

The operation of choice in Multiple Provider Employment Zones

by Anne Conolly, Naomi Day, Jon Hales, Rachel Kinsella
and William O'Connor

Department for Work and Pensions

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Anne Conolly, Naomi Day, Jon Hales, Rachel Kinsella, William O'Connor

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on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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Contents

Acknowledgements	ix
The Authors.....	x
Summary	1
1 Introduction	7
1.1 Background to Multiple Provider Employment Zones.....	7
1.2 Overview of the choice process.....	8
1.3 Research objectives.....	8
1.4 Methodology.....	9
1.4.1 <i>Scoping study</i>	9
1.4.2 <i>In-depth interviews</i>	10
1.4.3 <i>Non-participant observation of clients meetings</i>	12
1.4.4 <i>Telephone survey with EZ clients</i>	13
1.5 Analysis	14
1.6 Structure of the report	15
1.7 A note to the use of different data sources	15
2 A profile of Multiple Provider Employment Zone clients.....	17
2.1 Demographic characteristics	17
2.2 Activity status	19
2.3 Engagement with finding work.....	20
2.3.1 <i>Work motivation</i>	21
2.3.2 <i>Barriers to work</i>	22

2.3.3	<i>Job search activities</i>	22
2.4	Clients' assessment of EZ provision	24
3	Process of choice	27
3.1	Informing choice	27
3.1.1	<i>Sources of information</i>	28
3.1.2	<i>Information received via Jobcentre Plus</i>	28
3.1.3	<i>Other information channels</i>	32
3.2	Experiences of choice	34
3.2.1	<i>Experience of changing providers</i>	40
3.3	What underpins an informed choice	41
3.3.1	<i>The opportunity to visit provider offices</i>	41
3.3.2	<i>The time available to consider the information</i>	42
3.3.3	<i>The ability of the adviser to clarify and explain</i>	43
3.3.4	<i>The nature of the information received</i>	43
3.3.5	<i>The client's outlook and engagement</i>	45
4	Factors underpinning choice	47
4.1	Overview of the factors that influence choice	48
4.2	Location	50
4.3	Previous experience	51
4.4	Recommendations	52
4.5	Information and advice about the services provided	53
4.6	Influence of professionals	55
4.6.1	<i>Influence of providers</i>	55
4.6.2	<i>Influence of Jobcentre Plus advisers</i>	55
4.7	Type of organisation	58
5	The implications of choice	59
5.1	Operational effects of choice	59
5.1.1	<i>Jobcentre Plus advisers</i>	59

5.1.2	<i>The effect on the relationship between advisers and providers</i>	60
5.1.3	<i>Impact on EZ providers</i>	61
5.2	Implications for clients	63
5.2.1	<i>Value of choice</i>	63
5.2.2	<i>Factors influencing value of choice</i>	64
5.2.3	<i>What difference has choice made to clients?</i>	68
6	Conclusion	71
6.1	The operation of choice by Jobcentre Plus	71
6.2	The role of the adviser	72
6.3	What influences client choice	73
6.4	The operational implications for providers	73
6.5	What clients think of choice	74
Appendix A	Quantitative technical report	75
Appendix B	Qualitative Technical Report	81
Appendix C	Qualitative information leaflets	87
Appendix D	Qualitative fieldwork documents	93
Appendix E	Quantitative telephone questionnaire	129
References	169

List of tables

Table 1.1	Achieved sample for in-depth interviews with EZ clients	11
Table 1.2	Achieved sample for in-depth interviews with EZ clients	12
Table 2.1	Characteristics by client group	18
Table 2.2	Work status by client group	19
Table 2.3	Job search activities by client group	23
Table 2.4	Job application activities by client group	23
Table 3.1	Sources of information by client group	28
Table 3.2	Seeking additional information by access to provider information	33
Table 3.3	Additional information sought by clients	33
Table 3.4	Client experience of choice	36
Table 3.5	Sufficient information to choose	43
Table 3.6	Usefulness of information in making a choice	43

Table 4.1	Factors that influence choice.....	49
Table 5.1	Value of choice by client type.....	64
Table 5.2	Value of choice by previous experience on EZ.....	65
Table 5.3	Value of choice by experience with EZ provider	67
Table 5.4	Value of choice by job search motivation	68

List of figures

Figure 2.1	Activity status at the time of interview	20
Figure 2.2	Agreement with the statement 'How quickly I get/got a job depends/depended mainly on how much effort I put into looking for one' by work status	21
Figure 2.3	Agreement with the statement 'Meeting someone at "provider" improves/improved my chances of getting a job' by work status	24
Figure 3.1	Experience of choice by mandatory or voluntary participation	37
Figure 3.2	Number of providers that the client saw information about	38
Figure 3.3	Mandatory clients – number of providers discussed at Jobcentre Plus	39
Figure 5.1	Was being able to choose a good thing?	64

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Summary

Chapter 1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of a study that explored client choice in Multiple Provider Employment Zones (MPEZ). This study was designed specifically to focus on the operation of choice, rather than to evaluate other aspects of Employment Zone (EZ) delivery. The research was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen).

Alongside the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and New Deal 25 Plus, which were developed at the end of the 1990's, EZ were conceived as a relatively intensive and long-term programme for people in particularly disadvantaged labour markets. In 2004, MPEZ were established in six of the largest EZ areas, but only volunteers (lone parents and those on Pension Credit) to the programme were given a choice of provider. Since April 2007, this choice was extended to mandatory clients claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) in MPEZ. This study explored the operation of choice for mandatory and lone parents only.

The study was designed to employ both quantitative and qualitative methods. It had six main components:

- a scoping study;
- in-depth interviews with EZ clients;
- in-depth interviews with EZ providers;
- in-depth interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff;
- non-participant observation of client meetings;
- a telephone survey with EZ clients.

The telephone survey was carried out using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) with a random sample of clients in all six MPEZ. In-depth interviews and observations were carried out with participants in four of the zones. These were selected to ensure a diversity of relevant characteristics. Clients

were sampled and recruited via the EZ payment database. In-depth interviews with customers generally took place in their homes and those with staff took place at their office or via the telephone. Participants from Jobcentre Plus were selected with the help of job centre managers. A representative of each provider in the four zones was interviewed. Fieldwork took place between November 2008 and June 2009.

It is important to note that the clients' accounts of their experience may have been affected by their ability to recall the specifics of the process. There was a considerable delay between the time clients made a choice and when they were interviewed about it.

Chapter 2 A profile of Multi-Provider Employment Zones clients

The research provides a brief overview of the clients who participate on MPEZ. The telephone survey provided a nationally representative picture of the clients who participated in MPEZ between May and July 2008. There were roughly equal numbers of male and female clients, although the majority of mandatory clients were male and nearly all lone parents were female. A high proportion of MPEZ clients were social tenants (47 per cent) or lived with family or friends (25 per cent) and the majority of clients were single, never married (74 per cent).

The telephone survey was carried out with clients who had been on the EZ programme for roughly six months. At the time they were interviewed, 28 per cent of clients were in paid work, either as an employee or self-employed. Sixteen per cent of clients were involved in some form of work preparation activity, 37 per cent were seeking paid work, eight per cent were looking after the home or family and the remaining 11 per cent reported some other activity status.

Clients' orientation to work and their motivation to find work were explored. Positive work orientation was underpinned by clients' desire to gain greater independence, higher living standards, a structured lifestyle, pursue specific career aspirations, and to act as a positive role model. Low motivation was seen as something which increased steadily as the period of unemployment went on. In general, clients not yet in a job reported high levels of job search activities. The most common methods were looking for job vacancies in newspapers (74 per cent) and at the job centre (58 per cent). Some clients were not involved in any job search activities (15 per cent of those not in work), although this group mainly consisted of lone parents.

The research project did not attempt to evaluate EZ provider services, however, some data was collected relating to clients' experience of the EZ programme. Clients generally reported they thought participating in EZ improved their employment chances. Clients pinpointed specific aspects of the support that they had received from EZ providers that had helped them into paid employment, such

as, the vacancies signposted by provider staff, help with job applications and covering letters, and the training courses accessed through the programme.

Chapter 3 Process of choice

Clients accessed information about the providers from a variety of sources, but most common were the use of leaflets (51 per cent), followed by contacts with provider office (28 per cent), and posters and notices (21 per cent). Other sources were friends, family and EZ providers. Despite the range of sources of information that were available to clients, over a quarter of clients (27 per cent) said that they did not access any information.

The process of choice involved the distribution of information from Jobcentre Plus in two ways: through information leaflets circulated on behalf of the providers and through discussion with an adviser. This process did not operate in the intended way for all mandatory clients. It was expected that clients would receive information (EZ provider leaflets and a general EZ information leaflet) two weeks prior to making a choice at a Restart meeting with a Jobcentre Plus adviser. However, there was inconsistency in the amount of information clients received and whether clients received information prior to or at the time of their Restart meetings.

Discussions with Jobcentre Plus advisers gave clients the opportunity to gain more information about client choice and the programme itself. There was variation in the range and depth of the issues discussed which were dependent on: the different the nature of interview for lone parents and mandatory clients; knowledge of the adviser; and, adviser understanding of their role.

The research revealed that the experience of choice was influenced by how informed clients perceived they were to make a choice based on their access to information and awareness of choice. It was possible to identify four types of client experience:

- **choice based on complete information**, experience was characterised by clients feeling that they had made a conscious choice of provider with a full set of information. Only one in eight clients (12 per cent) recalled this experience;
- **choice with limited information**, where clients either did not have enough information about each provider available or were not aware of all of the providers available. Forty-two per cent of clients reported this experience;
- **failure to make a choice despite having information**; characterised by clients who felt they had been given information, but they did not want to, or feel able to make a choice. Only three per cent of clients had this experience;
- **no awareness of choice (with limited or no information)**, clients who did not recall any choice of provider. At the time they were interviewed just over two-fifths of clients (42 per cent) had no awareness of having made a choice.

The qualitative interviews highlighted five factors that underpin an informed choice: the nature of the information received; the opportunity to visit providers to find out about the services they provide and their approach to working with clients; the time available to consider the information; the ability of the adviser to clarify and explain, and the client's outlook and engagement.

Chapter 4 Factors underpinning choice

The research examined the factors that influenced clients' decisions when choosing an EZ provider. A wide range of reasons were identified and broadly categorised into six main factors. These encompassed: location of provider offices; previous experience with a provider; recommendations from family and friends; information and advice; influence of professionals, including both Jobcentre Plus advisers and providers, and the type of organisation. The reasons for choosing a provider varied for the different types of client. Not all clients described all factors, and the majority (80 per cent) identified one factor as a primary influence, while 20 per cent mentioned two or more reasons for choosing a provider.

The most common factors for choosing an EZ provider were the location of the provider (mentioned by 29 per cent of clients), the information and advice clients received about the provider (28 per cent) and clients' previous experience (27 per cent). Mandatory clients were more likely to identify the provider location and previous experience as reasons whereas voluntary clients were more likely to say that recommendations, the information and advice they received, and the influence of professionals were factors in their decision.

Location was seen to affect choice in four main ways through: the distance of the provider from the client's home; the distance between the job centre and the provider office; accessibility of the provider; and the environment or area in which the provider's office was based. There was also evidence to suggest that location was the fall back when their ability to make a choice was constrained in some way.

Where information and advice was discussed as a factor, clients highlighted the availability or accessibility of information, the appearance of the information leaflets, and the way information portrayed the services on offer. Past experience influenced choice through both positive and negative assessments of their time with EZ providers, such as, how well they got on with provider advisers, and success finding work through that provider.

Chapter 5 The implications of choice

The introduction of client choice had operational effects on both Jobcentre Plus advisers and providers, and for the relationship between the two. Where choice was felt to have brought about change for advisers, the effects were discussed in four ways: choice had made it easier to engage clients in the process; it had made advisers' roles easier and less strenuous; it had impacted on the efficiency of the

referral process and there was some feeling that choice had compromised adviser impartiality in the process. The evidence suggests that choice had also had both positive and negative effects on the relationships between adviser and providers.

The introduction of choice in MPEZ had two sets of implications for the way in which providers operated. The first related to the service offered to clients and the way they were marketed, and the second concerned their business operations. There were several aspects to this, which included: the location of the service, the staffing of the MPEZ provision, providers' ability to operate aspects of the choice process and fluctuations in their share of the market.

In addition to the operational impacts, choice was also seen to have impacted on clients. There was strong support for choice among the EZ clients. Seventy-eight per cent of those who recalled making a choice felt that they being able to do so was a good thing. The level of support varied among the different client groups. Those aged 18 to 24 were most likely to think that choice was a good thing (89 per cent), followed by people aged 25 or over (75 per cent) and finally lone parents (66 per cent).

Clients' feelings about the value of having a choice were based on a broad set of criteria. These included the experience of making a choice, the perceived degree of control they had over the process and the extent to which they felt they had a choice, clients' subsequent experience with the chosen provider, their achieved outcomes and their individual motivation to return to work.

There were mixed views among clients in particular, about whether choice had in fact made any difference to them. The evidence suggests that this was often related to the degree of value they placed on choice and was guided by the same set of factors. Nevertheless, choice had made a positive difference to some clients' feelings about themselves. Choice was also reported to have brought about a marked improvement in attendance, increased levels of engagement among clients and less resentment and hostility about having to attend a provider. However, the introduction of choice was also felt to have brought about confusion for some clients who found the decision making process difficult.

Chapter 6 Discussion and conclusions

The final chapter draws together the key conclusions of the research and the implications of these for the future operation of choice in programmes like Flexible New Deal (FND). These suggest that:

- any future delivery of choice needs to take account of the operational constraints on the front line and ensure that the protocols governing the choice process can be delivered by staff and work effectively for all clients;
- there could usefully be a review of the type of information given to clients to inform their choice;

- more needs to be done to underscore to clients the usefulness of contacting providers or visiting providers' offices given it can lead to a more informed choice, but at present is underused by clients. The value of other opportunities for dialogue between providers and clients should also be reviewed and applied consistently in all settings;
- any guidance issued to advisers about choice in future circumstances should be clearer about how they should engage with clients in advance of them making a choice and the parameters of their role in assisting clients to make a choice;
- the prominence of location as a factor influencing choice should not be underestimated. The richer information presented in this report about why location matters is something for providers in Flexible New Deal (FND) to consider;
- the factors underpinning choice demonstrate that clients are passing judgment on providers' delivery and customer service. This can lead to fluctuations in market share which in turn can affect business operations for providers;
- offering clients a greater level of control through choice can lead to improved attendance, increased engagement and less resistance to the process. However, the value is dependent on it being delivered in an effective way.

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of a study commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to explore Client Choice in Multiple Provider Employment Zones (MPEZ). The study was designed specifically to focus on the operation of choice, rather than to evaluate other aspects of Employment Zone (EZ) delivery. It involved research with clients, Jobcentre Plus staff and representatives of provider organisations. This first chapter gives some background to the project and gives a brief overview of the research design. It also sets out the structure of the report.

1.1 Background to Multiple Provider Employment Zones

EZ were conceived as relatively intensive and long-term interventions for people in particularly disadvantaged labour markets. The programme aims to offer practical support to lone parents, as well as those in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), and Pension Credit. Recipients of JSA are considered to be 'mandatory clients', in that they must take part in the programme when they become eligible. Lone parents and those on Pension Credit can volunteer to take part in the programme, though there are slightly different eligibility rules surrounding when this can happen.

The initial 15 Zones started in April 2000, when the EZ replaced the New Deal 25 Plus programme for older clients in receipt of JSA. Each EZ was initially contracted to a single provider. In 2004, MPEZ were established in six of the largest EZ areas and involve up to three contractors delivering Employment Zone provision. Mandatory clients on EZ were allocated to one of the providers via the Random Allocation Tool (RAT) on a prearranged contractual distribution of market share. Only volunteers to the programme were given a choice of provider. Since April 2007, this choice has been extended to mandatory clients claiming JSA in MPEZ. This study explored the operation of choice for mandatory clients and lone parents only. MPEZ clients who were in receipt of Pension Credit were excluded because of the low numbers of these types of MPEZ recipients. Early entrants to the programme were also outside the scope of this investigation due to their different circumstances and experience.

1.2 Overview of the choice process

The operation of choice in MPEZ is designed to operate differently for both mandatory clients and lone parents. Mandatory clients aged 25 or over become eligible for the EZ programme once they have had a continuous JSA claim lasting 18 months. Those aged 18-24 become eligible six months after taking part in New Deal for Young People (NDYP). Once a Jobcentre Plus adviser is alerted to the fact a client is eligible for EZ they will check their postcode to establish whether they live within the EZ area. At their fortnightly jobsearch review (FJR) the client is advised they are eligible for EZ and the Jobcentre Plus adviser briefly explains the programme and issues the client with an EZ introductory leaflet *EZ- Helping you into work*. The adviser also explains the choice model and issues the Jobcentre Plus choice flyer and leaflets about each of the providers in their area. Mandatory clients are then given two weeks to consider their choice and contact providers before their Restart meeting where they are asked to make a choice. For lone parents in receipt of income support, the EZ programme is introduced at the Work Focused Interview (WFI). Lone parents also had the option of New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), which offered a programme of support to help lone parents back into work. NDLP was initially introduced as an option at a first WFI. The EZ programme was then discussed at subsequent WFIs (except for London where NDLP did not operate). However, this is not the only route that lone parents can become involved in EZ. They can also self-refer, or become involved through direct marketing by providers in the local community or within the job centre.

1.3 Research objectives

The study aimed to explore the process of client choice within MPEZ from the perspective of clients, job centre staff and provider staff. It was designed to:

- understand the nature and level of client awareness of the choices available to them;
- explore what clients understand about the choices available to them;
- examine the nature of the information available to clients and consult clients and advisers about the adequacy and efficacy of that information;
- explore fully the clients' motivation for exercising or not exercising choice and set this in context of their overall work orientation;
- understand the full range of determinants that influence client choice of provider;
- examine how MPEZ have implemented the offer of choice to clients;
- gather Jobcentre Plus staff perceptions about how clients exercise choice and get their reflections on the full range of influences on client choice;
- understand how EZ providers attempt to guide and support client choice through their activities and promotional literature;

- map the operational impact of choice with Jobcentre Plus staff and EZ providers; and
- situate the empirical findings in the context of the limited existing evidence on the use of choice in welfare to work programmes.

1.4 Methodology

The study was designed as a mixed method project and employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to address the research objectives. It had six main components:

- a scoping study;
- in-depth interviews with EZ clients;
- in-depth interviews with EZ providers;
- in-depth interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff;
- non-participant observation of client meetings;
- a telephone survey with EZ clients.

The scoping study and the telephone survey included all MPEZ. The other components included only four of the six zones. A brief overview of the design and approach of each of these components is outlined below. More detailed information can be found in Appendix A and B.

1.4.1 Scoping study

The aim of the scoping stage was to develop an understanding of the policy and operational context for the evaluation, and to inform the development of the study design and research tools. It was carried out between December 2007 and February 2008 and comprised three different activities:

- a review of key literature on the operation of EZ and MPEZ;
- a series of telephone interviews with strategic Jobcentre Plus leads, Jobcentre Plus Third Party Provision Managers (TPPMs), Jobcentre Plus adviser managers and EZ operational leads to develop a better sense of operational infrastructure locally and identify any challenges to the research plans or areas;
- a brief content analysis of the materials used in each MPEZ to explain choice.

One important question for the scoping study was to identify which four MPEZ should be selected for the qualitative research components. The work conducted identified a set of criteria with which to make this selection. These were: the number of providers in the area; the location of providers in relation to the Jobcentre offices; the local labour market characteristics; the characteristics and needs of the claimant population; and known operational issues. The four selected MPEZ ensured that there was sufficient diversity in relation to these.

1.4.2 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with clients, Jobcentre Plus advisers, TPPMs and EZ providers in the four selected MPEZ. A topic guide was designed (in collaboration with DWP) for each of the respondent groups to ensure that issues discussed were relevant to each group, and that within each group a similar set of issues were explored with every respondent. Copies of the topic guides can be found in Appendix D. All the interviews were digitally recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim.

In-depth interviews with clients

The sample frame for the qualitative work with clients was the EZ payment database, specifically MPEZ starters in May, June and July 2008 in the four selected areas. To achieve as diverse a sample as possible across a range of key sampling criteria, clients were purposively selected from available records. These included geographical area, gender, claimant group (25+, 18-24 or lone parent), and whether clients had been allocated a provider or exercised a choice. Once clients had been identified, an initial letter and leaflet was sent introducing the research study and giving them two weeks to opt-out of the research. Clients were then contacted by telephone. The research was explained carefully and their agreement to participate was sought. Those who agreed to take part were sent a confirmation letter, including details of the time and location of the interview.

A total of 32 interviews were conducted with clients. A breakdown of the achieved client sample is shown in Table 1.1. The interviews with clients lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. The length varied across the sample, and the shortest interviews were with clients who had very poor recall of the process and this affected the degree to which they could usefully reflect upon it. The majority of the interviews were carried out in customers' homes, however, some expressed a preference to be interviewed elsewhere. In these cases, interviews were conducted in community centres or meeting rooms of local libraries. Clients were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity at all stages of the research. Twenty pounds was given to each participant as a token of appreciation for their participation and to cover any expenses they may have incurred by taking part.

The conduct of interviews with clients was delayed significantly because of restrictions placed by the DWP on the transfer of data to third parties. Although clients were selected because they made their choice somewhere between May and July 2008, interviews were not conducted with them until November 2008 and January 2009, something which presented considerable challenges for recall. Clients often found it difficult to remember key aspects of the process such as the order of different events, the information they received, the type of meetings they had attended, and the names of the providers.

Table 1.1 Achieved sample for in-depth interviews with EZ clients

	Achieved sample n
Area	
Birmingham	7
Glasgow	8
Southwark	7
Tower Hamlets and Newham	10
Client group	
18-24	14
25+	10
Lone parents	8
Gender	
Male	16
Female	16
RAT	
Yes	2
No	30
Total	32

In-depth interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff

In each of the four selected MPEZ, the relevant TPPM was interviewed by telephone to get an overview of the nature of provision in the area and to help in accessing other Jobcentre Plus staff and also providers. In addition, two Jobcentre Plus offices in each area (eight in total) were selected in order to conduct research with staff involved in delivering choice (including Jobcentre Plus advisers for JSA clients 18-24 and 25+, and lone parent clients). These were chosen to reflect the different sized job centres in the area and the nature of their client group. In each, in-depth interviews were conducted with two Jobcentre Plus advisers and a selection of their appointments with clients observed (discussed below).

To select these advisers, the relevant job centre manager was contacted, and given further detail about the study. They then identified appropriate Jobcentre Plus advisers who were involved in either Restart interviews or WFIs for us to interview and observe. Each participating adviser received an information leaflet that provided more detail about the study and their role in it which also stressed the confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. Two interviews were conducted at each selected Jobcentre Plus office, with a total of 16 in-depth interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff members, ten with mandatory advisers and six with lone parent advisers.

In-depth interviews with EZ providers

Interviews were conducted with representatives of each of the EZ providers in the four selected MPEZ. These were initially contacted by email and given

information about the research. This was then followed up with a telephone call to ensure appropriate members of staff were identified for interviews. The achieved interviews were conducted with staff members who fulfilled a variety of different roles for their organisation, such as operational, performance, business or managerial positions. However, they all had a working knowledge of the EZ services provided to the different claimant groups. In total, 11 interviews were conducted with provider representatives. The interviews took place at their offices and lasted around an hour.

1.4.3 Non-participant observation of clients meetings

The final qualitative component of the study involved observation of some Restart meetings held with mandatory clients and some WFIs held with lone parents. The purpose of these was to observe choice in operation. They usually happened on the same day as the adviser concerned was interviewed so that issues that arose in the meetings could be explored further with the adviser.

It was hoped that potential interviews to observe could be identified in advance to achieve some purposive selection. This had limited success because it was difficult for some job centres to predict which clients would be available on a given day. This meant that some interviews were selected on the day. Even here there were difficulties posed by the fact that clients failed to attend scheduled appointments, arrived late, or were not actually meeting their Jobcentre Plus adviser to make a choice. A total of 23 observations were carried out, with diversity in terms of geographical area, claimant group (lone parents, 18-24 and 25+ clients) and gender (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 Achieved sample for in-depth interviews with EZ clients

	Achieved sample n
Area	
Birmingham	6
Glasgow	4
Southwark	6
Tower Hamlets and Newham	7
Client group	
18-24	3
25+	14
Lone parents	6
Gender	
Male	17
Female	6
Total	23

All participants (advisers and clients) were given a leaflet explaining the study and had the opportunity to speak to a researcher who went through the same information before they agreed to take part. Verbal consent was also explicitly sought from both the clients and advisers prior to the observation taking place. To collect data during the observations a pro forma was drawn up, and this was filled in by the researcher during and immediately after the observation. A copy of the leaflets can be found in Appendix C and the pro forma can be found in Appendix D.

Following the observed interview, clients were also asked to take part in short interview to gather their immediate perceptions and experiences of the encounter. In practice, however, this proved difficult to achieve. There was not always the privacy needed in an open plan area for clients to feel they could express their views. Alternatively, clients had limited time after meetings or had young children present, which was distracting for them. As a result, 17 post-observation interviews were conducted with customers and some were considerably shorter than the planned 15 minutes. Clients who did take part in the post observation interviews received £20 as a thank you for their time.

In addition to the observation and short fifteen minute interview, clients were asked if they would agree to take part in a further in-depth interview at a time and location suitable for them. We had expected to conduct in-depth interviews with one-third of those who took part in the observations. However, this was difficult to achieve in practice because of a high number of broken appointments or inaccurate contact details. A total of six follow-up interviews were carried out.

1.4.4 Telephone survey with EZ clients

A telephone survey was carried out with EZ clients in all six MPEZ and provides a representative picture of how clients experienced the process of choice in MPEZ. The specific aims of the telephone survey were to:

- ascertain whether clients were aware of or wanted a choice of provider;
- examine whether clients felt sufficiently informed to make a choice;
- gather evidence on clients' reasons for choosing or deciding not to choose; and
- assess how motivated clients are in relation to job-search activities.

The sample was again drawn from the EZ payments database. A census of MPEZ starters in May, June and July 2008 in all six MPEZ was used for the sampling frame, although clients selected for the qualitative research were excluded from selection. The sample was stratified by– client type, RAT flag, client sex, and MPEZ – to ensure that each of these groups had reasonable sample sizes for analysis. In practice there were too few RAT clients to analyse this group separately. To maximise the chance of contacting respondents, addresses on the sample file were subject to NatCen's in-house teleappending process. This process enabled respondent contact information to be verified, updated and additional telephone numbers identified.

The questionnaire consisted of four main sections:

A: Current activity status.

B: Employment Zone participation and choice.

C: Steps to making a choice.

D: Job motivation and background.

The scoping study was also used to inform the development of the telephone questionnaire. It was piloted in December 2007 which contributed to the development of the main stage questionnaire. The pilot also highlighted that EZ clients represented a group of hard to reach respondents, particularly those aged 18-24 and a high proportion of respondents with language difficulties. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix E.

