Evaluation of the Off-Flows Potentially to Employment pilots (Waves One and Two)

by Sarah Culshaw, Stuart Deaton and Ann Purvis

DWP Department for Work and Pensions

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Acknowledgements

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Glossary of terms

Advisory Services Manager (ASM)	Based in Jobcentre Plus Offices, ASMs are responsible for overseeing the work of all Personal Advisers and Customer Engagement Team Leaders.
Customer Service Operations Manager (CSOM)	Based in Jobcentre Plus Districts, CSOMs are responsible for overseeing the performance of a number of Jobcentre Plus offices.
Job Entry Target (JET)	JET was a Jobcentre Plus target between 2002 and 2006. JET was based on recorded job entries following formal submissions of customers to vacancies by Jobcentre Plus staff. Job entries were recorded and counted for performance purposes only if a valid submission had been made, and proof of the job start had been obtained from the employer. JET involved a weighted points system, whereby job entries among high priority 'hardest to help' customer groups (e.g. lone parents, people with disabilities, etc) attracted higher performance points.
Job Outcome Target (JOT)	JOT aims to measure the number of Jobcentre Plus customers who move into work, whether through an advisory intervention, external help or a self-help channel. The Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study matches all P45/46 data from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) with information held on Jobcentre Plus' benefit and labour market systems. When there is a match a job outcome is reported, which is converted into points dependent on the customer's priority

	group, and awarded to the relevant district. There are five broad priority customer groups, each attracting a points score ranging from one to 12, and additional points are awarded if a customer lives in a disadvantaged area.
JSA Off-Flows Key Management Indicator (KMI)	The JSA Off-Flows KMI measures the speed of off-flows from Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). The aim of the measure is to provide Jobcentre Plus with accurate and meaningful management information to enable real time management of customers claiming JSA, thus reducing the duration of a customer's JSA claim. Each JSA customer is included in a monthly cohort, determined using NOMIS count dates, and the source data that provides the dates of on-flow and off-flow information is derived from the DWP Jobseeker's Allowance Payment System (JSAPS). Targets have been set to achieve JSA off-flow rates, for each cohort, of 56 per cent by week 13 of the customers' journey, 78 per cent by week 26 and 92 per cent by week 52.
NOMIS	NOMIS is a web-based database of labour market statistics run by the University of Durham on behalf of the Office for National Statistics.
Off-Flows Potentially to Employment (OPtE)	OPtE measure provides a figure for the number of individuals leaving working-age benefits excluding those who have moved onto other benefits, died, left the register and returned within one week, retired or taken up New Deal options. This leaves a figure for the number of customers who have potentially moved into employment.
Personal Adviser (PA)	Based in Jobcentre Plus offices, PAs assess the needs of people looking for work and offer help, support and advice to assist customers find a job. Some PAs work with all customers and others specialise in working with particular groups such as lone parents.

Abbreviations

AAT   Adviser Achievement Tool

ASM   Advisory Services Manager

CSOM   Customer Service Operations Manager

DMA   Decision Making and Appeals

DWP   Department for Work and Pensions

ESA   Employment and Support Allowance

FND   Flexible New Deal

HMRC   Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

IB   Incapacity Benefit

IDT   Interventions Delivery Target

IS   Income Support

JET   Job Entry Target

JOT   Job Outcome Target

JSA   Jobseeker's Allowance

JSAPS   Jobseeker's Allowance Payment System

KMI   Key Management Indicator

LEP   Local Employment Partnership

MI   Management Information

OPtE   Off-Flows Potentially to Employment

QAF   Quality Assurance Framework

Summary

This report sets out the findings from three stages of qualitative research to establish Jobcentre Plus staff views on the suitability of the current Job Outcome Target (JOT) and to explore the suitability and potential impact of introducing a new performance measure to underpin JOT, the Off-Flows Potentially to Employment (OPtE) measure. The pre-pilot research considered staff views on JOT before the introduction of OPtE; the second stage of research considered district-level staff views on an initial (Wave One) OPtE pilot that took place in 2008; the third stage revisited the pilot districts following the relaunch (Wave Two) of the OPtE measure in 2009. Field work was undertaken in July and August 2009, and it should be noted that there were a number of new initiatives and processes being introduced to districts at a similar time.

Three districts were involved in piloting both the Wave One and Wave Two OPtE measure; South London, South Yorkshire and The Marches. These three districts were also involved in the pre-pilot research along with three control districts; West London, West Yorkshire and Gloucester, Swindon and Wiltshire. Each wave comprised a series of one-to-one interviews with district and office level staff. This qualitative research contributed to the wider evaluation of the OPtE pilots, which also included a destinations survey of customers. The ultimate aim of the pilot evaluation was to determine whether the OPtE measure could be successfully incorporated into the suite of Jobcentre Plus performance targets and supporting measures.

Views on JOT

Most managers and staff recognised the importance of the JOT as the Jobcentre Plus target measuring the agency's ability to place job seekers into work. Many felt that it provided vital information for government and senior management in the organisation. However, most staff felt very detached from the measure at local office level, because JOT is produced as an aggregate measure above office level.

As a result of the perceived distance between staff and office activity and the outcome measure, JOT was not generally considered as a tool for driving office

and individual performance. Instead, office managers and staff were using the Adviser Assessment Tool (AAT), introduced at a similar time to JOT, as the main driver of staff performance. More generally, staff noted that strongest single motivating factor to improve or maintain job performance reported by advisers was the desire to help customers, rather than meet an 'administrative' target.

Staff reported a number of advantages of JOT over the previous Job Entry Target (JET). Many staff reflected on the benefits of receiving data on individual customer outcomes under JET, but recognised the intensity of the data collection required made it impractical. Some advisers suggested that the automated nature of JOT had released them to spend more time with customers. Staff also felt that JOT led to reduction in some of the perverse behaviours that were felt to be caused by JET, such as inappropriate job submissions. It was felt that JOT was less open to manipulation than JET and had encouraged better teamwork.

However, the majority of those interviewed stated a preference for a measure that reported performance down to individual office level, broken down by the different customer groups. They also cited a number of other characteristics of useful performance measures. These included more immediate (and preferably real-time) reporting of performance, consideration of job sustainability and focus on outcomes over outputs from advisers' interventions with customers.

The new OPtE measure was designed to reflect a number of those characteristics. OPtE provides a figure for the number of individuals leaving working-age benefits excluding those who have:

• moved onto other benefits;

• died;

• left the register and returned within one week;

• retired; or

• taken up New Deal options.

This leaves a figure for the number of customers who can are classed as potentially moving into employment.

Views on OPtE

During the initial OPtE pilot phase, district performance teams reported that OPtE did incorporate a number of the elements of a good performance measure raised at pre-pilot stage. OPtE was felt to be a useful addition to, or potential replacement for, JOT because it could show performance at office level, was more timely, and Jobcentre Plus did not have to rely on external agencies to produce the measure. This final issue in particular was felt to generate greater confidence among staff in the validity of the data.

Following the initial pilot phase, the OPtE measure was relaunched and Wave Two pilots began in April 2009. The evaluation fieldwork was conducted in July and August 2009. The research and findings were therefore limited by the infancy of the pilot. In particular, it was difficult to ascertain the true impact of OPtE on the performance of offices and individuals, as OPtE figures from April 2009 had not been made available to the offices during the fieldwork period. However, interviewees did provide a range of views on the potential implications of introducing the OPtE measure.

