It was apparent that customers based their choice of provider on a range of issues that did not necessarily include an appraisal of the services offered by the provider. These were:

- the geographical location and proximity of the provider to the customers' home;
- the transport links serving the provider organisation, including both public transport and the available car parking;
- prior knowledge of the provider based on the customer's own experiences or what they had heard about others' experiences; and,
- the extent to which the information presented by the providers in their leaflets was clear and accessible.

Customers who had been unable to make a choice reported that their Jobcentre Plus adviser had chosen a provider for them using some sort of random allocation system²². It also appeared in both the Customer Choice districts included in the study that in addition to assisting indecisive customers, random allocation tools were being used without customers being offered the chance to choose a provider. This may be because provider choice had been suspended in these districts, although it is not clear from the study findings whether or not this was the case.

4.2.4 Views about the Jobcentre Plus WFI

Customers held mixed views about the Jobcentre Plus WFI and experiences appeared to be mediated by two factors: the clarity of information received about the programme and the provider organisation (discussed above); and the approach of the individual adviser. Customers with positive experiences of the Jobcentre Plus WFI highlighted the importance of being treated in a polite and friendly manner

²² Where customers are unable or unwilling to choose between providers, a Provider Allocation Tool (PAT) is used to select a provider on the customer's behalf. This approach is also used where one provider has exceeded 120 per cent of their total volume share of customers and provider choice is suspended.

by Jobcentre Plus advisers. They also valued 'professionalism': this appeared to comprise punctuality and making sure the WFI neither overran nor felt rushed. Advisers' knowledge of the benefits system in general, the programme and the provider organisation(s), as well as their demonstration of an understanding of issues relating to people with specific needs like theirs was also important. Finally, customers also described the importance of feeling that they were being treated like an individual. They felt this was demonstrated by Jobcentre Plus advisers who:

- were patient and willing to answer customers' questions about the WFI, the providers and the programme and used simple language in doing so;
- were respectful of a customer's health condition, acknowledged its significance in the customer's life and were sensitive in asking health-related questions;
- were non-judgemental about customers' benefit receipt and the efforts customers had made trying to find paid employment;
- were appreciative of the uniqueness of each customer and their circumstances, and who offered advice, support and guidance tailored to those circumstances during the WFI;
- were positive and enthusiastic about customers' chances of gaining paid employment without 'pushing' the programme on them;
- addressed customers by their first name during the WFI.

Criticisms of the Jobcentre Plus WFI revolved around a perceived lack of language support for customers for whom English was a second language, and the mention of sanctions for non-attendance during the interview, which some customers reported made them feel apprehensive about future WFIs at the provider and the programme as a whole.

There is also evidence that customers who felt that they were far removed from the labour market (i.e. the group of customers that wanted paid employment but thought it an unlikely possibility) felt particularly negative about their experiences of the Jobcentre Plus WFI. This may be because such customers, perhaps more than the other groups described in Section 4.1, had not even considered paid employment as a prospect in the foreseeable future due to their health condition(s) and therefore, had deep-seated objections to attending the WFI and, indeed, being mandated to participate in a programme aimed at moving them closer to work.

4.3 The referral process

This chapter will now discuss customers' interactions with the provider organisations. More specifically, this section details customers' understanding and expectations of the provider role prior to referral, their experiences and views of the actual referral as well as the support that they were offered by the provider. This section will conclude with a discussion of customers' experiences of the sanctions and deferral process, as well as their views on the provider premises.

4.3.1 Understanding of the provider role

The requirement to attend further WFIs with the provider

Although customers were not always clear how many provider WFIs they had to attend, the Jobcentre Plus WFI did seem to make it clear to customers that attendance was compulsory and a failure to attend (FTA) would result in a loss of benefits. The compulsory nature of attendance elicited a critical response from customers, regardless of how close they felt to the labour market. Some customers described their resentment at feeling they were being '*pushed*' into attending when they did not feel well enough to be looking for work. In some cases, this was fuelled further by a perception that the compulsory attendance at interviews designed to get them back into employment went against the medical advice of their doctor. There was also a sense of resentment amongst those who felt close to the labour market at being '*threatened*' to attend further WFIs at provider organisations when they would have otherwise welcomed the programme and attended WFIs voluntarily. Indeed, in one instance, a customer had actually contacted the provider organisation prior to the Jobcentre Plus WFI to access help.

In contrast to these feelings about being mandated to attend provider WFIs, customers seemed unconcerned about the referral from Jobcentre Plus to a provider organisation. There were a number of reasons for this: First, some customers were very willing to embrace whatever might help them prepare for and secure paid employment, and they welcomed the dedicated one-to-one support that they expected to receive from provider organisations. Customers who were particularly intent on finding paid employment in the near future felt they were different from other users of Jobcentre Plus services and therefore, welcomed referral elsewhere. Finally, there was also evidence that Jobcentre Plus advisers were providing customers with reassurances about the legitimacy of the providers and stressing the close working relationships they had with Jobcentre Plus. This, coupled with perceived reassurances that customers could return to Jobcentre Plus if their experience with the provider organisation was unsuccessful, also contributed to customers' acceptance of the referral to the provider.

Customers who took issue with being referred from Jobcentre Plus to the provider organisation tended to be those who did not feel close to the labour market (i.e. those not thinking about paid work in the near future and those who thought paid work was an unlikely possibility in Figure 4.1), though not exclusively. The fact that these customers did not feel ready to go back to work, and therefore did not see the immediate value of receiving help around preparing for and securing employment, may account for this response. The specific reasons customers gave for objecting to referral to the provider were:

- they perceived that Jobcentre Plus were '*farming out*' or passing responsibility for customers over to providers;
- they objected to having to access employment services elsewhere – implicit in this was a preference for being able to access all employment-related support services under one roof; and

- they had concerns about finding provider premises and/or anxiety relating to going to a new geographical area (which could be heightened by mental health issues or concerns for personal safety).

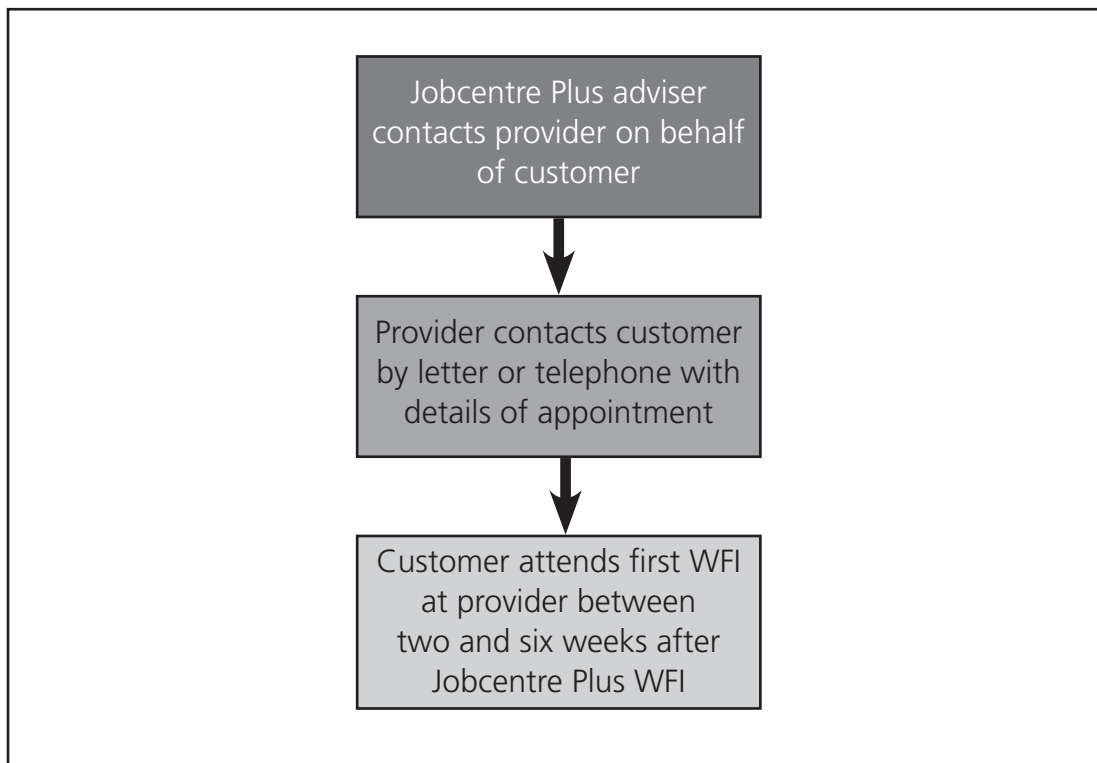
Impressions of the provider prior to the first provider WFI

Customers generally appeared not to have well formed expectations of the provider prior to their first WFI. Where they did express expectations, whether positive or not, it was clear that some of these reflected misunderstandings about the PL Pathways programme generally or about what the provider organisation would offer.

Positive expectations of the provider focused on its ability to help customers prepare for and/or obtain paid employment through the dedicated one-to-one support that they could offer, the potential training opportunities they would provide, as well as help they could offer to find employment opportunities that could accommodate the customer's health condition. Customers, particularly those who did not feel close to the labour market and/or whose views about the programme appeared to be affected by previous negative experiences of accessing support from Jobcentre Plus, held less positive expectations of the provider. Some expressed anxiety that the provider would force the customer back to work in order to move as many people off benefits as possible, even if they were not ready for work. Others questioned the availability and suitability of the promised support, for example they had anticipated that the advertised training may be over-subscribed or that the support on offer would not be geared to 'people like them'. Customers with professional qualifications expressed particular concerns that the support available would be too basic to be useful to someone with their employment history.

4.3.2 Making an appointment with the provider

To conclude the discussion of the customers' experiences of the PL Pathways programme prior to their first WFI at the provider, this sub-section explores customers' experience of the process of being referred to the provider. Figure 4.2 represents customers' typical referral pathway.

Figure 4.2 Customers' experience of the referral process

A number of variations in this referral pathway were, however, evident. Jobcentre Plus advisers made contact with the provider organisation during the Jobcentre Plus WFI in some cases or afterwards in others. Where contact was made with the customer present, customers were invited to suggest or state their preference for an appointment slot. Some customers described making contact with the provider themselves after the Jobcentre Plus WFI using information in the provider leaflet. The length of time between the referral and the first provider WFI also varied: customer estimates of this gap ranged from two to six weeks.

Customers reported few problems with the referral process. They were happy for Jobcentre Plus to make the initial contact with the provider on their behalf and for the provider to arrange the date and time of their appointment, provided customers did not have a preference for a specific slot. Customers were also generally happy with the length of the referral period and felt a gap of two to three weeks between the Jobcentre Plus WFI and the WFI at the provider gave them time to think about the PL Pathways programme and their work options prior to attending the provider WFI. The timing of the first provider WFI only appeared to be problematic when the referral period was less than two weeks, which was not felt to be long enough for customers to reflect on the programme, or longer than four weeks, which customers said was too long and affected their motivation towards the programme.

4.4 Experiences of the provider

Having explored the process of referral, this chapter will now move on to discuss customers' experiences and views of the provider. Specifically, this section will discuss:

- the first WFI with the provider;
- subsequent WFIs;
- sanctions;
- provider location and premises; and,
- the support offered by the provider.

All of the customers in the sample had attended at least one WFI with the provider, with attendance at subsequent WFIs ranging from none²³ to six or more (see Table 1.2 for further details of this attendance).

4.4.1 The first WFI

Customers recalled three components of the first provider WFI. The first was a discussion of the customer's health and employment profile, which included discussion of the customer's employment history, future employment aspirations and feelings about work. There were mixed views about the merits of this discussion at the first WFI. Some customers, having already provided this information at the Jobcentre Plus WFI, felt frustrated at having to provide it again and wondered why these details were not shared between Jobcentre Plus and the provider before they attended the first provider WFI. Others said they preferred to be able to describe themselves in their own words to ensure the provider adviser understood their circumstances.

The other elements of the first provider WFI described by customers were a discussion about the PL Pathways programme and the formulation of an individual action plan. Providers' descriptions of the programme and their organisation included information about why customers were attending the programme and how many WFIs customers had to compulsorily attend, as well as the broad types of support the provider could offer (see Section 4.3).

Customers' experiences of the first provider WFI varied and appeared to depend, in part, on their orientation to work. Those who were not thinking about paid work in the near future or who wanted paid employment but thought it unlikely recalled the first provider WFI less positively than those who were thinking about paid work in the near future. Some felt that the discussion of employment options was not relevant for them and others that they were not offered appropriate support to help them prepare or obtain paid employment, often blaming the adviser's lack of knowledge about their health condition.

²³ Customers attended no further WFIs because they found work shortly after their first WFI, they felt the first WFI was not useful, or they became ineligible for the programme as result of losing their entitlement to IB.

Regardless of customers' orientation to work, positive experiences of the first provider WFI were characterised by a favourable impression of the provider adviser. Customers valued the following adviser attributes:

- detailed knowledge of the PL Pathways programme, the support that their organisation could offer, disability-related employment issues and benefits that could help assist customers in moving towards paid employment;
- treating the customer as an individual by getting to know their health and employment needs without appearing to judge them, and tailoring their advice and support accordingly;
- being friendly, approachable and polite, for example encouraging customers to talk about their concerns during scheduled WFIs, as well as outside of formal WFI time, e.g. during informal telephone conversations that take place between WFIs.

4.4.2 Subsequent WFIs at the provider

Customers recalled that subsequent WFIs were used by provider advisers to explore work, training and self-employment opportunities and help customers develop a CV and complete job applications. For customers who had secured a job interview or employment during the course of their WFIs, subsequent interviews at the provider were used to help them prepare. Advisers not only provided advice and access to financial assistance for customers to purchase work or interview clothes but in some cases accompanied customers to help them choose appropriate outfits.

As for the first provider WFI, customers' orientation towards work appeared to be a critical factor in determining their experience of subsequent provider WFIs. Those who felt farthest away from work tended to give less positive accounts. They felt subsequent WFIs were of limited value for them because their health condition did not permit them to fully take advantage of the support that the WFIs offered. Some described reaching an understanding with their adviser, whether this was implicitly or explicitly acknowledged, that they would attend subsequent WFIs but that little else was expected from them. These customers would attend the mandatory WFIs at the provider but these would be short meetings with limited discussion about support or employment opportunities. This finding is echoed in the report by Hudson *et al.* (2010), which found that customers deemed to be furthest away from the labour market sometimes received a minimum of service from the providers.