The main stage fieldwork was conducted between November 2008 and February 2009 and was affected by the same delay and issues of recall that the qualitative research experienced. All interviews were carried out using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) conducted by interviewers in NatCen's dedicated Telephone Unit. Each interviewer attended a study-specific briefing, which introduced them to the aims of the research, broader policy background, questionnaire content and study procedures. A total of 972 interviews were achieved. Overall, 2,600 cases were issued to field, although a large number of cases 689 (27 per cent) did not have a valid phone number. The overall response rate for those cases in scope of fieldwork was 51 per cent. The average (mean) interview length was 12 minutes.

1.5 Analysis

The in-depth interviews with clients, provider representatives and Jobcentre Plus staff were all digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Analysis was undertaken using FrameWork, a qualitative analysis software developed by the Qualitative Research Unit at NatCen. Appendix B gives more detail about this approach. To accommodate the different experience of clients, Jobcentre Plus staff and EZ providers, a separate analytical framework was developed for each participant group. The data gathered in the observations pro forma was also analysed using FrameWork.

Analysis of the survey data was carried out using SPSS version 15. Weights were generated to take account of sample stratification and survey non-response. Weighting was based on the census data (from which the original sample was drawn). The weights are scaled so that the average weight is one. After weighting, the overall effective sample size was 749. All quantitative analysis presented in this report has been carried out on weighted data. Exploratory analysis investigated the clients' experience of choice in MPEZ and paid particular attention to the differences between client groups.

1.6 Structure of the report

The remainder of this report contains five other chapters. **Chapter 2** gives the profile of MPEZ clients, based on findings from the telephone survey, describing their demographic characteristics, work status and job search activity. The following chapter (**Chapter 3**) explores the process of choice. It examines the information that clients had to make a choice, their actual experience of the process and what helped in making an informed choice. **Chapter 4** looks specifically at the factors underpinning client choice while **Chapter 5** explores the operational implications of choice and the effect on clients. The final chapter (**Chapter 6**) draws together the key conclusions from the research and their implications for the operation of choice in welfare to work programmes.

1.7 A note to the use of different data sources

This report presents qualitative data on providers and advisers, as well as a mix of qualitative and quantitative data on clients. While this combination of data on clients is highly complementary, the underlying evidence is obviously different in form and nature. This difference is particularly important in drawing wider inference from the findings. While it is of course appropriate to use quantitative findings to draw conclusions about the prevalence of different views, behaviours and experiences within the wider population of MPEZ clients, it is not possible to use the qualitative data in this way. Rather, this data helps us to understand more about how and why things occur and what underpins the client experience. It would be reasonable to assume that the qualitative findings here map the range and diversity of what would be expected within the wider population of mandatory and lone parent MPEZ clients. Every attempt has been made to identify which findings are drawn from which data source.

Throughout the report, verbatim quotations are used to illustrate the qualitative findings. They are labelled to show the client type (lone parent, 18-24, 25+) and gender. Tables presented in this report use the following conventions:

- * Percentage value is greater than 0, but less than 0.5.
- 0 No observations.
- Category not applicable.
- [] Figures are based on less than 25 cases and are not robust, therefore results not presented in this report.

2 A profile of Multiple Provider Employment Zone clients

While the overall aim of the research project was to investigate clients' experience of choice in Multiple Provider Employment Zone (MPEZ), this chapter aims to give a brief overview of the clients who participated on the programme and, in doing so, to provide some context about their circumstances and outlook. It is worth noting that this chapter profiles mandatory clients and lone parents only, and is based on a sample of clients who started on the programme between May and July 2008. MPEZ clients who were in receipt of Pension Credit and early entrants to the programme were not included in the study.

2.1 Demographic characteristics

Table 2.1 explores the profile of Employment Zone (EZ) clients. Overall there were roughly equal numbers of male and female clients (54 and 46 per cent, respectively). However, this differed greatly by client group. Seven out of ten young people (18-24) and eight out of ten older people (25+) were male, compared to just five per cent of lone parents.

Table 2.1 Characteristics by client group

	Client group			Total %
	18-24 %	25+ %	Lone parents %	
Sex				
Male	72	82	5	54
Female	28	18	95	46
Age				
18-24 years	87	11	20	25
25-34 years	11	30	34	28
35-44 years	*	30	31	24
45-54 years	11	27	14	17
55-65 years	0	12	1	6
Tenure				
Owner occupier	1	11	4	7
Social tenant	19	45	67	47
Private tenant	10	20	21	18
Living with family/friends	67	20	5	25
Other	3	3	3	3
Marital status				
Single	94	67	71	74
Married or living as married	6	19	2	11
Separated	0	6	15	8
Widowed	0	1	1	1
Divorced	*	6	10	6
Area				
Brent and Haringey	6	15	23	16
Birmingham	36	32	17	28
Glasgow	14	14	23	17
Liverpool and Sefton	25	17	16	18
Southwark	6	9	11	9
Tower Hamlets and Newham	14	12	10	12
<i>Unweighted base</i>	342	374	256	972

¹ One per cent of young people reported being aged 45-54 and one per cent of older people reported being aged 18-24; it is likely that this represents measurement error.

Base: MPEZ clients.

Source: Telephone survey.

Around half (47 per cent) of all EZ clients were social tenants. A further 25 per cent of EZ clients lived with family or friends and just seven per cent were home owners. Nationally, around 18 per cent of households are occupied by social tenants and 68 per cent are owned or being bought with a mortgage (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009). Young people were likely to live with

family or friends (67 per cent) and lone parents were likely to be social tenants (also 67 per cent).

The majority (74 per cent) of EZ clients were single (never married) and this was almost universal (94 per cent) among young people. Clients aged 25+ were more likely to be married or living as if they were married than the other EZ client groups (but still just 19 per cent). More lone parents were separated (15 per cent) or divorced (ten per cent) compared to the other groups. Existing research has shown that being single (never married) is associated with being unemployed (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009). It is therefore not surprising that this was such a common experience for such a large proportion of EZ clients.

2.2 Activity status

The research was carried out with clients who had been on the EZ programme for roughly six months. Table 2.2 looks at whether clients were in paid work at the time of the interview. Overall, 28 per cent of clients were in paid work, as an employee or self-employed, at the time they were interviewed. Lone parents were more likely to be in paid work (33 per cent) than the other two groups.

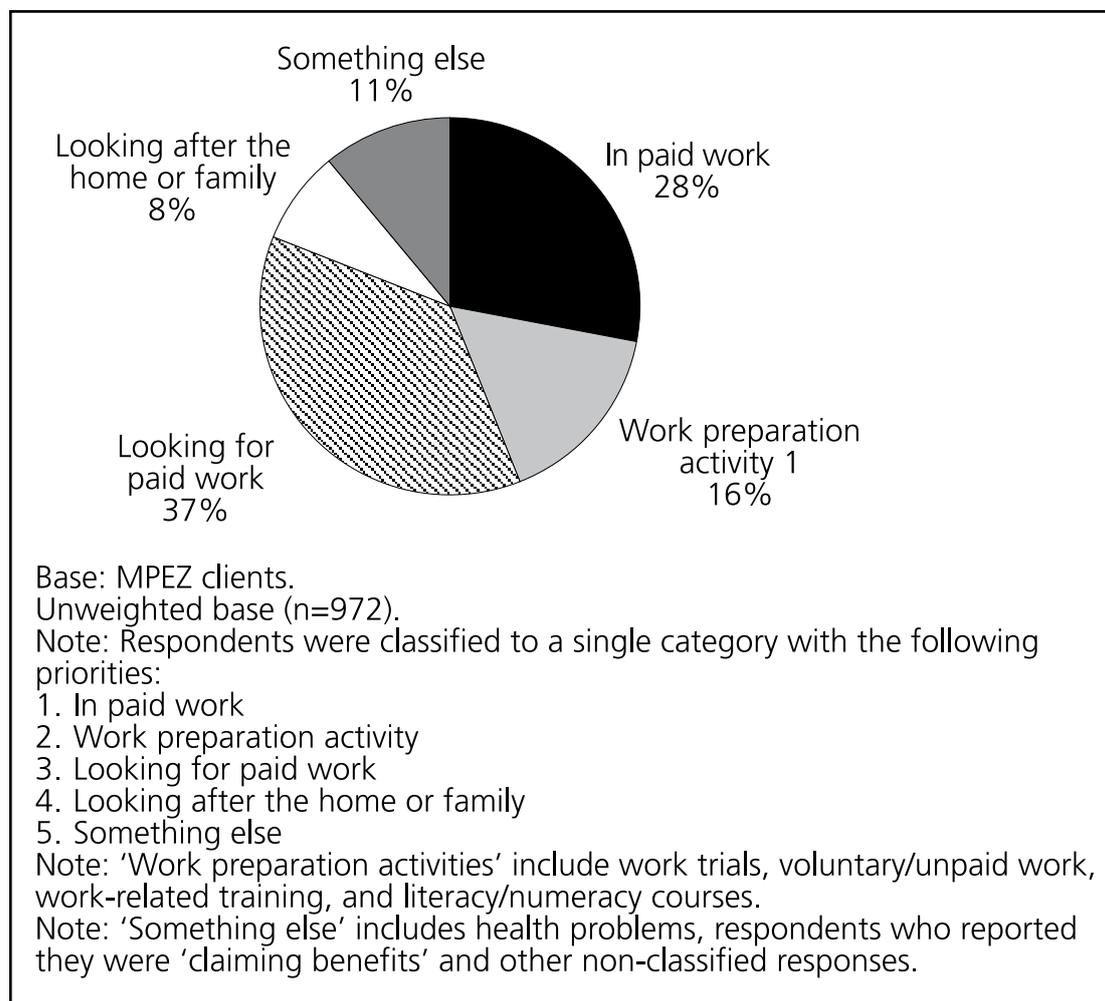
Table 2.2 Work status by client group

Work status	Client group			Total %
	18-24 %	25+ %	Lone parents %	
In paid work	27	24	33	28
Not in paid work	73	76	67	72
Unweighted base	342	374	256	972

Base: MPEZ clients.

Source: Telephone survey.

Participants in the qualitative interviews were also asked to describe their day-to-day activities, and likewise some had recently moved into work. They were engaged in a variety of entry level jobs such as retail assistants, catering assistants and construction workers. The nature of employment contracts varied and included self-employed, full-time, part-time, and temporary positions.

Figure 2.1 Activity status at the time of interview

For those who were not in paid employment a number of activities were reported, as indicated in Figure 2.1. Sixteen per cent of clients were involved in some form of work preparation activity, 37 per cent were seeking paid work, eight per cent were looking after the home or family (mainly lone parents) and 11 per cent reported some other activity status. In the qualitative study, clients who had not yet gained employment described spending their time on a range of different activities, which included looking for work, caring for children, attending part-time further education courses, volunteering, and attending work trials arranged through their EZ provider.

2.3 Engagement with finding work

Perhaps the most important feature of client circumstances for this study is their orientation to work. We deal with three aspects of this here – client motivation to find work, the barriers they experience and their jobsearch activities.

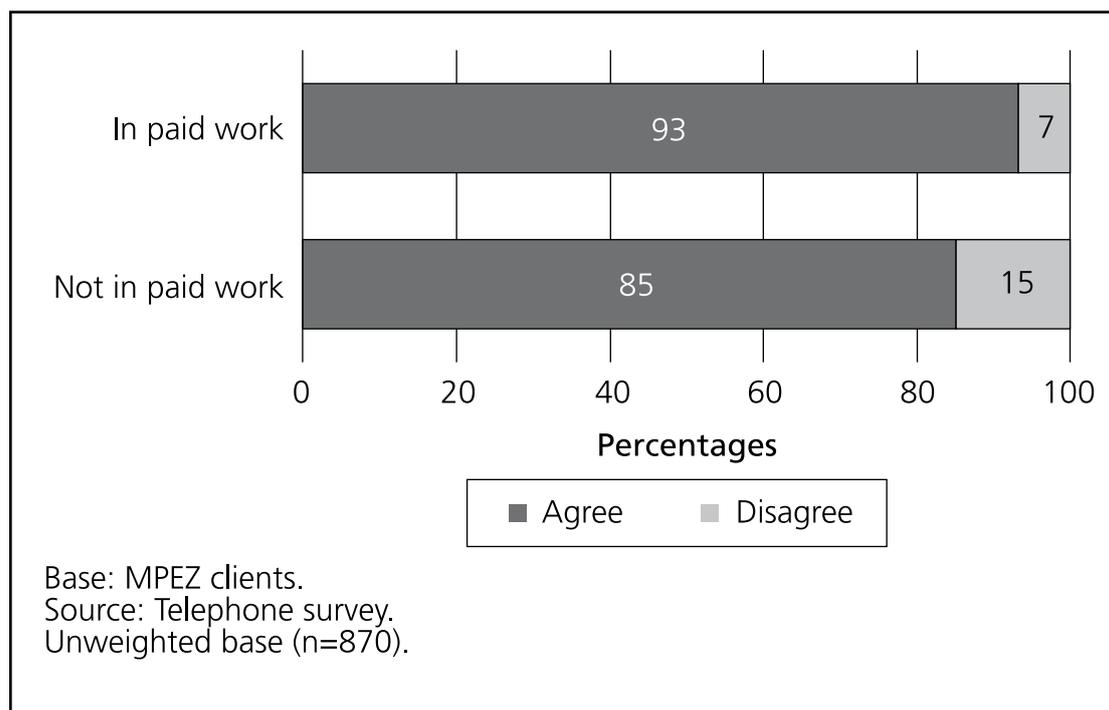
2.3.1 Work motivation

Work motivation was examined in the telephone survey by asking clients whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements. Clients who were employed at the time of their interview were more likely to say that getting a job depended on the amount of effort they put into jobsearch. Figure 2.2 shows that nearly all clients in paid work (93 per cent) agreed with the statement 'How quickly I get/got a job depends/depended mainly on how much effort I put into looking for one' compared to 85 per cent of those not in work.

The qualitative research discussed with clients their feelings about returning to work and found a varied level of motivation to work. Clients who had a positive orientation to work cited a range of issues underpinning this, including to:

- provide a purpose and structured daytime activity in their life;
- gain greater independence through earning an income;
- pursue specific career aspirations;
- encourage a work ethic to children and family by acting as a role model;
- provide a better standard of living (e.g. providing a stable family home or additional money to spend on social and leisure activities).

Figure 2.2 Agreement with the statement 'How quickly I get/got a job depends/depended mainly on how much effort I put into looking for one' by work status



Where motivation was low or there was less of a focus on finding work, this was felt to have increased steadily as the period of unemployment had gone on,

prompted mainly by the frustration of not finding work quickly, or by less than agreeable experiences of work which had not been sustained.

'It's probably my motivation is my biggest barrier. I've got to get myself motivated, to get myself... Its not, its not like I don't like work; its getting myself back into the frame of mind because that's mainly [it] Because as for my last job there, I just couldn't be bothered with it. That way you just lose interest in the job...I want to get a job as well that I kind of can bulk myself up a wee bit and become a Manager or something instead of just working day in, day out in the same job that way.'

(Male, mandatory client 18-24)

2.3.2 Barriers to work

A range of barriers to finding work, common among long-term unemployed people, were outlined by clients in the qualitative research. These encompassed:

- scarcity of vacancies that matched skill or previous experience;
- employers preference for those with more recent experience or with more consistent work experience;
- inability to find work in desired sectors, sometimes due to lack of experience and training;
- lack of opportunities for work in the local labour market because of the deteriorating economic climate after mid-2008;
- concern about making work pay and scepticism about whether work would make any positive difference to financial circumstances;
- difficulty in finding work that fitted around caring responsibilities.

2.3.3 Job search activities

Survey respondents who were not currently working were asked about various job search methods they may have used. High levels of job search activity were reported and the most common methods were looking for job vacancies in newspapers (74 per cent) and at the job centre (58 per cent) (Table 2.3). Some clients were not involved in any job search activities (15 per cent of those not in work) although this was much more common among lone parents (33 per cent) than mandatory clients (young and older people, both eight per cent) (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Job search activities by client group

Job search activities	Client group			
	18-24 %	25+ %	Lone parents %	Total %
Looked for vacancies in a newspaper	78	85	54	74
Looked or asked about jobs at a job centre	65	68	36	58
Looked for jobs on the internet	75	56	47	57
Asked someone to see if their employer has vacancies	44	53	29	44
Contacted employers directly to ask for a job	50	51	24	43
Looked or asked about jobs at an Agency	43	41	19	35
Any other ways in which you have looked for vacancies	10	14	8	11
None	8	8	33	15
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>207</i>	<i>240</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>598</i>

Note: Column sums to more than 100 because respondents could give more than one answer.

Base: MPEZ clients not in paid work.

Source: Telephone survey.

Clients who reported some job search activity were also asked specifically about job applications in the four weeks preceding the interview (Table 2.4). The two most common ways people applied for jobs were sending CVs (69 per cent) and completing application forms (60 per cent). Less formal methods, such as asking friends about jobs, were also common (48 per cent). Lone parents were less likely to report job application activities than mandatory clients (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4 Job application activities by client group

Job application activities in last 4 weeks	Client group			
	18-24 %	25+ %	Lone parents %	Total %
Sent a CV	74	72	60	69
Completed an application form	67	61	52	60
Got a friend to asked about jobs on your behalf	52	51	36	48
Got an agency to apply on your behalf	32	28	20	27
Got a personal advisor to ask an employer to interview you	16	20	12	17
None of these	5	10	22	12
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>139</i>	<i>166</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>378</i>

Note: Column sums to more than 100 because respondents could give more than one answer.

Base: MPEZ clients not in paid work and who had done some job search activities.

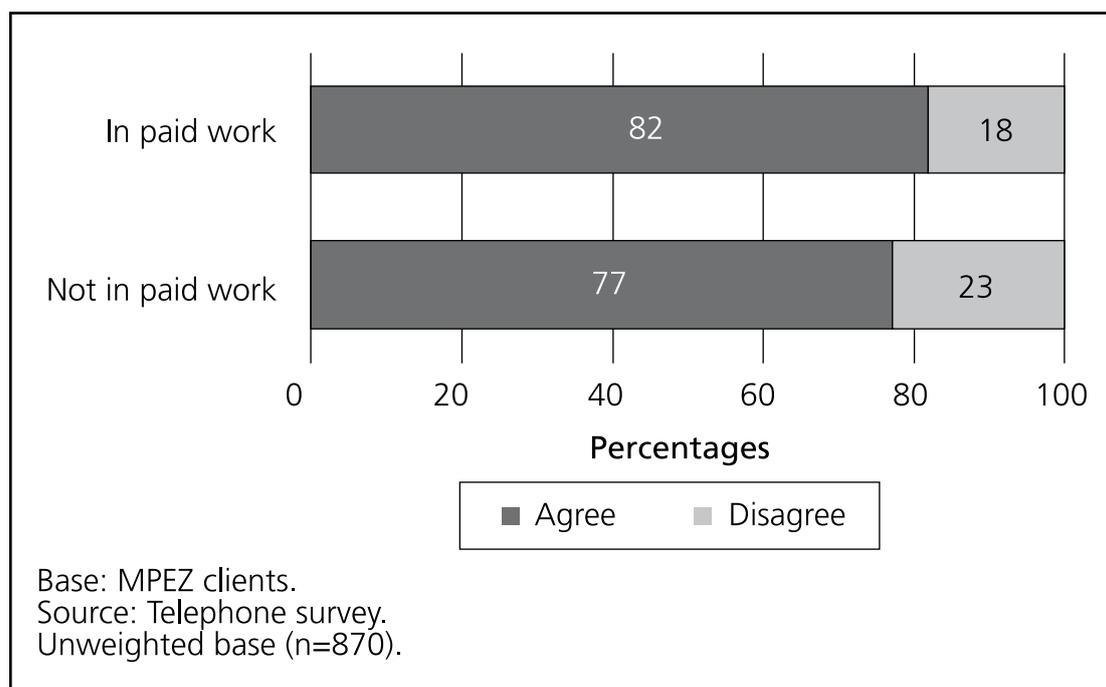
Source: Telephone survey.

2.4 Clients' assessment of EZ provision

This research did not attempt to evaluate EZ provider services, however, some data was collected relating to clients experience of the EZ programme that is of relevance. Clients were asked whether they thought their experience on the programme had an impact on their employment chances. Current work status had some impact on the response to these questions. Those in paid work at the time of the interview were more likely than those who were not in a paid job to agree that 'Meeting someone at 'provider name' improved/improves my chances of getting a job' (82 per cent compared to 77 per cent¹, Figure 2.3). This was also reflected in the qualitative research, where clients pinpointed specific aspects of the support that they had received from EZ providers that had helped them into paid employment, such as: the vacancies signposted by provider staff; the help with job applications and covering letters, and the training courses accessed through the EZ programme.

It is difficult, however, to establish the direction of the relationship between a client's view of their provider and whether they were in paid work. Opinions about providers could be shaped by employment outcomes or it could be the case that those with a positive attitude towards their EZ provider are more likely to find work.

Figure 2.3 Agreement with the statement 'Meeting someone at "provider" improves/improved my chances of getting a job' by work status



¹ significant $p < 0.10$.

The qualitative research also highlighted a relationship between these two issues. Whether clients had negative or positive views of their experience of the programme, they were generally influenced by three issues:

- **the provider's understanding of clients' needs:**

Clients felt that they were provided with good service if their adviser had a good understanding of their individual needs and gave good advice on jobsearch and vacancies that chimed with the client's perceptions of their skills, experience, and aspirations. It was felt important that provider staff discussed openly with clients their individual needs and barriers to employment in a friendly and approachable way. These discussions, it was argued, then allowed providers to suggest strategies to overcome barriers and highlight the skills and experience of clients, which in turn helped improve the client's confidence and motivation to return to work.

'I felt that I'd made the right decision because they was helping me to get out there, and to get into interviews...I'd probably say its like given me a bit of confidence to say, you've got the experience, you're willing to learn and a hardworking person and that, so the fact that they're giving me a bit of courage...and helped me to make the phone calls easily, and talk enough that they [employers] can understand me.'

(Female, mandatory client 18-24)

Clients who had more negative impressions of the provision did so because they felt that the adviser had failed to take account of their individual needs and aspirations. This was said to be reflected in the types of vacancies an adviser offered, for example, when advisers encouraged them to apply for vacancies that did not meet their expectations, which were below their previous salary, were in a sector that was not of interest, or were in a distant location that was inconvenient to travel to. Some clients went so far as to suggest that they were being directed to go for inappropriate vacancies because providers wanted to meet specific targets for job outcomes.

'The jobs which he sent me for wasn't really suitable for me...He was trying to get me to do a lot of cleaning and I'm telling him I can't do that at the moment. He wasn't really listening...sometimes I feel like he was just pushing me so he can get his bonus.'

(Male, mandatory client 18-24)

- **the level of support and help received with job search:**

Clients' assessments of their provision reflected the level of support and help that they received with job search activity. Clients were more satisfied if they felt providers were actively helping them find work by, assisting them with CVs writing and applications, signposting suitable up-to-date vacancies, arranging interviews and appointments with employers, and organising work trials or training around basic skills or certificates for specific employment fields (e.g. food and hygiene

certificates). Clients who were not happy with the level of support received, felt that the programme had not helped with their job search for some of the following reasons:

- there had been limited discussions of vacancies and employers;
- vacancies advertised or signposted were out of date;
- the programme had not highlighted new opportunities or vacancies that clients themselves were not aware of from their own job search activities;
- clients had experienced delays in arranging and attending relevant training.

- **the general environment of a provider:**

Finally, the general environment at the providers' premises was also a factor in whether clients were satisfied with the provision they received. Clients appreciated providers whose office had an informal and relaxed environment where they were able to drop in and use the resources of the providers (telephone and internet) to carry out job search activity when they needed.

3 Process of choice

While choice of provider had been a longstanding offer for lone parents in Multiple Provider Employment Zone (MPEZ), the introduction of choice for mandatory clients constituted a significant change in practice. Prior to that, the Random Allocation Tool (RAT) had been used to place clients with a provider, under an agreed market share system. This was not without criticism and previous evaluations have highlighted a range of problems with the use of the RAT. It was seen to have negative implications for mandatory clients because they were unable to pick the provider that suited their own circumstances or needs (Policy Research Institute, 2006). For repeat Employment Zone (EZ) clients this was seen to be particularly disadvantageous because they were powerless to avoid a return to a provider who they judged had been unable to help them on a previous occasion (Hirst *et al.*, 2006). Questions were also raised about the RAT from an operational perspective. Initial problems meant that the tool took a longer period of time than expected to process a response, which meant that some job centres had to undertake random assignment of provider without the client being present (Hirst *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, there were suggestions that the RAT compromised the full operation of choice within MPEZ because providers were limited to competing for lone parent clients (Griffith and Durkin, 2007).

This chapter will explore the process of choice following the introduction of choice for all clients. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data, it explores the source and content of information used to make a choice, client experience of making the choice and the factors that underpin an informed choice.

3.1 Informing choice

A central issue for this study is to understand what information was used by clients to determine which provider was best for them. This section gives an overview of the sources of information that clients used, and explores in depth the nature of information accessed via Jobcentre Plus, as well as through other channels.

3.1.1 Sources of information

The survey identified that clients' accessed information about EZ providers from a variety of sources (Table 3.1). The most common of these were leaflets (51 per cent), at the provider office (28 per cent), from posters and notices (21 per cent), the internet (15 per cent) and in newspapers (15 per cent).

While there was consistent use of leaflets across all client groups, there was some variation in access to other information sources. Notably, lone parents were most likely to access information in an EZ provider office (39 per cent), on a poster or notice (28 per cent) or in a newspaper (19 per cent). This is consistent with the findings of previous research which explored the sources of information used by lone parents in MPEZ to inform their choice of provider (Policy Research Institute, 2006; Hirst *et al.*, 2006). Perhaps unsurprisingly, young people were the group most likely to access information on the internet.

Despite the range of information sources available to clients, over a quarter of clients (27 per cent) said that they did not access any information or, some months later, were unable to remember using any information. This suggests that there were some clients who did not have an opportunity to make an informed choice or do not remember making one. This is discussed in Section 3.2.

Table 3.1 Sources of information by client group

Information source	Client group			
	18-24 %	25+ %	Lone parents %	Total %
Leaflet	54	49	53	51
EZ office	26	23	39	28
Poster or notice	18	19	28	21
Internet	23	12	13	15
Newspaper	14	14	19	15
Friends and family	10	3	4	5
Job centre	1	2	2	2
Telephone	*	1	2	1
Other	5	8	5	7
None	24	31	20	27
<i>Unweighted base</i>	289	329	157	775

Note: Column sums to more than 100 because respondents could give more than one answer.

Base: MPEZ clients who were aware of choice.

Source: Telephone survey.

3.1.2 Information received via Jobcentre Plus

The intention was that clients would receive information from Jobcentre Plus in two ways: through information leaflets circulated on behalf of the providers and through discussion with an adviser. We examine here how both channels operated.

The provision of information leaflets

The marketing leaflets distributed by Jobcentre Plus advisers were designed by each provider, but subject to Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) rules and guidance. Providers were permitted to supply information on the services they provided, but not to give information regarding performance. The type of information covered within provider leaflets related to the:

- practical help a client could expect to receive, e.g. CV writing and interview technique;
- training opportunities that could be accessed to improve or update skills;
- nature of support available to help with confidence and motivational barriers;
- types of financial support available during the search for work (e.g. money towards interview clothing and household bills); and
- contact details and location of the provider, which enabled clients to contact providers before making a decision.