Furthermore the OPtE Wave Two pilot was being conducted during a period of significant change within Jobcentre Plus. The recession, Flexible New Deal (FND) and Local Employment Partnerships (LEPs) were all seen as having driven significant changes within the organisation. When discussing targets staff also suggested that the introduction of the JSA Off-Flow KMI had more impact than the pilot of OPtE. There was a general perception that OPtE was aligned with and supported the changes, but was not a key driver of them.

OPtE was seen by staff to fit with the overarching Jobcentre Plus aim of getting people into work. While it was agreed that OPtE went some way to closing the distance between frontline activity and the performance measure of that activity seen with JOT, it was still generally regarded as an overarching measure of performance most useful for government and Jobcentre Plus senior management. It was not generally seen as the most appropriate tool for driving performance at office level because it was not felt to be sufficiently timely and could not identify the cause(s) of that performance. However, a number of staff suggested OPtE would provide a useful comparison of the relative performance of offices within a district. Other performance measures and office practices can then be explored in more detail in high and low performing offices to identify what produces good overall performance.

The majority of staff interviewed saw the tasks and activities they conducted as influencing OPtE performance. However, they also regarded their influence on OPtE performance as limited by overarching issues such as register numbers, the availability of jobs, Jobcentre Plus staffing levels and customer attitudes toward taking up specific jobs offered.

Generally, managers and staff felt that OPtE would lead to offices ensuring that current Jobcentre Plus processes are carried out correctly, rather than introducing any new ways of working. Staff also suggested that OPtE might encourage a renewed focus in areas of administrative 'housekeeping'. That is the accurate recording of job submissions and closing claims down quickly and correctly to ensure all off-flows are captured.

The research explored staff views on three potential impacts of OPtE on customers; customer targeting, job submissions and decision making and appeals (DMA) activity.

There were mixed views on whether and how OPtE may affect customer targeting. OPtE is a contrast to JOT, in that it is a measure based on the raw numbers of customers flowing off benefit, rather than a priority group, points-based system. A number of interviewees suggested they focused more on priority group customers under JOT because it was a points-based system, but that there was now a greater sense that all customers should receive appropriate support to help them get back into work. This rebalancing, supported by the OPtE measure, was generally viewed as positive by staff, who reported feeling the focus on priority group customers had been detrimental to other customers.

Staff suggested two ways in which OPtE might have a positive impact on job submission behaviour. Firstly, OPtE could encourage more appropriate job submissions as advisers could be more likely to submit the most appropriate customer for the job rather than the customer with the highest points (under JOT). Secondly, OPtE could encourage more submissions to jobs that were not captured under JOT, but are captured under OPtE, for example those under the lower earnings limit.

The third potential impact explored was that on sanctioning behaviour. Some staff speculated whether OPtE would encourage advisers to move customers off benefits through sanctioning. Undertaking appropriate decision-making activity and more frequent attendance interviewing were both reported as priorities by staff. However, there was no clear indication whether the increased focus on sanctioning behaviour was driven by or simply supported by OPtE.

Given the infancy of the pilot at the time of the research, it has not been possible to ascertain whether OPtE has had the impacts outlined above. While the principle of the OPtE measure was broadly welcomed in the three pilot districts, further research will be required to establish precisely how OPtE does affect day-to-day activity in Jobcentre Plus offices.

1 Background

A key means for determining the value and performance of Jobcentre Plus performance is the measurement of the agency's ability to place job seekers into work. The current Jobcentre Plus target which measures this is the Job Outcome Target (JOT). JOT was introduced in April 2006, following a period of piloting and evaluation, and replaced the Job Entry Target (JET).

JOT aims to measure the number of Jobcentre Plus customers who move into work, whether through an advisory intervention, external help or a self-help channel. The Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study matches all P45/46 data from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) with information held on Jobcentre Plus' benefit and labour market systems. When there is a match, a job outcome is reported which is converted into points dependent on the customer's priority group, and awarded to the relevant district. There are five priority customer groups, each attracting a points score ranging from one to 12, and additional points are awarded if a customer lives in a disadvantaged area.

Since April 2009, the JOT target has been measured at regional level and, prior to this, the target was measured down to district level. As JOT is not measured at local office level, the front-line operational contribution to the target is managed through the delivery of a suite of underpinning Key Management Indicators (KMIs) and other performance tools.

The movement of customers off benefits has been proposed as an underpinning measure for JOT, the aim being that such information would offer more timely and insightful intelligence to both monitor performance and to identify links between Jobcentre Plus inputs and the positive impact of customers entering the labour market.

In April 2008, the use of Off-Flows Potentially to Employment (OPtE) data was first piloted as a performance management tool.

The OPtE measure provides a figure for the number of individuals leaving working-age benefits excluding those who have:

• moved onto other benefits;

• died;

• left the register and returned within one week;

• retired; or

• taken up New Deal options.

This leaves a figure for the number of customers who are classed as potentially moving into employment.

OPtE data and targets are communicated to operational staff in terms of customer numbers rather than points. To score overall district performance, the customer volume numbers are converted back into points using the same point scoring system as JOT, and these points are communicated to the top layer of managers in each district only.

Three Jobcentre Plus districts received and interacted with the OPtE data as part of this pilot. One of these districts was simultaneously involved in a pilot of office-level JOT data.

After revisions and improvements to the OPtE code, including improving the accuracy of the exclusions and including ESA off-flows and cross-flows in the data, the pilots were relaunched in April 2009. The same three pilot districts were involved in this second wave.

The Jobcentre Plus Performance Measurement and Analysis Division commissioned the Centre for Public Policy, supported by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, to conduct a qualitative evaluation of these pilots. The qualitative evaluation formed part of a structured programme of research, which also included a quantitative customer destinations survey.

This short report presents the key findings from the qualitative evaluation which consisted of three distinct but interrelated stages; pre-pilot research exploring staff views on the suitability of JOT, a post introduction review of the (Wave One) OPtE measure and a post introduction review of the (Wave Two) OPtE measure following the pilot relaunch.

2 Methodology

2.1 Aims of the evaluation

The qualitative evaluation of the Off-Flows Potentially to Employment (OPtE) Wave One and Two pilots contributed to the wider evaluation of the OPtE pilots. The ultimate aim of the evaluation was to determine whether an OPtE measure was feasible, workable and could be effectively operationalised as a Jobcentre Plus operational target.

The qualitative evaluation aimed to gain insight from Jobcentre Plus staff involved in the pilot districts about the suitability of the measure.

This aim was underpinned by a number of objectives at each stage of the evaluation.

2.1.1 Pre-pilot

This stage of the research primarily considered:

• Staff attitudes to, and any issues with, JOT.

• Whether JOT was a suitable tool for managers to judge and manage job broking performance.

• The impact of JOT on staff behaviour.

• Whether there was a need for a supporting measure to JOT and, if so, what this measure would need to look like.

• Whether an OPtE measure might be a suitable supporting measure to JOT.

• The potential impact of using an OPtE measure on staff behaviour.

• Whether there were any other measures which might be more suitable for judging and managing job broking performance (with a particular focus in District One on office level JOT data).

• Any lessons or good practice in relation to piloting and introducing new targets and management information.