It is interesting to note however that, over time, other customers who had considered themselves far away from the labour market, began to appreciate the provider WFIs as opportunities to help them reassess their skills and think about alternative career pathways, as well as to become more knowledgeable about the types of benefits they could receive in order to help them make the transition into paid employment when they were ready.

In addition to customers' work orientation, three further factors that influenced perceptions of subsequent provider WFIs were apparent: continuity between WFIs;

the adviser's approach; and, the timing of the WFIs. Continuity between WFIs was marked by customers seeing the same adviser throughout all of their WFIs – this helped to develop a rapport between customer and the adviser and spared the customer the need to revisit sensitive and personal information with different advisers. Where it was necessary for the customer to see a different adviser, they appreciated that adviser learning about the customer from the previous advisers (thereby avoiding the need for the customer to re-state their circumstances) and honouring any scheduled appointments and support promised by the previous adviser. That subsequent WFIs were built upon the action plans of previous WFIs was also felt to be important. This was felt to give WFIs a sense of purpose and direction and was demonstrated by providers revisiting earlier action plans to assess progress and identify next steps, and providing promised support or advice at or between WFIs.

As for the first provider WFI, the provider adviser played a key role in determining customers' experiences of subsequent WFIs and the same characteristics outlined above were valued. In addition to these, customers also reflected positively on advisers who they perceived had been working for them in-between WFIs, who for example sent customers advertisements for suitable jobs or information about training courses. Customers also acknowledged and appreciated advisers tailoring their advice to the needs of the individual customer, for example by taking into account their health condition when considering which jobs to bring to their attention. The perception that advisers would 'go the extra mile' for customers was also valued by customers – an adviser accompanying a customer to buy work or interview clothes was one example of this.

Finally, the timing of WFIs appeared to influence customers' perceptions of subsequent provider WFIs. In particular, where they were felt to be too far apart – for example, with six week gaps between WFIs – customers complained about feeling disengaged with the provider and feeling unsupported.

4.4.3 Failure to attend and sanctions

Views about sanctions

Customers' views about sanctions varied widely. At one end of this spectrum were customers who generally accepted sanctions for failing to attend WFIs as a necessity. They either accepted sanctions as an integral part of the PL Pathways programme without question or acknowledged that sanctions were a reasonable measure to motivate customers who would otherwise be unwilling to move towards paid employment. Notwithstanding this acceptance, these customers felt that sanctions should be applied sensitively and flexibly to take account of a customer's health and feelings about work. At the other end of this continuum were customers who held the view that sanctions were wholly unnecessary, either because they thought customers would welcome support to move towards work (and therefore be pleased to attend the programme) or, alternatively, because they thought sanctions would cause anxiety amongst a group of customers who are

already vulnerable. There was no evidence of a relationship between customers' views about sanctions and their orientation to work (according to the groups identified in Figure 4.1).

Experiences of sanctions

Within the sample of customers included in this study were people who had missed up to two WFI appointments at the provider for reasons including ill health and inclement weather. In some cases, customers had informed their adviser prior to the appointment being missed, although in other cases customers had failed to attend without informing their adviser. Whilst some customers had received warnings about missing appointments, only one had experienced sanctions. In this case, the customer's benefits were sanctioned and only fully resumed following attendance at the next provider WFIs. This customer felt this had placed them under financial strain although for a limited period of time. The evidence from the customer interviews therefore suggests that customers who missed one WFI were not necessarily being sanctioned and this perhaps reflects the efforts by providers to limit the application of sanctions (discussed in Section 3.2). Customers appreciated this approach and attributed it to the understanding and helpful attitudes of provider advisers, who were happy to reschedule interviews providing that customers contacted them by telephone, even if only at short notice.

4.4.4 Views about provider premises

Customers tended to give favourable reviews of provider premises. Provider offices appeared to be centrally located within Jobcentre Plus districts with good transport links for customers travelling by public transport and car parking. They were described as accessible for customers with mobility difficulties, with ground floor access to offices, lifts and wide entrances. The offices themselves were commonly described as '*comfortable*', '*relaxing*' and '*welcoming*' which customers ascribed to the provision of tea and coffee facilities, comfortable reception and waiting areas, and the fact that providers offices were less busy than Jobcentre Plus offices, making these premises feel less hectic. Contrasts were also made between the customers attending Jobcentre Plus offices and those attending the provider – that provider premises did not appear to work with the same groups of customers as Jobcentre Plus, described by customers as '*undesirable individuals*', also contributed to making provider premises feel more welcoming.

A key feature of customers' positive accounts of the provider's premises was the privacy they afforded to customer interactions with the provider adviser. Privacy was provided by advisers using their own offices to conduct WFIs, and by offering individual interview rooms in offices that were otherwise open-plan. Customers valued this privacy because it enabled them to talk openly about sensitive issues, such as their health or financial situation, without other customers overhearing, as well as helping customers to focus during meetings without the distraction of other conversations taking place around them. Again, this provision compared favourably with customers' experiences of interviews at Jobcentre Plus which they said took place in open-plan spaces.

Negative views about the provider premises focused on issues relating to their location and proximity to local transport and seem to sit at odds with the more favourable views that were discussed previously. This difference in views may reflect individual preferences for travelling to provider premises, as well as variability in the nature of individual provider premises. Where provider premises were some distance from the customer's home, customers complained that they could be difficult to get to, especially compared with a Jobcentre Plus office that was nearby. Customers also drew attention to the financial strain they experienced getting to provider premises – although aware that their travel fare would be reimbursed, some said they lacked the financial means to get to the provider in order to claim their travel fare back. A further criticism of some provider offices concerned their accessibility for customers. This related to a lack of provision for customers with mobility difficulties as well as a lack of childcare facilities for parents attending WFIs. Complicated signing-in procedures or the presence of security personnel, apparently in operations where providers shared premises with other organisations, were also blamed for making provider premises feel overly formal and unwelcoming.

4.4.5 Experiences of provider support

Support offered to customers by providers can be categorised into four types: employment-related support; financial support and advice; emotional support; and support directly related to customers' specific health condition.

Employment-related support was focused on helping prepare customers for paid employment and/or helping them find paid work. It was provided in-house by the provider organisation or externally. Examples of this type of support included:

- job-specific courses, e.g. IT, health and safety;
- courses to develop customers' 'soft skills' e.g. courses on motivation/confidence-building;
- literacy and numeracy courses;
- instruction in how to compile a CV;
- help with job searches or instruction in how to search for jobs;
- contacting potential employers about vacancies or for application forms on customers' behalf;
- help completing job application forms;
- writing job references; and
- training in interview techniques.

Financial support encompassed advice on the benefits customers were currently entitled to, as well as work-related financial assistance from the provider such as financial assistance to buy clothes for job interviews, travel to interviews and,

where this was a requirement for a particular job, paying for customers to have Criminal Records Bureau checks. This financial assistance is similar to the support available through the Adviser Discretion Fund in Jobcentre Plus-led Pathways to Work areas.

Emotional support tended to be informal and took the form of provider advisers offering customers encouragement and motivation around health, employment and financial issues through one-to-one conversations during WFIs or telephone conversations outside the formal WFIs.

Finally, customers also recalled support around their health condition. This included being given contact details for external sources of support or access to the provider's Condition Management Programme (CMP).

Customers who were not thinking about paid work in the near future or who wanted paid employment but thought it unlikely, felt they could not fully exploit some of the support offered to them, for example support to conduct job searches, because the nature of their health condition meant that they were not ready to think about work. These customers also perceived that advisers spent less time with them during their WFIs once it was apparent that they were not ready to enter the labour market in the near future (this reflects the 'cherry picking' approach described by provider advisers in Chapter 3). Other customers also perceived that advisers tailored the level of support for preparing them for paid employment (e.g. access to or funding for courses) according to their perceptions of how close the customer was to moving into work.

Customers' views about the health-related support they were offered were also mixed. Some held the view that the provider had little expertise in health-related employment issues. One commented on the lack of contacts the provider had with disability groups which they felt could have helped them to access support for their condition as well as guidance on how others experiencing the same condition have been able to enter the labour market. Other customers drew attention to what they perceived was limited availability of help around specific health conditions, such as depression, or questioned the effectiveness of the CMP that they had accessed through the provider. Criticisms of the provider's CMP related to being offered only group counselling rather than one-to-one counselling, and the brevity of counselling sessions.

A number of other concerns about the support offered by provider organisations, not limited to customers in specific circumstances, were also raised:

- **access to financial support:** for example, one customer could not access the funds to buy new clothes for an interview because their allocated adviser was not in the office and another complained that they had to temporarily suspend their attendance at a course paid for by the provider because the provider had not organised payment to the training provider;

- **access to appropriate support:** customers, particularly those with professional backgrounds, felt that the kinds of support offered, such as CV help, training in interview skills and basic literacy and numeracy courses, was too basic to meet their needs. They also felt that providers' job searches were insufficiently focused on skilled work;
- **availability of employment-related support:** some customers had reportedly not received the advice and support they felt they had been promised. This included not receiving advice around self-employment opportunities or failing to receive formal training such as a basic IT skills course.

More positive reflections on the support offered by the provider highlighted customers' appreciation of what they perceived was an individualised approach by provider advisers, that is the advice and support offered took account of customers' work aspirations, health condition and skills set. The offer of emotional support, such as general encouragement and the opportunity for customers to talk to advisers outside the WFI about a wide range of issues, was viewed by some customers to be as important as the employment-related support they received. This support helped to boost customers' confidence and reportedly helped them to feel more positive about themselves and their employment prospects.

4.5 Experiences of ongoing contact with Jobcentre Plus

Customers described little or no contact with Jobcentre Plus following their referral to the provider. Customers felt that they had no reason to contact Jobcentre Plus having been formally referred to the provider organisation under the terms of the PL Pathways programme or they preferred the help and support they had received at the provider to that offered by Jobcentre Plus. Customers described contacting Jobcentre Plus to:

- deliver paperwork to support their benefit application (e.g. a doctor's note);
- query a change in benefit, for example, the loss in entitlement to IB;
- enquire about Working Tax Credit;
- access other financial support, for example Return To Work Credit;
- take advantage of access to telephones to make a benefit enquiry or job search facilities.

Customers were not always clear about whether to approach Jobcentre Plus or the provider to access support in certain situations, for example where customers' IB claims were revoked following a medical assessment part-way through the PL Pathways programme, or once customers had completed their mandatory attendance of the five WFIs at the provider organisation. At this point, some customers felt they had no sources of support available to them although others were encouraged by the provider adviser to use the provider following completion of the WFIs and continued to have informal contact with their adviser.

4.6 Customer reflections

To conclude this chapter, this section explores customers' employment situations at the time of the research interview and compares this to their situation prior to their first provider WFI.

4.6.1 Customers' current circumstances

At the point at which customers were interviewed for this study, they fell into one of the following groups:

- customers who were in full- or part-time paid work;
- customers who were thinking about paid work and/or had taken steps towards it;
- customers who were not thinking about paid work in the near future; and,
- customers who wanted paid work but thought it an unlikely possibility.

These categorisations reflect those identified for customers at the outset of the PL Pathways programme with an additional category for those who had moved into work.

Customers who had been thinking about paid work at the outset of the PL Pathways programme were, at the time of the research interview, either still in the same position or felt that paid work, though desirable, was an unlikely possibility. Movement away from work in these cases was explained by increased caring responsibilities or deterioration in health.

Those customers who, prior to their first provider WFI, were not thinking about paid work in the near future occupied a mixture of positions in relation to work at the time of the research interview. Some had moved into paid employment which they attributed to an improvement in their health condition or identifying an alternative career pathway, with the help of their provider adviser, a pathway that could accommodate their health condition. Others had not moved and again attributed this to deteriorating health or increased caring responsibilities.

Customers who fell into the category of wanting paid work but thinking it unlikely prior to the provider WFI appeared to have travelled the greatest distance towards paid employment by the time they were interviewed for this study, with some customers in this group having moved into employment. Again, they attributed this to improvements in their health conditions or the role of the provider adviser in helping them to re-think the types of work they could do. There were however others who had not moved any closer to work.

A similar set of barriers and facilitators to entering paid employment was experienced by all types of customers, and the role of the provider was just one element of this. In addition customers identified that the following had helped them feel to move closer to the labour market:

- improvement in health condition and/or having had time to come to terms with health condition;
- better management of their health condition through, for example, counselling or different medication;
- taking time to rest whilst receiving IB and feeling ready to re-enter the labour market;
- improvement in living circumstances, such as having a permanent place of residence, which meant that they could now focus on work; and
- encouragement and support from family and friends.

In addition to continuation or deterioration of the customers' original health condition(s), including waiting for an NHS operation, customers articulated the following barriers to moving towards work:

- unexpected changes in circumstances, e.g. pregnancy;
- increased caring responsibilities (e.g. for a child or a parent) and the difficulty associated with finding flexible employment to accommodate these;
- perceived age-related factors, e.g. perceiving reluctance amongst employers to employ someone close to retirement age; and
- concerns about how their health condition will affect their 'employability' – unresolved concerns about how potential employers will view or understand their health condition and any need for the customer to take time off work for their health condition.

Notwithstanding access to CMP, there was a general feeling that neither the provider nor Jobcentre Plus could do much to help customers address the above barriers.

4.6.2 Views about the need for ongoing support

Customers who had obtained employment at the time of the research interview generally felt they required little additional support. The support needs they did identify revolved around training to move into a different job role or to move from part-time to full-time work. These customers also wanted help and advice to deal with work-related issues, for example conflict at work. It was not always clear who customers felt should be responsible for delivering this support, although some were being supported in this way by the provider organisation.

Customers who were not in employment but thinking about it for the future focused more on the support that they felt was needed to help them continue to prepare, search and apply for paid employment. This ranged from help with their CV to help searching for jobs that could accommodate customers' health condition(s). It was clear that customers felt there was a role for the provider in providing this support. Some customers were accessing this support from the

provider, even after they had completed their mandatory WFIs. Those who were not continuing to receive support from the provider suggested they should and that this should take place either informally or by extending the series of WFIs for some customers. Customers with specific health conditions who felt the provider organisation was not well-equipped to help them wanted additional support to come from organisations specialising in helping people with their health condition move into work.