Different leaflets were produced for lone parents and mandatory clients. While both sets of leaflets covered a similar set of core issues, the leaflets targeting lone parents highlighted how the provider's services could address specific barriers experienced by them (such as childcare) or described the links they had with local employers who provided child friendly working hours. Alongside the marketing leaflets, clients were expected to receive a general leaflet which explained the purpose and process of client choice in MPEZ.

The intention was for mandatory clients to receive the information about choice when attendance at a Fortnightly Job Review (FJR) triggered an appointment for a Restart meeting². Once triggered, Restart meetings were expected to happen about two weeks afterwards. It was expected that clients would have access to information about the providers and the choice process during the intervening period and that they would receive this either at the FJR or by post. The process was designed to give the client time between the two meetings to consider the information provided and to weigh up the pros and cons of various options.

The evidence in this study suggests that the process did not operate in the intended way for all mandatory clients. The survey showed that roughly half of mandatory clients (54 per cent of those aged 18-24 and 49 per cent of those 25 or older) reported accessing information from provider leaflets (Table 3.1). However, it is important to note that difficulties with recall because of the timing of the interviews may have affected clients' ability to pinpoint what information, if any, they accessed. Nevertheless, the qualitative research also indicated that there was

² The trigger point varied for different client groups. For clients aged 18-24 it was six months after taking part in New Deal for Young People (NDYP), while for clients aged 25 and over it was 18 months of claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA).

much variation in clients' access to the correct range of leaflets. While some clients received the full set of information, others received incomplete information, as a result of not being given a full set of provider leaflets, not getting the leaflet which explained client choice or both. This left some clients feeling confused or unclear about whether they had a choice and what they were being asked to choose between.

'They sent out that letter for me to go up for the interview and the [name of provider] leaflet was in that, but it didn't actually say...why I was going to the interview...there was nothing in the letter that told you about employment zones...it just said that you had to come for the interview with a date and a time...I just thought it [provider leaflet] was information they were sticking in...you know like, where you get letters from different places and then you've got leaflets to do with different things in it'.

(Female, mandatory client 25+)

There was similar inconsistency regarding the timing of information. While some clients received the information as intended, either at or around their FJR, others reported that they did not receive any information until the Restart meeting. This had implications for the ability of clients to assimilate the information and to make an informed choice, discussed in Section 3.3. Interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff shed some light on why this might have occurred. In one area it had been a conscious change of practice to distribute information at Restart meetings because information mailed to clients had repeatedly been lost in the post or mislaid. Indeed, some advisers were sceptical about the value of giving information in advance because they felt it was rarely considered or fully understood. Alternatively, the increased pressure on job centres due to the rising numbers of new claims in 2008/09 meant that some advisers involved in FJR work said that they did not have the time to provide this information in the intended way.

The process for distributing information to lone parents was different, in part because providers could market their services to them directly outside of the job centre, but also because their entry to the programme often happened via a Work Focused Interview (WFI) rather than an FJR or Restart interview. The individual circumstances of individual lone parents determined whether they were given any information about providers in the context of a WFI. This is discussed further below.

There was among some clients a preference to receive the information in a different way to what they experienced. Some of those who had received the information by post expressed a preference to be given it at a face-to-face meeting, so that they could ask questions, and have the information further explained. Others felt the information could have been delivered by email, because they felt this would be more convenient to access in one place on their PC.

Interaction with adviser

A client's meeting with a Jobcentre Plus adviser was an opportunity to gain more information about the programme itself and the process of choice. Observations

of these meetings, as well as the accounts of advisers and clients, indicated that they covered a range of different issues such as:

- whether referral to the programme was mandatory/voluntary;
- the different stages of the EZ programme;
- how the programme differed from the support that they had received via Jobcentre Plus (e.g. providers offered more intensive 1-1 support from an adviser);
- how benefit would be paid and that responsibility for payment transferred to EZ providers;
- the choice of provider available for clients;
- the nature of support offered by providers to help people back into work (e.g. CV writing, help with interview technique); and
- the support for travel costs offered by providers.

However, there is also evidence to suggest that there was variation in the range and depth of issues discussed. This was influenced by:

- **the nature of the interview:**

The different purpose and context of Restart interviews versus WFIs influenced when and how advisers introduced information about providers. Client choice for mandatory clients was discussed within Restart meetings after other activities, such as a review of jobseekers agreement and discussion of job search activity. In these circumstances, choice was a definite agenda item, something that had to be discussed and decided upon. Choice was introduced for lone parents in the context of the WFI³ which, while compulsory to attend, does not have to achieve a set of definite outcomes. Consequently, it was more usual for advisers in these interviews to first discuss a lone parent's feelings about work in general, and then important issues such as their work experience, training needs, qualifications and skills, and caring responsibilities. The EZ programme was introduced in the context of this general discussion of the challenges and benefits of returning to work. In this sense, it was presented as one way that Jobcentre Plus could provide help for lone parents back into work. Lone parents (in areas outside of London) were also given the option of enrolling in New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), which like EZs provided a similar programme of voluntary support for clients back into work.

³ Lone parents also had the option of NDLP, which offered a programme of support to help lone parents back into work. NDLP was initially introduced as an option at a first WFI. The EZ programme was then discussed at subsequent WFIs (except for London where NDLP did not operate).

- **the knowledge of the adviser:**

It is clear that the depth and quality of information received was also dependent on the knowledge of advisers. Advisers were portrayed as knowledgeable by clients if they provided comprehensive information about the programme and were able to answer detailed questions about the providers and the services they offered.

'I mean he would pull out booklets and he had loads of little bits of paper with all this writing, I can't even remember what it was all, all for now, but I mean he just knew exactly what he was talking about, what questions I needed to ask. When I asked him questions he'd come straight back to me with an answer without even hesitating so he did know quite a lot.'

(Male, lone parent client)

Conversely, advisers were portrayed as having limited or insufficient knowledge when clients were dissatisfied with the quality of information they received about what individual providers offered and the differences between them. In the qualitative research, clients sometimes felt that advisers were unable to distinguish between providers. Some clients pressed for distinctive characteristics and they were either told that they all provided 'the same service' or that the only distinguishing feature was their location. It is possible of course that these clients may have misconstrued an adviser's attempt to be impartial as a lack of knowledge on their part.

- **adviser understanding of their role:**

The final influence on the information received by clients during interviews about the providers appears to be rooted in the adviser's understanding of their role in supporting client choice. Advisers had different interpretations of this and consequently different approaches to talking about and giving information about providers. This is discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

3.1.3 Other information channels

While it was expected that all clients would have access to information via Jobcentre Plus, clients' understanding of the choice available to them was also aided by other information channels. About one in seven (14 per cent) clients in the survey reported that they sought additional information to help make a decision about which provider to join. Clients who had seen promotional materials about all of the providers in their area were more likely to report that they sought additional information (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Seeking additional information by access to provider information

Did you try to find information about the providers in any other ways?	Saw information about all providers		
	Yes %	No %	%
Yes	19	13	14
No	81	87	86
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>158</i>	<i>601</i>	<i>775</i>

Base: MPEZ clients who were aware of choice.

Source: Telephone survey.

The most common reasons for looking for more information was a desire to know more about what the provider could offer (77 per cent) and whether providers would improve their chance of getting a job (71 per cent) (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 Additional information sought by clients

Information sought	
What you would be expected to do	54
What the organisation would do for you	77
How much the advisor would respond to what you wanted	58
How much the meetings would improve your chance of getting a job	71
Other ways they might help you	30
None of these	3
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>117</i>

Note: Column sums to more than 100 because respondents could give more than one answer.

Base: MPEZ clients who sought additional information.

Source: Telephone survey.

While people in the survey outlined a range of different sources of additional information about providers (see Table 3.1), clients in the qualitative research emphasised only two: EZ providers and friends or family.

Information direct from providers

Over one-quarter of clients who were aware that they made choice reported that they accessed information directly from EZ providers (28 per cent, Table 3.1). Engagement with EZ providers happened in three ways:

- **through discussion with EZ provider representatives within job centres:**

This was an important source of additional information where it was permitted. However, each MPEZ had specific arrangements in place for whether providers could have a presence within the job centre. These agreements varied in terms of whether representatives from providers were allowed to speak to both lone parents and mandatory clients, or just to lone parents. In one MPEZ, Jobcentre Plus did not allow providers to have contact with clients in the job centres at all. This was felt to make the process more impartial and to reduce the flow of clients in and out of job centres in what had become a busy time for new claimants

- **by clients' contact with EZ provider offices directly:**

Clients contacted EZ providers either in person, telephone or by accessing provider websites to find out more information about providers and the services that they provided. This was sometimes initiated by the clients themselves or, alternatively, was in response to signposting by a Jobcentre Plus adviser. In practice, awareness of this opportunity among clients varied considerably. Providers reported that very few clients took it up.

- **as a result of EZ provider outreach work and direct marketing:**

Lone parents also had experience of the providers through outreach work and direct marketing within the local community (in places like shopping centres and community centres). This increase of the profile of provider organisations locally and created an awareness of how they could help people back into work.

Information from friends and family

The other way that clients in the qualitative research learned more about providers was through **asking friends and family**, a source that was also mentioned by a minority (five per cent) of survey respondents (Table 3.1). As well as giving clients a greater depth of information about the type of services they offered, talking to friends and family also allowed clients to develop a basic familiarity with a service and what it might be able to do for them. The role of recommendations in the choice process is discussed further in Chapter 4.

3.2 Experiences of choice

A key issue within existing research on how choice operates in the delivery of welfare to work programmes has been client experience of choice. It has been reported that some clients (such as lone parents in MPEZ) had limited awareness of choice because they did not have enough, or any, knowledge about the range of providers available (Hirst *et al.*, 2006). Alternatively, it has been suggested in previous evaluations of MPEZ that while most lone parents were aware of the choice available to them, they felt that they had not been given a real choice. Rather, the experience of referral and allocation to a specific provider had been

akin to a mandatory process (Policy Research Institute, 2006). These issues have also been reflected in other relevant work. Research looking at the experiences of JSA customers of EZ and New Deal found that of those clients who were eligible to choose a provider, there was not always awareness that this choice was available to them. The impression given was that choice was largely absent, in that providers were assigned automatically and that clients assumed the provider they were referred to was the only one available (Adams and Carter, 2008). The key message from this research is that choice needs to be better explained to clients at the point of referral.

In this study, there was considerable variation in how clients experienced choice. From the survey and qualitative research it is possible to identify four different experiences of choice, based on client awareness of having made a choice and recall of the information received. These were:

- choice based on a complete set of information;
- choice with limited information;
- failure to make a choice despite having information;
- no awareness of choice (with limited or no information).

It is important to note that the clients' accounts of their experience may have been affected by their ability to recall the specifics of the process. As noted in Chapter 1, there was a considerable delay between when clients made a choice and when they were interviewed about it.

Exploring these different typologies of client experience in the survey research reveals that only one in eight (12 per cent) of clients experienced choice in the way it was intended – that is having an awareness of the purpose of choice and feeling like they had a complete set of information with which to make it (Table 3.4). Perhaps more worryingly, only just over half of clients reported making a choice (54 per cent). Just over two-fifths of clients (42 per cent) interviewed in the survey had no awareness of choice.

Table 3.4 Client experience of choice

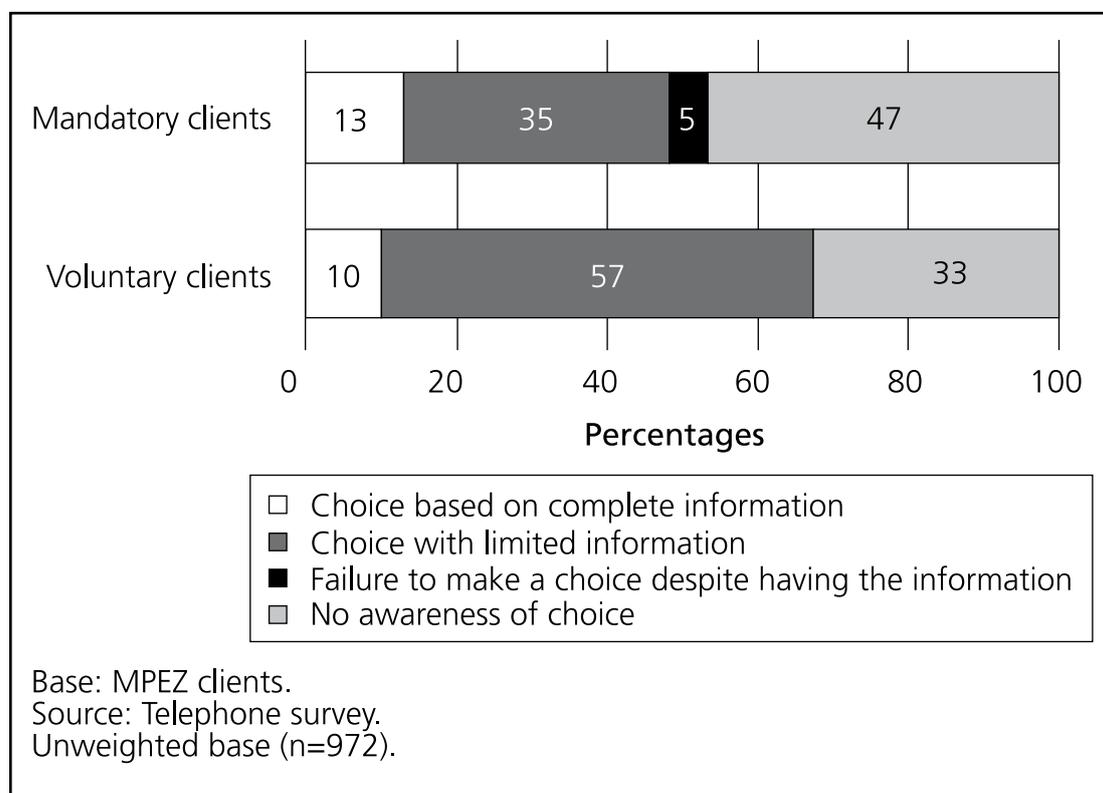
	Details of experience	% of clients¹
Choice based on a complete set of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aware of full choice of providers, and • Received leaflets for all providers 	12
Choice with limited information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not aware of full range of providers, or • Did not receive all or any of the leaflets 	42
Failure to make a choice despite having information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice made via RAT 	3
No awareness of choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only aware of a single provider • Did not receive leaflets/ or received leaflets for one provider 	42
<i>Unweighted bases</i>		972
Source: Qualitative interviews		Source: Telephone Survey

¹ Survey respondents were classified into one of the four categories based on their answers to various questions about awareness of providers, information accessed and whether they made a choice. Voluntary clients were defined as having made a choice if they were aware of more than one provider.

Base: MPEZ clients.

Almost half (47 per cent) of mandatory clients did not recall making a choice of EZ provider at the time they were interviewed. The other half were aware of choice and reported making a decision either with information about all of the providers (13 per cent), with limited information (37 per cent) or used the RAT (five per cent) (Figure 3.1). Among lone parents, a third were unaware that they could choose an EZ provider, whereas the remainder were aware of more than one provider (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Experience of choice by mandatory or voluntary participation



The remainder of this section outlines the different experiences of choice in more detail.

Choice based on complete information

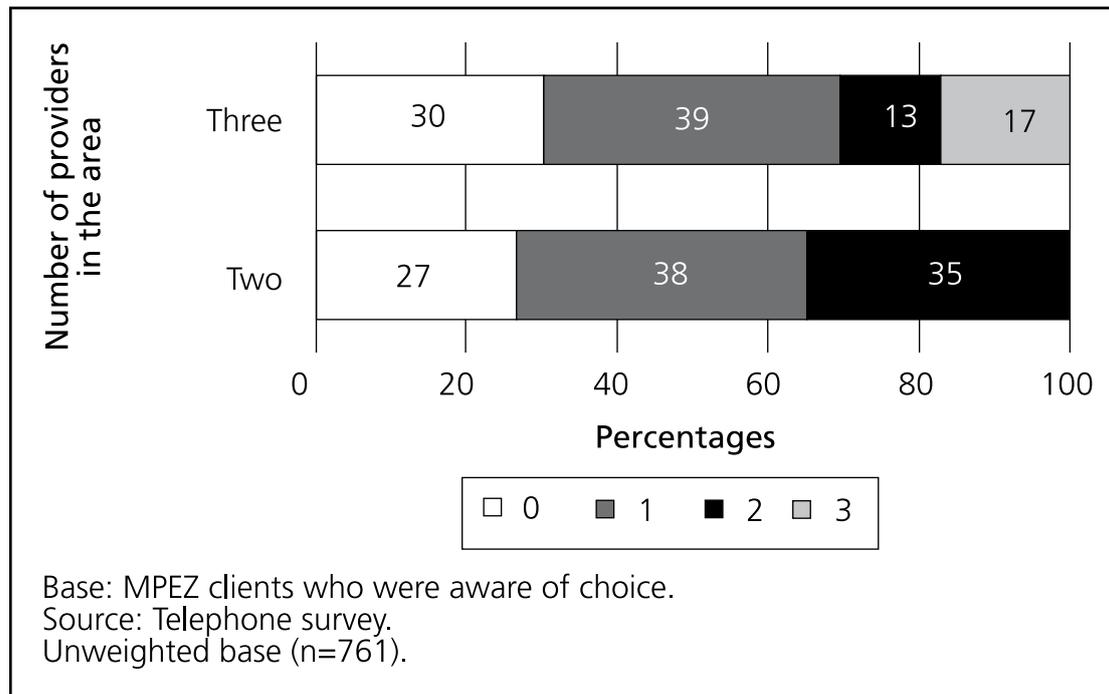
This experience was characterised by clients feeling that they had made a conscious choice of provider and that they had done so with a full set of information. As discussed earlier, there was variation in when this information was received and this had implications for how informed they really were (discussed further in Section 3.3). It is perhaps worth noting that those who felt they had made a choice in this way did not always have their choice fulfilled. This was highlighted by the experience of one client in the qualitative research who recalled that the adviser was unable to contact the chosen provider to make the referral and so instructed the client to select an alternative.

Choice with limited information

Another experience was that of making a choice, but with limited information, that is, clients either did not have enough information about each of the providers available or they only had information about some of the providers on offer. This meant that clients did not have adequate information to make an informed choice. A considerable proportion of clients (42 per cent) were not aware of the full range of providers and/or felt that they received limited information regarding the providers. In areas where there were three EZ providers, only 17 per cent of

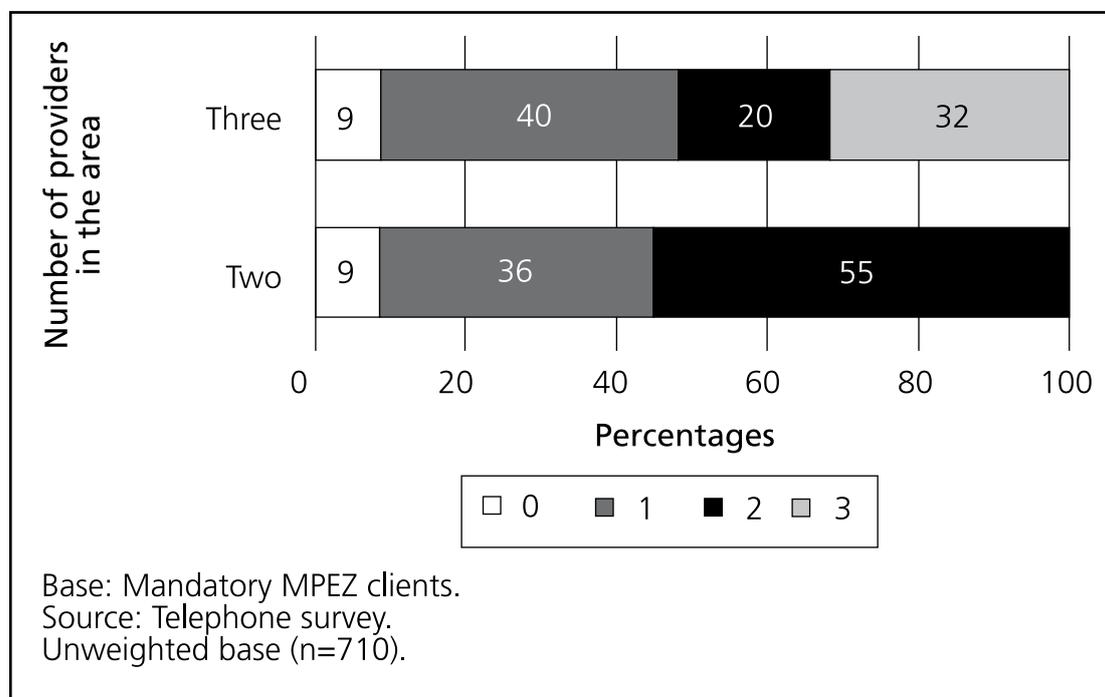
clients said they saw information about all of the providers (Figure 3.2). Where there was just two EZ providers, only 35 per cent of clients said they saw information about both.

Figure 3.2 Number of providers that the client saw information about



Similarly, in areas where there were three EZ providers, only one third of mandatory clients (32 per cent) recalled talking about all of the providers at the Jobcentre (Figure 3.3). In areas where there were just two EZ providers, over half (55 per cent) of mandatory clients recalled talking about both.

Figure 3.3 Mandatory clients – number of providers discussed at Jobcentre Plus



Failure to make a choice despite having the information

A third experience of choice was recalled by those who felt they had been given information but they did not want to, or feel able to, make a choice. This experience was limited to a small number (five per cent) of mandatory clients. The qualitative research has highlighted two reasons why clients did not make a choice. The first of these related to client ability to understand and comprehend the task. This occurred where clients found it difficult to relate to the concept of choice within the context of a job centre and, it could be argued, did not have a proper understanding of the shift from automatic selection to self-determined choice. It also happened when clients had poor literacy and language skills and were not able to absorb the information they were presented with. Alternatively, there is also evidence to suggest that failure to make a choice was a reflection of the lack of value some clients placed in the choice process. From this perspective, there was no point in selecting a provider. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Where clients did not make a choice, the expectation was that they would be randomly allocated a provider using the RAT. There was limited use of the RAT across MPEZs since the introduction of choice. Advisers discussed using the RAT as a last resort if someone refused or could not make a choice, mirroring the rationale given by clients above. However, there was not universal awareness of the RAT among all advisers. Admittedly, some had been in the role for a short time, but there were other more longstanding advisers who were of the view that the RAT was no longer used following the introduction of choice.

No awareness of choice

The final 'experience' of choice was from clients who, in fact, did not recall any kind of choice at all. As noted above, around four in ten clients in the survey (42 per cent) had no recall of being given a choice, and this was common among both lone parents and mandatory clients. Moreover, just under a third of clients (30 per cent) in areas with three providers of clients and just over a quarter of clients (27 per cent) could not recall seeing any information about any of the providers. These sorts of experiences were also reflected in the qualitative interviews with clients. It was clear that some clients were unaware of any other provider in their area at the time they made their choice. Some did learn at a later time about other providers, but this was too late to influence their choice.

'They've only given you that one option so you think, yeah, that's the only option you've got. So it would have been a good idea if there are other organisations out there they could have said well you can go to these various places. That would have been a lot better. At least you would have had a choice...I kind of thought it's either go to [name of provider] or do it by myself.'

(Female, lone parent client)

3.2.1 Experience of changing providers

Lone parents, but not mandatory clients, were able to switch providers. The ability to do this was generally valued because it allowed lone parents more than one opportunity to select the organisation that they felt best met their needs. For example, lone parents sometimes switched providers to one which was closer or more convenient or because they felt another provider could deliver better customer service. The availability of additional information regarding the alternative providers was key to facilitating such changes, though recommendations from friends and family or direct marketing by providers also played a role. It is worth noting that there were lone parents who would have welcomed the opportunity to change provider, but felt they were unable to make that decision because they did not have enough information to know whether another provider would provide a better service.

Mandatory clients also expressed some preference for this option. The telephone survey revealed that, out of the mandatory clients who recalled making a choice, one in five (20 per cent) said that they would like to change to a different organisation at the time they were interviewed. Where mandatory clients expressed a desire to change providers in the qualitative research this was due to a negative impression of their current provider and/or because of subsequent recommendations from friends and families of an alternative provider who they thought would better suit their needs.

3.3 What underpins an informed choice

One of the main functions of choice was to empower clients to select a provider who would most meet their needs. The previous section has shown how client experience of choice was influenced by how informed they were to make a choice. It is therefore important to understand what aspects of the process assist clients in choosing a provider. Interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff and clients, as well as observations of Restart and WFIs, suggest that there are five factors that underpinned an informed choice:

- the opportunity to visit providers;
- the time available to consider the information;
- the ability of the adviser to clarify and explain;
- the nature of the information received;
- the client's outlook and engagement.

Each of these is explored in the subsections that follow.

3.3.1 The opportunity to visit provider offices

The accounts of clients in the qualitative research who contacted providers prior to making a choice suggest that it led to a better informed choice. This was because the contact gave them important additional information about the approach and style of providers; was an opportunity to ask about how a provider would meet their individual needs; or gave them a better feel of the environment and atmosphere of an organisation. This was especially important where the information from Jobcentre Plus was not satisfactory.

'I wouldn't have been able to make a choice if I hadn't gone to see them for myself...Because I don't actually think (the adviser), She hasn't been there herself so obviously she doesn't know much about them. She knows about Employment Zone but not about each individual company which made it hard.'

(Male, mandatory client 25+)

The value of a client having direct contact with a provider was also underscored by providers themselves who felt that without it clients were sometimes unable to understand the differences in the quality and nature of the support offered by different provider organisations.

'Now the problem with choice...is that that individual has been told you have to go to this place, you don't know that much about the difference of quality between those individuals because for ourselves we would always sell ourselves on the quality of our staff. Now with choice a client never gets to meet our staff before they make their choice so the judgment is purely on the basis of a piece of paper ultimately.'

(Employment Zone provider)

The accounts of both providers and Jobcentre Plus advisers suggested that few clients took up this option. Jobcentre Plus advisers felt that in some cases clients lacked the confidence to get in contact. However, some clients interviewed in the qualitative research were unaware of the opportunity to contact providers prior to choice despite the contact numbers being highlighted in provider leaflets. This suggests that more could be done to increase awareness about this option.

Providers and Jobcentre Plus staff felt that the providers' role in providing information to clients directly could be enhanced. One suggestion was Jobcentre Plus should host information sessions or group sessions with clients so they could meet all the providers at the same time, although there was some acknowledgement this would be difficult logistically, and that it may be difficult to get some clients to attend.

3.3.2 The time available to consider the information

Advisers spoke of the importance of giving clients the time and space to understand the choice available to them. This was felt to be particularly important in situations where there were difficulties in comprehending the information or, alternatively, where clients had an apparent lack of experience of making choices around work and employment (such as younger clients). The observations and the interviews with advisers highlighted that a range of strategies were used to create this space for clients. These included giving the client time to read the leaflets in the meeting or getting clients to articulate what attributes were important to them in a provider. Where advisers were unconvinced about a client's readiness to make a choice, they sometimes rescheduled appointments to give time to read the leaflets, discuss options with family and friends, or make contact with providers.