2.1.2 Pilot

Both the Wave One and Wave Two pilot research aimed to consider:

- How the pilots were implemented.

- Whether communications and guidance were appropriate and adequate.

- OPtE's alignment with other Jobcentre Plus targets, initiatives and activities.

- Whether the pilots encouraged new or different types of behaviour and whether these were appropriate.

- If and how the pilots changed working relationships between Jobcentre Plus staff and customers.

- Perceived benefits, disadvantages and consequences of OPtE.

- Whether OPtE could be used as a successful performance target.

2.2 Fieldwork

The evaluation intended to explore staff views about JOT and OPtE and so was qualitative in nature, involving individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews rather than an analysis of management information.

Initial discussions were held with the Jobcentre Plus Performance Measurement and Analysis Division and district-level managers and these discussions, along with the research questions in the project specification, informed the development of the topic guides used in the staff interviews. Copies of these topic guides can be found within Appendix One.

Fieldwork for the pre-pilot research was carried out in the three pilot districts plus three control districts selected by Jobcentre Plus to have broadly similar characteristics to the pilot areas.

Over 120 face-to-face interviews were conducted during April and May 2008 with Advisory Services Managers, Personal Advisers (Generic, Lone Parent and Incapacity Benefit) and Fortnightly Jobsearch Reviewers. In each of the six districts, interviews were conducted at four offices, selected to reflect a range of office sizes. Telephone interviews were also conducted with District Managers, District Performance Managers, Regional Performance Managers and other key performance staff in each of the six districts.

Wave One and Two pilot fieldwork was carried out in the three pilot districts only and this reports presents findings from the three districts as Districts One, Two and Three.

For the Wave One OPtE evaluation a small number of telephone interviews were conducted during August and September 2008 with regional and district management and performance staff in the three pilot districts. Follow-up

interviews were not conducted with office-based managers and staff as originally planned, due to the OPtE data not being disseminated down to this level in any of the pilot districts.

For the Wave Two OPtE evaluation, over 80 face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted during July and August 2009. Four offices from each of the three pilot Districts were visited and interviews conducted with front-line managers and staff. Telephone interviews were also conducted with District Managers, District Performance Managers, Regional Performance Managers and other key performance staff in each of the three districts.

Full details of the numbers of staff interviewed are given in Appendix Two.

Permission to record interviews was sought and, in the majority of cases, obtained. A small number of respondents preferred not to have the discussion recorded and in these cases notes were taken via tabular interview schedules.

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed along with the interview notes to identify key themes. A coding framework linked to the key themes and incorporating areas of interest highlighted within the research specification was then devised, and the interview transcriptions coded accordingly. Tables were constructed for each staff group and location, which identified the key themes, with rows for the insertion of a summary of the coded data from the individual interviews. A final stage of analysis was also carried out which aimed to highlight patterns within and across staff groups and locations.

3   Pre-pilot findings

3.1   Working with JOT

Most managers and staff recognised the importance of the Job Outcome Target (JOT) as the Jobcentre Plus target measuring the agency's ability to place job seekers into work. Many felt that it provided vital information for government and senior management in the organisation, but felt very detached from it at local office level.

> *'It's beneficial – maybe not as an individual but as an organisation.'*

> (Personal Adviser)

Most staff could name ways in which JOT data was disseminated to them or in which they could access it, e.g. emails, notice boards, performance meetings, Jobcentre Plus intranet homepage, etc. The majority of JOT performance data seemed to reach staff as part of a package of wider performance data and many front-line staff admitted not paying much attention to JOT as they saw it as not directly relevant to their day-to-day roles. Staff in more than one district felt that JOT performance was only focused upon by district and office managers when performance was poor.

Working under JOT was perceived as less competitive and pressured than under the Job Entry Target (JET), which was welcomed by many staff, but felt by some managers to have resulted in staff 'taking their eye off the ball' (Advisory Services Manager).

The introduction of JOT had also removed the requirement under JET for staff to track the destinations of customers, a process identified by a number of staff as time-consuming and unproductive.

> *'If you got a person in a job that's the end product, you shouldn't have to then spend hours following that up.'*

> (Personal Adviser)

Some advisers therefore found that the automated nature of JOT had released them to spend more time with customers. However, over one-third of ddvisers interviewed admitted to informally tracking customers where possible to monitor their own performance, and a number of offices were formally tracking everyone leaving the benefits register using returned ES40 signing cards and thus had not achieved the reduction in workload envisaged with the introduction of JOT. In addition, staff reported that under JOT they had lost the feedback loop they had with JET which informed them of whether the job submissions they had made for customers had been successful. They suggested that this prevented them from discovering, and therefore being able to address, issues such as customers not attending arranged interviews. Staff also felt that they had less communication with local employers under JOT which was felt to have reduced opportunities to find out about new vacancies and to get relevant and detailed information about these.

3.2   JOT's alignment with other performance management tools

During the pre-pilot and Wave One Off-Flows Potentially to Employment (OPtE) pilot fieldwork, JOT performance was reported down to district level. Front-line managers and staff suggested that the lack of office level JOT data and targets had resulted in a reliance on other tools and management information to monitor performance, including the Adviser Achievement Tool (AAT), Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) observations, case conferences, support and share interviews, periodic reviews and the balanced scorecard. None of the tools or processes identified were felt to link directly to JOT however.

District performance staff suggested that the introduction of AAT at the same time as JOT, and the inability to use JOT to manage performance at the local level, meant that the focus for managers and staff had moved from JET to AAT rather than from JET to JOT.

> *'Advisers are now very much focused on AAT, that's where all the focus has been shifted.'*

(Personal Adviser)

Many managers reported relying heavily on AAT data due to its ready availability and specificity to an individual. However, there were concerns expressed about the prescriptive nature of AAT which it was felt could encourage focus on processes rather than the customers themselves.

> *'Previously the person sat in front of you was the most important part of the interview, whereas now it's how you manage the computer system and the processes we've got to go through to make sure results are recorded.'*

(Personal Adviser)

'We got quite fixated with process measures and as a result made our advisers into box tickers so they just go through the process without thinking about what that process is delivering.'

(District Manager)

This potentially detrimental focus on process over outcome was felt to be exacerbated by the perceived lack of a direct link between AAT and JOT performance. Managers therefore reported being unable to quality-assure the AAT process measure against the JOT output measure.

Some managers and staff reported a preference for QAF observations as they felt these had a greater focus on quality. However, QAFs were also reported as being extremely time-consuming for managers and there were some concerns raised about staff acting differently from their normal conduct when being observed. Most staff interviewed reported that they did not receive regular monthly QAF observations from their manager. A number of managers felt that QAFs would be more useful if there was more flexibility in their use, e.g. being able to focus observations on new or struggling advisers rather than having to do one per month with each staff member.

3.3 Staff perceptions of JOT

One of the main benefits of JOT identified by staff was that it addressed some of the perverse behaviours felt to be caused by JET, such as inappropriate job submissions and misuse of the Adviser Discretion Fund. It was felt that JOT was less open to manipulation than JET and had encouraged better teamwork and 'reduced infighting for results' (Personal Adviser).