4.7 Summary

This chapter set out to explore customers' views and experiences of the PL Pathways programme to include their experiences at Jobcentre Plus (including the referral process) as well as the provider. Exploration of customers' experiences of the provider included presentation of their views about WFIs at the provider organisations, the support offered by providers and taken up by customers, and sanctions.

Customers' experiences of the **Jobcentre Plus WFI** were mixed. Positive experiences were underpinned by the clarity of information from advisers about the PL Pathways programme and about the provider, as well as the feeling that customers were being treated as individuals by advisers.

Customers' **choice of provider organisation** reflected a range of concerns unrelated to an appraisal of the services offered by the providers, including the geographical location of the provider organisation and available transport links. In Customer Choice districts, some customers felt that they had insufficient information or were not given enough guidance by Jobcentre Plus advisers about providers, and therefore felt unable to make an informed choice.

The process of **referral to the provider** appeared unproblematic with some customers reportedly feeling open to embrace '*whatever works*' to help them prepare for employment. Customers were happy that Jobcentre Plus made the initial contact with the provider on their behalf and that providers arranged the WFI appointment. Customers' only frustration was where the referral period was too long, causing them to feel disengaged with the programme, or too short, meaning that customers felt they had insufficient time to prepare for the first provider WFI.

Customers reflected positively on the **location of providers and their premises** highlighting that they were accessible and offered privacy. Criticisms were centred on being referred to a provider that was some distance from their home, or on intimidating security procedures where providers shared offices with other organisations. Comparisons between Jobcentre Plus offices and provider premises tended to reveal a preference for the provider's offices because these offices were seen to afford more privacy and be more comfortable and welcoming than Jobcentre Plus offices.

Positive experiences of the **first provider WFI** were underpinned by a number of factors, including the clarity of information given about the programme and the support offered by the provider. The adviser's approach also played an important part in customers' experience of the WFI, with customers reflecting favourably on advisers who were friendly, knowledgeable and appeared to tailor their approach to working with the customer to their individual circumstances. For subsequent WFIs, customers valued continuity: this was achieved by having the same adviser for every WFI and feeling that each WFI referred back to and built upon the action plan developed at the previous WFI.

Customers in the sample for this study had seldom missed more than one provider WFI and so had little exposure to **sanctions**. Their attitudes towards sanctions ranged from accepting them without question as a necessary incentive to attend the programme, to viewing them as unnecessary and even inappropriate for customers with health conditions. No patterns were evident to suggest that these views were held by customers with different health conditions or with different views about work.

The **support** customers had received from the provider was valued by some, in particular that which was specifically employment-related and the less formal emotional support and support for customers' soft skills, such as motivation and confidence. Some had moved into work since completing the mandatory elements of the PL Pathways programme and customers attributed this, in part at least, to the help provided by the programme. A need for continuing support was identified, not only for those still looking for work or requiring help to move towards employment, but also for customers in work to support them to deal with employment-related issues.

5 Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to provide feedback on the delivery and experience of the Provider-led Pathways to Work (PL Pathways) programme in phase 2 districts from the perspective of provider and Jobcentre Plus staff, as well as customers. This chapter draws together key elements of the discussions of the PL Pathways programme in previous chapters to highlight issues for consideration by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in the ongoing development and delivery of the programme. The chapter is structured around seven key themes. These are:

- division of roles and responsibilities;
- the exchange of information and administrative processes;
- provision of Customer Choice;
- failure to attend (FTA) and sanctions;
- provider staff knowledge and skills;
- meeting customers' needs for support; and
- tensions between job outcomes and providing appropriate support.

Issues for consideration in each of these areas are discussed in turn in the sub-sections of this chapter.

Comparisons between the findings from this study and those from the study of implementation in phase 1 districts (Nice *et al.*, 2009) are made throughout this discussion. The final section of this chapter summarises these comparisons to create a picture of how the management and delivery of the PL Pathways programme has changed since the study of implementation in phase 1 districts.

5.1 Division of roles and responsibilities

One of the key differences between PL Pathways and Jobcentre Plus-led Pathways to Work is that the responsibility for Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) and case management sits with provider staff rather than Jobcentre Plus staff. Previously,

Jobcentre Plus advisers in PL Pathways districts would have dealt with voluntary customers and had a role in referring them to relevant support. This posed challenges for staff at both Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations. Jobcentre Plus advisers lamented the loss of their caseload and their interaction with customers on an ongoing basis, and felt that their skills in working with Pathways customers were not being utilised. They reported feeling less satisfied in their job roles under the PL Pathways programme than previously as a result. Findings from this study also showed that provider organisations had not always accurately anticipated the needs of the customers they would be working with under their contract and some provider advisers felt they lacked the skills to work with the customer group, particularly those with multiple or complex needs.

These findings raise a number of issues for consideration by the Department. The first relates to Jobcentre Plus advisers' feelings about losing their caseloads. Whilst it is not intended under the PL Pathways model that Jobcentre Plus advisers should have continued contact with customers, unless referred back to them for specialist disability services, it is clear that some feedback on customer progress would be welcomed. This need not be a resource-intensive exercise and Provider Engagement Meetings (PEMs) are already providing a useful avenue via which Jobcentre Plus advisers can receive updates about customer progress. The findings from this study suggest that more opportunities to hear about customer successes and general progress would be welcomed by Jobcentre Plus advisers.

To address the challenges faced by provider organisations in working with this group, provider organisations should perhaps be encouraged to revisit the training they provide to their advisers in working with customers with complex needs. There may also be a more prominent role for Jobcentre Plus advisers in providing training or ongoing advice to provider organisations about disability and financial support to help customers move from benefits into work. It is also useful to reflect on the models of delivery employed by different provider organisations, for example in the way some provider organisations have sub-contracted the delivery of WFIs to customers with specific needs to other, specialist organisations. Notwithstanding the black box approach to contract design, there may be merit in encouraging provider organisations to reflect on the knowledge and skills represented in their staff teams and encouraging consideration of different models of programme delivery. In any case, it might be expected that as PL Pathways continues, provider organisations, and individual provider advisers, will build on and consolidate their experiences of working with Pathways customers, making them better equipped to meet the challenges of working with the customer group. A reduction in the volume of customers with very complex needs referred to the provider organisation who are later categorised as belonging in the ESA Support Group can also be expected as the backlog of WCAs is dealt with.

A further issue for consideration regarding the division of roles and responsibilities is the apparent lack of clarity in the differences between those of Third Party Provision Managers (TPPMs) and Contract Managers (CMs). This study, as at phase

1, found that TPPMs felt there was some overlap between the responsibilities of TPPMs and CMs to monitor provider performance, customer feedback and the overall delivery of the contract in Jobcentre Plus districts, although this study cannot shed light on whether or not this perspective is shared by CMs. That this confusion has continued suggests that there may be a need for some more explicit communication to TPPMs from the Department about their respective roles. Consideration of TPPMs' suggestion that they should perform some aspects of the contract management role by virtue of their proximity to the contract both physically and through their frequent contact with both Jobcentre Plus advisers and contracted provider organisations may also be warranted.

5.2 The exchange of information and administrative processes

The findings of this study indicate that some of the challenges relating to the exchange of information identified in the evaluation of the phase 1 districts have persisted. This refers to information provided to the customer about the PL Pathways programme and the role and services available at the provider organisation, and the exchange of information between Jobcentre Plus and the provider organisation during the referral process.

In contrast to the findings of the phase 1 study, this study suggests that customers were well informed about the mandatory nature of the provider WFIs and understood that non-attendance could result in the application of sanctions. However, customers appeared much less knowledgeable about the aims of the PL Pathways programme, the rationale for mandating them to participate in it, and the potential benefits for them of taking part. In particular, customers lacked a good understanding of the role of the provider organisation and the types of support it could offer. This may reflect Jobcentre Plus advisers' own lack of knowledge about the provider offer and, in Customer Choice districts, their attempts to remain impartial in the face of two provider organisations, as well as customers' engagement with the information about the provider and/or the programme more generally. For customers making a choice between providers, the lack of information and guidance from the Jobcentre Plus adviser may lead them to prioritise factors other than the provider offer in making a decision. It is clear then that there is a need to revisit the training that Jobcentre Plus advisers receive about the provider organisation so that they feel better informed, as well as the guidance given to Jobcentre Plus advisers in Customer Choice districts about their role in facilitating a choice between available providers. The advantages of co-locating Jobcentre Plus advisers with the provider organisation, or vice versa, is also worthy of consideration – this model of delivery is being used in some districts and it may be worth gathering specific feedback from staff in these districts about the implications of this for programme delivery.

Challenges in the communication of customer information were also identified in this study. This appeared particularly problematic at the referral of the customer

from Jobcentre Plus to the provider organisation. Provider advisers complained that the PL Pathways referral form and customer action plan sometimes lacked detail about the customer, in particular about their circumstances and the implications of their health condition on their participation in PL Pathways and the type of work they were willing to consider. This issue was further exacerbated by the delays to the receipt of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) which not only meant that customers ineligible for the PL Pathways programme were being referred but also, for those who were referred appropriately, limited information about their health condition was passed to the provider in time for the first provider WFI. A lack of channels for direct communication between Jobcentre Plus advisers and provider advisers about individual customers, as well as provider advisers' perception that contact with Jobcentre Plus advisers was discouraged, meant that provider advisers found it difficult to clarify information prior to their first WFI with the customer. This meant providers had to ask customers to clarify details, something provider advisers felt uncomfortable about and which was frustrating for customers.

This discussion of the transfer of information between Jobcentre Plus and the provider organisation raises two issues. First, the need for timely and detailed information about customers' health conditions is clear and the work currently underway to clear the backlog of WCAs will go some way towards addressing that. Second, a review of the opportunities for advisers at Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations to communicate might help to address the challenges in the exchange of information about individual customers. For example, it would appear that opportunities for provider advisers to feed back on the clarity and content of the customer actions plans prepared by Jobcentre Plus advisers at the Jobcentre Plus WFI would be welcomed.

Finally, a general complaint from provider staff related to the volume of paperwork associated with the PL Pathways programme as a whole. Findings from interviews with TPPMs also indicated some issues around providers failing to complete or return paperwork to Jobcentre Plus. PEMs did appear to provide an opportunity for Jobcentre Plus staff to discuss difficulties associated with paperwork and explain requirements and it may be that as these become more established, difficulties with paperwork will be addressed. Given the desire to reduce this burden, and the challenges associated with the late receipt of customer information, it is perhaps not surprising that both Jobcentre Plus staff and advisers raised the possibility of revisiting channels for the transfer of customer data, arguing that the facility to complete and send paperwork electronically would reduce the burden of paperwork and facilitate it being received in a timely way.

5.3 Provision of Customer Choice

The provision of a choice of provider organisations was introduced during the roll-out of the PL Pathways programme in phase 2 districts. Customer Choice is in place in three of the 16 phase 2 districts. The discussion of the information provided to customers about provider organisations by Jobcentre Plus above has

identified one barrier to customers exploiting the opportunity to choose a provider. Two other barriers to choice were also highlighted by this study. These were:

- the provision of written information about providers only at the Jobcentre Plus WFI and not in advance of the Jobcentre Plus WFI. This did not allow customers sufficient time to digest information and facilitate an informed decision between providers. This is particularly important in the context of the sometimes limited information provided to customers about the provider by Jobcentre Plus advisers at the Jobcentre Plus WFI (described in Section 5.2);
- that providers' offers did not appear to differ widely so that, in the context of no guidance, customers' choice of providers was based on their geographical location or previous experience of providers.

Following the selection of a provider, customers' choice of provider may be said to be further limited by the lack of opportunity afforded to them to switch providers, even if they felt they had made the wrong decision.

Steps to address these barriers to choice could include training for Jobcentre Plus advisers in the services offered by providers and ensuring customers in all Jobcentre Plus districts receive information about providers prior to their Jobcentre Plus WFI.

At a more fundamental level, consideration of the rationale for the provision of Customer Choice may also be appropriate. In the light of findings from this study about the factors customers take into account when choosing a provider – location, previous experience, recommendations of other customers – it may be helpful to reflect on the kind of choice facilitated by the current model and the extent to which the original aims of providing customer choice are being achieved.

5.4 Failure to attend and sanctions

Customers' views about the necessity of sanctions echoed those presented in the report of findings from the phase 1 study: whilst some customers held the view that sanctions were simply an integral part of the programme and a necessary incentive for some customers to participate, others felt they were both unnecessary and inappropriate for customers like them. Of particular interest is the perception of customers that the threat of sanctions could undermine any messages about the benefit of the programme for customers, particularly at the early stages of introducing the programme to customers via the letter from Jobcentre Plus and at the Jobcentre Plus WFI. The need for early communications about the programme to mandatory customers to emphasise both their obligation to participate and the potential benefits of the programme is clear. The findings from discussions with provider staff indicated that whilst the reported use of sanctions was low, providers were beginning to reassess their use of sanctions for FTAs. There was some evidence that providers felt more frequent use of sanctions, and increased severity of sanctions, would consolidate their efforts to reduce FTAs.

5.5 Provider staff knowledge and skills

The findings of this study indicate that the issues raised by the phase 1 study about gaps in provider staff knowledge of the PL Pathways customer group and their skills in working with these customers were still relevant. Both customers and Jobcentre Plus staff raised questions about providers' knowledge of specific health conditions and their understanding of appropriate work-focused activities, job roles and sources of external support for these customers. The recruitment practices of provider managers, who placed value on advisers with commercial experience in recruitment and sales amongst other professions, and the employment histories of provider advisers, goes some way to explaining this. Whilst provider managers and TPPMs acknowledged some advantages to employing provider advisers without experience of the customer group – such as experience of working with performance targets and of placing people in work – it is clear that this did not eliminate the need for provider advisers to have good knowledge of the benefits system, approaches to employment support, and customer health needs. A revision of the training provided to provider advisers would serve to address these issues without losing the advantages gained from employing provider advisers from a range of professional backgrounds.

5.6 Meeting customers' needs for support

There is evidence from this study to suggest that the support provided to customers via the PL Pathways programme was a factor in helping some customers move towards employment, in particular for those customers who felt closer to the labour market at the outset of the programme. However, and as identified in the evaluation of implementation in phase 1 districts, there were also customers who felt that the programme could not accommodate their needs. These were customers who had retained a contract of employment and planned to return to their previous job once their health was sufficiently improved, customers who felt they were far removed from the labour market because of the severity of their health condition(s), and customers from professional backgrounds. Providers should be encouraged to consider the support they offer to customers in these groups and use the flexibility afforded by the black box contract to adjust their provision to ensure these customers' needs are met. A revision of the targets structure to recognise soft outcomes as well as job outcomes (discussed below) might provide an incentive.