Lone parent advisers had greater flexibility in ensuring clients had enough time to make a decision, because clients did not need to make a decision on the day of their meeting and could also change providers. This meant advisers could encourage lone parents to see all providers and then make a decision, and provide reassurances to clients that they could change providers if they were not happy with the support they had received.

As noted earlier in this chapter, there was inconsistency in the amount of information clients received and when they received it. When there were gaps in the information clients had received, or where they had received none at all, this was mitigated to some extent by an adviser following some of the strategies outlined above to ensure that clients had the information they needed to guide their choice. However, the observations of meeting between clients and advisers revealed occasions when clients were given leaflets for the first time, but were not necessarily given the time to read fully the content, nor were they guided by the adviser to read the leaflets given to them before making a choice. This undoubtedly undermined the potential for informed choice.

3.3.3 The ability of the adviser to clarify and explain

As will perhaps be evident from the preceding point, advisers performed an important role in clarifying and explaining choice. While this does raise questions about the adviser's impartiality in the choice process (discussed in Chapter 4), it was deemed invaluable by some clients. An adviser's input was important in two ways. It helped clients to understand the purpose and nature of the choice they were making. It also helped clients to understand how providers were different from each other. The importance of being able to use meetings to give extra support to those with language or literacy issues was also highlighted. Advisers sometimes arranged for translators to be involved where the client's first language was not English.

3.3.4 The nature of the information received

It is perhaps obvious that a key factor underpinning informed choice was access to information that was perceived as useful, clear, and accessible. We know from the discussion above that a client's experience of choice is often hampered by the limited availability of information. Around one in five of clients (21 per cent) who felt they had made a choice felt they had not had enough information (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5 Sufficient information to choose

Did you feel that you had enough information to make a choice?	Total %
Yes	79
No	21
<i>Unweighted base</i>	346

Base: MPEZ clients who reported making a choice

Source: Telephone survey.

There is evidence to suggest that many clients were happy with the information contained in provider leaflets. The survey found that clients who recalled making a choice, and who had seen at least one provider leaflet, generally felt that the information was useful in helping them choose (86 per cent said that the information was either very or somewhat useful) (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6 Usefulness of information in making a choice

How useful was the information in helping you choose?	Total %
Very useful	44
Somewhat useful	42
Not very useful	7
Not at all useful	6
<i>Unweighted base</i>	220

Base: MPEZ clients who recalled making a choice and who had seen provider leaflets.

Source: Telephone survey.

However, there was dissatisfaction among other clients who felt they needed additional information to understand the differences between providers. In this respect, the restrictions placed on the content of provider leaflets were felt by some Jobcentre Plus staff and providers to limit their usefulness:

Participant: *'There is not much in them [provider leaflets], you know, its just the same sort of things, we can help to move you into work, we can offer you a wide range of services', just all generic statements...and I think if there was a bit more information about exactly what they had on offer...'*

Interviewer: *'So what information do you think would be useful within the leaflets?'*

Participant: *'Oh, its, we offer a fast track to CSCS certificate, we offer training for the forklift licence, we can get you work placements. You know, that kind of thing.'*

(Job centre mandatory adviser)

In their recollection of the choice process, clients indicated they would have been better able to choose if they had more information about:

- **the support a provider offered;**

This related to the types of services on offer, such as the type of training courses provided or whether providers offered specialist knowledge in a particular employment field (e.g. retail or construction). It also, for some, related to a need to know more about the style and approach of provision, particularly whether support was offered through 1-1 sessions or group work. It is worth noting that these information 'gaps' related to issues that other clients felt they could glean from the information provided. This raises questions about how accessible the information is to all clients but also perhaps is an indication of the level of engagement some clients have made with the information provided. This is discussed further below.

- **the effectiveness and performance of a provider:**

A second area where clients wanted more information related to the provider's experience of, and success at, getting people back into work. Providers themselves suggested that this could be done by lifting the restrictions over the content included within the leaflets and adding more tangible information about the level of performance and effectiveness. For example, the inclusion in leaflets of information about the success rate at getting clients back into work, the sustainability of jobs attained, and the range of employers available, were all suggested by providers as items that would assist clients in making a more informed choice.

'I think clients should be able to...look at stats, look at how people are doing and they make informed choices in that way, you know. I think providers should be able to give as much information as they can, not limit them. Because how does it help a client when you have to have the same information? How are they making an informed choice? Because they're just looking at the same thing and as a provider we feel anything that we do wouldn't matter because we can't share that information with clients.'

(Employment Zone provider)

It was also suggested by advisers and provider staff that clients could be given more information to differentiate providers. This, it was argued, could be achieved by sharing the current star rating system used by Jobcentre Plus to compare the performance of providers.

- **the financial implications of joining a particular provider;**

Providers were permitted to use incentives within their direct marketing of lone parents, but were not allowed to use incentives for mandatory clients. Providers did not admit to using financial incentives in this way themselves, but it was common for them to describe how their competitors had used them to encourage lone parents to sign up. This led some providers to advocate the scrapping of incentives to avoid client choice being based on financial reward.

There was a view from both mandatory clients and lone parents that there could be greater clarity about the type of financial assistance a provider could offer during the search for work. This related in particular to financial assistance with travel costs or to help buy clothing for interviews. There was not universal support for this move among providers who felt that introducing this information into the choice process would be unhelpful, because this may be perceived as an incentive by clients. From this perspective, financial assistance from providers was not offered to attract clients but to support them into sustained employment.

- **the transports links to provider offices:**

Lastly, clients wanted to receive information regarding the transport links to providers premises so they could establish how convenient it was to travel there.

3.3.5 The client's outlook and engagement

A client's own outlook and engagement also played a part in their ability to make an informed choice. This occurred in two ways. The first related to whether or not they felt they were being offered a real choice. Where clients were convinced of this, it helped them engage with the information presented. Conversely, where they were unconvinced of this – because having a provider was something they had to do rather than something they could opt to do – then their level of engagement with the material was undoubtedly compromised. The second related to how oriented clients were to find work at all. Chapter 2 has outlined that clients had varied levels of motivation to enter work and this was felt by Jobcentre Plus advisers to affect their engagement with the material presented.

4 Factors underpinning choice

A key question for this research is what factors clients take into account when they choose a provider. Previous research on this matter is limited, although there are some relevant studies. We know from research conducted with lone parents in Multiple Provider Employment Zone (MPEZ) that their choice is influenced by the types of services on offer, the quality of service, and the location (Policy Research Institute 2006). Other factors said to affect choice were provider reputation, recommendation from family and friends, incentives (e.g. help with childcare costs and clothes), and the experience of visiting an Employment Zone (EZ) provider (Hirst *et al.*, 2006). These reflect the sorts of reasons that clients of other welfare to work programmes take into account when choosing a provider. Legge *et al.*, (2006) reported that New Deal for Disabled People clients chose providers on the basis of proximity and convenience, the perception that their job broker provided a good service, the role of Jobcentre Plus offices in referring potential registrants to job brokers, and a positive assessment of how the help provided match their needs. They also, to a certain extent, reflect the factors identified outside the UK. The most important factor influencing choice in Australian welfare to work programmes is location, with word of mouth also cited as a reason (Morrell and Brandosky 2005).

This chapter uses both the survey and qualitative research findings to understand which factors influence choice in MPEZ. It identifies the factors that are most important for which types of clients and demonstrates how they influence choice.

4.1 Overview of the factors that influence choice

There were a wide range of factors that influenced client choice of provider. These related to six different sets of issues. Table 4.1 shows the proportion of clients who mention each factor as a reason for choosing a provider, broken down by type of client. It also matches this quantitative data with the key points from the qualitative data about how each factor affects choice. It is important to note that not everyone described all the factors listed. The majority (80 per cent) of clients identified only one factor as a primary influence, while 20 per cent mentioned two or more reasons for choosing a provider.

The three most common factors for choosing an EZ provider were the location of the provider (mentioned by 29 per cent of clients), the information and advice clients received about the provider (28 per cent) and clients' previous experience (27 per cent). Recommendations to EZ providers were also mentioned by 20 per cent of clients and a small proportion mentioned that their decision was influenced by a professional (four per cent) (Table 4.1). The type of organisation was not identified as a factor in the survey, but was discussed by clients in the qualitative interviews.

The reasons for choosing a provider varied for the different types of client (Table 4.1). The most prevalent factors for mandatory clients were location and previous experience, while lone parents were more likely to be influenced by information and advice, recommendations and the advice of professionals.

In addition to the categories shown in Table 4.1, clients sometimes reported making a random choice (four per cent) or reported that they didn't know why they had chosen a particular provider (two per cent). Other specific reasons, which did not fall into any particular category, were also mentioned in three per cent of cases.

Each of the following sections describes each of the six factors in detail and how each played a part in influencing choice.

Table 4.1 Factors that influence choice

Factor	Aspects of factors identified through qualitative research	% of clients who mentioned factor in the survey			
		18-24	25+	Lone parents	All clients
1) Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distance from clients home/job centre Accessibility Location of provider Important factor when little or no other information to make choice 	34	30	16	29
2) Previous experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive experience Negative experience 	27	30	12	27
3) Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience of friends/family Word-of-mouth 	22	18	25	20
4) Information/advice provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appearance of leaflets Content of the information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services on offer Jobs on offer Incentives Lack of information 	28	26	36	28
5) Influence of professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence of providers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presence in job centre Clients contacting providers in person/by phone Influence of Jobcentre Plus advisers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence Indirect influence Direct influence 	3	3	11	4
6) Type of organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercial versus non commercial Reputation 	-	-	-	-
<i>Unweighted Base</i>		159	159	35	353
	Source: Qualitative interviews	Source: Telephone Survey			

Base for survey data: Clients who recalled making a choice.

Note: Survey respondents could report more than one reason.

Note: The quantitative data for the 'influence of professionals' category only includes advisors in Jobcentre Plus, the influence of EZ providers was not addressed in the survey.

Note: Type of organisation emerged through the qualitative research but was not mentioned in the client survey.

4.2 Location

Location was the most important factor influencing choice for clients in general. Around one in three (29 per cent) clients, who recalled making a choice, identified location as a reason for choosing their provider. This picture chimes with the views of providers and Jobcentre Plus advisers who felt it was the main factor that influenced client choice. However, location was more important for mandatory clients (34 per cent of clients aged 18-24 and 30 per cent of clients aged 25 or over said their choice was affected by the location of the provider) than for lone parents (only 16 per cent say that location influenced their choice) (Table 4.1).

Where location was discussed in the qualitative research as a factor underpinning choice, it was said to affect choice in four main ways. The first of these related to **the distance of the provider from the client's home**. Clients' described choosing the provider that was closest to their home or the most convenient to get to. The second way location played a role related to **the distance between the Jobcentre Plus Office and the provider office**. Providers, in particular, felt clients favoured providers that were close to the job centre as it saved them making two journeys. The third related to the **accessibility of the provider**. How easy it was to get to a particular provider was a consideration in clients' choice. Good transport links, available parking, or being within walking distance from home attracted clients because it helped to reduce travel costs.

'It was closer, it was within walking distance, because obviously it costs you money to get to these places and if you're on the brew, you've not got that kind, you've not got bus [money]. It might sound miserable but you've not got three pound to go to a Job Club. Do [you] know what I mean? Unless they were paying. If they were paying for it, aye, fair enough but it was within walking distance, that's it. It's easier.'

(Female, mandatory client 25+)

The final way location influenced choice related to **the environment or area in which the provider's office was situated**. Important here was how familiar clients were with the exact location of the provider and the surrounding area. However, the setting of the provider could also sway clients in other ways. When the location was perceived in a positive way, it could attract clients. For example, one client described picking a provider that was located in the city centre as he felt it would have more links with employers in the area, he would have greater access to other agencies and organisations, which in turn would be a greater help to him in finding employment. Conversely, the setting of the provider's office could also discourage clients from choosing a particular provider. Perhaps the most startling example of this occurred in areas where there was a culture of gang violence. Here the location of a provider's office in a rival gang's territory prevented some younger clients from attending their offices:

'We have incidences where because we've got some gang cultures in certain parts of the city. If a customer living in a certain area...has a particular provider they could...go to because it's on their doorstep, they will ask to go to a different one because they can't travel across that particular boundary.'

(Third Party Provision Manager)

Another less extreme example of where the actual location of the provider had deterred clients from choosing them related to their location in 'distracting environments'. For example, providers that were located in shopping centres were sometimes favoured less because going there could lead clients to focus more on shopping than on finding employment because going there could lead clients to spend money they did not have.

While there was a clear rationale in the accounts of clients for how location influences choice, there was also some evidence to suggest that location was the fall back when their ability to make a choice was constrained in some way. This occurred in two different ways. First, where clients felt that they did not have enough information to make an informed choice, they tended to base their decision solely on the location of the providers. Second, in circumstances where clients were unable to discern any differences between what the providers offered, then they also tended to be influenced by where the offices were located.

'I didn't really think there was much difference between them [providers] anyway, so for me the choice came down purely to where it was at.'

(Male, mandatory client 25+)

4.3 Previous experience

Clients' previous experience with EZ providers was another important factor that influenced their choice, with over a quarter (27 per cent) of clients citing it as a reason, although this varied for different client types (Table 4.1). Mandatory clients were much more likely than lone parents to report that previous experience with an EZ provider had influenced their choice. Twenty-seven per cent of clients aged 18-24 and 30 per cent of clients aged 25 and over, cited previous experience as a factor, compared to just 12 per cent of lone parents (Table 4.1). It is possible that clients may also have experience of these providers through another welfare to work programme, or in their capacity as a private recruitment agency.

From the qualitative research with clients, it was possible to identify a range of ways in which past experience influenced choice. Where a client had a past experience with a provider that was positive – for example, they got on well with the staff members or they successfully found work using that provider – this sometimes led them to choose that same provider again. Alternatively, if they felt they had got all the help they could from a provider, and that repeating the experience would not have value, this sometimes led them to choose a different provider. Where a client's previous experience with a provider was negative – for example,

not getting on with their adviser, not finding employment or feeling like there was too much competition for vacancies – this usually led them to choose a different provider.

'I had first hand experience of [name of provider] and they didn't really help me. I got the job through my mother, so I noted from there that [name of provider] was no help, and [other provider] can't be any worse...can it?'

(Male, mandatory client 18-24)

4.4 Recommendations

One in five (20 per cent) clients reported that personal recommendations had influenced their choice of provider (Table 4.1). Lone parents were most likely to rely on recommendations, with one quarter of lone parents (25 per cent) basing their choice on recommendations. It was also an important factor for mandatory clients, cited by roughly one in five clients (22 per cent of those aged 18-24 and 18 per cent of clients aged 25 or more) (Table 4.1).

The impact that recommendations from family and friends could have on a client choice was highlighted by Jobcentre Plus advisers, providers and clients. The experiences other people had with a provider, in this way, could sway clients in favour or against those providers. These recommendations were used to make specific judgements about a provider's way of working or their performance. The aspects of provider services that were questioned were:

- **relationships with staff members:**

Where people had got on well with their adviser, found them helpful and approachable, this led them to recommend the provider to others. Not surprisingly, where a client had found staff members to be unhelpful or unfriendly they were less inclined to recommend them to friends or family.

- **the services and support on offer:**

Where people felt that the providers' training opportunities and support had matched their needs, this led them to recommend the provider to others. Where this had not occurred, then they were less likely to give a positive endorsement.

- **the provider's success rate at finding them employment:**

Where people had successfully found employment and attributed this to their experience with a provider, this led them to positively recommend that provider to others.

'...I knew a couple of people that went there as well, and they've got work from there, and they said they're pretty good at getting people into work fairly quick, that's how I kind of thought, that's kind of one of the reasons why I went with [name of provider] as well.'

(Female, mandatory client 18-24)

4.5 Information and advice about the services provided

The information and advice provided by Jobcentre Plus advisers and EZ providers was also viewed as being a factor that underpinned choice. Twenty-eight per cent of clients reported that their choice was influenced by the information and advice available. Lone parents were most likely to report that the information and advice offered was a reason for choosing a particular EZ provider. Indeed, this was the most important factor for lone parents with 36 per cent of lone parents mentioning information as a factor influencing their choice of provider. It was also an important reason for mandatory clients, chosen by just 28 per cent of 18-24 year old clients and 26 per cent of clients aged 25 or over (Table 4.1). This greater reliance by lone parents on the information supplied by providers was suggested by Third Party Provision Managers (TPPMs) to result from the different marketing strategies that providers were permitted to use for voluntary clients.

Three main aspects of the information provided were pinpointed as being important in the qualitative analysis. These related to:

- **the availability or accessibility of information:**

The amount of information that clients received to help inform their choice varied considerably, discussed earlier in Chapter Three. Where information was limited – for example, where clients received information on some but not all of the providers or received partial information on all providers – this undoubtedly affected the degree to which they could rely on it to help them choose. Similarly, when clients found the information inaccessible – for example, because of literacy or language issues – they were less inclined to rely on it to make the choice and were more influenced by other factors, particularly location. Of course, not understanding the differences between providers could make choice difficult and result in clients choosing on the basis of location.

- **the appearance of the information leaflets:**

The choice of provider was sometimes based on the appearance of the information leaflets. Information that was set out clearly and concisely could attract clients to a particular provider. Important here was whether the leaflet was deemed eye-catching or friendly. There was a sense in the qualitative interviews with clients that this was a particularly important factor when clients found it difficult to make a choice based on other criteria. Providers' accounts support this view. They argued that because of the generic nature of the information contained in all provider leaflets, client's choice was based more on the appearance of the leaflets than the information in them.

- the way the information portrayed the services on offer:

A key issue for clients was what the information communicated about the services on offer. Clients reported that they were more likely to choose a provider that they thought offered services that met their individual needs. For example, if a client could see clearly that a provider offered help with CVs, or had multilingual staff, or offered support in moving into self-employment, or in finding training opportunities, they were inclined to choose that provider over others. What the information communicated about the way services were delivered was also important. For example, both clients and providers described how choice depended on what the information available said about whether support was delivered through one-to-one or group sessions. Previous experiences of group encounters in other welfare to work programmes led to a preference for 1-1 sessions by some clients. Where this occurred, group sessions were viewed as less helpful because other people within the groups were seen to be less motivated to work and to take the sessions less seriously. Alternatively, it was felt that individuals within the groups had different strengths and weakness to returning to work which needed tailored rather than group support. Similarly, what the information said about the types of vacancies that a provider had access to could also influence a client's choice of provider. Jobs that matched clients' aspirations, qualifications and skills encouraged clients to choose one provider over another. Interestingly, the role of this sort of information in being able to influence choice was questioned by some Jobcentre Plus advisers and providers. They argued that it would be difficult for clients to differentiate between the providers and the services on the basis of the information contained in leaflets because it was, by necessity, so similar in nature.

'It's mainly location and experience, to be honest...because like I said, the information is pretty similar and generic, so obviously by looking at it, there's probably not a great deal in there.'

(Job centre mandatory adviser)

Related to this, the information that respondents received about any likely incentives they would receive as a result of working with a specific provider also had an influence on their choice of provider. Both lone parents and mandatory clients described choosing providers because they offered supermarket vouchers, helped pay for transport cost or clothing for interviews

[Provider name] actually said on the front of the leaflet that they paid you your, they'll pay your travel costs for a month or something, but I didn't know whether it was a month while you were going there or a month if you'd gone back to work, so I just picked them because that said about the travel costs whereas the [other provider] didn't.'

(Female, mandatory client 25+)

There was a general view among providers and Jobcentre Plus advisers that lone parents could take advantage of the system and move between providers to receive several payments.

4.6 Influence of professionals

Both EZ advisers and providers had the potential to influence client choice in a variety of ways. We discuss here the role played by both types of staff.

4.6.1 Influence of providers

The extent to which providers could influence client choice was largely determined by how much access they had with clients prior to them making their choice. A common theme across all participants in the qualitative research was that providers could influence the choice process if they had the opportunity to engage directly with clients about the services and support they offered. There were two ways in which providers could do this. First, providers could influence client's choice if they had a presence in the job centre. This allowed them to actively target clients and sell their services. As outlined in Chapter 3, there was not a consistent approach to this across the MPEZs. Not surprisingly, there was concern among providers in the areas where they were not allowed to do this that they had to rely on Jobcentre Plus advisers to inform the client of the services they provided. The second way in which providers could influence client choice was if clients contacted their office directly in person or by phone. Where clients did visit providers prior to making their choice, four aspects of the experience influenced their decision:

- the **location**: whether it was close by and easy to get to;
- the **friendliness of staff members**: where staff were helpful and less formal, clients felt at ease, which made them more inclined to choose that particular provider;
- the **layout of the office**: there were different views here. Some preferred offices with meeting rooms because they offered privacy, whereas other preferred open plan offices as it meant advisers could not pretend to be busy, or unavailable, as illustrated in the example below.

'...the layout of the place, and with [name of provider] being a complete open floor, nobody can be hidden. So if they say your adviser is on the phone, you can tell they are on the phone, you know they can't be lying.'

(Male, mandatory client 25+)

- **interaction with other users of provider services**: Where clients visited providers' offices their conversations with users of the service sometimes led them to regard the provider in a more positive or negative light.

4.6.2 Influence of Jobcentre Plus advisers

The role of the adviser, as outlined in Chapter 3, was to outline to clients the various providers available and to distribute marketing materials to inform client choice. It was not expected that they would lead or guide client choice in any way or make explicit recommendations. Previous research has highlighted that this is a challenge for advisers. Hirst *et al.*, (2006) has shown clients did ask advisers for

guidance on which provider to choose or which provider was the best for their individual needs. Their research found that advisers responded to these questions by suggesting that clients visited the providers themselves. If pushed, advisers did outline the views on the strengths and weaknesses of providers, but were careful not to make an outright recommendation.

The perceived influence of Jobcentre Plus advisers in the choice process was a recurrent theme among EZ providers in this study. While providers acknowledged the role of Jobcentre Plus advisers was to be impartial and neutral, there was still a concern that advisers had a degree of influence over client choice, whether intended or unintended. Clients did identify Jobcentre Plus advisers as an influence on their choice of provider, although much less of an impact than other factors. Only four per cent of clients in the survey mentioned it as a factor influencing their choice (Table 4.1). Lone parents were almost four times more likely than mandatory clients to report that Jobcentre Plus advisers had an influence on their choice of EZ provider. Eleven per cent of lone parents cited it as a reason, whereas only three per cent of mandatory clients did so (Table 4.1).

The qualitative research has highlighted that where advisers have an impact on client choice, it is related to two issues: the adviser's interpretation of 'impartiality' and the way that they presented and discussed information.

The adviser's interpretation of 'impartiality'

All of the advisers interviewed in the study described their role as intended – to provide clients with impartial information about the providers available. However, there is evidence to suggest that in practice advisers are guided by very different interpretations of what this means. At one end of the spectrum were advisers who made a conscious effort to hold back any information that might help clients to distinguish between the various providers on offer. It was common for these advisers to limit their role to explaining the general types of support and help that providers could give and not to talk specifically about the support offered by any one individual provider. Some recounted how they specifically said to clients that all the providers offered 'similar' provision and how they were reticent about presenting their own views about any differences they might perceive in the service and quality of providers. It is worth noting, however, that this approach sometimes had implications for whether clients felt they had enough information to make a choice.

'The only thing we can do is offer general advice because we have to, at all times, remain impartial and you know its like this morning one of them said well which one do you recommend. I can't do that, and we wouldn't do that because you know we have to be seen to be fair to all three providers, so it's just a matter of saying to them well this is the sort of things that any of them can do for you...we are automatically programmed...to be impartial so we always do.'

(Job centre mandatory adviser)

At the other end of the spectrum were advisers who saw it as part of their role to ensure clients made an informed choice by giving them as much information as possible, even if it inadvertently meant it might influence choice. This led to personalised approaches in how they discussed the providers, for example, highlighting information in leaflets (e.g. specific training and types of employment available), and discussing the location or bus routes to a provider.

Interviewer: *'What kind of information or support can you offer the client in sort of...in helping them make that choice?'*

Participant: *'Well one of the easiest things to do is obviously we've got the leaflets. Go through them establishing really whether or not the customers have got basics skills needs first, because it's no good giving them the three leaflets and say, while I'm doing this, do you want to just have a browse through there...so I tend to go through with them and explain where the offices are...we look at the location...I tend to say, where is that? And draw them out, is that closer to you? ...So, this one here, [name of provider] has got three offices, so we look at the pros and cons of would you really want to drive into town? Would you like to go into town, you know, approximately twice a week? Or do you want to be more local.'*

(Job centre mandatory adviser)

The way that advisers presented and discussed information

A second, and related, issue influencing client choice was the way in which advisers presented information about the providers. This occurred in two ways. The first related to how provider leaflets were presented to the client in a meeting, for example, whether provider leaflets were laid next to each other or one provider's leaflet was placed on top of the other provider. The second related to what sort of prompts advisers used in describing providers, for example, whether they highlighted the location. It is important to note here that these were not regarded by advisers as intentional ways of influencing choice. However, the influence of advisers could be seen implicitly in clients' descriptions of how advisers highlighted or suggested locations, for example, advisers explaining that one provider was just down the road or discussing which provider was closest to where a client lived. It is worth noting, however, that when explicitly asked, clients generally described the information that they received as impartial, and said there was little difference in the information given regarding the type of support offered by each provider.

How exactly information is presented or discussed is a particular source of concern where a client is unable or unwilling to make a choice. Since the introduction of choice there has been little use of the Random Allocation Tool (RAT). Consequently, concern has been raised by some providers about what advisers do when a client experiences difficulties in choosing or refuses to choose a provider. There was

considerable suspicion among some providers that in these circumstances the sorts of subtle messages discussed above have a particular power.

'I think ultimately I believe that job centre advisers do have some influence on clients although there is impartiality there. Purely also it can be as simple as, and its not even necessarily intentional, they could push one leaflet further forward than another and that can make a difference between someone Or which one they show them first. You know, that may not be in any way a conscious influence on that individual but it ultimately has an influence.'

(Employment Zones provider)

Some providers also believed that the RAT was not used with indecisive or uncooperative clients, but instead that the adviser directed clients to choose a specific provider. These suspicions are borne out in the accounts of some clients who indicated that advisers had a direct influence on their choice when they were unable to make one.

'...they advise you to pick the closest one to where you live so you don't have to travel that far.'

(Female, mandatory client 18-24)

There was some suspicion by providers that the quality of an adviser's working relationship with a specific provider could sometimes influence the prominence they gave to them in discussions with clients. Interestingly, providers themselves talked about how they tried to foster good relationships so that an adviser might look upon them more favourably than their competitors. For example, some providers gave additional information about the services they provided and their performance, in the hope that this would encourage advisers to discuss their services with greater enthusiasm and insight. Others described how they offered gifts of lunches, cakes, and office supplies to advisers to carry favour with advisers. An important caveat here is that where these incentives had been offered, Jobcentre Plus managers had made efforts to stop it occurring.