The JOT measurement captures customers moving into work that Jobcentre Plus have been involved with on a multitude of levels, and not just customers they have submitted to a job. Some staff felt this was a benefit of JOT over JET and suggested they undertook many tasks that helped customers move towards the labour market in addition to submitting them directly to jobs. Some staff also positively reported that JOT supported them in focusing on supporting priority group customers and allowing customers who were more able to help themselves to move back into the labour market.

When advisers were asked what motivated them to improve or maintain job performance, the strongest single motivating factor reported was the desire to help customers. Pride in doing a good job was another motivator. Only a small number of staff named targets as a motivator, and only then as a secondary factor. Furthermore, JOT was not regarded as a target that particularly motivated individuals due to its perceived remoteness from their day-to-day actions. In contrast, many staff reflected that JET had been extremely motivating, as it allowed them to see their successful outcomes with individual customers, and felt that their motivation and sense of achievement had reduced since JET was replaced by JOT.

Many staff interviewed, particularly at the front-line level, displayed a level of mistrust in the JOT data. A number of staff raised concerns about the omission from JOT of job outcomes where customers did not pay tax. This concern was principally raised by Lone Parent Personal Advisers, who felt their customers were particularly likely to enter part-time work which fell under the lower earnings limit and thus would not count towards JOT. The reliance on data from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) was also viewed negatively by many staff as it was felt this removed Jobcentre Plus control and ownership over JOT performance figures, although a small number of staff did suggest that the external collection of the data provided useful independent verification.

3.4 Characteristics of useful performance measures

The majority of those interviewed stated a preference for performance measures that report performance down to individual office level, broken down by the different customer groups. The majority of managers and staff recognised that job outcomes often result from efforts by more than one member of staff and so did not want individual adviser-level data for this. Many staff reflected on the benefits of receiving data on individual customer outcomes, but there was recognition of the impracticalities surrounding the time such data collection takes.

More immediate (and preferably real-time) data was also commonly raised as a characteristic of useful performance measures, as was consideration of job sustainability and focus on outcomes over outputs from advisers' interventions with customers.

The majority of interviewees suggested that performance data needs to be simple, straightforward and meaningful for office managers and staff to be willing and able to take it on board. At office level, there was a preference for data to be presented in a manner which does not require any further interrogation, with the option of accessing more detailed data if required. A number of office managers felt it was important for district and performance staff to ensure they worked to prevent performance information overload at office level.

A number of staff felt that performance measures were of most benefit when used to improve working practices and performance, e.g. when used to identify best practice in successful areas and to incentivise staff. Some front-line staff suggested that increased focus on performance measures when targets are not being met can lead to a culture of achievement of targets by any means and thus a potential increase in perverse behaviours.

Staff interpretation of the relative importance of different performance measures needs careful consideration. Front-line staff suggested that they often prioritise measures for which they have individual targets over those which have whole office or district targets. One Lone Parent Personal Adviser explained that having an individual target for work trials resulted in this taking precedence over the

whole district target for JOT and, consequently, the adviser felt pressured to *'push work trials just to hit a target when the customer could get a job instead'*.

Staff identified a need for performance measures and targets to be rationalised and complementary to each other. Many advisers stated a preference for a reduced number of targets and for more flexibility to work with customers in the way they felt was appropriate.

4 Pilot findings

4.1 Implementation and context

The Wave One Off-Flows Potentially to Employment (OPtE) pilots began in April 2008 and the evaluation fieldwork was conducted in August and September 2008.

During the interviews with regional and district managers and performance staff it became apparent that the Wave One OPtE data and targets had not been shared with Jobcentre Plus offices in the pilot districts. Those interviewed suggested this was because they felt it would be beneficial for the district performance teams to spend some time considering and interacting with the data prior to any dissemination. The pilot districts were also still being measured on Job Outcome Target (JOT) performance and so were reticent to introduce another measure to front-line staff, particularly in District Three which was in JOT priority status due to underperformance against the target.

The planned research interviews with office-level managers and staff were therefore cancelled and the Wave One OPtE findings in this report are therefore purely reflective of the views of regional and district managers and performance staff.

The OPtE pilots were relaunched in the same three districts in April 2009, following revisions and improvements to how OPtE was constructed. The first of the improvements was the tightening of the OPtE code so the algorithm looks for a date of death before a date of off-flow. This improved the accuracy of the exclusions and ensured that all those who died were now excluded from OPtE. The Wave Two OPtE data also included Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) off-flows, and also looked for cross-flows from ESA to other benefits and from other benefits to ESA as part of the exclusions.

The Wave Two OPtE evaluation fieldwork was conducted in July and August 2009. There were a number of changes both external and internal to Jobcentre Plus that had occurred since the Wave One OPtE fieldwork and affected the context of this Wave Two OPtE fieldwork.

External to Jobcentre Plus, the economic recession and related rise in unemployment numbers has had a significant impact on the agency and resulted in a large increase in new customers and the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) register size. Many front-line staff in the Wave Two research suggested that they had less time to concentrate on performance as they were extremely busy just dealing with the new claims.

Internally, in relation to performance, and due to changes in operational policy, all of Jobcentre Plus were accountable for JOT performance at regional level only from April 2009, as compared to district level prior to this. In addition, a new Key Management Indicator (KMI) had been introduced to the performance suite: the JSA Off-Flows KMI. This KMI measures the speed of off-flows from JSA. The aim of the measure is to provide Jobcentre Plus with accurate and meaningful management information to enable real time management of customers claiming JSA, thus reducing the duration of a customer's JSA claim. Each JSA customer is included in a monthly cohort, determined using NOMIS count dates, and the source data that provides the dates of on-flow and off-flow information is derived from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Jobseeker's Allowance Payment System (JSAPS). Targets have been set to achieve JSA off-flow rates, for each cohort, of 56 per cent by week 13 of the customers' journey, 78 per cent by week 26 and 92 per cent by week 52.

The expected time lag for Wave Two OPtE reporting was two to three months. Unfortunately, due to a delay in the resolution of issues with the Work and Pensions Warehouse Programme and New Deal databases, the actual OPtE data time lag is four months. However, the evaluation fieldwork period was fixed to meet Jobcentre Plus reporting deadlines and so could not be moved to account for this increased OPtE reporting delay. The implication of this delay was that the three pilot districts had not received any OPtE data relating to the pilot period before or during the fieldwork. Overall district targets had been set by the Jobcentre Plus Performance Measurement and Analysis Division and allocated by districts down to office level prior to the fieldwork period of July and August 2009, but the most recent OPtE data that had been received was for March 2009. The research and findings were therefore limited by the infancy of the pilot.

In District One, district and performance staff reported that their current performance focus was on the JSA Off-Flows KMI and, more generally, on implementing the Flexible New Deal (FND). The JSA Off-Flows KMI was given greater prominence in part because they had been regularly receiving performance figures and also because it mirrored the stages under FND into which teams had been restructured. Staff also felt that the offices were focusing strongly on achieving their Local Employment Partnership (LEP) targets.

All offices in District One used a balanced scorecard consisting of a set of 20 targets and KMIs. This was reported as being the key focus and driver of performance in the district. Each office had been allocated an individual OPtE target based on the estimated distribution of customer groups across offices in the district. The

intention was to incorporate OPtE into the balanced scorecard and, through this, disseminate OPtE data down to office level. However, this had not been done at the time of the fieldwork as the district had not received any data relating to the pilot period of April 2009 onwards.