The evaluation of implementation in phase 1 districts suggested that there was little evidence to indicate that in-work support was being offered by providers or taken up by customers. In contrast, this study did find evidence that in-work support was on offer from some providers, although it is not a prescribed component of Pathways services. Indeed, customers did not consistently understand that this support was provided to them as part of the PL Pathways programme and some interpreted it as a 'goodwill' gesture on the part of the provider organisation. This understanding of in-work support by customers may explain why other

customers do not take it up: it seems reasonable to assume that if customers do not understand that in-work support is part of the range of services offered by their provider, or they feel it is something the provider adviser is offering over and above their normal workload, they may not ask for it or feel reluctant to take advantage of it. It may, therefore, be helpful for providers to be both more explicit about the in-work support that they offer and to send out a clear message that this in-work support is part of the range of support mechanisms that they offer. This may also serve to allay any fears customers have that the support they receive from the provider will end if they enter employment. If providers are not offering in-work support, perhaps because they see it as less profitable than other services, a re-emphasis to providers of their targets for sustained job outcomes may also provide an incentive for provider advisers to explain and offer in-work support.

5.7 Tensions between job outcomes and providing appropriate support

Providers' experiences of a high volume of customers (related to the delays in the receipt of WCAs), coupled with their job outcome targets, led providers to describe different approaches to providing support to customers seen to be closest to, and furthest away from, the labour market. Provider staff described 'cherry picking' those customers closest to the labour market for intensive, targeted support, whilst customers furthest away from employment were 'parked' and received a lower level of support. This approach was also identified at phase 1. To ensure that support is provided to all PL Pathways customers, provider managers felt that the role of targets for providers in PL Pathways contracts should be revisited and modified to reflect not only tangible job outcomes but also the work of the provider in helping customers move closer to the labour market. This suggestion resonates with the value placed on non-employment-related support by customers. A study of the outcome-based contracting model considers these issues in more depth (Hudson *et al.* 2010).

5.8 Concluding comments

This study aimed to explore experiences of the implementation and delivery of the PL Pathways programme in phase 2 districts. In doing so, it has raised a number of issues for consideration by the Department in the ongoing provision of the programme that may necessitate changes to the design of the programme, contract design or programme delivery.

The preceding discussion has highlighted a number of comparisons between the findings from this study and the findings from the study of implementation in phase 1 districts. Overall, it is clear that not all of the issues suggested to be 'teething' problems at phase 1 have been resolved by the time this research was conducted in phase 2 districts. For example, there are still identified issues relating to the knowledge and skills of provider staff, as well as the provision of information

about the provider organisation to customers by Jobcentre Plus. New teething problems associated with the introduction of Customer Choice are also evident: customers' choice of provider does not always appear to be based on an appraisal of the services the providers offer, and this appears rooted in the approach of Jobcentre Plus advisers to maintaining impartiality between providers. Other problems do, however, appear to have been addressed, at least in part. For instance, there appears to be better understanding of the respective roles of Jobcentre Plus and the provider, and the time taken to refer customers from Jobcentre Plus to the provider appears reduced. Furthermore, there is evidence that new channels of communication such as PEMs are facilitating better communication between Jobcentre Plus offices and provider organisations.

Despite addressing some of these teething problems, there is evidence that some of those challenges identified in the phase 1 study as likely to persist have done so. For instance, the focus on work-ready customers at the expense of those with more complex needs continues. The delays in the receipt of Personal Capability Assessment (PCA) information at phase 1 are echoed in delays to the conduct of WCAs since the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and the impacts of these delays on the appropriate referral of customers to providers, and on Jobcentre Plus and provider staff access to customer information is also ongoing.

Appendix A

Technical appendix

This technical report provides detail about the process for designing the samples, the selection and recruitment of participants, and the conduct of fieldwork and analysis.

Research design and methods

This study employed a design similar to that used for the early implementation study in phase 1 districts (Nice *et al.*, 2009). It comprised fieldwork in six phase 2 Provider-led Pathways to Work (PL Pathways) districts with:

- PL Pathways customers;
- managers of provider organisations and personal advisers from each provider organisation; and
- Third Party Provision Managers (TPPMs) and personal advisers from each Jobcentre Plus district.

Sampling and recruitment

The aims of this study were focused on exploring experiences in phase 2 PL Pathways districts. Of the 16 phase 2 PL Pathways districts, six were selected by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to participate in the research to include diversity in terms of the provider organisation, type of location (e.g. rural, urban), and geographical spread, and to include some districts offering Customer Choice.

Customers

It was originally proposed that this research would include interviews with 36 customers from the six selected districts (eight from each of the two Customer Choice districts – four per provider – and five from each of the remaining four

districts) drawn from DWP administrative data of new Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants referred to the PL Pathways programme between November 2008 and January 2009. In the event however, this sample frame was not available. Instead, a sample of customers was drawn from referrals between July and August 2008 in the six selected districts of new Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants²⁴. An initial sample of 587 customers was drawn and provided to NatCen. Customers for whom only incomplete records were received – those without full contact details – were removed from the sample. Following this process, 192 customers remained in the sample frame across the six districts (the number of samples per district was not evenly distributed and ranged from 24 to 38), a much smaller sample frame than anticipated.

An opt-out exercise was then conducted with this sample frame of customers. Letters drafted by NatCen on behalf of DWP were sent to all customers. These letters provided information about the study, what involvement would entail, and provided customers with the opportunity to opt out using an enclosed reply slip and pre-paid envelope or by calling a freephone telephone number and leaving their details. A copy of this letter can be found in Appendix B. Following the two-week opt-out period, a total of 18 people opted out of further contact about the study. Three people also responded to say they wished to take part.

Customers who had not opted out were then contacted by NatCen's Telephone Unit and invited to hear more about the study and to take part in a short screening questionnaire (see Appendix C for a copy of this). The screening questionnaire sought to establish customers' characteristics according to key sampling criteria – age, gender and health condition. Diversity was sought against these characteristics to facilitate exploration of a range of experiences of PL Pathways in the context of customers with varying needs. It also collected information relating to their current employment status, their contact with Jobcentre Plus and the relevant provider in the past year, and their ethnicity. Customers who fitted the sampling criteria were invited to take part in an interview and, for those who agreed, appointments were arranged during the screening telephone call. Confirmation letters that included further information about the nature of the interview and details about the appointment were sent to participating customers (see Appendix D for a copy of this letter).

Attempts were made to contact all customers in this original sample frame and 17 interviews were conducted. Customers in the remaining sample were unwilling to participate, ineligible, or were not contactable for some reason. Table A.1 provides a breakdown of the outcomes for this sample frame.

²⁴ These were customers making new claims for IB before the introduction of ESA in October 2008.

Table A.1 Recruitment outcomes – first customer sample

	Total across all six districts
Postal opt-outs	
Total opt-out letters sent out	192
Opted out after receiving the invitation letter	18
Opted in after receiving the invitation letter	3
Telephone recruitment	
Contacted by telephone (including those who had actively opted in)	174
Not contactable (incorrect contact details)	45 (37)
Ineligible (had never claimed IB and/or had never visited the relevant provider)	61
Refusals	10

Following this recruitment exercise, it was necessary to draw a further sample of customers in order to reach the target of 36 completed interviews. A further sample of 1,312 customers was provided by DWP from administrative data returns from provider organisations in the six Jobcentre Plus districts included in the study. Once customers for whom incomplete contact details were held were removed from the sample, 1,254 remained (sample per district ranged from 30 to 50). The opt-out process and recruitment exercise described above was conducted again. A further 19 customers were recruited at this stage and this completed the customer sample.

The achieved customer sample included customers from each of the six selected districts and, in districts with a choice of provider, customers with experience of each of the provider organisations. It also included diversity in terms of customers' age, gender and health condition, as well as more limited diversity in work orientation and ethnicity. A breakdown of the achieved customer sample is provided in Table A.2 (a breakdown by Jobcentre Plus district is provided in Table A.3).

Jobcentre Plus and provider staff

The study aimed to speak to managers and personal advisers in provider organisations, and TPPMs and personal advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices to offer different perspectives of the implementation and delivery of the PL Pathways programme in phase 2 districts. Contract Managers (CMs) were not included following indications from the phase 1 study (Nice *et al.*, 2009) that TPPMs work more closely with provider staff on a daily basis and that CMs are relatively more remote.

An initial letter was sent by DWP to managers at the provider organisations and Jobcentre Plus offices in each of the six selected districts. This informed managers about the research and the rationale behind it, and introduced NatCen and PSI as the research contractors (a copy of this letter can be found in Appendix E). DWP then provided NatCen and PSI with contact details for key personnel – provider managers and advisers, and Jobcentre Plus advisers and TPPMs – in the relevant provider organisations and Jobcentre Plus offices. The research team at PSI made

direct contact with the lead contact at the Jobcentre Plus office and managers at the provider organisation(s) in each district who, in turn, recruited advisers to participate in the research. Copies of the letters to Jobcentre Plus lead contacts and provider managers are appended (Appendix F). Leaflets that described the study and what participation would involve were also produced to be passed on to provider and Jobcentre Plus advisers by their managers – copies of these can be found in Appendix G.

Table A.2 Achieved customer sample

Characteristic	Number of customers
Primary sampling criteria	
Gender	
Male	18
Female	18
Age	
18 to 34	11
35 to 54	18
55 and over	7
Health condition	
Physical	19
Mental	9
Physical and mental	8
Secondary sampling criteria	
Ethnicity	
Asian	2
Black	1
Mixed	0
White	33
Other	0
Work orientation	
Working full-time	2
Working part-time	4
Looking for work	2
Unable to work at present	28
Number of WFIs attended at provider*	
1	4
2	5
3	3
4	3
5	10
6 or more	11
Total number of customers	36

*This information was collected during the screening exercise and also during the interview. The figures presented here are taken from the interviews with customers.

Table A.3 Achieved customer sample by district

District	Number of customers interviewed
A	5
B	5
C	5
D	5
E*	8
F*	8
Total	36

* Customer Choice district – two providers operating.

Provider staff from eight provider organisations were involved in this study. These organisations varied by type (with a mixture of charities, private sector businesses and private-public companies), their reach (including those with national and/or regional coverage) and the types of customers they worked with (with some specialising in working with customers with disabilities and others with people not in employment). All the providers were currently working with DWP on projects other than PL Pathways, or had worked with DWP previously on programmes such as Employment Zones or New Deal. For some of the provider organisations, PL Pathways represented their first experience of working with customers who had been mandated to take part in work-related activities (rather than those accessing provider services voluntarily).

A total of eight provider managers, 42 provider advisers, six TPPMs and 24 Jobcentre Plus advisers were included in the study. A breakdown of the achieved Jobcentre Plus and provider staff sample is provided in Table A.4.

Table A.4 Achieved Jobcentre Plus and provider staff sample

District	TPPM	Jobcentre Plus adviser	Provider manager	Provider adviser
A	1 interview	4 interviews	1 interview	1 group discussion
B	1 interview	4 interviews	1 interview	1 group discussion
C	1 interview	4 interviews	1 interview	1 group discussion
D	1 interview	4 interviews	1 interview	1 group discussion
E*	1 interview	4 interviews	2 interviews	2 group discussions
F*	1 interview	4 interviews	2 interviews	2 group discussions
Total	6 interviews	24 interviews	8 interviews	8 group discussions

* Customer Choice district – two providers operating.

Data collection

Customers

In-depth interviews were conducted with customers in order to provide an opportunity to explore individuals' circumstances, experiences and views in detail. Thirty-six interviews were conducted face-to-face. In the main, these were conducted in participants' homes: in some cases, participants requested meeting at a local venue and in these cases interviews were also conducted at local libraries and cafés. Interviews lasted approximately one-and-a-half hours each. Each participant was given £20 as a thank you for their time.

A topic guide was developed by NatCen, in conjunction with DWP, for use in the customer interviews. Interviews focused on their experiences of PL Pathways and their views on the programme as a whole. Topics discussed included their current circumstances, their experiences of the first WFI and referral to the provider, including any element of provider choice where appropriate, their experiences with the provider and their views about the support they received. A copy of the topic guide is appended (Appendix H).

Fieldwork with customers took place between April and September 2009. No fieldwork took place between mid May and early June because of the purdah in place for local elections that took place on 4 June 2009. Only a limited amount of fieldwork took place in June and early July 2009 whilst the second sample of customers was drawn and provided by DWP.

Jobcentre Plus and provider staff

It was originally intended to conduct one-to-one interviews with TPPMs and provider managers, and group discussions with Jobcentre Plus advisers in each district and with provider advisers at each provider organisation. Group discussions rather than interviews were planned with advisers to maximise the number of advisers and the range of experiences included in the study, for example of different customer types, types of support and contact with Jobcentre Plus and any sub-contractors. This approach was taken for the phase 1 implementation study (Nice *et al.*, 2009) and worked well. Fieldwork with provider advisers was undertaken using group discussions, however, it was not possible to convene Jobcentre Plus advisers in this way due to concerns about workload at Jobcentre Plus and the impact of removing multiple staff from their front-line roles at the same time to attend. Instead, Jobcentre Plus advisers were interviewed on a one-to-one basis and four interviews were conducted per Jobcentre Plus office.

Fieldwork with Jobcentre Plus and provider staff took place between April and July 2009. Interviews with TPPMs and provider managers lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours each, interviews with Jobcentre Plus advisers approximately one hour, and group discussions with provider advisers up to two hours each. All interviews and group discussions took place at the relevant Jobcentre Plus or provider offices.

A separate topic guide was developed by NatCen in conjunction with DWP for each of the staff participant groups (copies of these can be found in Appendices I to L).

Discussions with TPPMs focused upon their dealings with providers, monitoring contracts and provider performance, and their views about the experience of customers. Interviews with Jobcentre Plus advisers gathered their experiences of liaising with provider organisations, including referrals and contact post-referral, and their experiences of administering sanctions. Interviews with provider managers focused on their dealings with Jobcentre Plus, their experiences of delivering the Pathways service and experiences of working with sub-contractors or other providers. Group discussions with provider advisers included discussion of their dealings with Jobcentre Plus, their experiences of delivering the Pathways service and of working with sub-contractors or other providers. All staff at Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations were asked about their views on how well the programme is working and what improvements could be made to it.