4.7 Type of organisation

The final issue underpinning choice of provider was mentioned in the qualitative interviews only. Some providers felt that the commercial nature of their organisations could either put people off or encourage them, depending on whether it chimed with their own personal objectives. This view was echoed in clients' accounts. For example, one client decided not to go to a particular provider because he felt its services were tailored towards **city professionals** who he could not compete with and it offered employment opportunities that were not suitable for his qualifications. Equally important was the reputation of the provider. Clients spoke about choosing a provider because they were well known, for example, they were regularly advertised on television. Jobcentre Plus advisers also felt that clients were swayed by how work orientated they felt the providers were and how much pressure they would put on them to find employment.

5 The implications of choice

The introduction of client choice of provider in Multiple Provider Employment Zone (MPEZ) represented a significant change in practice. This understandably had implications for all the parties concerned. This chapter will explore these. It looks first at the operational effects of choice – on Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations. It will also explore what difference choice made to clients, focusing specifically on the value placed on being offered a choice of provider.

5.1 Operational effects of choice

Putting choice into practice had particular effects on both Jobcentre Plus advisers and providers, and for the relationship between the two. These are explored in the sections that follow.

5.1.1 Jobcentre Plus advisers

The discussion about the effects of choice on Jobcentre Plus focused primarily on its implications for the Jobcentre Plus adviser's role. Some advisers felt that the introduction of choice had not brought with it significant change. They retained the same caseload and had similar sorts of meetings with clients, in which they explained the programme and what support was on offer from the providers in the same way as before. Where choice was felt to have brought about change for advisers, the effects were discussed in four different ways.

1. The introduction of choice was seen to enable Jobcentre Plus advisers to sell the Employment Zone (EZ) programme to clients in a way they were not able to before and this was felt to have **made it easier to engage clients in the process**, particularly mandatory clients. Advisers reported that they were less likely to face resistance from clients because they felt the choice process gave clients a sense of involvement or control over the decision making process. This was contrasted with the previous use of the Random Allocation Tool (RAT) which advisers felt imposed an outcome on the client, one which was more difficult to engage them in.

'I think they don't perceive it as you're sitting there and telling them [what to do] It [choice] gives them an element of control over what they want to do... they've got the actual control and the choice of saying, 'I want this one. '

(Job centre lone parent adviser)

2. This in turn was felt to have **made advisers' roles easier and less strenuous**. Advisers explained how choice had reduced the potential for clients to blame them or be aggressive if the RAT selected a provider that they were not satisfied with.
3. There were mixed views about the effect of choice on **the efficiency of the referral process**. The exclusive use of the RAT prior to the introduction of choice was described by some advisers as a cumbersome process, often dogged by technological problems. The dramatic reduction in its use was said to make for a smoother referral process. Conversely, choice was felt by others to have made the referral process longer and more time consuming for the adviser because it required them to explain all the options to clients and allow them time to make their decision. Where this occurred, it had sometimes led to the rescheduling of meetings so that clients could have more time to consider their choice, something which added to the adviser workload.
4. Finally, there was some feeling that the introduction of choice had in some way **compromised adviser impartiality**. How this occurred is discussed in Chapter 4. Jobcentre Plus advisers felt there was a concern among providers over how neutral they were when offering choice to clients, which could have a negative affect on their relationship with Jobcentre Plus staff. Consequently, there was a preference among some advisers to return to the blanket use of RAT and, in doing so, to remove any doubt over the impartiality of their role.

5.1.2 The effect on the relationship between advisers and providers

In addition to the effects described above, the introduction of choice also affected the adviser's relationship with EZ providers. The evidence suggests that it had both positive and negative impacts on the relationships. Where it was positive, Jobcentre Plus advisers noted that relationships had improved because providers made a conscious effort to increase their contact and communication with them. This was seen by providers as an opportunity to build up a rapport with the Jobcentre Plus staff and keep them updated on any changes to their services, which in turn meant that advisers were better informed to answer questions from clients during the choice process. This reduced providers concerns about how informed clients were when making their choice and helped build positive relationships. Providers also changed their referral processes in an attempt to make it easier and quicker for Jobcentre Plus advisers to make referrals by asking Jobcentre Plus advisers for less information during the referral phone calls and training other members of staff to process referrals.

Where choice was seen to have a negative effect on relationships, this occurred in a range of ways. Where providers questioned the neutrality of advisers, this was said to create tension between the two parties. Even where there was no question of bias, perceived changes in some adviser's practice – such as not attending provider events in order to avoid being seen to favour one over another – were viewed by providers to hamper the quality of what hitherto had been good working relationships.

'...before we used to go and play football with them, but they can not be seen to be biased towards a particular provider, so you know they've been more reluctant in accepting or coming out on events, because they don't want to be seen that they're being biased. There are very clear guidelines regarding the acceptance of what might to somebody looking in be considered an inducement.'

(Employment Zones provider)

Increased competition between providers was also thought to put a strain on advisers' relationships with providers. As noted earlier, the challenge to increase market share had apparently led some providers to try to subtly influence advisers by offering gifts such as sweets, cakes and branded office supplies. While this had been unproblematic in some settings, in others it had a negative effect on relationships.

5.1.3 Impact on EZ providers

The introduction of choice in MPEZ had a range of effects on EZ providers. Interviews with providers and Jobcentre Plus staff revealed that the introduction of choice had two sets of implications for the way in which providers operated. The first of these related to the service offered to clients and the way they were marketed:

- **the range of services on offer:**

Increased competition was said to have made providers **up their game**. Providers described how they had introduced new services or expanded the range of training opportunities on offer to keep up with changes in the labour market and client need but also in response to what other providers offered. Choice had also resulted in changes to the ways in which services were delivered. Providers discussed how they had become more customer focused and had adopted a more tailored approach to meet individual clients needs. The use of incentives was also said to have increased with the introduction of choice. This was particularly noticeable for lone parents who were offered, for example, free bus passes or clothing allowances to encourage them to choose a particular provider. This supports earlier research which suggested that increased competition led to providers improving customer service and innovation in the services they provided to attract, retain, and offer services to clients which would appeal to their individual needs (Policy Research Institute 2006).

- **the nature of marketing materials:**

The format and layout of marketing material was changed to make it more attractive and to advertise services more effectively. This involved setting out the content of services in bullet points, so they were clearer to read, and providing information in different languages. Changes were also made to the content of the information presented, for example, including information about specific training opportunities they had on offer. These changes were made by some in response to feedback from clients and Jobcentre Plus advisers.

The second set of implications for providers concerned their business operations. There were several aspects to this.

- **the location of the service:**

Providers described how they had relocated or opened new offices in prime locations to attract clients. Some, for example, moved close to the large job centres in the area. This was grounded in the view that the most important factor influencing client choice was the location of the provider's office. Such moves were costly and were said by providers to create difficulties in budgeting because such structural changes had not been allowed for in their original business plan. There was some suggestion that the cost of adding locations had adversely impacted on budgets for training staff and for client focused work.

- **the staffing of MPEZ provision:**

Choice had sometimes led to the creation of new staff roles. This happened for two reasons. New staff members were appointed to act as representatives in the job centres and liaise directly with the Jobcentre Plus advisers to build constructive and effective relationships. Alternatively, new roles had been created to try and meet the individual needs of clients in their MPEZ , for example, appointing bilingual staff to work with people for whom English was not their first language.

- **ability to operate aspects of the choice process:**

There were difficulties for some providers in operating certain aspects of the choice process. Of particular note here were the challenges posed by clients moving between providers, which lone parents, but not mandatory clients, were permitted to do. This was said to create problems in managing caseloads and there was some suggestion that such flexibility had made it difficult to keep track of some clients' progress. A shared database between providers and advisers was proposed as being a possible solution for addressing these problems.

- **the share of the market:**

There were reports of how choice had increased or, conversely, decreased a provider's market share. While such changes were seen positively by some providers, they were bemoaned by those who had suffered a reduction in market share after the introduction of choice. Fluctuations in market share were said to have had an impact on budgeting and funding and to make it difficult for providers to manage resources. For example, where market share increased, new staff were recruited to deal with increased levels of referral and larger caseloads. Where market share contracted, this had led to redundancies or redeployment of staff to other areas of service delivery. These fluctuations were felt by some to have a detrimental effect on the performance and the quality of their service.

'One of my concerns about choice ultimately is that as a company and as providers it can actually have a detrimental impact on performance... [Referral rates] can fluctuate from 14 per cent to 35 per cent. You set your staffing levels on the number of clients that you have coming through the doors and you will want to have low caseloads...If every month you don't know how many people you are going to receive, for example, you can have one month where you can get 200 clients, another month where you get 100 clients and that can mean that your caseload is very high which means you have too many people to be working with, with the number of staff that you have. And then you can have too few which makes it more difficult for individuals to achieve the level of performance that you need to achieve your overall conversion levels.'

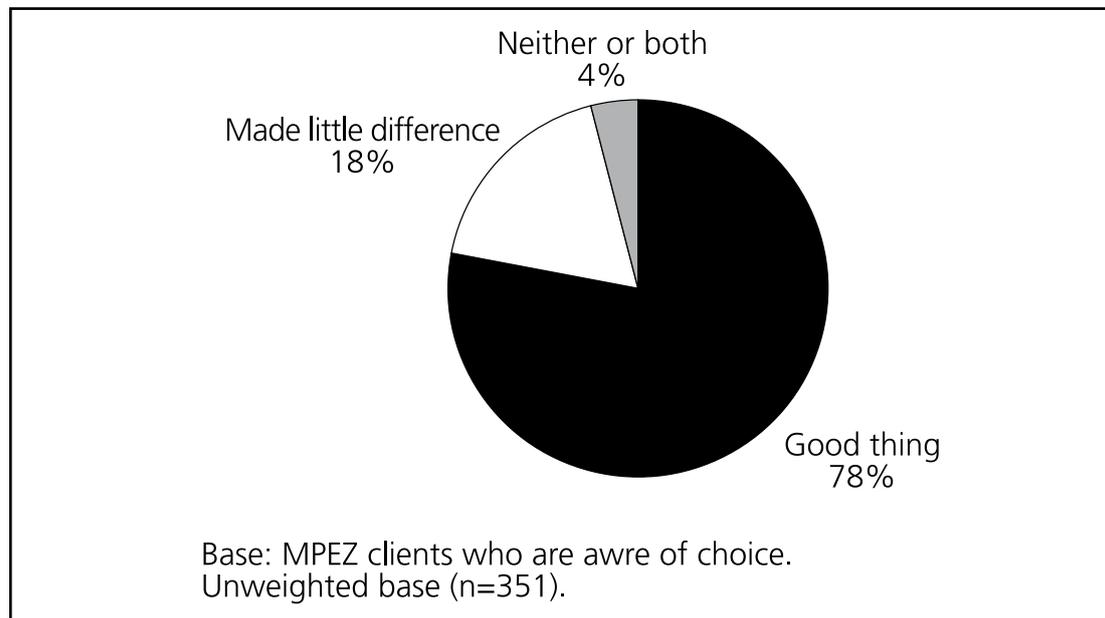
(Employment Zones provider)

5.2 Implications for clients

The implications of choice for both mandatory clients and lone parents was the focus of much discussion among the various respondents in the research. This section outlines the value clients placed in the choice process and what difference it made to their engagement with work and the search for work.

5.2.1 Value of choice

There is strong support for choice among EZ clients. The survey evidence shows that among clients who were aware that they had made a choice, the majority valued this opportunity. Figure 5.1 shows that 78 per cent reported that they felt being able to choose was a good thing, while around two in ten (18 per cent) thought that it made little difference.

Figure 5.1 Was being able to choose a good thing?

The level of support for choice varied among the different client groups, as illustrated in Table 5.1. Among clients who were aware they had made a choice, those aged 18-24 were most likely think that choice was a good thing (89 per cent), followed by people aged 25 and over (75 per cent) and finally lone parents (66 per cent). This finding may reflect the fact that, since mandatory clients are required to participate on the programme, they value the opportunity to have some choice in the process.

Table 5.1 Value of choice by client type

Did you think it was a good thing to be able to choose, or did it make little difference?	Client type			
	18-24 %	25+ %	Lone parents %	Total %
A good thing	89	75	66	78
Made little difference	10	21	21	18
Neither or both	1	4	13	4
Bases	159	158	34	351

Base: MPEZ clients who were aware of choice.

Source: Telephone survey.

5.2.2 Factors influencing value of choice

As the choice of provider is a relatively new practice in the delivery of welfare to work programmes in the UK, there has been little previous research on whether clients value it. There have however been studies that have looked at how clients valued the idea of choice. Where choice was valued, this has been because:

- it offers the client control over the process and creates a sense of empowerment;
- it allows the client to choose the provider that most fits their views or requirements (such as choosing the provider closest to them; the one recommended by friends or family; or simply avoiding providers or options that they did not want to pursue);
- it is assumed that it will lead EZ providers to create more specialist services.

(Hirst *et al.*, 2006; Policy Research Institute, 2006; Adams and Carter, 2008; Finn *et al.*, 2008)

Where choice was not valued, it was usually either because clients were content with the RAT process or because they felt they would lack the knowledge required to make an informed choice (Hirst *et al.*, 2006; Adams and Carter, 2008).

The evidence from this study supports these findings. Moreover, it suggests that clients' feelings about the value of having a choice are based on a broad set of criteria which include, but is not limited to, the process of making a choice. Those factors directly related to the choice process included:

- **the experience of making a choice:**

Chapter 3 has set out the varied experiences clients had of the choice process. Perhaps not surprisingly, the quality of these experiences could influence the extent to which they valued being offered a choice.

- **the perceived degree of control:**

A key issue that affected the value clients placed in choice was the extent to which they really believed they had a choice. Where clients felt that choice gave them control over which providers to choose, they were generally supportive of choice. This perhaps explains why the survey found that previous experience on EZ was associated with the value placed on choice (Table 5.2). Those who had participated on the EZ programme more than once were more likely to say that having a choice was a good thing (84 per cent) than those who were on the programme for the first time (75 per cent).

Table 5.2 Value of choice by previous experience on EZ

Was being able to choose a good thing?	First time on EZ	Second or subsequent time on EZ	Total
	%	%	%
Good thing	75	84	78
Made little difference	20	13	18
Neither or both	5	3	4
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	254	97	351

Base: MPEZ clients who were aware of choice.

Source: Telephone survey.

Choice has undoubtedly enabled returners to the programme to target providers they have had positive experiences with in the past and avoid those with whom they have had negative experiences.

'It [choice] was important because after what happened last time, after I lost my job last year I was frustrated with [name of provider], I didn't really wanna go back there, I felt like they'd let me down. They didn't help me, so I didn't really wanna go there, I wanted to try something new.'

(Male, mandatory client 18-24)

Conversely, when choice was not seen to give clients the degree of control they wanted they valued it less. This occurred in two ways. The first related to the ability or willingness of the client to distinguish between the various provider offers. Where a client was unable to discern any differences, then they were less inclined to see the point in choice. From this perspective, all providers offered the same services, so the opportunity to choose was somewhat irrelevant. The second was voiced only by mandatory clients who said they valued choice less because it occurred in the context of a compulsory activity. From this perspective, the choice was theoretical because not choosing a provider was not an option and would result in a sanction.

'...you just have to choose from three of them, it's not a choice, because you have to choose from them, because if you don't they're going to cut your benefit, so you just have to choose...'

(Female, mandatory client 25+)

While there are distinct aspects of the experience of choice that affect the value clients place on it, there are also a set of factors unrelated to the experience of choice which appear to influence what clients think about choice. These related to:

- **subsequent experience with the chosen provider:**

As noted in Chapter 2, there is evidence to suggest that the value placed on choice by clients is affected by their subsequent experience. This primarily related to the extent to which the level of contact, the activities conducted, the training programmes suggested and the help they received in finding work-matched clients' expectations. Where clients had positive views about these, it appeared retrospectively to influence their thoughts about choice. Conversely, where they did not, they seemed to have placed less value on the opportunity to choose. This was less important for lone parents who were able to switch providers. Evidence from the telephone survey supports this finding. Survey respondents were asked to rate the overall service of their EZ provider (by assigning marks out of ten); those who gave a high rating were more likely to value choice (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Value of choice by experience with EZ provider

Was being able to choose a good thing?	Provider marks out of 10		
	0-5 %	6-10 %	Total %
Good thing	54	86	78
Made little difference	38	10	18
Neither or both	8	3	4
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	77	266	351

Base: MPEZ clients who were aware of choice.

Source: Telephone survey.

- **outcomes achieved:**

Similarly, the value some clients placed on choice was influenced by whether the programme had been successful in helping them to find work. While the survey results did not show any discernable differences in the support for choice by work outcome achieved, the qualitative interviews with clients do suggest that there is a relationship between these two issues. Choice was viewed as unimportant by those who had not found employment through EZ as they had not achieved their primary goal and were still unemployed. While finding work did not always affect the value placed in choice by clients, it did make some clients view the process in a more favourable light.

'It's quite nice to have a choice instead of being told which one to go to...it's made a difference because they did help me find work and training.'

(Female, mandatory client 18-24)

- **individual motivation to return to work:**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is evidence to suggest that the value clients placed on choice is to some extent influenced by their inherent motivation to work. The survey revealed that clients who were motivated to return to work also tended to value choice to a greater extent. Those who agreed with the statement 'How quickly I get/got a job depends/depended mainly on how much effort I put into looking for one' were more likely to think that choice was a good thing than those who disagreed with the statement (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4 Value of choice by job search motivation

Was being able to choose a good thing?	'How quickly I get/got a job depends/ depended mainly on how much effort I put into looking for one'		
	Agree %	Disagree %	Total %
Good thing	80	69	78
Made little difference	16	25	18
Neither or both	4	6	4
Unweighted bases	301	36	351

Base: MPEZ clients who were aware of choice.

Source: Telephone survey.

The qualitative interviews with clients support this finding to a degree. Choice was valued by those who were motivated to return to work because it allowed them to pick the provider most relevant to their individual needs. But choice was not always considered important by the highly motivated. Rather, there were some who argued that they would have gone to any of the providers if they thought they could help them find employment. There was a sense choice was not important to clients who had a low motivation to return to work. This view was shared by Jobcentre Plus advisers who explained that some clients did not value being offered a choice as they were not engaged in the overall process of finding employment.

5.2.3 What difference has choice made to clients?

In the qualitative interviews, clients were not always able to articulate what difference choice had made to their experience. There were some who were clear it had made a difference but could not specify how. This is illustrated by the following extract:

Interviewer: *'What difference do you think it's made for you, if at all, that you were able to choose to go to [name of provider]?''*

Participant: *'Erm [hesitates]...erm, I can't really explain it, it's quite difficult to explain.'*

Interviewer: *'How much do you think it's made a difference to how you feel about going back to work or looking for work?'*

Participant: *'Oh yeah, yeah definitely yeah. erm, it's made a difference because they do help me...it's quite difficult to explain.'*

(Female, mandatory client 18-24)

Where clients did express their thoughts, there were mixed views about whether choice had in fact made any difference. Unsurprisingly, this was related to the degree of value they placed on choice and guided by the same set of factors discussed above.

Nevertheless, the views of some clients, and the accounts of advisers and providers, illustrate that choice has made a positive difference to some clients' feelings about themselves. Jobcentre Plus advisers and providers spoke about clients feeling valued, empowered and in control as a result of being involved in the process. Clients' accounts also supported this view and they described feeling good about themselves and liking the independence choice gave them.

'...it was actually quite nice to have a choice instead of being told which one to go to, it was nice to have a choice. I'm an adult now and I'm allowed to make my own choices and that's what made me feel good in myself that I was able to make a choice.'

(Female, mandatory client 18-24)

This had led to effects for their behaviour in relation to the programme and was manifested in three ways. First, it was suggested by advisers and providers that choice had brought about a marked **improvement in attendance**. This had resulted in lower than usual failure to attend rates. Providers in particular noted that this change was a result of clients feeling more in control and involved in the decision-making process, and as a result more willing and enthusiastic to attend. Second, **increased levels of engagement** both during the Restart meetings and when making a choice of provider was said by Jobcentre Plus advisers to be a result of the introduction of choice. Third, there was sense from providers that client involvement in choice meant that there **was less resentment and hostility about having to attend** a provider.

However, the introduction of choice was also felt to have brought about **confusion** in the minds of some clients that had made the decision making process difficult. This was a view that was expressed by in particular by lone parent advisers as they felt there was too much choice and lone parents often misunderstood why they had to make a choice. This could be due to the voluntary nature of their attendance and their freedom to move between providers. Clients could also become confused when making a choice if they did not understand the information (e.g. due to a language barrier), or if they did not understand the difference between the providers. This underscores the importance of clear and accessible information for the client to help them in the choice process.

6 Conclusion

This research has generated considerable insight into the operation of choice in Multiple Provider Employment Zones (MEPZs). Although the Employment Zone (EZ) programme itself is soon to come to an end, the principle of offering choice to clients will be continued in Flexible New Deal (FND). This reflects the programme's core principles to encourage clients to become more active customers in their engagement with Jobcentre Plus and providers, and to enable them to travel along a pathway to work that is more personalised and responsive to need. The intention is that FND clients will be offered choice in the second year of FND contracts. With this continued use of choice in mind, we reflect here on the key conclusions of this research and pinpoint the implications these have for how it should operate in the future.

6.1 The operation of choice by Jobcentre Plus

It is clear from the findings presented that there has not been a uniform experience of choice in MPEZ. Only a minority of clients experienced choice in the intended way and, perhaps more worryingly, a considerable proportion of clients reported having had no awareness of choice at all. To make an informed choice, clients need to have a full complement of information about providers and they need to be given sufficient time to consider it. It is clear that neither of these have occurred in a consistent way, even allowing for poor recall about what was experienced and when. There was evidence to suggest that this was related to a changed operational environment. Job centres were much busier in autumn 2008 and early 2009 than they had been when the protocol for choice in MPEZ was first developed. As a result, advisers had less time to ensure that clients receive advance notice in the way the current protocol envisages. This underscores the importance of any future delivery of choice taking into account the operational constraints on the front line and ensuring that whatever system is put in place can be delivered by staff and work effectively for all clients.

There is much within this report that can help to improve the operation of choice in the future. Clients, Jobcentre Plus staff and provider representatives have all made recommendations about how the process could be improved. Important

here is the nature of the information given to clients. There are suggestions for ways in which the format of leaflets and other promotional literature could be enhanced. Among clients who had accessed material about EZ providers, the vast majority said that the information was useful, however, clients also articulated a desire for information to be clearer and to signal to clients the distinctive features of providers' services. Providers themselves feel that the restrictions on marketing content do not help clients to truly exercise choice and would support Jobcentre Plus sharing key performance measures with clients. The way in which information is gleaned is also significant. Notwithstanding concerns about impartiality, this research shows that there is clearly value for the client in having the opportunity to engage directly with provider organisations. The opportunity to visit a provider in advance of making a choice is something which is clearly underused at present. Where clients have taken it up it has added real value. There is definitely more that could be done to underscore the usefulness of such visits to clients and to integrate them more into the intended process of choice. The usefulness of such contact with a provider suggests that the rules about it happening within the job centre should also be reviewed. These were not the same across MPEZ areas and arguably they should be.

6.2 The role of the adviser

The study has shown that there is not a consistent approach by advisers to either Restart or Work Focused Interviews (WFIs). This supports previous research in MPEZ areas which has suggested that the impartial operation of choice is challenging for advisers (Hirst *et al.*, 2006). Impartiality is of course an important aspect of the adviser's role; however, the evidence suggests that there are varying interpretations of it among advisers themselves, and this has implications for what the client experiences. Advisers' attempts to ensure they remain impartial have been shown to affect the nature and quality of information that the client receives and to curtail the extent of useful engagement between client and adviser. Conversely, some advisers are keen to facilitate informed choice and, perhaps inadvertently, have led clients to choose certain providers over others, either by the way they talk about them, or the subtle cues they give to clients. The findings also indicate that there is variable awareness and use of the Random Allocation Tool (RAT) by advisers in MPEZ prompting doubts about how clients who are unable or unwilling to make a choice are being dealt with. These issues have been shown to undermine providers' confidence in the process and to create tension between the provider organisation and job centre staff.

There is undoubtedly a role for advisers in engaging with clients about the choices available to them and it will always be difficult to draw a line between what is considered to be informing and what counts as influence. However, the current variation in approach suggests that any guidance issued to advisers about choice in future circumstances should be clearer about how they should engage with

clients in advance of them making a choice and the parameters of their role in assisting clients to make a choice. Given the centrality of choice to the operation of FND, this may require specific training for advisers and careful monitoring to ensure guidelines are adhered to.

6.3 What influences client choice

The research has shed considerable light on the factors that influence clients in their choice of provider. The survey evidence confirms what Jobcentre Plus staff and provider representatives generally think, that the location of the provider office is an important factor. However, the qualitative research has shown that though location is important, why it matters varies for different respondents. For example, it can be related to the distance from a client's home to the provider's office or, alternatively, to where the provider's office is situated within the local community. More worryingly, it is also used as a fall back when there is a lack of information about the options available. Moreover, the evidence also suggests that it matters less for lone parents who were more likely to base their choice on the information and advice they received from Jobcentre Plus. Nevertheless, the prominence of location as a factor influencing choice should not be underestimated. There are signs that some providers are already taking account of this in their service planning and, undoubtedly, the richer information presented here about why location matters is something for providers in FND to also consider.

There are other important factors at play also. Clients of course base their choice on the information they have about what services providers offer and the mode of delivery. They learn about these through the marketing materials produced by providers, but also in other ways. The emphasis placed on either personal experience or that of friends and family is not surprising, something which marketing specialists the world over can attest to. There is an important message for providers here about the value of being seen to be responsive to need – regardless of whether provision results in the ideal outcome of finding a job. Where clients or those close to them perceived that services suggested jobsearch strategies or vacancies that suited their need, they were more inclined to think positively about them. The reverse is also true. These perceptions affect customer choice and suggest that the quality of customer service has the potential to affect market share over time.

6.4 The operational implications for providers

The findings suggest that the challenge of operating in a competitive environment has led to some changes in what providers offer and how they present themselves to clients. Knowing how this has happened and why will be of use to providers who are preparing for the introduction of choice in FND. There are some important lessons also about the impact that choice can have on business planning for providers. Fluctuations in market share as a result of choice have, at times, made life difficult. While the providers in MPEZ had to adapt to the introduction of

choice, it is hoped that the findings presented here will enable future providers to plan for this variability.

6.5 What clients think of choice

The majority of clients do value choice. There is some evidence from discussions with clients, advisers and providers to suggest that offering a greater level of control can lead to improved attendance, increased engagement and less resistance to the process. However, this would need to be verified by analysis of administrative data. If it is found to be correct then it would strongly support the inclusion of choice in other welfare to work programmes like FND. But the research also shows that it is not valued by all clients. There are many reasons for this. Some are related to the actual experience of choice. Where clients feel that they have a real choice, and enough information to make it, they are more inclined to see the value of choice, underscoring again how important it is to get the mechanics of the choice process right. But there are other reasons too. The value of choice is, for some mandatory clients, tainted by the fact that it takes place within a compulsory setting (which affects their willingness to engage with the process). It is difficult to know how, if at all, these attitudes and ultimately the behaviour of these clients could be shifted. Finally, rightly or wrongly, clients do judge the choice process by their subsequent experience with a provider, and by whether the experience leads them to find work. This emphasises, once more, the importance of getting the provision right and meeting clients' needs and aspiration where this is possible.