In District Two, district and performance team staff also reported that their current performance focus was on the JSA Off-Flows KMI rather than OPtE. The performance team staff interviewed quoted previous analysis from within the Jobcentre Plus Performance Measurement and Analysis Division that suggests that Jobcentre Plus has the greatest influence over speeding up the rate in which customers find work and leave benefit. The performance staff therefore felt that benefit duration measures such as the JSA Off-Flows KMI are more relevant indicators of Jobcentre Plus performance than benefit off-flow measures such as OPtE.

Unlike District One, District Two was disseminating OPtE data to its local offices on a regular basis, despite not having received any data relating to the pilot period of April 2009 onwards. The performance team were reformatting the data before sending it out to the Customer Service Operations Managers who were then passing the data to Advisory Services Managers (ASMs) via the District Management Information Packs. Some, but not all, ASMs were then sharing the data with the staff in their offices. Those who chose not to disseminate the data suggested this was because they felt it would not be meaningful for staff at local office level. The district also reported difficulty in setting appropriate office level targets for OPtE, because it was felt that the District had a number of distinct labour markets within it.

In District Three, an OPtE Task and Finish Group had been set up to develop an achievement plan for OPtE. The district had also started using a proxy tracking tool which utilised claim closure information entered by staff onto the Jobcentre Plus Labour Market System as a real-time OPtE indicator. Interviewees indicated that completing the proxy tracking tool was not time consuming as it was largely based on the processes they already had to complete when closing down claims. While it was accepted that the tracking tool would not capture all customers going into work, it was seen as a valuable 'worst case scenario' real-time indicator of the OPtE figures.

As well as issuing the proxy tracking tool data to offices, the District Three performance team had disseminated summary data showing what the OPtE figures and achievement against target would have been month by month in 2008/09. The performance team had also broken the 2009/10 OPtE targets down to office level based on their share of the register, and some of the larger offices were reported to have broken the OPtE targets down further into team targets. The OPtE and corresponding tracking tool figures and targets were reported as being displayed on the performance boards in all Jobcentre Plus offices in the district. Satellite offices not dealing with new claims did not have their own OPtE targets but were instead grouped with the larger offices which dealt with the area's new claims. This was felt to limit their control over OPtE performance.

4.2   Staff awareness and understanding

Office-level staff awareness and understanding was not explored during the Wave One OPtE fieldwork due to the decision taken not to share the pilot data with offices.

Awareness of the Wave Two OPtE pilot had been raised through presentations delivered to office managers in all three pilot districts in February and March 2009. Following these presentations, managers in two of the districts cascaded the guidance down to front-line staff. In one of the pilot districts, managers chose to cascade messages on activities that underpinned OPtE rather than focusing on OPtE itself. OPtE was also added to general performance meeting agendas by some, but not all, managers interviewed across the three districts.

District and performance managers from all three districts commented that they had developed a large amount of guidance and marketing materials in their individual districts and suggested that more nationally produced materials would have been welcomed. The delay between the initial awareness-raising sessions and receiving the first set of pilot period OPtE data was also felt to have been unhelpful in developing and maintaining staff focus on OPtE.

Levels of awareness and understanding of the Wave Two OPtE measure were high among district, performance and office managers but varied among front-line staff.

> *'I have to be realistic and just accept that there have been so many things that have occurred in the last quarter that OPtE may not be top of everybody's list.'*

> (District Manager)

A number of interviewees displayed some confusion between OPtE and the JSA Off-Flows KMI. District managers suggested this could be as a consequence of rolling out both new measures simultaneously.

The majority of interviewees described the purpose of OPtE as being a measure of the success of Jobcentre Plus in moving people into work. A number of interviewees also described its value in addressing the perceived limitations of JOT.

> *'It's a useful tool to see how many people are off-flowing into work…it's a lot quicker than the Job Outcome Target, it includes all our customer groups… so it's useful from that point of view.'*

> (Advisory Services Manager)

The majority of those interviewed recognised and understood OPtE's alignment with the other Jobcentre Plus targets and KMIs, but there were mixed views on its relative importance to these. Some suggested OPtE should be used as an overarching measure and others saw it as a supporting measure for other targets and KMIs.

4.3 Staff perceptions

4.3.1 Suitability of Wave One OPtE as a performance measure

District performance teams reported a number of advantages to the Wave One OPtE measure in comparison to JOT data including its breakdown to office level, its improved timeliness and the internal control of its production (as opposed to the reliance on HMRC data for JOT) which it was felt could improve data reliability.

There were some concerns that the Wave One OPtE measure did not go far enough in redressing the key problems of JOT however.

> 'I think it's better than JOT but I wonder whether there is another step to go.'

> (Regional Performance Manager)

Like JOT, OPtE was seen as an overarching labour market measure rather than a specific Jobcentre Plus measure. There were concerns expressed as to whether it would be hard to affect it due to the many factors influencing it outside of Jobcentre Plus managers' control.

> 'It's great that OPtE is more detailed and timely but I'm not too sure how it will be useful on a process improvement level. We still haven't got that link to show what has gone wrong and what needs addressing to fix it.'

> (Management Information Lead)

District and performance level managers across all three pilot districts suggested that if OPtE is to be a suitable supporting measure for JOT there needs to be a reliable correlation between the two. District One, as the sole pilot district that received both Wave One OPtE and office level JOT data, overlaid the data to establish whether there was a correlation. They found that the two data sets did correlate to some extent, but that there was a big margin of difference which varied depending on the client group. Looking at data across two years they found a stable pattern of 65 per cent of lone parent customer off-flows resulting in job outcomes, but only 33 per cent of sick and disabled customer off-flows resulting in job outcomes. They speculated that this lower correlation could be due to a number of people claiming Incapacity Benefit for short periods who remain technically employed and subsequently return to their existing job. The District One analysis suggested that the Wave One OPtE measure correlated with, but was not a direct predictor of, JOT.

4.3.2 Potential benefits of Wave Two OPtE

Due to the infancy of the Wave Two pilot at the time of research, interviewees could not provide a full and accurate appraisal of the Wave Two OPtE measure. They did, however, suggest a number of potential benefits.

OPtE was seen by staff to fit with the overarching Jobcentre Plus aim of getting people into work.

> *'That's what we should be doing: getting people into employment. It is the yardstick. At the moment OPtE is one of the main targets because that is our measure of getting people off into work.'*

> (Advisory Services Manager)

The majority of staff commented positively on OPtE being a measure of raw numbers of people rather than a points system and suggested this was simpler, clearer and fairer, and also made comparisons to the unemployment figures easier.

> *'It's much easier explaining where we are in terms of customers off-flowing from benefit than to explain how many points we've got. Sometimes with the points there could be huge total and staff didn't always relate to that.'*

> (Customer Service Operations Manager)

A number of staff also mentioned that people, not points, had been promoted as part of the Jobcentre Plus 12 Must Dos in 2008/09 and welcomed OPtE's alignment to this.

Many interviewees felt OPtE was an improvement on JOT because of a perception that Jobcentre Plus did not have to rely on external data sources to produce the figures. Despite the initial delays in sending performance figures to the pilot sites, interviewees also recognised that OPtE figures could be produced more quickly than JOT, for which final figures are provided with a six month delay. They also welcomed the ability to receive office level OPtE data which was not generally available for JOT. Many district and office managers felt that this would help them to identify good practice and address underperformance at an office level in a more timely manner.