Analysis

All interviews and the group discussions were digitally recorded with participants' permission and later transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts were analysed using 'Framework', a method developed by the Qualitative Research Unit at NatCen.

The first stage of analysis involves familiarisation with the transcribed data and identification of emerging issues to inform the development of a thematic framework. This is a series of thematic matrices or charts, each chart representing one key theme. The column headings on each theme chart relate to key sub-topics, and the rows to individual respondents. Data from each case is then summarised in the relevant cell. The context of the information is retained and the page of the transcript from which it comes is noted, so that it is possible to return to a transcript to explore a point in more detail or extract text for verbatim quotation. This approach ensures that the analysis is comprehensive and consistent and that links with the verbatim data are retained. Organising the data in this way enables the views, circumstances and experiences of all respondents to be explored within an analytical framework that is both grounded in, and driven by, their own accounts. The thematic charts allow for the full range of views and experiences to be compared and contrasted both across and within cases, and for patterns and themes to be identified and explored.

Appendix B

Customer opt-out letter

Dear

I am writing to ask for your help with some important research which is looking at a government programme for people receiving incapacity benefits. I am getting in touch with you because I understand that you are receiving incapacity benefit and may have had some contact with an organisation called [provider name]. This research is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and will be carried out by an independent research organisation called the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen).

The research aims to find out more about people's experiences of going to Jobcentre Plus and of being referred to [provider name]. The researchers will also want to find out what people think of the help they may have been offered to take steps towards employment. The researchers will be interested to talk to you whatever your current thoughts about work.

In a few weeks, a researcher from NatCen may get in touch with you by telephone to tell you more about the research, answer any questions that you may have and ask whether you would like to take part in an interview. If you are interested in taking part, they will also ask you a few questions about your current circumstances and your contact with [provider name]. Taking part in an interview would involve meeting with a researcher at a convenient place and time. The interview would last no longer than an hour and a half. The researcher will discuss with you any requirements you may have which will make it easier for you to take part.

It is important that you know that taking part is entirely **voluntary** and **will not affect** any benefit you receive or any dealings you have with any government department or agency. Any answers you give will be treated in the **strictest confidence** in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Everyone who does take part will be given £20 as a token of thanks for their help.

I do hope that if contacted by a researcher you do decide to take part in the study. If you **do not** want to take part in this study, please let the researchers know by calling the following FREEPHONE number, 0800 652 0401, and leave your full name and the reference number at the top of this letter. Alternatively, you can contact the researchers directly by email at m.kotecha@natcen.ac.uk or complete the enclosed form and return it to them in the pre-paid envelope provided. If they do not hear from you by Wednesday 8th July 2009, you may be contacted by one of the research team.

If you have any questions or queries about this research, please do not hesitate to get in contact with me by telephone (0114 267 7406) or email (elizabeth.coates@dwp.gsi.gov.uk).

I hope you feel able to take part in this important research.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Coates

Senior Research Officer

Department for Work and Pensions

Appendix C

Customer screening questionnaire

Serial number of respondent _____

INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION:

PLEASE RECORD THE DATE, TIME AND RESULT OF CALL (E.G. NO REPLY, NUMBER NOT IN USE, TOLD TO CALL BACK AFTER 4PM) BELOW:

<i>FIRST call</i>	
<i>SECOND call</i>	
<i>THIRD call</i>	
<i>FOURTH call</i>	

INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION:

PLEASE TICK BOX BELOW IF CUSTOMER DOES NOT WANT TO ANSWER QUESTIONNAIRE:

Refusal

PLEASE TICK BOX BELOW IF AN APPOINTMENT FOR A FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW IS ARRANGED WITH THE CUSTOMER:

Face-to-face interview arranged

Please insert interview details:

Introduction

- My name is [AS APPROPRIATE], and I am calling on behalf of the National Centre for Social Research.
- You should have received a letter from us about a study we are doing in your area, looking at support provided to people receiving Incapacity Benefit.
- We are doing the study for the government, but we are an independent research organisation so are NOT PART of the government or Jobcentre Plus.
- The government is offering a work-related programme for those claiming incapacity-related benefits. The programme involves Jobcentre Plus staff and a number of organisations providing support to people receiving incapacity benefits. Our research is being carried out to understand people's experience of the programme.
- Your name was selected from those who started a claim for incapacity benefit between July and August 2008. Your involvement is completely voluntary and whether you agree or disagree to take part in this research, it will not affect your benefits in any way.
- Taking part would first of all involve answering a few questions about yourself and your involvement in the programme. This information will be kept completely confidential. We will use it to help us make sure we include people in the study in different situations and who have had different experiences of the work-related programme. If for any reason you do not want to answer any of the questions you can just say. Nothing you say will be shared with anyone outside NatCen.
- Do you have any questions you would like to ask me about the study? **IF YES, REFER TO BRIEFING NOTES.**
- Are you happy to answer these questions now? **IF THE CUSTOMER SAYS NO, EXPLAIN THAT IT WILL ONLY TAKE A FEW MINUTES AND THEY DO NOT HAVE TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS THEY DON'T WANT TO. IF THEY STILL SAY NO, ASK THEM IF WE CAN CALL THEM BACK AT A MORE CONVENIENT TIME (RECORD THIS INFORMATION IN THE CALL LOG). IF THEY STILL SAY NO, THANK THEM FOR THEIR TIME AND END THE PHONE CALL**

READ OUT:

Thank you for agreeing to answer a few questions. First of all, can I check some background information with you?

Q1. Have you received Incapacity Benefit (IB) at any point in the last 12 months?

Yes (CONTINUE WITH THE QUESTIONNAIRE)

No (DOUBLE CHECK IF THEY ARE SURE ABOUT THIS. IF THEY ARE, THANK THEM FOR THEIR TIME AND CLOSE INTERVIEW)

*Q2. Next, could I ask whether the health condition for which you claim IB is primarily for:
READ OUT:*

- Physical health condition
- Mental health condition
- Both physical and mental health

*Q3. Could you please tell me which of these age groups you fall into:
READ OUT:*

- 18-34 years old
- 35-54 years old
- 55+ years old

*Q4. Are you currently:
READ OUT:*

- Working full-time
- Working part-time
- Looking for work
- Unable to work at present

Q5. Which of the following broad ethnic groups do you consider yourself to be:

- White
- Black
- Asian
- Mixed
- Other

PLEASE NOTE WHETHER THE RESPONDENT IS:

Male

Female

READ OUT:

Thank you. I'd now like to ask you a few questions about your contact with Job Centre Plus since you have been receiving IB.

Q6. Roughly how many times have you attended a meeting with someone from Jobcentre Plus at their offices in the last 12 months?

READ OUT:

Never

Between 1 and 3 times

On 4 or more occasions

Q7. And have you met with anyone from [name of provider] in the last 12 months?

PLEASE READ OUT THE NAME OF THE PROVIDER(S) FOR THE AREA THE RESPONDENT IS FROM.

[Table with a list of areas and providers]

Yes

No

INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION: FOR AREAS WITH TWO PROVIDERS, PLEASE WRITE IN NAME OF PROVIDER THE CUSTOMER HAS MET WITH HERE:

Q8. And roughly how many times have you attended a meeting with someone from [name of provider] at their offices in the last 12 months?

READ OUT:

Never

Between 1 and 3 times

On 4 or more occasions

READ OUT:

Thank you very much for answering those questions. I'd like to tell you a bit more about the study now.

We would like to re-contact some people to arrange to speak to them in person about their experiences and views of this work-related programme. This would take about 90 minutes of your time and we would meet you at a time and place that suits you. If you do take part in the next stage, you would be given £20 as a thank you for helping us. This money will not affect the benefits you receive.

Q9. Would it be alright if someone from NatCen phones you again to tell you more about that part of the study and to invite you to take part?

Yes *(CONTINUE TO Q10)*

No *(OFFER REASSURANCES AS NECESSARY. IF STILL NO, THANK AND CLOSE THE INTERVIEW).*

Q10. Thanks very much. And when is usually the best time of day to ring you? Is there a good day of the week to ring?

INTERVIEWER: PLEASE FILL IN SUGGESTED DAYS AND TIMES HERE:

READ OUT:

Thank you very much for the help you've given us today. A researcher from NatCen may be in touch with you again about the next stage of the study.

MAKE FINAL REASSURANCES RE CONFIDENTIALITY.

END

Appendix D

Confirmation letter

Dear

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in the research. The details of your interview are:

Date:

Time:

Where:

The discussion will last no longer than 1½ hours. You will be offered a gift of £20 as a thank you for taking part in the research.

The National Centre for Social Research has been asked to carry out this research by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). NatCen is an independent not-for-profit research organisation, specialising in research on social issues. We will be recording the discussion but everything that is said will be treated in complete confidence. We will not pass on to anyone the names of the people who participate, and nothing will be reported in a way that could identify individual participants.

We hope that you will enjoy taking part in the research. If you require any further information please contact me on 020 7549 8514 or at mehul.kotecha@natcen.ac.uk.

I look forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely

Mehul Kotecha
Senior Researcher
Qualitative Research Unit, NatCen

Appendix E

Letter from DWP to Jobcentre Plus and provider leads

Letter to Jobcentre Plus leads From: Lizzie Coates
To: Jobcentre Plus District
Managers, External Relations
Managers and/or Third Party
Provision Managers and/or
Pathways Managers;
DWP Contract Managers

Research Officer
Disability & Work Division
Department for Work & Pensions
Moorfoot, Level 10
Sheffield, S1 4PQ

0114 267 7406
elizabeth.coates@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Date: 28 January 2009

PROVIDER-LED PATHWAYS TO WORK EVALUATION – RESEARCH STUDY
CONCERNING IMPLEMENTATION IN PHASE 2 DISTRICTS

Issue

1. To inform you of forthcoming research concerning the delivery and experience of Provider-Led (PL) Pathways to Work provision in phase 2 districts where the programme has been available since April 2008. This research will involve the participation of customers who have participated in the Pathways programme and staff within Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations responsible for the delivery of the programme.

Timing

2. Interviews with Jobcentre Plus Third Party Provision Managers and Personal Advisers, and interviews and focus groups with provider staff will be conducted over March and April 09. Interviews with Pathways customers will be carried out in April and May 09. All parties will be contacted in advance to ascertain their willingness to participate in the research and to determine their availability.

Action

3. To note contents and inform relevant parties in your district, where necessary. Separate correspondence will be sent to relevant provider organisations to notify them about this research.
4. To support the conduct of this research in your district and/or with your provider organisation.

Background

5. The research concerning the implementation of PL Pathways in phase 2 districts forms part of the on-going evaluation of PL Pathways. The aim of this research is to explore Jobcentre Plus and provider staff and Pathways customers' experiences and views of the operation and impact of PL Pathways. This research is taking place in six districts.
6. The research will be conducted by an external independent research organisation, the National Centre for Social Research, in collaboration with the Policy Studies Institute.
7. **In each district**, the research will consist of interviews with the Jobcentre Plus Third Party Provision Manager and four Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers. The research will also involve interviews with between eight and ten Pathways customers. **In each provider organisation**, the research will involve a focus group with (four to six) Personal Advisers and an interview with the provider manager. In districts where there is a choice of providers, both organisations will be included in the research.
8. Clearance for the conduct of this research has been granted by Operational Delivery Support Division in Jobcentre Plus (ref G08.12.56). Clearance has also already been granted by relevant Jobcentre Plus District Managers.
9. If you require any further information about this work, or have any questions, please contact Lizzie Coates, Disability and Work Division, DWP by email (elizabeth.coates@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) or telephone 0114 267 7406.

Regards

Lizzie Coates

Letter to Provider leads

To: Pathways Provider managers From: **Lizzie Coates**
Research Officer
Disability & Work Division
Department for Work & Pensions
Moorfoot, Level 10
Sheffield, S1 4PQ

0114 267 7406
elizabeth.coates@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Date: 02 February 2009

PROVIDER-LED PATHWAYS TO WORK EVALUATION – RESEARCH STUDY
CONCERNING IMPLEMENTATION IN PHASE 2 DISTRICTS

Issue

10. To inform you of forthcoming research concerning the delivery and experience of Provider-Led (PL) Pathways to Work provision in phase 2 districts where the programme has been available since April 2008. This research will involve the participation of customers who have participated in the Pathways programme and staff within Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations responsible for the delivery of the programme.

Timing

11. Interviews with Jobcentre Plus Third Party Provision Managers and Personal Advisers, and interviews and focus groups with provider staff will be conducted over March and April 2009. Interviews with Pathways customers will be carried out in April and May 2009. All parties will be contacted in advance to ascertain their willingness to participate in the research and to determine their availability.

Action

12. To note contents and inform relevant parties in your organisation. Separate correspondence has been sent to Jobcentre Plus in your district.
13. To support the conduct of this research in your organisation.

Background

14. The research concerning the implementation of PL Pathways in phase 2 districts forms part of the on-going evaluation of PL Pathways. The aim of this research is to explore Jobcentre Plus and provider staff and Pathways customers' experiences and views of the operation and impact of PL Pathways. This research is taking place in six districts.

15. The research will be conducted by an external independent research organisation, the National Centre for Social Research, in collaboration with the Policy Studies Institute.
16. **In each district**, the research will consist of interviews with the Jobcentre Plus Third Party Provision Manager and four Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers. The research will also involve interviews with between eight and ten Pathways customers. **In each provider organisation**, the research will involve a focus group with (four to six) Personal Advisers and an interview with the provider manager. In districts where there is a choice of providers, both organisations will be included in the research.
17. Clearance for the conduct of this research has been granted by Operational Delivery Support Division in Jobcentre Plus (ref G08.12.56). Clearance has also already been granted by relevant Jobcentre Plus District Managers. This research has been developed in collaboration with officials from Commercial Employment Provision, DWP.
18. If you require any further information about this work, or have any questions, please contact Lizzie Coates, Disability and Work Division, DWP by email (elizabeth.coates@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) or telephone 0114 267 7406.

Regards

Lizzie Coates

Appendix F

Letters to Jobcentre Plus lead contact and provider managers

Dear [THIRD PARTY PROVIDER MANAGER]

I am writing to request your help with the **evaluation of the Provider-led (PL) Pathways to Work programme in phase 2 districts**.