Appendix A

Quantitative technical report

Aims

A telephone survey was carried out with Employment Zones (EZ) clients. The specific aims of the telephone survey were to:

- ascertain whether clients were aware of or wanted a choice of provider;
- examine whether clients felt sufficiently informed to make a choice;
- gather evidence on clients' reasons for choosing or deciding not to choose; and
- assess how motivated clients are in relation to job-search activities.

Sample

The target was to achieve approximately 1,000 telephone interviews with Multiple Provider Employment Zone (MPEZ) clients. The sample was drawn from the EZ payments database. A census of MPEZ starters in May, June and July 2008 was used for the sampling frame. Prior to the sampling for the survey, a sample of clients for the qualitative in-depth interviews was selected (approximately 250 cases). Records where there was no telephone contact information were not included.

The sample frame was then stratified by four variables:

1. Client type;
2. Random Allocation Tool (RAT) flag (whether the Random Allocation Tool was used);
3. Area/zone;
4. Client sex.

This divided the database into 56 non-empty cells/strata, ranging in size from one to approximately 600. Clients in the smaller cells (less than 50) were sampled with certainty, while clients in the remaining cells were sampled with varying probabilities of selection based upon:

- i) assumptions about likely response rates;
- ii) targets for achieved numbers of interviews overall in each client group;
- iii) projections of the resulting weights in each cell (with the aim of avoiding extreme weights and thereby maximising the effective sample size).

Two samples were drawn for the telephone survey. The initial sample consisted of 1,800 cases for issue and a reserve sample was also drawn containing an additional 800 cases.

To maximise the chance of contacting respondents, addresses on the sample file were subject to National Centre for Social Research (NatCen's) in-house teleappending process. Contact information was run through MatchCode software which verifies or provides more accurate address information. This helps maximise success at the next stage of sample preparation, the telephone number 'look up'. This stage uses the latest AFD telephone look-up software which is updated on a quarterly basis. For each address successfully matched from the MatchCode process outlined above, the AFD routine operated as follows:

- extracted all names and addresses at that post code from AFD;
- searched the post code extract for the surname of the sample member;
- if the surname was found the associated telephone number, if present, was saved;
- if the surname was not found then the street number and street name are located and the phone number, if present, was saved.

The telephone numbers obtained through this process were then crosschecked against those telephone numbers already in the sample file. Additional telephone numbers obtained were added to the sample. In this way, some sample members had up to two telephone numbers appended to their record. All of these telephone numbers were used by the NatCen telephone unit to try and make contact with the sample members. In addition to the above strategies, the NatCen Telephone Unit manually checked incorrect or disconnected telephone numbers during the fieldwork period.

Questionnaire development

The questionnaire was developed with an average (mean) interview length of 12 minutes. It consisted of four main sections:

A: Current activity status

B: Employment Zone participation and choice

C: Steps to making a choice

D: Job motivation and background

A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix E.

A pilot study was carried out in December 2007 and productive interviews were achieved with 30 respondents. After finishing their assignments, all interviewers filled in a feedback form about their experience and attended a face-to-face debrief session with the research team. This exercise generated feedback about the questionnaire, which was used to improve it for the main stage of the survey. The pilot also highlighted that EZ clients represented a group of hard to reach respondents, particularly those aged 18-24 and a high proportion of respondents with language difficulties. The Scoping Study (see Section 1.4.1) was also used to inform the development of the telephone questionnaire.

Fieldwork

The mainstage fieldwork was conducted between November 2008 and February 2009⁴. Prior to fieldwork, all cases were sent a letter giving them the opportunity to opt out of the study. This is a standard procedure when a sample is drawn from benefit records. Cases who choose to opt-out are not issued to the interviewers.

All interviews were carried out using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). This method of data collection entails an interviewer reading out questions and entering respondent's answers into a computer. There were 30 telephone interviewers who conducted the fieldwork. Each interviewer attended a study-specific briefing, which introduced them to the aims of the research, broader policy background, questionnaire content and study procedures. Each interviewer also had to complete a practice interview.

At the start of fieldwork, 1,800 cases were issued. It became apparent that the target of 1,000 interviews would not be achieved from the initial sample. This was mainly due to high levels of non-contact, and in particular, the discovery that a high proportion of the telephone numbers in the sample were invalid. The reserve sample, consisting of an additional 800 cases, was issued in January 2009. In total 972 telephone interviews were carried out.

Response

Table A.1 shows the outcomes for all sample cases for the telephone survey. A total of 972 interviews were achieved (including 16 partial interviews). Out of the 2,600 sampled cases 689 (27 per cent) did not have a valid phone number. The overall response rate for those cases in scope of fieldwork was **51 per cent**.

⁴ The length of time between pilot and mainstage fieldwork was a consequence of temporary restrictions placed by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on the transfer of sample files to external contractors.

Table A.1 Telephone survey response

Fieldwork outcome	n	% in scope of study	% in scope of fieldwork
Total sampled	2,600	100	
Opt outs	11	0	
Invalid phone number	689	27	
In scope of fieldwork	1,900	73	100
Non contact	703	27	37
Refusal to interviewer	94	4	5
Broken appointment, unable to recontact	40	2	2
Refusal to Head Office	3	0	0
Language problems	21	1	1
Other unproductive	67	3	4
Productive interview	972	37	51

Weighting

Weights were generated to take account of varying selection probabilities across strata and survey non-response. Weighting targets were generated from the EZ payment database (from which the original sample was drawn). The population was considered to be all MPEZ starters in May, June and July 2008, regardless of whether they had telephone contact details on the database.

Calibration weighting was used; this adjusts a set of input weights to sum to the totals specified in each number of categories. The categories were generated from the following cross-tabulations:

- 1) Client type * Area/zone * Client sex
- 2) Client type * Whether client had been on EZ programme before

The first set of targets took account of the varying selection probabilities across these cells/strata, while the second accounted for differences in the response propensity between clients who had and had not previously taken part in an EZ programme.

After calibration, the numbers in each corresponding cell of the weighted sample equated to those in the population. Finally, the weights were scaled so that the average weight is one.

Actual and effective sample sizes for the three client types are shown in Table A.2.

Table A.2 Actual and effective sample sizes

Client type	Actual n	Effective n
18-24	342	295
25+	374	314
Lone parents	256	216
Total	972	749

All quantitative analysis presented in this report has been carried out on weighted data.

Coding and editing

Measurement errors can stem from the questionnaire (its wording, design etc), the interviewees, the interviewers and the data collection method. While it is impossible to avoid this type of errors completely, steps were taken to reduce them as much as possible. Processing error in the case of a Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) survey can stem from data-entry by interviewers and from in-office coding and editing process.

The questionnaire contained several questions where interviewers could record an 'other' answer as an open text, if there was no suitable answer among the existing codes. These answers were coded during the subsequent in-office data preparation phase. Supplementary code-frames were developed by researchers based on the complete data, which ensured that they were as relevant as possible and did not lead to the introduction of processing error.

Checks were also implemented to reduce both measurement and processing errors. The checks were of two main types: a) consistency checks, which were triggered when a value of a data item was implausible in the context of other values and b) range checks, which were triggered by unusually low or high values. Checks were implemented in two stages. First, the data entry program itself contained the most basic checks, which were triggered and had to be resolved by interviewers during the interview itself. And as a second stage, several checks were added to the program later during the editing phase. All checks triggered at this stage were verified by editing staff, who either solved the problems or flagged them for researchers.

Appendix B

Qualitative Technical Report

The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews and observations with clients, Jobcentre Plus advisers, Third Party Provision Managers (TPPMs) and Employment Zone (EZ) providers in four Multiple Provider Employment Zone (MPEZ) areas. This technical report augments the description of the qualitative research design provided in Chapter 1 and gives more detail about the rationale for the choice of the specific MPEZ in which the qualitative research was conducted, the selection of respondents and observation encounters within those, recruitment challenges and the how the qualitative data were analysed.

Sample design

As part of the scoping stage of the research, telephone interviews were conducted with job centre TPPMs, and representatives of the different provider organisations operating in the areas. These interviews included discussions about the local context for the operation of MPEZ and choice and how choice was implemented in these areas.

In selecting four out of the six possible areas in which to undertake qualitative fieldwork, the aim was to secure as much range and diversity in how client choice was delivered as possible. The key strategy for identifying what aspects of diversity to include was the scoping study which involved exploring the characteristics of all six areas and interviewing key strategic and operational leads within those Jobcentre Plus areas. This brief investigation identified five key criteria which guided our selection of the four areas included in the main stage of qualitative investigation. These related to the:

- number of providers in the area;
- location of providers in relation to Jobcentre Plus offices;
- local labour market characteristics;
- characteristics and needs of the claimant population; and
- significant issues relating to the operational context.

In addition, the selection choice was influenced by two practical considerations, that:

- there was a big enough Jobcentre Plus office in the area in which we could undertake the observation stage of this research;
- whether the flow of clients was sufficiently high and diverse client to ensure that there would be enough diversity of cases to observe and explore.

As a result, the four MPEZ selected were:

- **Birmingham:**

Birmingham offered us a number of different choices of office, and the area is home to a diverse set of clients in terms of their ethnic backgrounds and employment-related needs. There was a perception that choice was being made due to the distance and transport links between the location of the EZ provider offices and claimant's home address. This was a key issue in this district due to the limited travel aspirations and reputation that local providers had built up within the community.

- **Glasgow:**

This area was distinct because the Scottish 'Training for Work' programme, which is targeted at clients who have been unemployed for under a year, meant that clients were likely to enter the EZ provision after they have been unemployed for much longer periods of time (and who are therefore more likely to have even more significant needs). There was a greater use of the Random Allocation Tool (RAT) than any of the other districts. There were significantly high numbers of 18-24 clients. Unlike the other districts, providers were not allowed a presence within the Jobcentre Plus offices, thus limiting the potential for influencing client choice in this way. There was also some interesting evidence of providers undertaking outreach via regeneration initiatives, which could have influenced how much 'reach' or profile they have in the community.

- **Southwark:**

This was the only district to have the choice of two providers. In contrast to the other areas, interviewees in the scoping study felt that the location and distance of the EZ providers was less important than the differences in the reputation and service delivered by the providers.

- **Tower Hamlets and Newham:**

The district covers two London boroughs with an ethnically diverse population and a varied client profile. Interviewees at the scoping stage felt that choice was being guided by the distance between the location of the provider offices and claimants home address. There were significant English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) needs in Tower Hamlets and related concerns about whether providers were meeting the needs of harder to help groups.

In-depth interviews

Within each MPEZ area, it was proposed that in-depth interviews would be carried out with clients, Jobcentre Plus staff members and EZ provider staff.

Interviews with clients provided an insight into their personal experiences of the choice process, how well they understand the choice being offered to them, the difference between the providers, reasons for their choice and any suggestions for improvement.

To complement the views of clients and give the fullest perspectives as possible on the research objectives, the research design also included interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff. The in-depth interviews with job centre staff sought to explore the adequacy and efficacy of the information available to clients, their perspective on how clients exercise choice, the factors which influence choice, and the operational impacts of choice.

A key focus of the research was to understand how EZ providers attempt to guide and support client choice through their activities and promotional literature. Interviews were undertaken with EZ providers in each of the four MPEZ areas. It was also felt that interviews with providers would provide a valuable insight into the factors that influence choice and the operational impact of choice.

Observations

In addition to the different types of depth interviews described above, the study included observations of restart meetings and Work Focused Interview (WFI) with clients who were eligible to join the EZ programme. The purpose of the observations was to observe the interaction to contextualise and triangulate the data collected in the other qualitative strands.

Selection and recruitment

In-depth interviews

The method of sampling and recruitment described in chapter 1 had a number of advantages. Information about the research was shared with customers at several points in the recruitment process – in the initial approach letter, during the recruitment telephone call and with their letter to confirm their interview appointment. These multiple contacts were designed to ensure that customers were fully informed about the purpose of the research and had a number of opportunities to seek clarification or ask questions of the research team. Another advantage was that initial contact by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to Jobcentre Plus managers in each district helped ensure 'buy' and reassure them of the legitimacy of the research and its credibility.

Alongside these advantages, there were two challenges. The problems with the sample frame for clients were outlined earlier in Appendix A and these also

hampered our efforts to recruit clients to the qualitative research.. Our approach to recruiting Jobcentre Plus advisers did carry the risk that Jobcentre Plus managers could have cherry picked advisers with a particular impression or experience of the choice process. Ideally, we would have asked each Jobcentre Plus to give us a list of all advisers who conducted either Restart or, WFIs where choice could feature and from that to select advisers ourselves. This, however, was felt to place too much of a burden on Jobcentre Plus offices. Instead we opted for the more expedient approach of getting Jobcentre Plus managers to identify relevant advisers to take part. The diversity of views voiced by advisers interviewed suggests that this approach did not undermine the validity of the research with advisers.

Observations

Observations of both Restart meetings and WFIs were conducted. The aim was to include interviews with a variety of different customers who were being offered a choice of provider. To facilitate this, job centres were asked in advance to select nine potential interviews for researchers to observe, on the assumption that only three or four would happen. This strategy, however, proved difficult to operationalise, for a variety of reasons. First of all, some of the job centres selected struggled to get that many appointments booked in for the day the observations were meant to happen. Even when appointments were arranged they were not always suitable for us to observe, either because they involved lone parents who were not ready to make a choice or because they were with mandatory clients who had already made a choice but failed to attend their first appointment with a provider. The situation was made even more difficult by the high number of booked clients who did not show up for their appointments. To address this, we expanded the number of days spent in some job centres and this helped increase the number of observed interviews.

Analysis

All in-depth interviews with providers, Jobcentre Plus advisers, TPPMs and clients were digitally recorded with participants' permission and later transcribed verbatim. Data management was conducted using Framework, a software package developed by National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and based on the qualitative analysis research method of the same name developed by Qualitative Research Unit at NatCen. Analysis was conducted using Framework.

The first stage of analysis involves familiarisation with the transcribed data and identification of emerging issues to inform the development of a thematic framework. Framework is then used to create a series of thematic matrices or charts, each chart represents 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 a link back to the original transcript is maintained, 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 data management 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 analysed and compared and contrasted both across and within cases, and for patterns and themes to be identified and explored. To accommodate the different experiences of clients, Jobcentre Plus staff and EZ providers, a separate Framework was developed for each participant group. The data gathered in the observation pro forma was also analysed using Framework.

Appendix C

Qualitative information leaflets

Our responsibilities to you:

- **We guard your privacy:** your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Your contribution will be used for research purposes only.
- **We respect your wishes:** participation in the study is voluntary and you are not obliged to answer any questions you do not wish to.
- **We answer your questions:** we will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.

NatCen is a company limited by guarantee (Company registration number: 4392418) and a registered charity (Charity number: 1091768).



Contact the team

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or would like to discuss any aspect of your participation in the research.
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The **National Centre for Social Research** (NatCen) is the largest independent social research institute in Britain. We design, carry out, and analyse, research studies in the fields of social and public policy.



Commissioned by



Client choice in Employment Zones
who chooses and why?

Research interviews with customers

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to carry out a research study looking at the experience of being offered a choice of which Employment Zone provider you go to and how easy or difficult it is for people to make this choice or not.

The leaflet provides more information about the research

It is also available in large print,
Braille or tape

Who are we?

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is an independent research organisation conducting this research on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). We are not part of the government or Jobcentre Plus.

What is the research about?

The study will explore the experience of being offered a choice of Employment Zone provider, how easy or difficult it is to make this choice, and the reasons why people make their choice.

What would taking part involve?

Talking part in an interview would involve talking to a researcher about:

- How you found the experience of meeting with your personal adviser to discuss choosing a provider
- How easy or hard you found the process of choosing an Employment Zone provider
- If you made a choice, the reasons why you choose that particular provider,
- How you felt about your initial experience of the Employment Zone provider.

How long would it take?

If you agree to take part in a research interview, it will take place at your home or somewhere else that is convenient for you. Interviews will last about an hour.

Will I get anything for taking part?

Everyone who is interviewed will receive a £20 payment as a thank you for helping us with the research. **This payment is not counted as income by Jobcentre Plus and will not affect your benefit payments in any way.**

Why do you want to interview me?

Your name was selected at random from DWP records as someone who has recently started an Employment Zone programme. Our aim is to learn about what works best for people when offered the choice of employment zone provider. Whatever your experiences have been, it will be extremely useful to hear your views.

How do I get involved?

A member of the research team might call you in the next few weeks to discuss whether or not you would like to take part.

However, not everyone will be contacted as we are only doing a small number of interviews.

Who will learn what I say if I am interviewed?

Everything that you tell the researchers will be confidential. A research report produced at the end of the research will summarise the views and experiences of everybody who takes part in the research. **It will not be possible for someone else to identify you.**

The interview will be digitally recorded, with your permission, and typed up afterwards. This is so we have an accurate record of what is said, and means that the researcher can concentrate on what you're saying during the interview. Only the NatCen research team will have access to the recording and transcript. At the end of the research both will be destroyed.

Do I have to take part in the research?

Taking part in the research is completely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to.

If you do not want to take part in the research you can fill in the form attached to the letter sent with this leaflet or phone the following freephone number **0800 168 2790**

Our responsibilities to you:

- **We guard your privacy:** your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Your contribution will be used for research purposes only.
- **We respect your wishes:** participation in the study is voluntary and you are not obliged to answer any questions you do not wish to.
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Who are we?

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is an independent research organisation conducting this research on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). We are not part of the government or Jobcentre Plus.

What is the research about?

The study will explore the experience of being offered a choice of Employment Zone provider, how easy or difficult it is to make this choice, and the reasons why people make their choice.

Why do you want to observe my meeting?

The aim of the observation is for the research team to understand what happens in your meeting with an adviser. *The observation is not in any way to check up on you or your adviser.*

What does taking part involve?

On the day of your appointment with an adviser, researchers will be present in the Jobcentre Plus office. You will be asked if a researcher can sit in on and observe your meeting with an adviser. The researcher will also ask you to take part in a short 15 minute interview afterwards (without the adviser) so we can find out about your experience of the meeting.

The researcher may also ask if they can get in touch with you a few weeks later on to talk in more detail about the experience of choosing your EZ provider. If you agree and are contacted, it will take place on a different day at a time and place that is convenient to you. These interviews take around an hour.

What will I get for taking part?

People who take part in the observation and the short 15 minute interview will receive £20 as a thank you for their time. If you take part in the follow-up interview a few weeks later, you will receive another payment of £20.

Any payment received as part of this research is not counted as income by Jobcentre Plus and will not affect your benefit payments in any way.

Why do you want to interview me?

We want to hear about your experiences of the meeting with the Personal Adviser. Our aim is to learn about what works best for people during the meetings. Nothing you say to us in the interview will be discussed with your adviser.

Who will learn what I say if I am interviewed?

Everything that you tell the researchers will be confidential. A research report produced at the end of the research will summarise the views and experiences of everybody who takes part in the research.

It will not be possible for someone else to identify you.

Do I have to take part in the research?

No. Although you must attend the interview at Jobcentre Plus, taking part in the research is completely voluntary. Both you and the adviser involved must give permission before the meeting can be observed and we will ask you again for your permission before the interview.

If you do not want to take part in the research you can tell us on the day of your appointment or call ahead on the following freephone number **0808 168 2790**

Appendix D

Qualitative fieldwork documents

Client choice in Employment Zones

Topic guide for client interviews

As this is an investigative and exploratory study, we wish to encourage respondents to discuss their views, perceptions, attitudes and experiences in an open way without excluding issues which may be of importance to the study. Therefore, unlike a survey questionnaire or semi-structured interview, the questioning will be responsive to the issues raised by the respondents

The following guide does not contain pre-set questions, but rather lists the key themes and sub-themes to be explored within interviews. It does not include follow-up questions like 'why', 'when', 'how', etc. as it is assumed that respondents' views will be fully explored throughout to understand how and why these views are held.

The topics will be introduced and explored in turn within each interview. The amount of time spent on different themes will vary between interviews in response to the answers given by respondents.

NB: text in italics within the guide denotes instructions to the researcher.

Objectives

To understand the following key issues:

- Clients' awareness of the Employment Zone (EZ) programme.
- Clients' experiences of the process for making a choice in Multiple Provider Employment Zone (MPEZ).
- How well clients understand the differences between providers.
- How well clients understand the choice being offered to them.
- The reasons underpinning choice.
- Clients' experiences of the Random Allocation Tool (RAT).
- Reflections on choice since contact with the provider.
- Views about how the choice process might be improved.

1 Introduction

Aim: to introduce the research, set the context for the interview and gain informed consent.

- Introduce self and NatCen (emphasise independence from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus).
- Outline evaluation and particular aims of this study; explain that commissioned by DWP.
- Explain recording and confidentiality; how findings will be reported.
- Seek permission to record.
- Reassure about voluntary nature of participating in the study and answering questions (i.e. don't have to answer any questions don't want to).
- Length of interview will be about an hour.
- Check whether they have any particular requirements for the interview (e.g. need for a break halfway through etc.).
- Will receive £20 thank you payment at the end; this will not affect their benefits if receiving any.
- Ask if they have any questions or concerns before starting; check they are still happy to proceed.

2 Background

Aim: to understand the participant's background, work and education history, and previous experiences of Employment Zones and Welfare to Work.

- Age.
- Household composition:
 - Who living with, ages, relationships.
 - Nature of any caring responsibilities.
- Access to transport:
 - Car/public transport.
 - Feelings about transport/travel.
- Current day-to-day activity:
 - Whether working/ in education/on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)/ other benefit.
- Employment History:
 - (If not currently employed) When last worked (if ever).
 - Place(s) of employment or self employed and role(s); part time or full time; permanent or temporary; paid or unpaid.
 - Educational background, skills and qualifications.
- Views about moving into work:
 - Whether expects/ wants to return to work.
 - Motivations for returning to work.
 - Active steps taken to find work.
 - Any barriers to work.
- Current health:
 - Nature of any health problems/disabilities.
 - Impact on feelings about work.
- Previous experiences of support received via Jobcentre Plus (briefly):
 - Previous experiences of EZ programme and EZ providers; nature of advice and support received.
 - Previous experiences of other Welfare to Work programmes; nature of advice and support received.
 - Views about quality of previous support received.

3 Initial understanding of the EZ programme

Aim: to explore the participant's initial understanding of the EZ programme – how the EZ programme was first introduced and initial information received on the providers.

- When first heard of EZ programme.
 - Whether heard of EZ prior to introduction by Jobcentre Plus.
- Way in which EZ programme was introduced by Jobcentre Plus:
 - Medium used (*e.g. leaflet, letter, phone call, in person at Jobcentre Plus*).
 - Preferences for sources of information.
- Whether discussed EZ with Jobcentre Plus adviser before Restart meeting:
 - Type of meeting when first discussed EZ (*e.g. fortnightly jobsearch review (FJR), Work Focused Interview (WFI)*);
 - How EZ introduced by Jobcentre Plus adviser; explanation given.
- Further information offered before Restart meeting:
 - When information offered (*e.g. FJR, WFI, sent through post*);
 - Type of information;
 - *Prompts*:
 - EZ provider leaflets;
 - General leaflet on EZ programme;
 - Opportunity to discuss support with EZ providers.
- Contact with provider(s) prior to making choice:
 - Which provider(s) contacted
 - Medium used (*e.g. phone call, visit to provider(s), spoke to provider(s) at Jobcentre Plus office*).
 - Information given by provider(s).
- Initial understanding of EZ programme:
 - Expectations of the programme/what EZ designed to offer.
 - Extent to which saw EZ as voluntary/mandatory.
- Initial reactions to EZ programme:
 - How relevant they felt EZ would be to them.
- Views on information offered by Jobcentre Plus and provider:
 - Ease/ difficulty of contacting providers.

- Ease/difficulty of understanding information.
- Any further information required.

4 Experience of the Restart meeting

Aim: to understand the participant's experience of the Restart meeting and how choice in EZ provider fits into the meeting. What the meeting covered and the role of the adviser in helping the participant to make a decision.

- How felt prior to Restart meeting:
 - Expectations of what the meeting would be like.
 - Whether aware that going to be asked to make choice in EZ provider.
 - Any concerns/worries/questions.
- Length of time between being told about EZ and being asked to attend Restart meeting:
 - Views on length of time.
- Description of the Restart meeting (*Ask the participant to talk through their experience*):
 - Explanation given by adviser for purpose of meeting.
 - What was discussed during the meeting.
 - How choice in EZ provider fits into Restart meeting.
- Information given on different EZ providers at this point:
 - Way in which information was delivered.
 - *Prompts:*
 - *EZ provider leaflets.*
 - *General leaflet on EZ programme.*
 - *Discussion with EZ provider staff in Jobcentre Plus.*
 - *Explanation by Jobcentre Plus adviser.*
 - Type of information supplied.
 - *Prompts:*
 - Training and support offered by different providers.
 - Location of provider.
 - How the provider would meet their individual needs.
 - Success of provider in getting people back into work in general or into work interested in.
 - Any other information given about provider(s).

- Views about Restart meeting:
 - Views on explanation given by Jobcentre Plus adviser for the Restart meeting.
 - Views about the role of the Jobcentre Plus adviser in the choice process.
 - Views on how helpful or supportive the adviser was.
 - Whether felt able to make an informed decision.
 - Whether felt able to ask questions/raise concerns.

5 Understanding of the different EZ providers

Aim: to explore the participant's previous experiences of the providers, understanding of the different providers and sources of information available.

- Whether aware of EZ providers prior to introduction by Jobcentre Plus:
 - Previous experience of EZ providers (not in relation to EZ Programme).
 - Nature of any advice and support received.
 - Views about quality of support received previously.
 - Other sources of awareness (e.g. word of mouth, internet, promotional activities).
 - Initial understanding/impression.
- Understanding of the differences between providers:
 - Level of understanding of what offered by different providers.
 - Anything distinctive or significant about different providers.
 - *Prompts:*
 - *ethos of provider;*
 - *types of services/support offered;*
 - *specialist training.*
- How became aware of distinctions between providers

Spontaneous, then prompt:

- *Jobcentre Plus staff;*
- *provider leaflets;*
- *contact with provider;*
- *friends/family;*
- *own past experience;*
- *local reputation.*

- Whether Jobcentre Plus advisers seemed well informed on differences between providers.
- Views on being offered a choice in provider
 - Extent to which value being offered a choice in provider
 - Whether offered enough diversity in choice of providers
 - Whether being offered a choice in provider has made a difference
 - *Prompts:*
 - *to how engaged with provider they have felt;*
 - *to their chance of finding work.*

6 Experience of the decision making process

Aim: to explore the participant's experience of the decision making process, the factors considered when making that decision and the reasons for choosing the provider.

(LONE PARENTS ONLY)

- Factors considered when deciding to volunteer for EZ programme

Spontaneous and then prompt:

- *caring responsibilities;*
- *existing skills and work experience;*
- *length of time away from employment;*
- *financial situation;*
- *promotional activity by provider;*
- *incentives offered by provider;*
- *other factors.*

(ALL)

- Whether made a choice.