While many interviewees were extremely positive about the JSA Off-Flows KMI, and a number stated a preference for using this measure on a practical basis over OPtE, they recognised that the OPtE measure covers more benefit customer groups and is therefore a more complete measure of Jobcentre Plus performance.

Another suggested benefit was that OPtE captures more job outcomes than JOT, for example customers moving into employment under the lower earnings limit and customers going into self-employment.

There were also some positive views expressed about OPtE capturing some non-job outcomes. A number of interviewees suggested it was appropriate that the measure includes customers who have gone off the register that have not gone into work, as staff could put a lot of time and effort into moving customers off benefit who should not be receiving it (e.g. those working in the black economy or 'lone' parents who are living with a partner). They suggested these off-flows should count towards OPtE performance as they helped to protect the public purse.

> *'I think there should be some recognition for people that leave the register but not necessarily into work [because] there's a lot of effort gone into each person signing off.'*

(Team Leader)

Some interviewees, however, albeit a smaller number, did raise concerns about the 'potentially' aspect (see Section 4.3.3).

4.3.3 Potential drawbacks of Wave Two OPtE

The two potential drawbacks of Wave Two OPtE suggested by interviewees as the most limiting were that the measure does not directly link to any specific actions or individual staff performance and that the measure, albeit more timely than JOT, does not provide real time management information. It was suggested that these two factors prevent OPtE from being useable as a practical performance management tool.

> *'I've got nothing against the OPtE performance target, I just don't think it can be used in a way that it was thought of at the beginning which is to help improve Jobcentre performance. I think it works as a replacement for JOT* [at a] *quite high level but not for day-to-day performance improvement and management.'*

(District Performance Manager)

Some interviewees, particularly at the district and performance team level, questioned whether OPtE was the most appropriate measure of Jobcentre performance in relation to moving customers into work. Some suggested Jobcentre Plus has the greatest influence over the speed in which customers leave the register. Others suggested OPtE is a measure of the labour market rather than Jobcentre Plus performance and that the influence Jobcentre Plus staff can have on OPtE is limited. Others pointed out that OPtE includes customers outside Jobcentre Plus influence, such as Incapacity Benefit customers in Provider Led Pathways Districts, which also limited the influence Jobcentre Plus staff can have on OPtE.

Pilot districts suggested that OPtE would only be as accurate as their recording on the Jobcentre Plus systems. There were some concerns that inaccuracies in data input could be exacerbated by staff shortages and also by the large numbers of new and inexperienced staff joining the organisation. There were also some concerns raised about setting accurate and appropriate targets. This appeared to be a problem that would be particular to districts with a number of distinct labour markets within them and would need to be addressed.

As noted in Section 4.3.2, some interviewees were positive about the fact that the OPtE measure incorporated some non-job outcomes. However, a small number of interviewees did express some concerns that the measure was based on the number of customers that had 'potentially' rather than 'definitely' moved into employment. They argued that the 'potentially' element undermined the validity of the measure in the eyes of some staff, particularly if it is not clear what criteria

and datasets were being used to validate the off-flows and their likelihood of being to employment. If the target was not regarded as valid by some, because they felt that certain off-flowing customers had been inappropriately included in the count, then it was likely to have limited influence on performance.

> *'I think the problem we've got with OPtE is the 'potential'. You know, we're not saying that all of these people actually went into jobs. We're saying these people have all left benefits and we think the ones that are left after we've done the filtering, potentially, have gone into work. I think that's quite a weak message.'*

(District Performance Manager)

Finally, there is the possibility, as with any performance measure, that the pressure of achieving an OPtE target could drive perverse behaviours, such as those discussed in Section 4.4.1.

> *'I think sometimes if you focus on a target you're not focusing on the person and then what happens is they'll go off benefit and you'll get an outcome but they'll come back on because it's not right.'*

(Personal Adviser)

4.4 Potential impact

4.4.1 Potential impact of OPtE

As staff below district level did not interact with the Wave One OPtE data, its impact on staff behaviour could not be evaluated. However, one potential impact of an OPtE measure on staff behaviour was suggested at this stage, this being a potential for focus on decision making and appeals (DMA) activity over job preparation and submission activity.

> *'If you say to someone, we have got 500 off-flows and we need to get another 50, how are they going to manage that? DMA referrals, overstayers, customer compliance, programme starts. All these things we can manage on a day-to-day basis and all are really good things for getting people who shouldn't be claiming off the register which will make our off-flows quite high, but none lead to work, none actually hit JOT performance.'*

(Management Information Lead)

The Wave Two OPtE pilot was not fully underway at the time of the fieldwork due to data delays and so the true impact of the measure on the performance of offices and individual staff could not be ascertained. However, interviewees did identify a number of potential impacts discussed below.

District One reported that they were looking more closely at how claim closures were dealt with in Benefit Delivery Centres. Staff in one office also reported that they had started carrying out more frequent attendance interviewing with customers they felt were not conducting sufficient work search activities. Two

offices visited reported that they were informally recording if customers had flowed into work in order to ensure they were on track to meet their OPtE targets.

District Two staff suggested they were also looking at claim closures to ensure all appropriate closures were counted towards OPtE performance. A small number of interviewees reported using the OPtE figures to motivate customers during Back to Work sessions, by showing that people were still moving into jobs despite the recession. One office reported that DMA activity for customers failing to attend interviews and more frequent attendance interviewing have both been focused on more recently, although this may be more closely linked to the operational context of rising claim volumes than to the OPtE pilot.

District Three reported having started to provide more support to customers accessing job points, such as talking through vacancies, completing applications, etc. Some offices also reported investing a greater amount of time in more frequent attendance interviewing with the stated aim of moving customers off benefit who should not be claiming.

Generally, managers and staff across all three pilot districts felt that OPtE would lead to a focus on ensuring current Jobcentre Plus processes were carried out correctly, rather than introducing any new ways of working.

> 'Personally I don't think we will need to change our process [for OPtE]…I think it will just be confirmation that what we're doing, we're doing correctly.'

(Personal Adviser)

While they did not expect OPtE to significantly change the way they work, a number of staff did suggest, however, that OPtE might encourage a renewed focus on closing claims down quickly and correctly to ensure all off-flows are captured and recording job submissions, which had become less of a priority under JOT due to an expectation that outcomes resulting from submissions would be automatically captured.

It was apparent from the interviews conducted that the Wave Two OPtE pilot was taking place during a period of significant change within Jobcentre Plus. The recession, FND, LEPs and the JSA Off-Flows KMI were all seen as having driven many process changes. There was a general perception that OPtE was aligned with and supported these process changes, but was not a driver of them. For example, the focus on JSA customers appeared to have increased since the pre-pilot and Wave One OPtE research. However, this was felt by staff to be attributable more to other factors than to OPtE. These factors included; the large increase in the JSA register size caused by the recession, the increase in the number of lone parents claiming JSA due to the introduction of Lone Parent Obligations and Provider Led Pathways decreasing the number of priority group customers supported directly by Jobcentre Plus offices.

The research explored staff views on three potential impacts of OPtE on customers, the first being customer targeting. There were mixed views on whether and how OPtE may affect targeting. A number of interviewees suggested that they focused more on priority group customers under JOT because of its points system, but that there was now a greater sense that all customers should receive appropriate support to help them get back into work. This shift in focus was generally viewed as positive by staff, who reported feeling that focus on priority group customers had been detrimental to other customers.