In late 2007, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned research in phase 1 PL Pathways districts to provide early feedback on experiences of the programme.

As part of the ongoing evaluation of PL Pathways, DWP have commissioned further research in phase 2 districts. As with the research in phase 1 districts, this will involve exploring the experiences of customers, provider staff and Jobcentre Plus staff. This research will contribute to informing ongoing policy development on PL Pathways. The study is being carried out by two external research organisations: the National Centre for Social Research and the Policy Studies Institute.

'[Enter research area]' has been selected by DWP as a research area for this part of the study. We would like to conduct a one-to-one interview with you as the Third Party Provision Manager for this district. We expect that the interview would last no longer than an hour and a half and will provide valuable learning about delivering PL Pathways and any implementation issues that have arisen. We were given your contact details by the DWP project manager for the PL Pathways evaluation – Elizabeth Coates. She can be contacted by email at elizabeth.coates@dwp.gsi.gov.uk, or by telephone on 0114 267 7406.

We would also like your help to recruit four Jobcentre Plus Pathways personal advisers for individual interviews. The interviews with personal advisers will last

approximately an hour. Please find leaflets enclosed providing more detail on the research, which can be distributed to personal advisers.

A researcher will be in touch soon to talk to you about the study and to check that you are willing and able to take part in this interview. If so, they will discuss arrangements for identifying personal advisers and making appointments for interviews. If you would like to pass on the responsibility for this task to someone else, please do let the researcher know.

If you would like more information about this study please do not hesitate to contact me on '[enter tel number]', or by email at '[enter email address]' .

Yours sincerely,

Dear [PROVIDER MANAGER]

I am writing to request your help with an **evaluation of the Provider-led (PL) Pathways to Work programme in phase 2 districts.**

In late 2007, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned research in phase 1 PL Pathways districts in order to provide early feedback on experiences of the programme.

As part of the ongoing evaluation of PL Pathways, DWP have commissioned further research in phase 2 districts. As with the research in phase 1 districts, this will involve exploring the experiences of customers, provider staff and Jobcentre Plus staff. This research will contribute to informing ongoing policy development on PL Pathways. The study is being carried out by two external research organisations: the National Centre for Social Research and the Policy Studies Institute.

'[Enter research area]' has been selected by DWP as a research area for this part of the study. We would like to conduct a one-to-one interview with a member of the managerial team (possibly you, if this is appropriate) within your organisation. The manager interview is designed to last no longer than an hour and a half. We were given your contact details by the DWP project manager for the PL Pathways evaluation – Elizabeth Coates. She can be contacted by email at elizabeth.coates@dwp.gsi.gov.uk, or by telephone on 0114 267 7406.

We would also like your help to recruit between four and six members of frontline staff who are involved in delivering the Pathways programme for a group discussion. The group session is designed to last no longer than two hours. We expect that these discussions will provide valuable learning about the support you provide to incapacity benefits recipients, how you work with Jobcentre Plus and implementation issues associated with PL Pathways. Please find leaflets enclosed providing more detail on the research, which can be distributed to front-line staff.

A researcher will be in touch soon to talk to you about the study and to check that you are willing and able to take part. If so, they will discuss arrangements for a researcher to visit the organisation to conduct the interview and group discussion. It would be most convenient for us if we could hold the group discussion and manager interview on the same day, at the organisation premises, however we will be as flexible as possible to match your availability.

If you would like more information about this study please do not hesitate to contact me on '[enter tel number]', or by email at '[enter email address]'.

Yours sincerely,

[Researcher name]

Appendix G

Leaflets for provider and Jobcentre Plus staff

Provider staff leaflet

Evaluation of Provider-Led Pathways in Phase 2 Districts

Background

As part of the ongoing evaluation of Provider-led (PL) Pathways to Work, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have commissioned the National Centre for Social Research and the Policy Studies Institute to conduct research in Phase 2 Pathways districts. The research will include interviews and group discussions with provider staff, Jobcentre Plus staff and customers.

Why have you been given this information leaflet?

'[Enter research area]' has been selected by DWP as a research area for this study. As part of this research, we would like to conduct one-to-one interviews with managerial staff, and group discussions with between four and six front-line members of staff at provider organisations. You have been identified as someone that we would like to invite to a group discussion.

What participation in the research would involve?

The group discussion will last up to two hours. The researcher will ask the group about experiences of liaising with Jobcentre Plus, delivering Pathways and working with customers. A researcher will make arrangements with the managerial team at your organisation to come to the premises at a date and time that is convenient. Participation in the research is voluntary and you can opt out at any stage.

Who will see the findings and hear your views?

All information gathered during the interviews and group discussions will remain confidential and be treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act. We will not discuss your actions, views or opinions with anyone outside of the research team, including your manager. A report will be produced at the end of the research that will include your views and experiences along with those of other people who took part in the research. However, no names or other information will be used that would allow someone else to identify you. The report will be available on the DWP website after publication.

What will happen next?

If you would be happy to take part in the group discussion, please tell your manager. When between four and six front-line members of staff have agreed to take part, we will agree a convenient time and date through your manager to conduct the group.

If you do not wish to take part, you do not need to do anything.

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions about the research please contact '[enter name and contact details]'

Jobcentre Plus STAFF LEAFLET

Evaluation of Provider-Led Pathways in Phase 2 Districts

Background

As part of the ongoing evaluation of Provider-led (PL) Pathways to Work, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have commissioned the National Centre for Social Research and the Policy Studies Institute to conduct research in Phase 2 Pathways districts. The research will include interviews and group discussions with provider and Jobcentre Plus staff, as well as interviews with customers.

Why have you been given this leaflet?

'[Enter research area]' has been selected by DWP as a research area for this study. As part of this research, we would like to conduct one-to-one interviews with the Third Party Provision Manager (TPPM) and a small number of personal advisers from Jobcentre Plus offices in the district. You have been identified as someone that we would like to invite to participate in an interview.

What participation in the research would involve?

The interview will last about an hour and the researcher will visit you at your office. The researcher will ask you about your experiences of liaison with Pathways providers, delivering Pathways and working with customers. The interview with

the researcher will take place at a time that is convenient for you. Participation in the research is voluntary and you can choose to opt out at any stage.

Who will see the findings and hear your views?

All information gathered during the interviews will remain confidential and be treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act. We will not discuss your actions, views or opinions with anyone outside of the research team, including your manager. A report will be produced at the end of the research that will include your views and experiences along with those of other people who took part in the research. However, no names or other information will be used that would allow someone else to identify you. The report will be available on the DWP website after publication.

What will happen next?

If you would be happy to take part in an interview, please tell your manager. A member of the research team will then get in touch with you to arrange an interview appointment.

If you do not wish to take part, you do not need to do anything.

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions about the research please contact '[enter name and contact details]'

Appendix H

Customer topic guide

1. Interviewer's introduction

- **Introducing NatCen & Self:** Explain that this research is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, and that NatCen is an independent organisation.
- **Introduce study:** The aim of the research is to explore their views on a work-related scheme introduced by the government for those claiming incapacity. The scheme involves Jobcentre Plus staff and a number of organisations providing support to people on incapacity benefits. Some staff from these organisations and Jobcentre Plus will also take part in interviews and give their views on how the scheme is working.
- **Interview discussion:** Our discussion today will concentrate on:
 - Your experiences of contact with Jobcentre Plus
 - Your experiences of contact with [provider]
 - Any support or services you were offered and received
 - Your overall reflections on what has been helpful, what has not been so helpful and any improvements that could be made.
- **About the interview:**
 - The discussion will take *between 60 and 90 minutes*.
 - Ask for permission to use *recorder*. Explain that recordings will be typed up professionally and seen only by the research team.
 - *Explain confidentiality* and how material will be used – a report for DWP in which their views are included, but they will be anonymous.
 - Taking part is completely *voluntary*.
 - Check *informed consent*. Ask them to sign the consent form.

If asked what we mean by 'complying with the Data Protection Act' explain that we will:

- *keep all data in a secure environment;*
- *allow only members of the research team (including administrators and transcribers) access to the data;*
- *keep the data only as long as is necessary for the purposes of the research and then destroy it.*
- Give the participant the £20 gift and explain that this is a token of thanks for their participation. Ask them to sign and return the receipt.

1. Background

Aim: To elicit background information relating to the customer

- **Household composition**
- **Age**
- **Current employment** situation

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are they currently employed? - If so, what do they do? - Mode of employment (paid, unpaid or undertaking training) - Type of employment (part-time/full-time)

- **Date** of IB claim

[Note: We anticipate that the customer would have started to claim IB in July or August 08]

- Reasons for claiming IB: brief details of their **health conditions**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What were the specific health conditions that led them to claim IB? - How long have they had this health condition? - How do they feel these conditions affected their ability to work

2. Experiences of Jobcentre Plus, the initial Work Focused Interview (WFI) and referral to the provider

Aim: to explore the customer's experiences of the Jobcentre Plus, with particular reference to the initial WFI and the process of referral to the provider organisation

2.1 Experiences of the WFI interview and the referral

- Explore the customer experience of the **Work Focused Interview** at Jobcentre Plus (e.g. with a personal adviser) and basic details of this interview

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expectations around the interview - Initial understanding of what the interviews entail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did they attend an initial interview? - When and where did the interview take place?

- What were their **thoughts about work** at this time?

- Explore the customer's **overall experience** of the interview

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How useful did they find the interview? Why did they find the interview useful/not useful? - Did the interview match their expectations of it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What did they think of the interview? - Their views on the personal adviser they spoke to - How did they feel at the end of the interview – e.g. positive/enthusiastic or negative/confused – and why?

- Explore the **advice they received about [provider(s)]** during the interview

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any mention of [provider(s)]? - What were they told about [provider(s)]? - Which provider[s] did they get advice about? - In areas where there are two providers, check whether customer has received advice about both providers. - Whether this was the first time they heard about these [provider(s)]? - Their first impressions of what the [provider(s)] could offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any information and advice they received about [provider(s)]

- Explore how the customer **felt about being referred** to [provider(s)], rather than working with the Jobcentre Plus
- *In areas where there are two providers*, explore the **information** the customer was given about the providers and their **experience of selecting** a provider

[Please note: this question only relates to areas where two providers exist]

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did they select between the two providers? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was information helpful? • What input did they get from the adviser? • What other sources of information did they use to make a choice? • How did the adviser present the choices? • What other factors determined their choice of provider? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Were they informed that more than one provider exists in the area? - The nature of the information they were given about each provider - Their evaluation of the experience of choosing providers (empowering? confusing?)

- Explore the **customer’s experience of being referred**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How was an appointment with [provider] made? – Any problems with referral from Jobcentre Plus to [provider]

3. Contact with provider organisation

Aim: to explore the customer’s experiences of the provider organisation

3.1 Initial contact with provider and experiences of their first visit

- Explore the **contact** that they have had with staff at [provider]

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of contacts/interviews – Who they have met with (<i>NB. May be more than one adviser/broker/trainer/practitioner</i>) – When was their first contact? – When was their last contact?

- Take the client through their **first visit** to [provider]

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explore what their thoughts about work were at this stage – Explore whether there were any changes in health or other circumstances in the period between the customer being referred and their first visit to the provider. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – When did the first visit take place? – How long did they have to wait from referral to the first visit? – What happened during the visit?

- Explore customer’s views on the [provider’s] **location and premises**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Views on the rooms/environment that interview took place – Accessibility of location

- Explore the specific **types of support and information** the customer received on the **first visit**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Did they take up the support that was made available to them? (Why?/Why not?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Did they receive any information and/or advice? – What kinds of support were made available to them?

- Invite customers to **evaluate their first contact/interview** with [provider]

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did their first visit match with their expectations (e.g. Jobcentre Plus adviser might have given an indication of what might be available – was this offered?) What did match their expectations? (Why?) What did not match their expectations? (Why?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What did they think about the person/people they spoke to? Usefulness and relevance of the support given to their situation Usefulness and relevance of the advice/information given to their situation How did they feel at the end of the visit/interview? (E.g. positive/enthusiastic or negative/confused?) Why did they feel this way?

3.2 Ongoing contact with provider, Jobcentre Plus and exploring any experiences of sanctions

- Explore whether they have had to attend any **further interviews** with staff at [provider]?

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did their ongoing contact differ from their first contact? (How so? Why?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When? Frequency of contact What was discussed What support offered and whether taken up Usefulness and match with expectations Expectations about further interviews

- Explore whether the customer **missed any interviews** and, if so, their experiences of the consequences of this

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any threat of sanctions? Any actual imposition of sanctions? If so, their views about being sanctioned? If so, their views about the impact that the sanctions had on them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why did they miss the interview? What happened when they missed interviews?

- Explore whether they have had any **other reasons for visiting [provider]** or being in contact with staff?

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When? Frequency of contact What was discussed What support offered and whether taken up Usefulness and match with expectations Expectations about further interviews How did their visit fit with their WFI?

- Explore if they have had any **other contact with staff at Jobcentre Plus** since making their claim for incapacity benefits

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reason for contact - When contact made? - Frequency of contact - What was discussed? - What support offered and whether taken up? - Usefulness of support

4. Support received

Aim: This section explores the support received by the customer from the provider

- Explore whether the customer has **received any support or services** through contact with **[provider]**.

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What kinds of support received? (e.g. CMP & Job Brokers) - <i>For each kind of support:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Who</i> provided this support? (name of organisation) • <i>What</i> did it involve? (delivery format, frequency of contact, duration) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views about support received: • <i>Usefulness</i> and relevance • Match with <i>expectations</i> • Views about <i>staff</i> • How <i>helpful</i> was this support in preparing for work? • Did they feel that the different types of support received <i>complimented</i> one another

- Which forms of support did *they* **particularly relate to/engage** with and why.

5. Overall reflections

Aim: to capture the customer's overall reflections on the support provided by the provider as well as Jobcentre Plus, as well as their current thoughts on work and the support they currently need

5.1 Overall views on the support they have received

- How would they **sum up your experiences of [provider]**? (E.g. mostly good, mixed, not so good ...)

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What were the positives? (Why?) – What were the negatives? (Why?)

- Explore whether there has been **anything or anyone that has been especially helpful** to customer since they made your claim for incapacity benefits

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Helpful in terms of : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preparing for work • improving health and wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Helpfulness of contact with Jobcentre Plus – Helpfulness of [provider] – How have they been helpful? – How does [provider] compare with Jobcentre Plus?