(IF YES)

- Resources found most useful in making a decision.

Spontaneous, then prompt:

- *Written information about the providers;*
- *Discussion with Jobcentre Plus adviser about the providers;*
- *Discussion with provider about support offered.*

- Reasons for choosing that particular provider.

Spontaneous, then prompt:

- *Type of services/support offered.*
- *Location of the provider.*
- *Transport links and travel aspirations.*
- *Previous experience of chosen provider.*
- *Previous experience of another provider.*
- *Family/ friend recommendation.*
- Extent to which Jobcentre Plus adviser influenced decision.
- Experience of making a choice.
 - Ease/difficulty of making a decision.
 - Time spent making a decision.

(IF NO)

- Whether asked to make a choice between providers.
- Reasons for not making a choice.
- Ease/difficulty of making a choice.
- How provider was allocated.

Spontaneous, then prompt:

- RAT/Jobcentre Plus computer system.
- The adviser made the decision.
- Other.

(If RAT used)

- Information given by Jobcentre Plus adviser about the RAT.
- How they felt about the provider being randomly selected.

(If RAT not used)

- Views on alternative selection process.
- Any opportunity to change their mind and choose a provider.
- Anything that could have been done differently to help them choose/make them more inclined to choose.

(ALL)

- Whether their feelings/ thoughts about their decision changed in advance of the first appointment with the provider.

7 Reflections on choice after starting the EZ programme

Aim: to discuss whether or not the provider met their expectations, whether they tried to change provider and whether they attended all the provider meetings.

- Whether the EZ provider met their initial expectations:
 - Extent to which the provider offered the services/ support they expected.
 - Feelings or thoughts about their decision since starting the EZ programme.

- Whether missed any appointments.

(If applicable)

- Reasons for missing appointments.
- Consequences of missing appointments.
 - Prompt: any sanctions applied; feelings about sanctions.

- Whether considered changing providers.

(IF YES)

- Reasons for wanting to change providers.
- Whether able to change providers.

(IF ABLE TO CHANGE)

- Process of changing providers; what had to do to change providers.
- Ease/ difficulty of changing providers.
- How the providers compared e.g. support/approach offered.
- Whether missed any appointments with new provider.

(IF UNABLE TO CHANGE)

- Reasons given by Jobcentre Plus for not being able to change provider.
- Views on not being able to change provider.
- Whether continued to attend meetings with the original provider.
- (If applicable) Consequences of no longer attending meetings.
 - Prompt: any sanctions applied; feelings about sanctions.

(ALL)

- Length of provision:
 - Whether still attending EZ.
 - (If applicable) Reasons for leaving.
 - Consequences of leaving.
 - Prompt: any sanctions applied; feelings about sanctions.

8 Views about how the choice process could be improved

Aim: to allow the participant to reflect on how well the EZ choice worked for them and how the choice process could be improved.

- Importance of being able to choose an EZ provider.
- Any suggestions on how to improve the choice process.

Spontaneous and then prompt on all:

 - Information about the providers
 - Other information; when would be useful to receive this
 - Meeting with adviser at Jobcentre Plus prior to choice meeting
 - Choice meeting
 - Contact with provider prior to making decision
 - Length of time given to make choice
- Any other suggestions/comments

At the end of the interview:

- Thank respondent for taking part in the research
- Reassure re: confidentiality
- Check whether they have any further questions about the research
- Give respondent £20 thank you payment and ask them to sign receipt

Client Choice in Employment Zones

Topic Guide for MPEZ provider staff

Objectives

To understand the following key issues:

- The provider role and involvement in MPEZ choice.
- Perceptions of the reasons underpinning customer choice.
- The process of referral and information received.
- The providers' delivery of the EZ programme.
- Views about the impact of choice on EZ provider, customers and Jobcentre Plus.
- Suggestions to improve the delivery of choice.

Note: Respondents will have been sent an introductory letter and leaflet explaining how the overall evaluation is being conducted and how this discussion will contribute. The letter will set out the main areas that will be included in the discussion so that people have a chance to think about the issues in advance

Guidance for interpretation and use of the topic guide: The following guide does not contain pre-set questions but rather lists the key themes and sub-themes to be explored with each participant. It does not include follow-up questions like 'why', 'when', 'how', etc. as it is assumed that respondents' contributions will be fully explored throughout in order to understand how and why views and experiences have arisen. The order in which issues are addressed and the amount of time spent on different themes will vary between interviews.

1 Introduction

Aim: to introduce the research and set the context for the interview. Also to gain informed consent from participant to record the interview.

- Introduce self and NatCen.
- Introduction to research: commissioned by DWP, aims and objectives, what findings will be used for.
- Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw.
- Discuss confidentiality and anonymity, and how findings will be reported.
- Use of audio-recorder and data storage.
- Length of interview will be about an hour.
- Any questions/concerns.

2 Background

Aim: to capture information about their current role and involvement with MPEZ and brief overview of the EZ provider.

- Respondents' role:
 - Description of current role.
 - Length of time in role.
 - Nature of involvement with MPEZ programme.
- Provider details:
 - Type of organisation.
 - Size of organisation (e.g. local, regional, national).
 - Number of staff in total in organisation.
 - Location of office(s).
- Nature of relationship with Jobcentre Plus:
 - Other past/current contracts with Jobcentre Plus.
 - Other contracts/ services provided.

3. Choice in EZ programme

Aim: to capture information about their the EZ providers role and involvement in the choice process.

- Involvement in the choice process
 - View of EZ provider role in choice process
- Information provided to customer
 - Nature of information provided
 - Rules/requirements for information provided
 - Other marketing/promotional channels (e.g. incentives to new participants)
- Contact with customers during the choice process
 - Nature of contact with customers during the choice process

Probe for contact via

- staff located in the Jobcentre Plus office
 - phonecall
 - face-face visits to EZ provider office
- Frequency of contact
- Understanding of the role of Jobcentre Plus in the choice process
 - Process for offering choice
 - Intended role of Jobcentre Plus advisers
 - Nature of information/guidance given to customers
- Understanding of the process if customer can not make a choice
 - Process if customer cannot make a choice
 - The role of the Jobcentre Plus adviser
 - The use of the RAT

4. Customer referral

Aim: to explore understanding of the referral process and perceptions and information collected on customer choice.

- Customer referral process:
 - How customers are referred.
 - Nature of information received.
- Levels of referrals
 - Current referral rates (for each claimant group 18-24, 25+, and lone parents).
 - Percentage of customers referred via the RAT.
- Views on the reasons for choice of customer
 - Channels/ mechanisms for receiving feedback on reasons for choice.
 - Factors influencing customers' choice;

Probe on all

- *location/distance of the provider to home/Jobcentre Plus;*
 - *available transport and travel links; travel aspirations;*
 - *previous experience of the provider;*
 - *an alternative to another provider;*
 - *whether the EZ providers offers services for particular customer needs;*
 - *work/career aspirations;*
 - *incentives;*
 - *other.*
- Extent to which customers have enough information to make an informed choice
- Awareness of any differences in customers referred who make a choice and those who do not:
 - Type of customer.
 - Needs of customers.

5. Delivery of EZ programme

Aim: to explore the delivery of the provider EZ provider, the services provided, customer needs and how that relates to the local labour market, contact relationships with Jobcentre Plus, and levels of retention of customers.

- Types of services offered:
 - Ethos/underlying principles to services offered.
 - Types of services/activities offered.
- EZ customer needs and local labour market:
 - Local labour market (e.g. factory work, retail).
 - Types of EZ customer needs/skills required.
 - How provider responds to local customer needs and labour market conditions.
- The nature of contact/ arrangements with Jobcentre Plus:
 - Administrative arrangements/payment of benefits.
 - Contact between Jobcentre Plus advisers and EZ frontline staff.
 - Strategic/operational meetings.

- Levels of customers changing providers:
 - Frequency of customers changing providers (*distinguish mandatory 18-24, 25+ and voluntary customers*)
 - What happens if customer wants to change.
 - Perception of reasons for change of provider.
 - Impact on EZ provider.
- Disengagement/withdrawal from EZ provider:
 - Level of disengagement/drop out (*distinguish mandatory 18-24, 25+ and voluntary*).
 - Process if customer disengages/drops out.
 - Extent to which Jobcentre Plus is prepared to apply sanctions for non-attendance.
 - Perception of reasons for disengagement/drop out.
 - Impact on EZ provider.

6 Impact of the introduction of choice for mandatory customers

Aim: to explore what effects, if any the introduction of choice has had on the delivery of MPEZ.

- Impact on customer needs and EZ provider services:
 - The needs and types of customers referred.
 - Type of services and support offered (e.g. development of specialisms for customers).
 - Distribution/targeting of services for particular customer types and groups.
 - How provision currently meets needs/circumstances of customers.
- Impact on the role of EZ provider staff:
 - Levels of resources and staff.
 - Nature of their role.
 - Skills required for the role.
- Impact of choice on relationship with customers:
 - Engagement generally
 - Work aspirations/motivations of customer
 - Customer relationship with provider staff (e.g. customer interaction)
 - Customer engagement with service
 - Customer retention

- Impact on EZ provider marketing and business performance:
 - Marketing information/channels for marketing (e.g. leaflets, incentives, other promotional activities).
 - Business performance e.g. market share and conversion rates to employment for each provider.
 - Competition between providers.
 - Sustained employment.
- Impact of choice on relationship with Jobcentre Plus:
 - Levels of contact between staff working directly with customer.
 - Strategic/operational relationships.

7 Reflections/suggestions for the improvement of the delivery of choice

Aim: to allow the participant to reflect on how well MPEZ choice has worked and how the operation of choice could be improved.

- Overall how well MPEZ choice has worked.
- Suggestions for improving the operation of choice.
- How useful is the offer of choice for customers.
 - Review main advantages and disadvantages.
 - Variation between groups/different types of customers.
- Other mechanisms that could be used to enhance the placement of customers with providers.
- Whether choice could be extended into other areas of delivery.
- Future plans for the delivery of EZ services.
- Any other suggestions/comments.

At end of interview:

- Thank for participation in interview.
- Reassure regarding confidentiality.
- Check whether they have any further questions about the research.

Client Choice in Employment Zones

Topic Guide for Jobcentre Plus frontline staff

Objectives

To understand the following key issues:

- Advisers understanding of the role and purpose of customer choice with MPEZs.
- The operation of choice and barriers and facilitators to choosing.
- Perceptions of the customer experience of choice.
- The use and operation of the Random Allocation Tool (RAT).
- Differences between providers and whether this has an impact on the delivery choice.
- Views about the impact of choice on Jobcentre Plus, customers, and EZ providers.
- Suggestions to improve the delivery of choice.

Note: Respondents will have been sent an introductory letter and leaflet explaining how the overall evaluation is being conducted and how this discussion will contribute. The letter will set out the main areas that will be included in the discussion so that people have a chance to think about the issues in advance

Guidance for interpretation and use of the topic guide: The following guide does not contain pre-set questions but rather lists the key themes and sub-themes to be explored with each participant. It does not include follow-up questions like 'why', 'when', 'how', etc. as it is assumed that respondents' contributions will be fully explored throughout in order to understand how and why views and experiences have arisen. The order in which issues are addressed and the amount of time spent on different themes will vary between interviews.

1. Introduction

Aim: to introduce the research and set the context for the proceeding discussion. Also to gain informed consent from respondents to record the focus group.

- Introduce self and NatCen.
- Introduction to the research: commissioned by DWP, aims and objectives, what findings will be used for.
- Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw.

- Discuss confidentiality and anonymity, how findings will be reported.
- Use of audio-recorder and data storage.
- Suggested ground rules (e.g. important that everyone gets a chance to speak and people speak one at a time).
- Length of interview – 30 mins.
- Any questions/concerns.

2 Background

Aim: to introduce the respondents to each other and capture information about their current roles.

Helpful if they could start by saying a little bit about themselves:

- Name, Jobcentre Plus office
- Nature of involvement with EZ and customer choice

3 How choice operates

Aim: to understand how choice is delivered and facilitators and barriers to the delivery of choice.

- Role in delivering EZ Choice.
 - Approach to delivering EZ Choice.
 - Type of support/advice given customer.
 - Techniques/individual approaches.
 - Importance of neutrality and impartiality to delivering choice.
- Barriers and facilitators to offering choice in a neutral way

Spontaneously then probe:

- Needs/circumstances of the individual.
- Customer understanding of EZ and the scope of choice.
- Relationship between adviser and customers.
- Procedures/working practices.
- Training or guidelines around operation of choice provided to advisers:
 - Details of guidelines/training.
 - How used in practice.
 - Differences in operation of choice from guidelines.

4 Role of adviser when customers do not make a choice

Aim: to understand advisers role if a customer can not make a choice and the use and operation of the RAT.

- How easy/difficult do customers find it to make a choice;
 - Variations between groups of customer/ claimant groups.
- Approach used if someone finds it difficult to choose a provider:
 - Probe: techniques used by adviser, then the process followed.*
- Approach used if someone does not choose:
 - Probe: techniques used by adviser, then the process followed.*

Spontaneous, then prompt:

- Use of the RAT.
 - Circumstances RAT is used.
 - How often occurs.
 - How RAT used; process for using RAT.
 - Views about use of RAT.
- Use of any other processes apart from the RAT

5 Perceptions of customer experience of choice

Aim: to understand adviser's perception of customers' experience of the choice process and decision making.

- How 'choice' is viewed by customers:
 - What are seen to be the advantages and disadvantages.
- Whether there is consistent understanding of the process of choice:
 - What enhances/inhibits understanding.
- Whether consistent engagement with the choice process:
 - What enhances/inhibits engagement.
- Factors influencing choice made by customer;

Probe:

- *Location/ distance of the provider to home/Jobcentre Plus.*
- *Available transport and travel links; travel aspirations.*

- *Reputation of provider.*
- *Services/support offered by providers.*
- *Previous experiences of the provider (self, others).*
- *Alternative to another provider.*
- *Whether the EZ providers offers services for particular customer needs.*
- *Job/career aspirations.*
- Perceptions of how well choice works in practice for customers:
 - Variation between different groups.
- Any variations in how well choice works for different claimant groups/ different circumstances and needs.
- Perceptions of any variation between providers available for clients to choose from.

6 Impact of the customer choice

Aim: to explore what effects, if any, the introduction of choice has had on the wider delivery of MPEZ.

- Impact of EZ choice on customers.
 - Variations between customer groups (LP, 18-24, and 25+).
- Impact of EZ choice on Jobcentre Plus advisers:
- Impact of EZ choice on job centre.
- Impact of EZ choice on EZ providers.

7 Reflections/suggestions for the improvement of the delivery of choice

Aim: to allow the advisers to reflect on the how well EZ choice has worked and how the delivery of choice could be improved.

- How well EZ choice has worked overall.
- How useful is the offer of choice for customers.
- What they see as the key factors effecting the delivery of customer choice.
- Suggestions for improving the operation of choice.
- Any other suggestions/comments.

At end of interview:

- Thank for participation in interview.
- Reassure re confidentiality.
- Check whether they have any further questions about the research.

Client Choice in Employment Zones

Topic Guide: Jobcentre Plus Managers

Objectives

To understand the following key issues:

- Advisers' understanding of the role and purpose of MPEZ and customer choice.
- The operation of choice and barriers and facilitators to choosing.
- Perceptions of customers' experiences of choice.
- The use and operation of the RAT.
- Differences between providers and whether this has an impact on the delivery choice.
- Views about the impact of choice on Jobcentre Plus, customers, and EZ providers.
- Suggestions to improve the delivery of choice.

Note: Respondents will have been sent an introductory letter and leaflet explaining how the overall evaluation is being conducted and how this discussion will contribute. The letter will set out the main areas that will be included in the discussion so that people have a chance to think about the issues in advance

Guidance for interpretation and use of the topic guide: The following guide does not contain pre-set questions but rather lists the key themes and sub-themes to be explored with each participant. It does not include follow-up questions like 'why', 'when', 'how', etc. as it is assumed that respondents' contributions will be fully explored throughout in order to understand how and why views and experiences have arisen. The order in which issues are addressed and the amount of time spent on different themes will vary between interviews.

1 Introduction

Aim: to introduce the research and set the context for the interview. Also to gain informed consent from participant to record the interview.

- Introduce self and NatCen.
- Introduction to research: commissioned by DWP, aims and objectives, what findings will be used for.
- Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw.

- Discuss confidentiality and anonymity, and how findings will be reported.
- Use of audio-recorder and data storage.
- Length of interview will be about 20-30 minutes.
- Ask if they have any questions or concerns before starting: check they are still happy to proceed.

2 Background

Aim: to capture information about their current role and involvement with MPEZ.

- Respondents' role.
- Nature of involvement with the EZ programme and customer choice.
 - Role and responsibilities in relation to the management and delivery of choice.

3 How choice is delivered and monitored

Aim: to understand how choice is delivered and facilitators and barriers to the delivery of choice.

- How choice is delivered to customers.
- Training or guidelines around choice provided to advisers:
 - Details of training and guidelines.
 - Implementation of training/guidelines.
- How process of choice is applied in practice:
 - Variation due to practical factors.
 - Variation due to operational factors.
- Barriers and facilitators to offering choice.
- Monitoring the delivery of choice.
- Any observation of choice not being delivered as intended.
 - How dealt with if choice not delivered as intended
- Whether Jobcentre Plus offices share information on the operation of choice

4 Adviser's role if someone can not make a choice

Aim: to understand the role of Jobcentre Plus advisers if a customer cannot make a choice, and the use and operation of the RAT.

- How easy/difficult do customers find it to make a choice:
 - Variations between groups of customers/claimant groups.

- Factors that make choice easy/difficult for customers.
- Advisers role if a customer cannot make a decision.
- Alternatives to choice and use of the RAT:
 - Circumstances in which RAT is used.
 - How often occurs.
 - Use of any other processes apart from the RAT.
- How useful is the process of using the RAT.

5 Relationship with EZ providers and the perception of differences between providers.

Aim: to explore whether variations between providers have an impact on the operation of choice:

- Overview of the role of providers in multiple provider EZ areas.
- The nature of contact/ arrangements with the providers.
- Variation between providers.

6. Perceptions of reasons for customer choice of providers

Aim: to understand the participant's perception of the customers experience of the choice process and decision making.

- Channels/ mechanisms for receiving feedback on reasons for choice.
- Factors influencing customers' choice;

Probe on all:

- *location/distance of the provider to home/Jobcentre Plus;*
- *available transport and travel links; travel aspirations;*
- *previous experience of the provider;*
- *an alternative to another provider;*
- *whether the EZ providers offer services for particular customer needs;*
- *work/career aspirations;*
- *incentives;*
- *other.*
- Overall extent to which choice works in practice for customers

7 Impact of EZ customer choice

Aim: to explore any impacts since the introduction of choice

- Impact of EZ choice on customers.
- Impact of EZ choice on Jobcentre Plus advisers:
- Impact of EZ choice on job centre.
- Impact of EZ choice on EZ providers.
- Views about the impact of RAT.

8. Reflections/suggestions for the improvement of the delivery of choice

Aim: to allow the respondent to reflect on the how well EZ choice has worked and how the delivery of choice could be improved.

- Overall how well EZ choice works.
- Are there other mechanisms that could be used to enhance the placement of customers with providers.
- Suggestions for improving the operation of choice.
- Any other suggestions/comments.

At end of interview:

- Thank for participation in interview
- Reassure regarding confidentiality
- Check whether they have any further questions about the research

Client Choice in Employment Zones – Observation pro forma

Descriptive observations

Researcher name(s):	
Date:	
Start time:	
Finish time:	
Role of Jobcentre Plus staff:	Fortnightly Jobsearch Reviewer/Jobcentre plus adviser/lone parent adviser
Type of meeting:	FJR/Re start Interview/ lone parent WFI/Other local appointment
Type of claimant:	JSA 25+/JSA 18-24/lone parent

The environment (process):

NB: Please tick only the appropriate box and add any additional notes on observations on the quality of the environment, and any observed impact on the context of the meeting.

Type:					
Dedicated interview room		Generic office		Other	
Seating:					
Chair		Armchair		Other	

Between customer – adviser:					
Space		Desk		Other	

<p>Privacy: Private</p>	<p>Semi-private (others can hear interaction)</p>	<p>Public</p>
<p>Any distractions: Noise</p>	<p>Poor lighting, overcrowded setting</p>	<p>Interruptions/any other distractions</p>

Evaluative observations:

Opening talk: approximate time spent on topic =
staff introduces self; purpose and structure of meeting; appropriateness of pace and content; opportunity for questions; verbal and non-verbal interaction between adviser; how engaged is the customer e.g. any questions asked, body language

Discussion before the introduction of choice (e.g. job search strategies, benefits queries, any other discussion): approximate time spent on topic =
Content of what is discussed; verbal and non-verbal interaction between adviser; how engaged is the customer e.g. any questions asked, body language

The introduction of choice: time spent on topic

NB: Please note down the language, terminology and emphasis used by both customers and staff; length of time of discussion.

- *How the adviser introduces the EZ programme and choice; how the customer responds to client choice; pace and content of information given: how EZ choice is presented in regard to whether choice is mandatory/voluntary; whether adviser explains whether customers can/ can not switch providers after decision is made*
- ***(Restart meeting/WFI ONLY)** Customer awareness of choice prior to meeting; whether expecting to make a choice in meeting or first time EZ choice is introduced; whether providers are discussed before asking for decision*
- *How are the providers discussed; length of time of discussion; whether discussion is instigated by adviser or customer; how are the leaflets and literature introduced whether the customer asks any questions or asks for advice with choice; how neutral is the adviser e.g. any non-verbal and verbal cues/emphasis on providers, services/support offered, location; how the adviser responds to questions; whether the adviser suggests any strategies for making choice; how well informed is the adviser regarding the providers*
- *Customer and adviser interaction; how engaged is the customer e.g. body language*

The introduction of choice: time spent on topic (continued)

Decision making (*likely to be only applicable to re-start interviews*): time spent on topic =

- *How is the customer asked which provider they have chosen; whether the customer is asked if they had enough time and information to make a choice; at what stage is the client asked about their decision*
- *If they have not decided – pace and content of information about each provider; how neutral is the role of the adviser in discussing the provider and the decision (any verbal or non-verbal cues/emphasis); time given to choose a provider*
- *Whether client is asked for or gives reasons for choice; what happens after the decision is made, e.g. administration, first interview booked with provider*

RAT process (if applicable): approximate time spent on topic =

- *How is the RAT introduced; pace and timing of introduction; reaction of the respondent (inc. verbal and non-verbal)*
- *Whether the customer agrees to use of RAT or makes their own decision after the use of the RAT is discussed*
- *Whether the client asks questions and how the adviser responds; how is the RAT used; client's reaction when used*
- *What happens next. e.g. administration, first interview booked with provider; for mandatory clients – any explanation that they will have to remain with that provider.*

Discussion following the discussion of choice (e.g. job search strategies, benefits queries, any other discussion): time spent on topic =

Content of what is discussed; verbal and non-verbal interaction between adviser and customer; how engaged is the customer e.g. any questions asked, body language

Concluding talk 'what happens next': approximate time spent on topic =
how is the meeting closed – who moves discussion towards a close, whether meeting closed at logical point; what happens next.

Overall summary of the interview
The weighting given to choice within the interview; how was choice located within the whole meeting; how objectively choice is presented; how actively client engages with the meeting.

Researcher reflections:

Approach/any techniques used by staff member in the delivery of choice; what seemed to work well and less well in delivery of choice; reactions to choice and reflection on reasons for this.

Attempt to recruit respondents

Whether successful, any questions asked; if customer declined, did the customer give a reason

Post-observation reflections**(FJR)**

- Initial reaction to the introduction of choice
- Extent to which there was clear explanations of the Employment Zone programme
- Understanding of the leaflets given about the providers
- Ability to ask questions/find out more information about the EZ providers and Employment Zone programme

(Restart/WFI)

- Whether they were aware that they would make a choice of provider in meeting (FJR meeting, sent info in post etc...)
- Initial reaction to the introduction of choice
- Extent to which there was clear explanations of the Employment Zone programme
- Understanding of the leaflets given about the providers
- Ability to ask questions/find out more information about the EZ providers and Employment Zone programme
- How easy/difficult to decide whether to choose a provider or not
- Whether the customer felt they had enough time or information to make a decision
- Factors affecting their ability to make a choice of provider or not and (if made a choice) reasons for choosing a particular provider
- Feelings regarding the influence of the adviser on whether they made a choice or not, and (if made a choice) choosing a particular provider (If RAT used) initial reaction to the introduction of the RAT
- Factors influencing using/not using the RAT
- Feelings about future contact with EZ provider
- Overall feelings about how the meeting went
- Whether anything could be done differently

Post-observation reflection cont...

Appendix E

Quantitative telephone questionnaire

BLOCK A 'Current activity status'

{All}

Aintro

Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is XXXX. I'm calling from the National Centre for Social Research, an independent research institute.

You should have received a letter from us recently telling you about some research we have been asked to carry out behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.

The research is about services in your area that try and help people move into work. Your answers will be used for research purposes only and will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

ADD IF NECESSARY: We are interested in hearing your views on these services, even if you have had little contact with them or if you are now in regular paid work.

ADD IF NECESSARY: Your involvement in this study will not affect any benefits you may receive now or in the future.

INTERVIEWER: PRESS 1 AND ENTER TO CONTINUE

{All}

Aintro2

I would like to ask some questions about what you have been doing recently.

INTERVIEWER: PRESS 1 AND ENTER TO CONTINUE

{If mon-fri THEN}

Awrk1

Today, have you done [or will you do] any paid work for one hour or more, including any casual or one-off jobs?

ADD IF NECESSARY: This does not include anything you did (or will do) to help relatives, friends or neighbours, unless they paid (or will pay) you in some way.

1. Yes
2. No

NODK, NOREFUSAL

{If Awrk1=no OR sat/sun THEN}

Awrk2

In the last seven days, since [day month], did you do any paid work of any sort for one hour or more?

INTERVIEWER: INCLUDE TEMPORARY ABSENCE, E.G. SICK/HOLIDAY

1. Yes
2. No

NODK, NOREFUSAL

{If Awrk1=Yes OR Awrk2=Yes THEN}

AMultJb

Can I check, are you doing more than one job at the moment?

IF 'NO': CODE '1'.

IF MORE THAN ONE: How many jobs are you doing?

NOTE: DIFFERENT JOBS MEANS DIFFERENT EMPLOYERS.

IF SELF-EMPLOYED, THEN CODE AS DOING ONE JOB.

Range = 1..10

{IF AMultJb > 1 THEN}

AMainJb

I'd like to talk about the main paid work that you are doing.

INTERVIEWER: 'MAIN' REFERS TO HIGHEST NUMBER OF HOURS

{All in paid work}

Aself

Are you an employee or are you self-employed in this job?

1. Employee
2. Self-employed

{All in paid work}

AStYr

In what year did you start [this particular job/ this period of self-employment]?

ENTER **YEAR** HERE. (ENTER MONTH AND DAY AT FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.)