> *'I think every single person should be offered the same type of services and help. We shouldn't say, well I've got some really good jobs and only give them to people that have got this and that, because what about all the other people? I think OPtE will give everyone a fairer chance.'*

(Customer Engagement Team Leader)

A small number of office managers suggested that staff, under pressure to meet an OPtE target, may need to be managed carefully to prevent them focusing on customers who may be most easy to help back to work. However, others felt that the range of other process and performance measures in place would limit the extent to which staff would be motivated to behave in such a manner. In particular, interviewees noted that having specialist advisers, pre-set time lengths for interviews and the Interventions Delivery Target (IDT) would together prevent the shift in focus moving too far towards those most easy to help, at the expense of customers with greater needs. One pilot district was not being measured on IDT during the Wave Two OPtE pilot as it was concurrently involved in an Adviser Flexibilities pilot, and one performance team member in this district suggested that it would be beneficial to reintroduce IDT prior to any roll-out of OPtE.

The second potential area of impact was on job submissions. Again there were mixed views on the extent and nature of the effect of OPtE on these. Generally, staff felt the sustainability of job submissions is affected by the labour market rather than specific actions they themselves take that are driven by targets such as OPtE. Even where staff felt targets might affect job submissions, it was generally personal targets, such as the Adviser Achievement Tool (AAT), that were felt more likely to have an impact than OPtE. This is because OPtE targets are not broken down to an individual level and is therefore seen by staff as a more general indicator of performance rather than a driver of behaviour.

> *'I think there's other things that drive behaviour, like we have the AAT for Advisers…and I think that's more likely to drive behaviour around job submissions than OPtE is because that is personal to that Adviser.'*

(Advisory Services Manager)

Staff proposed two ways in which OPtE might have a positive impact on job submission behaviour. Firstly, some staff suggested that OPtE could encourage more appropriate job submissions as advisers may be more likely to submit the most appropriate customer for the job rather than the customer with the highest

points under JOT. Secondly, some staff thought that OPtE could encourage more submissions to jobs that were not captured under JOT, but are captured under OPtE, for example those under the lower earnings limit. While these particular impacts have yet to be tested, it was generally felt that OPtE supported the renewed focus on helping customers look for work through job matching, which has been introduced in a number of job centres.

The third potential impact explored, which follows on from the comments made in Wave One, was that on DMA activity. Undertaking appropriate DMA activity and more frequent attendance interviews were both reported as priorities by staff. However, there was no clear indication of whether the increased focus on this was driven, or simply supported, by OPtE.

> *'I've actually put one of the new staff onto more frequent attendance interviewing and I perhaps wouldn't have done that last year before we'd got OPtE.'*
>
> (Customer Services Operations Manager)

Finally, one adviser suggested that, working under OPtE, staff might be less likely to encourage customers who fail to attend interviews to contact the job centre to rearrange, as if their claim is closed for more than one week they will count towards the OPtE figures. While it is important to note that this view was only expressed by one adviser it may be an area that could require review if OPtE is piloted further and/or rolled out nationally.

4.4.2 Potential impact of staff on Wave Two OPtE

The majority of staff interviewed saw the tasks and activities they conducted as contributing to OPtE and therefore felt they could influence OPtE performance.

> *'It is our job as Advisers to get people off the register and how we do that is going to obviously affect whether the office and the district reach the OPtE targets.'*
>
> (Personal Adviser)

However, they also regarded their influence on OPtE performance as limited by overarching issues such as register numbers, the availability of jobs, Jobcentre Plus staffing levels and customer attitudes toward taking up specific jobs offered.

> *'OPtE doesn't really measure job centre performance. We can fail or achieve the target just simply by the labour market changing, not by anything the job centre has actually done to influence it.'*
>
> (Customer Services Operations Manager)

A number of office-based staff contrasted the distance of the OPtE performance measure from their day-to-day activity with the more immediate LEP targets. As LEP targets are based on individual placements, advisers can see the immediate impact of their activity with specific customers, in a similar way to the previous JET targets. A number of advisers suggested that because they had direct control over

the number of customers taking up LEP jobs, they felt they were more likely to be motivated by LEP than they were by OPtE on a day-to-day basis.

District-level managers interviewed suggested that, although targets had been issued, they did not expect office-based staff to respond to OPtE until they had received monthly figures for a period of time and therefore they would not see any link between activity at the local office level and OPtE performance until then.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Perceived value and viability of roll-out

Overall, OPtE was perceived to have value as one of the suite of targets and indicators in Jobcentre Plus. However, while OPtE was seen to be more relevant at the local level than JOT, it was generally felt that it cannot be used to directly drive performance.

Approximately one-third of managers and staff interviewed were positive about Wave Two OPtE being rolled out nationally, viewing it as a more straightforward and appropriate measure than JOT. Another third of managers and staff were ambivalent towards a roll-out and had no strong views either way. The final third of managers and staff felt it was too early to determine its true value and that further piloting was required.

5.2 Potential uses

OPtE was generally seen by those interviewed as most useful, as high level management information, for ministers and Jobcentre Plus senior management to show how the organisation is performing overall. It was not generally seen as the most appropriate tool for driving office performance because it was not felt to be sufficiently timely and does not identify the cause(s) of office performance.

> *'For it to work at job centre level you've got to be able to measure a contribution from staff and that does not exist with OPtE.'*

> (District Performance Manager)

Nevertheless, interviewees did identify a number of potential uses for OPtE at the local level. OPtE was seen as a good indicator of overall office performance. A number of district and performance team staff suggested OPtE could be used to compare the performance of offices within a district and identify those that are performing relatively well or poorly. Other performance measures and office practices can then be explored in more detail within these high and low performing offices, with best practice from high performing offices being shared and poor practice within low performing offices being addressed.

> *'OPtE will highlight the various elements underneath it that feed up into it…
> then, say you've missed your target and of the nine or ten things underneath
> it, three of those you're really bad at…those are hurting your OPtE so you
> need to work on those three.'*

(District Performance Manager)

Another proposed use for OPtE was as a supporting quality measure for the JSA Off-Flows KMI, showing how many of the customers flowing off benefit and captured by the JSA Off-Flows KMI had potentially moved into employment. This might help prevent the potential perverse behaviours that could be caused by using the JSA Off-Flows KMI in isolation, such as inappropriately moving customers onto other benefits.

A third proposed use for OPtE was as motivation for customers and partner organisations to show that people are moving into employment. This was felt to be particularly useful during the current recession. Some staff had already started to use the pilot data in this way, during Back to Work sessions and other interactions with customers. Being able to give customers actual numbers of people moving into work (rather than a percentage of the register or a number of points as with JOT) was cited as making OPtE particularly useful in this regard.

> *'I use those figures at the Back to Work group sessions. It can be a good
> tool when people are in that situation, and with the economic climate, to
> say actually our off-flow for this period was this. It is good because it can be
> quite surprising to customers.'*

(Personal Adviser)

5.3   Potential amendments and improvements

A number of potential amendments to the OPtE measure were suggested by managers and staff. Of these, the most frequently suggested improvement was for the reporting time delay to be reduced. The expected, but not yet achieved, two month delay in OPtE reporting was seen as acceptable to most interviewees, though the more immediate the data the better.