- Explore whether there was anything that was **not so helpful**?

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What could be done differently and how? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Regarding Jobcentre Plus – Regarding [provider] – Any other organisations

- Explore whether the customer has any **outstanding appointments** with Jobcentre Plus or provider

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The nature of appointment(s) – Their expectations about appoint(s) – Their feelings about appointment(s)

5.2 Current thoughts on work, current experiences of work and support needs

- Explore their **current thoughts** about work?

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Willingness to work – Feeling able to work – Views on the types of work they would like to do 	

If the participant has since moved into voluntary or paid work, or training:

- **What was significant in helping them** to move into work/training

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would they have moved into voluntary work, paid work or training if they had not had any contact with [provider]? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - List factors which were significant - Why were they significant?

If the participant has not moved into voluntary or paid work, or training:

- **What do they feel is currently stopping them from** moving into work/training?

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - List factors which were significant - Why were they significant?

- What **help would the customer like to receive** at the moment?

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Type of support they require - Why they feel this support to be important - Who should provide this support

Thank you very much.

- Check if they have further questions.
- Check if they are happy for their views to be included in our work
- Reassure re confidentiality and (if appropriate) give more information about reporting.

Appendix I

TPPM topic guide

1. Facilitator's introduction

- Explain that this research is funded by the **Department for Work and Pensions**, and is one part of their overall evaluation of Provider-led Pathways to Work.
- The research units conducting the work are all **independent organisations**.
- This discussion **is part of ongoing research** to look at how Provider Led Pathways has been implemented and is working. Researchers will be meeting with a number of Jobcentre Plus staff, provider organisation staff and Pathways customers from various new Provider Led districts.
- Our discussion today will concentrate on:
 - Dealings with **providers**
 - **Monitoring contracts and provider performance**
 - The experience of **Incapacity Benefit recipients**
 - **Overall reflections** on what is working well, what is not working so well and improvements that could be made.
- The discussion will take around an **hour and a half**.
- **Ask for permission to use recorder**. Explain that recordings will be typed up professionally and seen only by the research team.
- Explain **confidentiality and how material will be used** – a report for DWP in which their views are included, but they will be anonymous.
- Taking part is completely **voluntary**.

Check informed consent.

If asked what we mean by 'complying with the Data Protection Act' explain that we will:

- *keep all data in a secure environment;*
 - *allow only members of the research team (including administrators and transcribers) access to the data;*
 - *keep the data only as long as is necessary for the purposes of the research and then destroy it.*
-

2. Background information

Aim: to understand the participant’s role, with specific reference to the PLP programme.

- **Current role** with Jobcentre Plus

Prompt	Probe
- How long they have been in the role	- Nature of role

Which PLP(s) do they have contact with? How long have they had contact?

- What **proportion of their work** is taken up with [**NAME OF PROVIDER**]? *Where there are two providers, does the proportion of time taken differ between each provider?*

3. The nature of contracted provision

Aim: To explore the nature and experience of managing the contract(s) with provider(s)

- Explore what [PROVIDER/s] is **contracted to deliver**
Where there are two providers, probe for each provider (Researchers should ensure that they understand what ‘should’ be provided as part of the contract for Pathways (see section 2.2. of research specification)

Prompt	Probe
- What outcome measures/targets are set for contractor? - How are these monitored?	- The nature of the services contracted

- Explore their assessment of the **experience of working** with [PROVIDER/S]
Where there are two providers, probe for each provider.

Prompt	Probe
- Has experience differed from expectations? (Why? And how so?) - Is volume of work as expected? (If not, why do they think this is and what have been the implications of this?) - What feedback has been received from Jobcentre Plus staff about experiences of working with providers?	- What has been positive working with the contractors? (Why?) - What has been negative? (Why?)

4. Managing Pathways contracts

Aim: To understand how the work of providers is monitored

Explore how the work of [PROVIDER/S] IS scrutinised

Where there are two providers, probe for each provider.

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who are the contacts at the provider organisations? - What, if any, management information is used? What does this cover (age, gender, ethnicity, different health conditions, vulnerable groups, etc)? - Are there contract reviews? At what intervals do they take place? - Have you held or participated in Provider Engagement Meetings? If so, has this helped? - Are there any 'quality standards' used? What are these? - How is 'value for money assessed'? - Nature/frequency of the contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature/frequency of contact with providers - Discuss the monitoring of customer referrals - Discuss the monitoring of waivers/deferrals - Discuss the monitoring of 'fails to attends' - How is the role of the provider in the sanctions regime monitored?

5. Monitoring 'user' experience

Aim: To establish the TPPM role in the monitoring of customers' experiences

- Establish what their **role is in monitoring** 'user' experience.

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is their personal role in the complaints procedure? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the complaints/evaluation procedures in place? - How do these facilitate learning for Jobcentre Plus and providers? - What has been learned from these so far?

6. Relationship with the Contract Manager

Aim: to explore the working relations with the Contract Manager

- Explore their views on the working relations they have with the **contract manager**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequency of contact with CMs - Perception of nature of relationship with CMs - What works well and why? - What does not work well and why? - How can challenges to working relations be addressed?

7. Overall reflections

Aim: to explore overall perceptions of the PLP programme and their role within it

- **Are there differences in managing PLP contracts compared with other Jobcentre Plus contracts?**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If not, why? - If so, what are these differences?

- **What has been changed since the start of the contract?**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has there been 'continuously improving provision'? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has anything changed? If not, why not? - If so, why so? And what has changed? - How did the change come about? - Have you used the DWP Quality Framework approach to facilitate this process?

- Establish what they feel is **working well** in the PLP

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why is it working well? - To whose benefit?

- Establish what they feel is **not working** well what **improvements** could be made

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is not working well? - Why? - What can be done to address these challenges?

- *In areas where there are two providers, their views on working with multiple service providers*

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do they manage working with two providers? - What difference does having multiple providers make? For provider manager, for other provider staff, for customers.

- Explore their **development plans for PLP contracts/relationships** with providers in the future

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of Local Action Plans or Provider Engagement Meetings in this process? - Use of DWP Quality Framework in this process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What plans do they have? - What do they hope to achieve with these plans?

- Thank participants for their time and thoughts.
- Check if they have further questions.
- Reassure re confidentiality and (if appropriate) give more information about reporting.

Appendix J

Jobcentre Plus adviser topic guide

1. Facilitator's introduction

- Explain that this research is funded by the **Department for Work and Pensions**, and is one part of their overall evaluation of Provider Led Pathways to Work.
- The research units conducting the work are all **independent organisations**.
- This discussion **is part of ongoing research** to look at how Provider Led Pathways has been implemented and is working. Researchers will be meeting with a number of Jobcentre Plus staff, provider organisation staff and Pathways customers from various new Provider Led districts.
- Our discussion today will concentrate on:
 - Experiences of liaison with provider organisations, including:
 - Experiences of **hand-offs** to the provider organisation
 - Any **ongoing contact** with customers and provider staff after referral
 - Experiences of **administering sanctions**
 - **Overall reflections** on what is working well, what is not working so well and improvements that could be made.
- The discussion will take around **about an hour**.
- **Ask for permission to use recorder**. Explain that recordings will be typed up professionally and seen only by the research team.
- Explain **confidentiality and how material will be used** – a report for DWP in which their views are included, but they will be anonymous.
- Taking part is completely **voluntary**.
- Check informed consent.

If asked what we mean by 'complying with the Data Protection Act' explain that we will:

- *keep all data in a secure environment;*
 - *allow only members of the research team (including administrators and transcribers) access to the data;*
 - *keep the data only as long as is necessary for the purposes of the research and then destroy it.*
-

2. Background information

Aim: to understand the participants' role

- What their **current role(s)** at Jobcentre Plus is
- Overview role in relation to PLP programme, responsibilities

3. Experience of hand-offs

Aim: to explore the processes for and experiences of referring customers to providers

- Explore what happens during the **Work Focused Interview** with customers

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do they tell customers about the provider and what they will do? - Where there are two providers, how do they guide customers about to make a choice between providers? - Experience of deferring/waiving WFI - Any differences in WFIs for volunteer customers and mandatory customers - Any differences in practice in relation to different customer groups? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is discussed? - What is decided? - Where does this take place? In Jobcentre Plus or provider premises? (What are the relative benefits of either location?)

- Explore **how referrals** to provider organisations are actually made

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their views and comments on the timing of the referrals - How liaison occurs with providers (e.g. phone, email, pre-set forms) - How much information/knowledge do they have about providers? How do they get this information? - Whether there is any personal contact with staff at the provider organisation - What information about the customer is shared with the provider - Any differences in referrals for volunteer customers and mandatory customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is discussed? - What is decided?

- Views in how the **transitions to the provider** are working

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any comments around customer attendance at meetings with provider (i.e. are FTAs an issue?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is working? Why is it working? - What is not working? Why do they feel it is not working? - Suggestions for improvements - Have there been any issues around delays with receiving relevant information from Benefit Delivery Centres?

- In areas where there are two providers, their views on working with multiple service providers*

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall views on referring to two providers - Their views on how they manage working with two providers - How do they think things would be different if there were only one provider organisation?

- For their **ESA customers**, explore their views on the **Work Focused Health Related Assessment (WFHRA)**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have you received any WFHRAs? - If so, has this been useful at the first WFI, and what are your views on the purpose of the WFHRA? - Have there been any issues with getting the WFHRA to the provider?

4. Ongoing contact with customers and provider staff

Aim: To explore experiences of any ongoing contact maintained with customers and providers after hand-off

- Determine the nature of any **contact with customers after referral to provider**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who initiates contact and for what purposes? - Regularity/mode of contact? - Views on this contact

- Determine whether they have had any experiences of **customers returning to them** for any reason (such as benefit questions) and their experience of this

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequency of this - In such cases, what do they see as their role? - Level of contact they have had with such customers? - Any differences in the types of customers returning? - How they have liaised with provider organisations - Outcomes

- Explore what happens if **customers want to access Jobcentre Plus initiatives** (e.g. Permitted Work, Return to Work Credit, Access to Work, Local Employment Partnerships job opportunities, liaison with employers regarding Reasonable Adjustments for disabled people?).

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In such cases, what do they see as their role? - Level of contact they have had with such customers? - How they have liaised with provider organisations - Outcomes – any access-related issues they experience

- Determine whether they receive any **feedback about customer progress?**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who provides this feedback? - What form does this feedback take? - What is done with this feedback? - Are formal records kept?

- Explore whether there are **any other reasons** for them to be in contact with provider after referral
- *In areas with two providers*, their views about how this affects their experiences of any of the above?

5. Administering sanctions

Aim: Explore experiences of administering sanctions and liaising with provider organisations regarding sanctions.

- Explore whether they have had any experiences of **sanctioning customers** for not attending the **first Work Focused Interview** at Jobcentre Plus

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What their experiences were - Who decides when a customer should be sanctioned - How do customers learn about being sanctioned - Are there any differences by customer characteristics?

- Explore whether they have had experiences of **sanctioning customers** for not attending **further Work Focused Interviews** with providers?

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did they become aware that customers had missed meetings with providers - How are providers involved in the sanctioning process? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What their experiences were - Who decides when a customer should be sanctioned? - How do customers learn about being sanctioned? - Are there any differences by customer characteristics?

- **How have customers responded** to being sanctioned?

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature of these responses - Reasons why they feel sanction elicited these responses

- **Views on how the sanctioning process has worked overall**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What has worked well? - Are there any challenges? - Why these seen to be challenges? - What can be done to improve process?

6. Jobcentre Plus staff and Pathways

Aim: to explore the impact of the programme on Jobcentre Plus staff

- Their views on the **impact** that the Pathway programme has had on **Jobcentre Plus staff**.

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact on staff roles (theirs and others') - Impact on workload experienced by staff - Impact on the skills sets needed by Jobcentre Plus - Impact on Jobcentre Plus resources in general 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature of the impact - Whether impacts are positive or negative - More generally, how has the economic downturn impacted on your workload?

7 Overall reflections

Aim: Overall reflection on the Pathways programme

- What is **working well** in the programme?

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For customers - For Jobcentre Plus staff - For provider organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why? - Are there any differences between types of customer?

- What is **not working** so well?

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For customers - For Jobcentre Plus staff - For provider organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why? - Are there any differences between types of customer?

- What **improvements** could be made?

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature of these improvements - Why they are considered an improvement - What is their relative impact? - Who the improvements would affect (Jobcentre Plus staff, customers, providers?)

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank participants for their time and thoughts. • Check if they have further questions. • Reassure re confidentiality and (if appropriate) give more information about reporting. |
|---|

Appendix K

Provider manager topic guide

1. Interviewer's introduction

- Explain that this research is funded by the **Department for Work and Pensions**, and is one part of their overall evaluation of Provider Led Pathways to Work.
- The research units conducting the work are all **independent organisations**.
- This discussion **is part of ongoing research** to look at how Provider Led Pathways has been implemented and is working. Researchers will be meeting with a number of Jobcentre Plus staff, provider organisation staff and Pathways customers from various new Provider Led districts.
- Our discussion today will concentrate on:
 - Dealings with **Jobcentre Plus management**.
 - Delivering the **Pathways service**.
 - Working with **sub-contractors or other providers**.
 - **Overall reflections** on what is working well, what is not working so well and improvements that could be made.
- The discussion will take around an **hour and a half**.
- **Ask for permission to use recorder**. Explain that recordings will be typed up professionally and seen only by the research team.
- Explain **confidentiality and how material will be used** – a report for DWP in which their views are included, but they will be anonymous.
- Taking part is completely **voluntary**.
- Check informed consent. Ask them to sign the consent form.

If asked what we mean by 'complying with the Data Protection Act' explain that we will:

- *keep all data in a secure environment;*
 - *allow only members of the research team (including administrators and transcribers) access to the data;*
 - *keep the data only as long as is necessary for the purposes of the research and then destroy it.*
-

2. Background information

Aim: to introduce themselves and provide some background information about their role and the organisation

- **Current role** with the provider organisation

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whether they have been with the PLP since its introduction - How long they have been in the role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature of role

- Briefly explore the **background** of the provider
Researcher: Only raise this topic if we do not have the necessary information about the provider organisation.