IF NOT SURE, ENCOURAGE A GUESS. IF CANNOT GIVE ANSWER, CODE '1900'

Range = 1900..2008

NODK, NOREFUSAL

{All in paid work}

AStMon

INTERVIEWER ENTER THE **MONTH**

IF NOT SURE, ASK: Can you remember the season?

IF CANNOT GIVE ANSWER, CODE 'JUNE'.

Range = 1..12

NODK, NOREFUSAL

{All in paid work}

AStDay

INTERVIEWER RECORD **DAY OF MONTH**

IF CANNOT GIVE ANSWER, CODE '15'.

Range = 1..31

NODK, NOREFUSAL

SOFT CHECK – If start date before 1 May 2008

INTERVIEWER: Start date is expected to be after 1 May 2008. Please check.

{All in paid work}

AWrkA

In this job, do you work at home, go out to work, or both?

1. Work at home
2. Go out to work
3. Both

{All in paid work}

AOrgDo

[What does the firm/organisation you work for mainly make or do (at the place where you work)/ What do you, or your business, mainly make or do]?

DESCRIBE FULLY: PROBE MANUFACTURING or PROCESSING or DISTRIBUTING ETC. AND MAIN GOODS PRODUCED, MATERIALS USED, WHOLESALE or RETAIL ETC.

OPEN

{All in paid work}

AJbTtl

What is your job title?

INTERVIEWER: PROBE FOR FULL JOB TITLE AND ROLE

OPEN

{All in paid work}

AHours

In the last seven days ending yesterday, (that is since [day month]), how many hours did you work?

INCLUDE PAID OVERTIME.

CODE 95 IF UNABLE TO STATE HOURS.

Range = 1..95

{IF AHours = 95 THEN}

AHrBand

Can I check, was it under 16 hours, 16 to 29 hours or 30 or more hours per week?

IF HOURS VARIED, PROBE FOR ESTIMATE OF HOURS LAST WEEK AND

ONLY CODE 'IT VARIED' IF CANNOT GIVE ANSWER.

1. Under 16 hours per week
2. 16 to 29 hours per week
3. 30 or more hours per week
4. It varied from week to week

{If employee THEN}

Atemp

Do you think your job is considered by your employer to be ... READ OUT...

... a temporary job (lasting less than 12 months)

...a fixed term job (lasting between 1 and 3 years), or

...a permanent job (with no known date when it will end)?

{If employee THEN}

APay

Last time you were paid how much take-home pay did you receive, that is after all deductions for tax, national insurance, pension contribution and so on, but including any overtime, bonus, commission or tips?

INTERVIEWER: RECORD WAGE OR SALARY IN POUNDS AND PENCE

RECORD TIME PERIOD AT NEXT QUESTION.

Range = 0.00..99999.00

{If employee THEN}

APayPer

What was the amount of time to which that pay related?

1. One hour
2. One day
3. One week
4. Two weeks
5. Four weeks
6. Calendar month
7. One Year/12 months/52 weeks
8. One off/lump sum
9. Other time period

{If APayPer = other THEN}

APayPerO

INTERVIEWER: CODE OTHER TIME PERIOD

OPEN

{If employee THEN}

AHrrt

Can I check, are you paid an hourly rate of pay in this job?

1. Yes
2. No

{If AHrrt=Yes THEN}

AHourly

What is your **basic** hourly rate?

NOT INCLUDING OVERTIME RATES.

INTERVIEWER: RECORD HOURLY RATE IN POUNDS AND PENCE

Range = 0.00..99.00

{If self-employed THEN}

AAnnual

Do you expect your usual income from this business, after tax and National Insurance, to be...READ OUT

1. ...less than £200 per week (that is, less than £10,000 per year)
2. ...£200 to £400 per week (£10,000 and £20,000 per year); or
3. ...more than £400 per week (more than £20,000 per year)?

{All in paid work}

AJbPepl

Thinking about when you [applied for the job/ decided to start a business], did you receive help or advice from any of these people...

READ OUT...

CODE ALL THAT APPLY.

(EXPLAIN IF NECESSARY: e.g. help in finding vacancy, completing application, etc)?

1. ...Someone already working in the workplace or in the same line of work
2. ...Someone at the job centre
3. ... Someone at [name of provider 1] (an Employment Zone)
4. ... Someone at [name of provider 2] or [name of provider 3]
5. ...Someone at an employment agency (Check NOT an EZ provider)
6. ...Someone in your family, a relative or a friend
7. ...Or someone else?
8. (SPONTANEOUS: No-one helped, I applied for/started it myself)

{IF IN PAID WORK and Job = Temporary or Fixed Term THEN}

AExpect

Do you expect to be working in the same job in four weeks' time from today?

1. Yes
2. No

{IF AExpect = No THEN}

AJobEnd

What makes you think you may not be working in the same job?

1. Expect to change job (same employer)
2. Due to change to a different job (different employer)
3. Decided to resign or leave/job not as good as expected
4. I'm having health problems
5. Threatened with dismissal/in notice period to quit
6. Coming to end of a short-term/temporary job
7. Other reasons not certain about job continuing

{If not in paid work THEN}

AActiv

Were you doing any of these activities last week (since [day month]). Were you doing...READ OUT...

NOTE: PRIORITY CODE ONE ANSWER

CODE 'OFF WORK' IF OFF FOR **MORE** THAN A MONTH BUT STILL **HAVE CONTRACT** (NO P45 FORM RECEIVED)

OTHERWISE, TREAT AS IN PAID WORK

1. ...**A work trial** (or preparation for a job),
2. ...**Voluntary or unpaid work** (not including domestic tasks),

3. ...a course to help with reading, writing or maths,
4. ...a course to help you apply for jobs,
5. ...any other work-related courses,
6. ...were you off work temporarily (e.g. on holiday or sick from employee or self-employed work), or
7. ...none of these things?

NODK, NOREFUSAL

{If AActiv=Other THEN}

AActOth

Which **one** of these activities were you **mainly** doing last week since [day month]).

Were you...READ OUT

INTERVIEWER: ALLOW RESPONDENT TO DEFINE 'MAINLY' OR SUGGEST HIGHEST NUMBER OF HOURS.

CODE ONE ONLY IN PRIORITY ORDER.

1. ... looking for paid work,
2. ... caring for a sick or disabled adult or child,
3. ... looking after the home or family,
4. ... or something else?
5. SPONTANEOUS: Inpatient in hospital (or nursing home)
6. SPONTANEOUS: Off sick/ health problem was main focus
7. SPONTANEOUS: Retired
8. SPONTANEOUS: Claiming JSA, Income Support, Incapacity Benefit or other
9. COMPLEX SPELL consisting of different things for short periods)
- 10.SPONTANEOUS AND DESPITE PROMPTING: Unable to remember

NODK, NOREFUSAL

{IF AActOth=Other THEN}

AActO

INTERVIEWER: RECORD OTHER ACTIVITY OR ASK IF NECESSARY:

What was the **main** activity you were doing?

OPEN

BLOCK B 'Making a choice'

{Mandatory participants}

BInfo1

According to DWP records, around last [May/June/July] you were due to start having meetings at [name of provider 1].

These meetings were to help you with looking for a paid job. Is that correct?

PROBE IF NECESSARY: WAS SOMEONE EXPECTING YOU TO START ATTENDING MEETINGS AT [name of provider 1]?

1. Yes
2. No

{IF BInfo1 = No THEN}

BInfo2

Apart from that, since the first of [May/June/July] 2008, were you expected to attend any meetings with a staff member at [name of provider2]?:

1. Yes
2. No

NODK

{IF BInfo1 = No AND Zone<>Southwark}

BInfo3

And since the first of [May/June/July] 2008, were you expected to attend any meetings with a staff member at [name of provider3]?

1. Yes
2. No

NODK

{IF (BInfo2=no AND BInfo3=No) OR (BInfo2=no AND Zone=Southwark) THEN}

BProv

Can I check, have you heard of Employment Zones, which is a programme to help people with finding jobs. In [name of area], the programme is run by [name of provider 1] or [name of provider 2] [or [name of provider 3]]?

1. Yes
2. No

{If BProv=yes}

BHelp

Can I check, were you expecting someone to arrange for you to start on the programme?

1. Yes
2. No

{IF BHelp = Yes THEN }

BHappen

What happened – how did you leave it?

OPEN

{IF BInfo1=yes}

BNumber1

About how many meetings have you attended at [name of provider 1], so far?

TOO MANY TO COUNT = 29

Range = 0..29

{IF BNumber1 = 0 OR IF BInfo2 = yes}

BNumber2

Can I check, have you had any meetings with a staff member at [name of provider2] since 1st [May/June/July] 2008?

IF YES, How many meetings did you have in that time?

CODE NO AS 0

Range = 0..29

{IF BNumber1 = 0 OR BInfo3 = yes}

BNumber3

And, can I check, have you had any meetings with a staff member at [name of provider3] since 1st [May/June/July] 2008?

IF YES, How many meetings did you have in that time?

CODE NO AS 0

Range = 0..29

{IF Mandatory participants AND have heard of EZ}

BTalk1

Did a staff member at the job centre talk to you about going on an Employment Zone programme with any of the following organisations ...

... [name of provider1]?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

3. Don't know

NODK,NOREFUSAL

{IF Mandatory participants AND have heard of EZ}

BTalk2

(And did a staff member at the job centre talk to you about going on an Employment Zone programme with...)

... [name of provider2]?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

NODK,NOREFUSAL

{IF Mandatory participants AND have heard of EZ AND Zone <> Southwark}

BTalk3

(And did a staff member at the job centre talk to you about going on an Employment Zone programme with...)

... [name of provider3]?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

NODK,NOREFUSAL

{If talked about at more than one provider (from BTalk1, BTalk2, BTalk3)}

BDecide

Did the staff member at the job centre say you could decide which of these organisations you would attend meetings with?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Know

{IF Mandatory participants AND have heard of EZ}

{IF BProv <> No}

BAware

[Apart from talking to a staff member at the job centre, were/Were] there any other ways you knew about being able to choose?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

{If BAware = Yes THEN}

BawOth

In what [other] ways were you aware that you could choose?

OPEN

{If talked about at more than one provider (from BTalk1, BTalk2, BTalk3)}

BChoice

Did you make the decision about which of these organisations you wanted to go to, or did it happen in some other way?

1. Respondent made the choice/decision
2. All other ways in which provider outcome occurred

{If BChoice=Other THEN}

BRat

We understand that in cases where people did not choose, then someone at the job centre could tell you which one to join. Did this happen in your case?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

{If Brat=Yes OR Brat=DK}

BRathap

[Were you/would you be] happy for someone at the job centre to tell you which organisation to join?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

{If Brathap=yes}

Bratrea

Was there any reason you did not make a choice?

OPEN

{If Brathap=yes}

BRatRNo

INTERVIEWER: HOW MANY REASONS WERE GIVEN?

Range: 0..10

{If BRatRNo > 1}

BRReImp

Which of these reasons for not making a choice, was most important?

OPEN

{Voluntary participants}

BLPStart

We understand you have been attending meetings with staff at [name of provider 1].

I would like to ask you about how these came to be arranged.

Firstly, did [name of provider 1] approach you, or did you contact them about taking part in meetings?

1. [name of provider 1] approached respondent
2. Respondent contacted [name of provider 1]
3. Some other process applied DESCRIBE NEXT
4. Information is incorrect – did not attend

{IF BLPStart = Other THEN}

BStOther

INTERVIEWER: WRITE WHAT RESPONDENT SAID ABOUT ARRANGING MEETINGS

OPEN

{IF BLPStart = NoStrt THEN}

BLPAware

Even though you did not attend meetings, were you aware about the services offered by [name of provider 1] in this area?

1. Yes
2. No

{IF BLPStart = EZProv THEN}

BStrtEZ

What happened to make it possible for [name of provider 1] to contact you?

1. Job centre staff gave information to [name of provider 1]
2. Another adviser/staff member gave information to [name of provider 1]
3. Someone I know made inquiry/appointment for me
4. Someone else I knew was already having meetings
5. Some other way

{IF BLPStart = EZProv OR BLPStart = Contact THEN}

BMotive

Was there anything in particular that encouraged you to start having meetings with [name of provider 1]?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

{IF BMotive = Yes THEN}

BWhyMeet

What were the things that encouraged you?

INTERVIEWER: PROBE FOR THINGS THAT AFFECTED DECISION AT THAT TIME

OPEN

{IF BLPStart = Contact THEN}

BContact

In what way did you first make contact with [name of provider 1]?

1. Visited office/in person
2. Called by telephone to get appointment
3. Someone I know made inquiry/appointment for me
4. Some other way

{IF BLPStart = EZprov OR Bcontact=Other OR BLPStart=Other BLPAware=Yes }

BCont2

In what ways [were you recruited by/did you make contact with/were you aware about the services offered] by [name of provider1]?

OPEN

{IF voluntary participants THEN}

BAwar2

[Did/Although you knew something about this particular service, did] you know anything about other organisations offering similar services in the area?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

{IF voluntary participants THEN}

BProv2

Had you heard of an organisation called [name of provider2]?

1. Yes
2. No

3. Don't know

{IF voluntary participants AND Zone <> Southwark THEN}

BProv3

Had you heard of an organisation called [name of provider3]?

1. Yes

2. No

3. Don't know

{IF BProv2=Yes}

BChoiLP1

Did you considered using [name of provider2] rather than [name of provider1]?

1. Yes

2. No

{IF BProv3=Yes}

BChoiLP2

Did you considered using [name of provider3] rather than [name of provider1]?

1. Yes

2. No

{IF BLPStart <> NoStrt THEN}

BLPNumb1

About how many meetings have you attended at [name of provider1], so far?

TOO MANY TO COUNT = 29

Range = 0..29

{IF BLPNumb1 = 0 AND BProv2 = 1}

BLPMeet2

Can I check, have you had any meetings with a staff member at [name of provider2] since 1st [May/June/July] 2008?

IF YES, How many meetings did you have in that time?

CODE NO AS 0

Range = 0..29

{IF BLPNumb1 = 0 AND Zone <> Southwark AND BProv3 = 1}

BLPMeet3

And, can I check, have you had any meetings with a staff member at [name of provider3] since 1 [May/June/July] 2008?

IF YES, How many meetings did you have in that time?

CODE NO AS 0

Range = 0..29

{If lone parent and not participated}

BLPNoPrt

Have you heard of a service called Employment Zones, which is a programme to help people with finding jobs. In [name of area], the programme is run by [name of provider 1] or [name of provider 2] [or [name of provider 3]]?

1. Yes
2. No

{ IF BLPNoPrt = Yes THEN}

BLPNo2

As far as you know, was someone expecting you to attend a meeting with a member of staff at one of these organisations?

1. Yes
2. No

{IF BLPNo2=Yes}

BLPNo3

What happened, how did you leave the matter?

OPEN

{Respondents who had not participated in any meetings, skip to start of Block D}

Compute variable for the EZ provider the respondent has seen most often since [start date of sample]. For mandatory participants use BNumber1, BNumber2 and BNumber3 and for voluntary participants use BLPNumb1, BLPMmeet2 and BLPMmeet3.

BLOCK C 'Steps to make a choice'

{All participants who have attended a meeting, 18-24, 25+ and lone parent}

CStart

I now want to ask some questions about how the meetings at [name of provider] were arranged.

INTERVIEWER: PRESS 1 AND ENTER TO CONTINUE

CContact

Did you contact someone at the [name of provider] office before you arranged to attend meetings there?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

{IF CContact = Yes THEN}

CKind

What kind of contact did you have?

OPEN

{IF CContact = Yes THEN}

CRefer

Did a staff member at the job centre do anything to help you make contact with [name of provider] ?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

{IF CContact = Yes THEN}

CHelp

At the time, did you think it was helpful to contact someone at [name of provider]?

1. Yes
2. No

{Ask all EZ participants}

CAffect

Had you heard anything about [name of provider] that affected whether you took part in the programme with them?

1. Yes
2. No

{If made a choice}

CMake

Was it easy or difficult for you to make a choice to join [name of provider] ?

1. Easy
2. Difficult
3. Both

{IF CMake = Difficult or Both}

CDiff

In what ways was it difficult to choose?

OPEN

{If made a choice}

CGood

Did you think it was a good thing to be able to choose, or did it make little difference in your view?

1. A good thing
2. Made little difference
3. SPONTANEOUS: neither or both

{If respondent states NOT Aware of choice}

CLike

Would you have liked to be able to choose whether to attend meetings with [name of provider] or with another similar organisation?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Know

{If aware of choice}

CLeaf

Did you see any information about [name of provider1] or [name of provider2] [or name of provider3], such as ... READ OUT ...

1. ... a leaflet,
2. ... a poster or notice,
3. ... something in a newspaper (advert or article),
4. ...something on the internet,
5. ... seeing their office,
6. or anything else you noticed?
7. SPONTANEOUS: None of these

{IF CLeaf <> None of these AND Zone <> Southwark THEN}

CWhich

Which of these organisations did you see any information about in this/these way/s... READ OUT...

1. [name of provider1]
2. or [name of provider2]
3. or [name of provider3]?

{IF CLeaf <> None of these AND Zone = Southwark THEN}

CWhichSW

Which of these organisations did you see any information about in this/these way... READ OUT...

1. [name of provider1]
2. or [name of provider2]

{If aware of choice}

CSeek

[Apart from what you saw in this way/these ways ... did/Did] you try to find information about [name of provider1] or [name of provider2] [or name of provider3] in any other ways?

1. Yes
2. No

{IF CSeek = Yes THEN}

CGetInfo

In what other ways did you try to find information?

OPEN

{If CSeek = Yes}

CSeekWht

When you were looking for information, were you trying to find out about any of these things ... READ OUT IN TURN ...

1. ... what you would be expected to do,
2. ... what the organisation would do to help you,
3. ... how much the adviser would respond to what you wanted,
4. ... how much these meetings would improve your chances of getting a job,
5. ...or, any other ways in which they could help you?
6. SPONTANEOUS: None of these

{If CSeekWht<>None}

CSeekDif

How easy or difficult was it for you to find that information?

INTERVIEWER: PROBE TO CLASSIFY...

1. Very easy
2. Quite easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Quite difficult
5. Very difficult

{If made a choice AND CLeaf <> None }

Cinfuse

How useful was this information in helping you choose which organisation to attend meetings at. Was it... READ OUT IN TURN ...

1. ...very useful,
2. ...somewhat useful,

3. ...not very useful,
4. ...or not at all useful?

{If made choice}

Cinfo

Did you feel that you had enough information to make a choice?

1. Yes
2. No

{If made choice}

Cinfo2

Do you think it would have been useful to have some other information before choosing?

1. Yes
2. No

{If Cinfo2=Yes}

Cinfo3

What other information would have been useful?

OPEN

{If made a choice}

CSoWhat

So, what were your reasons for choosing [name of provider] ?

OPEN

{If made a choice}

CSoMult

INTERVIEWER: PLEASE CODE HOW MANY REASONS WERE GIVEN

1. One
2. Two or more

{IF CSoMult=Two or more THEN}

CSoMain

Which one of these was the main reason for your having chosen [name of provider] ?

OPEN

{Ask all EZ participants}

CPastExp

Have you had any past experiences that made you more interested or less interested in going to [name of provider]?

INTERVIEWER: PROBE FOR 'MORE' OR 'LESS'

1. Yes, more interested
2. Yes, less interested
3. No

{IF CPastExp <> No}

CPastWht

What were these experiences?

OPEN

{If mandatory client and made choice}

{If BChoice=yes}

CSwap

Would you like to be able to change to a different organisation now?

1. Yes
2. No

BLOCK D 'Motivation/work orientation'

{All not currently working or expect job to end within four weeks}

DLineUp

Can I check, [apart from your current work] do you have a job lined up to start some time in the next few weeks?

1. Yes
2. No

{IF DLineUp = Yes THEN}

DLineWk

In how many weeks do you expect to start the job?

IF UNCERTAIN WHEN START, CODE DK

Range = 0..29

{IF DLineUp = Yes THEN}

DLineJob

What is the job title of the job you will be doing?

OPEN

{All not currently working or expect job to end within four weeks}

DLast4

[In the last 4 weeks, that is since [DATE]/ In the 4 weeks before you started your current work], which of these things [have you done/did you do] about finding a job ... READ OUT IN TURN...

1. ... Looked at vacancies in a newspaper,
2. ... Looked or asked about jobs at an Agency,

3. ...Looked or asked about jobs at a job centre,
4. ...Looked for jobs on the internet,
5. ...Asked someone to see if their employer has vacancies,
6. ...Contacted employers direct to ask for a job,
7. ...or, any other ways in which you have looked for vacancies?
8. SPONTANEOUS: None

{IF DLineUp = No THEN}

DChance

How likely do you think you are to find a (different) job in the next 4 weeks?

Do you think this is ... READ OUT ...

1. ... very likely,
2. ... fairly likely,
3. ... fairly unlikely,
4. or, very unlikely?

{IF DChance = fairly unlikely or very unlikely THEN}

DHope

Although it might take more than 4 weeks, do you expect to start a job within the next 6 months?

1. Yes
2. No

{Ask all who attended 1+ meeting}

DHelp1

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement ... READ OUT ...

Meeting someone at [name of provider] [improves/improved] my chances of getting a job.

IF 'DON'T KNOW' CODE CTRL <K>

1. Agree
2. Disagree

{Ask all who attended 1+ meeting}

DHelp2

(And) do you agree or disagree with the following statement ... READ OUT ...

I [am depending/depended] on someone at [name of provider] to find a suitable job for me.

IF 'DON'T KNOW' CODE CTRL <K>':

1. Agree
2. Disagree

{Ask all who attended 1+ meeting}

DHelp3

And (do you agree or disagree with) the following statement ... READ OUT ...

A staff member at [name of provider] [is helping/helped] me to resolve issues that [make/made] it hard for me to get a job.

IF 'DON'T KNOW' CODE CTRL <K>

1. Agree
2. Disagree

{Ask all who attended 1+ meeting}

DHelp4

And (do you agree or disagree with) the following statement ... READ OUT ...

How quickly I [get/got] a job [depends/depended] mainly on how much effort I put into looking for one.

IF 'DON'T KNOW' CODE CTRL <K>

1. Agree
2. Disagree

{Ask all who attended 1+ meeting}

Drate

From your experience so far, on a scale where 0 is no help at all, and 10 is as much help as you could possibly want, how helpful has the service provided by [name of provider] been?

Range = 0..10

{IF Jobsearch activity in the last 4 weeks, but no job lined up}

DApply

In the last 4 weeks, have you applied for any jobs by... READ OUT IN TURN...

1. ...completing an application form?,
2. ...sending a CV with a list of your skills and previous jobs?,
3. ...getting a friend to ask about a job, on your behalf?,
4. ...getting an agency to apply on your behalf?,
5. ...or getting a personal adviser to persuade an employer to interview you?
6. SPONTANEOUS: None of these.

{IF DApply <> None}

Dnoapl

How many jobs in total have you applied for in the last 4 weeks?

Range = 0..97

{IF Jobsearch activity in the last 4 weeks, but no job lined up}

DOffer

Have you received any job offers in last 4 weeks?

IF YES: How many offers?

IF NO: CODE 0

Range= 0..29

{IF DOffer > 0 THEN}

DTurnDo

In the last four weeks have you turned down any offer of a job?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

{ASK ALL}

DIntro2

We are nearing the end of the interview, and I would now like to ask you some background information as this helps us when looking at people's experiences and views.

INTERVIEWER: PRESS 1 AND ENTER TO CONTINUE

{ASK ALL}

DAge

What was your age last birthday?

Range=18..65

{ASK ALL}

Dmarital

Can I check, is your marital status...

READ OUT AS FAR AS NECESSARY

1. Single
2. Married or living as married
3. Widowed
4. Divorced
5. or married but separated?

{if Dmarital=Marri THEN}

DPartnr

Can I check, has your wife/husband/partner done any paid work in the last seven days?

1. Yes
2. No

{ASK ALL}

DAccomm

Do you own or rent the accommodation where you are living, or are you staying there under some other arrangement?

1. Own or rent
2. Other arrangement

{IF DAccomm=Other}

DNonPriv

How would you describe this other arrangement?

OPEN

{IF DAccomm=Private THEN}

DTenure

Is this accommodation...READ OUT

1. ... owned outright,
2. ...being bought with a mortgage
3. ... rented from a Council or New Town
4. ...rented from a Housing Association
5. or, are you renting from a private landlord?

{ASK ALL}

DFinal

What else would you like us to know about your experiences of taking part in an Employment Zone with [name of provider]?

1. Has further comments
2. No further comments

{IF DFinal=1}

DFin2

INTERVIEWER: RECORD FURTHER COMMENTS

OPEN

{ASK ALL}

FoIIUp

As well as these telephone interviews, we are planning to carrying out some more detailed face-to-face interviews with people who have taken part on the Employment Zones programme.

This would allow you to tell us more details about your experience.

Would you be happy if we contacted you about these interviews?

1. Yes
2. No

{ASK ALL}

DLink

It would help us with the evaluation of services if we could combine answers you have given in this interview with information held by the Department for Work and Pensions, or DWP.

Just to be clear, this will not affect any past, current or future claim you might have for benefits.

Are you willing to allow us to join the information in this way?

EXPLANATORY NOTES FOR INTERVIEWERS:

- The information will be used in accordance with the Data Protection Act.
- If the respondent wants to know more about reason for linking to administrative records, explain:

'We can get accurate dates of your benefit claims from DWP records. We could have asked you about this in the interview, but it would have taken some minutes and you might have found it difficult remembering the details of dates and types of benefit.'

1. Yes
2. No

{ASK ALL}

Lastqu

Before we finish, are there any comments you would like to make about any of the questions in this interview?

1. Yes
2. No

{IF Lastqu=Yes}

Lastq2

INTERVIEWER: RECORD COMMENTS

OPEN

{ASK ALL}

Thank

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

INTERVIEWER: PRESS 1 AND ENTER TO CONTINUE

References

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Hirst, A. *et al.* (2006) *Evaluation of multiple provider employment zones: early implementation issues*. DWP Research report No. 310.

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Morrell, H. and Brandosky, N. (eds) (2005) *The use of contestability and flexibility in the delivery of welfare services in Australia and the Netherlands: Report on study visits undertaken by the United Kingdom's*. Department for Work and Pensions, DWP Research Report No 288.

Policy Research Institute (2006) *Phase 2 Evaluation of Multiple Provider Employment Zones: Qualitative study*. DWP: Research Report No 399.

This report explores the operation of client choice in Multiple Provider Employment Zones (MPEZs). In 2004, MPEZs were established in six of the largest EZ areas, but only volunteers (lone parents and those on Pension Credit) to the programme were given a choice of provider. Since April 2007, this choice was extended to mandatory clients claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) in MPEZs.

The research aimed to explore the process of client choice within MPEZs from the perspective of clients (both mandatory and voluntary), Jobcentre Plus staff and EZ provider staff. The report examines the process of choice following the introduction of choice for all clients, client experience of choice and the factors that underpin an informed choice, and the factors clients take into account when choosing a provider. The research also explores the operational implications of choice for EZ providers and Jobcentre Plus and the difference that choice makes to clients, including the value placed on being offered a choice of provider.

If you would like to know more about DWP research, please contact:
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<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>