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Type of organisation - Date established - Location(s) - Other contracts/projects - How long Pathways contract has been in operation

3. Contracted provision

Aim: Explore the actual nature of the contract and their experience of delivering it

- Explore what the organisation is **contracted to deliver**
Researchers should ensure that they understand what 'should' be provided as part of the contract for Pathways (see section 2.2. of research specification)

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How far the provision of these services is new for the organisation? - How does this meet the purpose of the PLP programme? - Has this changed since they were first contracted by Jobcentre Plus? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature of the services provided - How has service changed and why? Who instigated this change (e.g. Jobcentre Plus or provider)

- Explore their assessment of the **experience of providing these services as part of the PLP programme**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has experience differed from expectations? (Why? And how so?) - Is volume of work as expected? (If not, what have been the implications of this?) - What feedback has been received from front-line staff about experiences working on the PLP? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What has been positive about providing these services? (Why?) - What has been negative? (Why?) What action have you taken to address this and what was the outcome?

4. Managing staff

Aim: To explore issues relating to staff recruitment, management and monitoring

- Explore their **staff recruitment practices** in relation to the PLP services that they deliver

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have new staff been recruited? - What staff with particular experiences/skills been identified and brought onto the delivery of the services? What type of skills/previous work experience? - Were there any TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)) issues on taking up the contract which had to be managed through? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How has recruitment been handled? - Why this strategy?

- Explore their views on the **staff composition** in relation to the PLP services that they deliver

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What training, if any, given to staff on the PLP - If so, is this training provided regularly? Does this training cover diversity issues and needs of different customers groups, relating to gender, age, ethnicity, health condition, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The role of staff working on the PLP - The number of staff on PLP - Permanent/temporary?

- Explore their views on the **supervision/monitoring** of staff

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of targets - Use of qualitative management techniques? (e.g. case reviews, case conferences) - How was the use of waivers/deferrals monitored? - How were 'failed to attends' managed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there any staff monitoring procedures in place? What are these?

5. Working with Jobcentre Plus

Aim: Establish the processes for and managers' experiences of working with Jobcentre Plus staff

- Establish **who they are in contact** with at Jobcentre Plus

Try to establish names, job titles, and location of each of the contacts – start with Contract Manager and TPPM

- For each contact, ask what is the **formal relationship** between them and that contact
- Explore experiences of working with **EACH CONTACT**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the helpful and unhelpful aspects? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How are they helpful or unhelpful? - How could they be different?

- Gain an understanding of how the **contract is managed**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What formal mechanisms are in place? - What management information is used? What does this cover (age, gender, ethnicity, different health conditions etc)? - What meetings/visits are used - How contact is maintained - What is the frequency of contact?

6. Relationships with sub-contractors or other providers

Aim: To explore the relationships they have with other providers and sub-contractors

- Explore whether they **sub-contract** any aspect of their provision

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there a good working relationship between yourselves and the sub-contractors? - What are the features/evidence that the relationship is working well? - Why so? Or why not? - What funding/payment model do you use with the subcontractor? Do you replicate DWP terms and conditions in this contract? - How effective are communications arrangements? Are they included in the self assessment process? - Do they set targets for them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which aspects? - Why?

- Explore whether they have contact with **other providers? (especially in areas where there is more than one provider)**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the relationship between this organisation and sub-contractors? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does the relationship work well? Why? - How could it be different?

- Explore their views about the **quality of the services** provided by sub-contractors/other providers and how well it complements their provision (and use of DWP Quality Framework)

7. Overall reflections

- Have **adjustments been made to your management/delivery of PLP** since the start of the contract?

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What has changed? - Why has it changed? - How did it come about?

- Establish what they feel is **working well** about their service/the PLP programme

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regarding helping customers to make progress towards work; which interventions/ways of working are particularly helpful? Ask for customer examples - Regarding working with Jobcentre Plus - Regarding working with DWP Contract Managers - Regarding working with sub-contractors/other providers 	

- Establish what they feel is **not working** well what **improvements** could be made

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regarding helping customers to make progress towards work; which interventions/ways of working are particularly helpful? Ask for customer examples - Regarding working with Jobcentre Plus - Regarding working with DWP Contract Managers - Regarding working with sub-contractors/other providers 	

- Explore their **development plans for PLP contracts/relationships** with providers in the future

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of DWP Quality Framework in this process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What plans do they have? - What actions are included on the plans? - Why are they considering these plans? - What would they like to change? - Who is involved in the plans and how often are they reviewed?

- Thank participants for their time and thoughts.
- Check if they have further questions.
- Reassure re confidentiality and (if appropriate) give more information about reporting.

Appendix L

Provider adviser topic guide

1. Facilitator’s introduction

- Explain that this research is funded by the **Department for Work and Pensions**, and is one part of their overall evaluation of Provider Led Pathways to Work.
- The research units conducting the work are all **independent organisations**.
- This group discussion **is part of ongoing research** to look at how Provider Led Pathways has been implemented and is working. Researchers will be meeting with a number of Jobcentre Plus staff, provider organisation staff and Pathways customers from various new Provider Led districts.
- Our **discussion today** will concentrate on:
 - Dealings with **Jobcentre Plus**.
 - **Delivering** the Pathways service.
 - Working with **sub-contractors or other providers**.
 - **Overall reflections** on what is working well, what is not working so well and improvements that could be made.
- The discussion will take **between one-and-a-half and two hours**.
- **Ask for permission to use recorder**. Explain that recordings will be typed up professionally and seen only by the research team.
- Explain **confidentiality and how material will be used** – a report for DWP in which their views are included, but they will be anonymous.
- Taking part is completely **voluntary**.
- Check informed consent.

If asked what we mean by ‘complying with the Data Protection Act’ explain that we will:

- *keep all data in a secure environment;*
 - *allow only members of the research team (including administrators and transcribers) access to the data;*
 - *keep the data only as long as is necessary for the purposes of the research and then destroy it.*
-

2. Brief introductions

Aim: to introduce participants to one another. Encourage each participant to introduce themselves in the following ways.

- **Current role** within the provider organisation

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How long they have been in the role - Whether they have been with the PLP since its introduction 	

- Briefly explore the **background** of the provider organisation
Only raise this topic/specific questions if we do not have the necessary information on the provider organisation from the provider manager interview.

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Details of special training within the organisation around the PLP role - The size of individual caseloads (and changes since the contract started) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Type of organisation - Date established - Location(s) - Other contracts/projects

3. Referrals from Jobcentre Plus

Aim: to explore their experience of the referral process

- How are customers **referred to you?**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How liaison with Jobcentre Plus takes place (e.g. phone, email, pre-set forms) - Whether there is any personal contact with Jobcentre Plus adviser - What information about the customer is shared by Jobcentre Plus 	

- Their views on the **appropriateness** of referrals from Jobcentre Plus

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whether any customers have been deferred or waived before being referred to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why? - What is the impact of this for them and for the customer?

- Explore any **challenges** experienced during the referral process and what can be done to address these challenges

Researcher: map the challenges on a flipchart, and then discuss their relative importance. Ask group to posit solutions for the most challenging first, and others as time allows.

Prompt	Probe
- What can be done to address these challenges	- Nature of these challenges - Their relative importance in terms of delivering the PLP service - Why they are considered to be important

- How are the customer transitions from Jobcentre Plus to them working **overall?**

4. Available interventions

Aim: to explore the interventions that the provider organisation offers to customers

- **Explore the interventions** that the organisation is able to offer Incapacity Benefit/ESA recipients

Build a list of interventions/service names using a flipchart/large piece of paper – researchers should ensure that they understand what ‘should’ be provided as part of the contract for Pathways (see section 2.2. of research specification)

Prompt	Probe
	- Nature of interventions - Purpose of interventions - The customers targeted by each intervention

- Explore how these interventions are **delivered**

Prompt	Probe
For each intervention: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whether they are provided in-house or externally - Where they are externally provided, whether they are sub-contracted or not - Duration of the intervention - Format of the intervention (group work/individual meetings) - Whether individual can take part in more than one intervention - What is communicated to the customer in relation to the desired outcome? 	

5. Working with customers

Aim: to explore their experiences of working with Jobcentre Plus customers.

- Explore the general **staff procedures** for working with customers

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who does the customer see on initial contact? - What are the set procedures that staff are meant to follow? - How often do staff depart from set procedures and why? 	

- Explore experiences of working with **Pathways customers**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does this customer group compare with others? - Are there any differences between IB and ESA customers? Have you observed any changes since the introduction of ESA in October 2008? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the nature of any challenges? Ask for examples - Why are they seen to be challenges? - How does this vary in relation to the types of customers? - If customers are easy to work with, why?

- For their **ESA customers**, explore advisers' views on the **Work Focused Health Related Assessment (WFHRA)**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Have they been receiving WFHRAs? – If so, how have they been using them in WFIs? – What is useful/not about the WFHRA? – What do you think is the purpose of the WFHRA? – Do you have any suggestions for the content of the WFHRA to help with WFIs? – Have you received any training or guidance on the WFHRA?

- Their views on the working with **new claimants and 'voluntary' Pathways customers**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Views on the use of their services by each group – Views on the different characteristics of each group/ type of condition – Views on the differences in working with each group (good experiences and challenges) 	

- Explore whether there any interventions which tend to be used together/in sequence because they are **complementary**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What these interventions are – Why are they seen as complementary?

- Explore how they use **waivers and deferrals** in dealing with customers

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How do they liaise with Jobcentre Plus around this – e.g. information sharing – Are these used differently with different customer groups? 	

- Explore how the provider organisation deals with customers that **fail to attend**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do they liaise with Jobcentre Plus around this – e.g. information sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature of the process in place

- Explore the extent to which advisers feel they have **discretion** in dealing with customers?

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there any area where they feel constrained? If so, why?

Explore their views and experiences of working with **targets**

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How helpful/unhelpful do they find the targets? (And why?) - The implications of these targets for their working practices

- Establish whether there are any mechanisms for obtaining **customer feedback** and advisers’ involvement in this and if these opportunities are used.

6. Referrals to sub-contractors or other providers

Aim: To explore the provider’s practices and experiences of working with sub-contractors and other providers

[RESEARCHER NOTE: We are looking for data on providers’ usual/preferred practices. It is not necessary to ask each question about EVERY organisation the provider might deal with. However, examples that refer to particular organisations are useful]

- Explore how referrals to **sub-contractors/other providers** are made

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Method of contact used (e.g. phone, email, pre-set forms) - Any personal contact with staff at sub-contractors/providers - What information about the customer is shared with sub-contractors/providers - Who would you refer to sub-contractors and why? 	<p>Are providers making referrals to IAPT (Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies) for customers with mental health conditions?</p>

- What are advisers' **views about the relationships** they have with sub-contractors/other providers?

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is working well? (And why?) - What is not working well? (And why?)

- *In areas with **two provider organisations***, explore advisers' views on having more than one provider in the area

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their experience of working in a situation where there is another provider (competition) - Their views of the impact of this arrangement (e.g. on customer choice, on the nature and quality of the services delivered, on their relationship with Jobcentre Plus)

7. Ongoing contact with Jobcentre Plus

Aim: to explore advisers' experiences of any on-going contact they have with Jobcentre Plus

- Explore the nature of **any contact with Jobcentre Plus advisers** about individual customers following referral to the provider

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature of this contact (<i>Ad hoc</i> or routine?) - What is useful/unhelpful about this contact?

- Explore their procedures for and experiences of dealing with customers that want to **access Jobcentre Plus initiatives** (e.g. Permitted Work, Return to Work Credit, Access to Work, Local Employment Partnerships job opportunities)

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Procedures for and experiences of liaising with Jobcentre Plus staff - Level and quality of feedback on customer experiences from Jobcentre Plus staff/service providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What their role is in facilitating access - Nature of customer outcomes

- Determine whether they have had experiences of needing to **refer customers back** to Jobcentre Plus for any other reason (e.g. to deal with ongoing benefit questions)

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How this impacted on their work with the customer - Procedure and experience relating to liaising with Jobcentre Plus staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature of customer outcomes - Outcomes for the provider

8. Overall reflections

Aim: to afford the provider organisation advisers an opportunity to reflect generally on the PLP programme

- Explore their views about the **quality of the services** provided under their PLP contract

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How compares with the quality of services provided by sub-contractors/other providers? - Awareness/use of DWP Quality Framework? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do they think about the quality of their services? - Why do they feel this way?

- Establish what they feel is **working well** in the PLP programme

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regarding helping customers to make progress towards work; which interventions/ways of working are particularly helpful? Ask for customer examples and are there any differences between types of customer? - Regarding working with Jobcentre Plus - Regarding working with sub-contractors/other providers 	

- Establish what they feel is **not working** well what **improvements** could be made

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regarding helping customers to make progress towards work; which interventions/ways of working are particularly helpful? Ask for customer examples and are there any differences between types of customer? - Regarding working with Jobcentre Plus - Regarding working with sub-contractors/other providers 	

- Anything else anyone would like to add?

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank participants for their time and thoughts. • Check if they have further questions. • Reassure re confidentiality and (if appropriate) give more information about reporting. |
|---|

References

Department for Work and Pensions (2009) *Pathways to Work Provider guidance*, [Online]. Available: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/supplying-dwp/what-we-buy/welfare-to-work-services/provider-guidance/plpcontents.shtml>.

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Office for National Statistics (2009) *Gross domestic product – Preliminary estimate – 4th quarter 2008*, [Online]. Available: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/gdp0109.pdf> [23rd January 2009].

When Pathways to Work was originally introduced in 2003 and later extended in 2005 and 2006, the programme was delivered by Jobcentre Plus on behalf of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). In the extension to the remaining areas in Great Britain (the 15 phase 1 districts in December 2007 and the 16 phase 2 districts in April 2008), the delivery of the programme was contracted out to private companies and third sector organisations. The programme in these areas is commonly known as Provider-Led (PL) Pathways to Work.

This study was conducted by the National Centre for Social Research and is qualitative in nature. The research methods comprised in-depth interviews and group discussions with staff and customers of PL Pathways to Work. Field work was conducted between April and September 2009.

The analysis explores staff and customers' experiences and views of the implementation and delivery of the PL Pathways programme. This report seeks to add to the findings from the early implementation study of PL Pathways (DWP research report No 595).

If you would like to know more about DWP research, please contact:
Paul Noakes, Commercial Support and Knowledge Management Team,
3rd Floor, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA

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