Presentation of the data was also raised as an area where improvements could be made. While at the district and performance team level there was an appetite for detailed information, managers and staff at the local office level generally only indicated an interest in the headline figures and knowing whether they were on target or not. A suggestion was also made that visual representation of the data might be helpful. Linked to the requests for simplification of OPtE data presentation, it was felt that the interim reporting datasets complicated rather than clarified and could not be meaningfully used as they did not consistently correlate to the final data. Removal of these interim reporting datasets was therefore suggested by staff and it is understood that this has simultaneously been recommended by analysts in the Jobcentre Plus Performance Measurement

and Analysis Division. District Three suggested that accompanying a roll-out of an OPtE measure with the proxy measure they have developed could be useful if it is shown to consistently correlate with the OPtE figures.

Performance staff in District Two suggested that it might be useful to present OPtE data in percentage terms: showing what proportion of an office or district's off-flow had off-flowed into employment. It was felt this might produce more comparable OPtE data when looking at performance across offices and districts and that it might not be as susceptible to fluctuations in the register caused by external factors, such as a major redundancy that particularly affects one office in a district. At the same time, the 'people not points' benefits of the current OPtE data should not be forgotten, and so it is recommended that the percentage figures are provided as a supplement rather than replacement to the raw numbers data.

Staff across all districts suggested there was a need to develop further and improved products to support and market the roll-out of OPtE. In particular there were requests for more clarity on what does and does not count towards OPtE outcomes, more guidance showing the differences and relationship between OPtE and the JSA Off-Flows KMI, and further guidance on how to close claims correctly.

> *'To reach all different levels of staff it needs to be* [presented] *in a more friendly manner and it needs to be different things for the different types of clientele you're selling it to within the Jobcentre.'*

> (Customer Engagement Team Leader)

Target setting was another area where improvements were suggested. Ensuring OPtE target setting takes into account the general turmoil in the labour market was felt to be very important across all pilot districts. In districts with large labour market variation, such as pilot District Two, it was felt there is a need to look further into how to set appropriate office level targets from the overall district target. Another area for improvement, in terms of targets, is ensuring that all offices have their own individual OPtE performance data and targets. Pilot District Three disaggregated the OPtE data and targets to office level based on new claims. As a result, some smaller offices that do not deal with new claims received grouped data and targets for their office, plus whichever larger office processes their new claims. If one of the benefits of OPtE over JOT is the production of office level targets, consideration should be given to how appropriate targets can be set for all offices.

While interviewees were generally quite confident in the accuracy of the OPtE data, a number of interviewees suggested that further steps should be taken to reduce the number of customers incorporated into the OPtE figures that had not definitely moved into employment. One interviewee also questioned whether the OPtE figures include those customers who go into work, but still claim some form of benefit, and suggested the measure is changed to include such customers if they are not already.

5.4 General recommendations in relation to piloting performance measures

District performance team staff suggested it is beneficial for them to be given time to consider any pilot target or management information before sharing it with offices.

> *'You should only go out to offices with a pilot measure once it is at a stage where staff will be able to totally understand how to manage it and what the benefits are.'*

(Management Information Lead)

Pilots need to be for a sufficient length of time to allow adequate analysis, testing and use. The majority of interviewees in both the Wave One and Two fieldwork felt that they needed to interact with the OPtE data for a greater period of time before they could consider its true impact and value.

When piloting a new target or management information in multiple districts, interviewees suggested they *'have to work quite closely together or you won't get the comparison you need to say if it will be a successful measure or not'* (District Performance Manager). All three pilot districts echoed this sentiment and emphasised the importance of sharing ideas and experiences during a pilot. Further facilitation and encouragement of this during the Wave Two OPtE pilot was welcomed.

Prior to piloting potential new targets, it was suggested that overlaying the new target data with existing sources of information such as JOT and LEP job outcomes would be useful.

> *'We need to be mapping the trends to see how useful the different measures are and to better understand how it all links together and what is a predictor for what.'*

(Regional Performance Manager)

Another suggestion was to also use pilots to develop the tools required to effectively manage the targets. Otherwise, it was felt there is a risk they would not be used to maximum effect when introduced and there will be 'a period where the organisation goes backwards rather than forwards' (District Manager). It was suggested that such tools still needed to be developed for OPtE.

The importance of ensuring there is sufficient guidance and marketing materials in relation to any new pilot measure prior to going live with the pilot was also emphasised. One particular issue that emerged from this pilot evaluation was the potential for confusion when two new measures are introduced simultaneously. In this case, the Wave Two OPtE measure was launched in the pilot districts at the same time as the new JSA Off-Flows KMI. It appears that this has led to a degree of confusion and conflation of the two measures among some office staff.

Finally, prior to going live with a new target or management information, it was suggested it would be useful for the Management Information Leads within each district to get together with the pilot project team to discuss and finalise the format the various reports should be presented in.

Appendix A
Topic guides

PRE-PILOT EVALUATION TOPIC GUIDE:
ALL MANAGERS AND STAFF

Background (all)

A1.   What is your job role?

A2.   How long have you been in this role, and with the organisation?

Understanding of JOT (non-management staff questions)

B1.   What do you think is the purpose of JOT?

B2.   Why do you think JOT is important to Jobcentre Plus?

B3.   How is JOT performance measured?

B4.   How do you, and the team you work with, contribute to JOT performance?

B5.   How does your manager assess your contribution?

Understanding of JOT (management staff questions)

B1.   What do you think is the purpose of JOT?

B2.   Why do you think JOT is important to Jobcentre Plus?

B3.   Do you think staff understand the purpose and importance of JOT to Jobcentre Plus?

B4.   How is JOT performance measured?

What do you measure/monitor locally to assess how your district/office/team is (probably) doing?

B5.   How do you, and your district/office/team, contribute to JOT performance?

B6.   Do individual members of your district/office/team understand the way in which their own performance contributes to JOT performance? If so, how?

How JOT performance is currently managed (non-management staff questions)

C1.   What tools and processes are used by your manager to monitor and manage your performance under JOT? *e.g. KMIs, AAT, QAF, etc*

C2.   Which of these do you find best reflects what you do?

C3.   Do you monitor your own performance? If so, how do you do this?

C4.   What helps to motivate you to do more or new labour market activities which might be reflected in JOT performance?

C5.   What types of information and support are offered to you and your team to help you improve performance with regards to JOT?

C6.   Are there any areas, including MI, which could be improved to help improve staff performance with regards to JOT?

How JOT performance is currently managed (management staff questions)

C1.   How do you manage JOT performance – both for individuals and your district/office/team as a whole?

C2.   What tools, processes and MI do you use to manage staff performance under JOT? *e.g. KMIs, AAT, QAF, etc*

C3.   Which of these do you find most useful in terms of:

   a) helping you assess successful/meaningful labour market activity;

   b) impacting on reported JOT?

C4.   How do you motivate staff in relation to JOT performance?

C5.   What types of information and support do you offer staff (individuals and the district/office/team as a whole) to improve their performance with regards to JOT?

C6.   Are there any areas, including MI, which could be improved to help improve staff performance with regards to JOT?

C7.   Are there any areas which offer a better measure/reflection of successful labour market activities carried out by staff?

C8.   Are there any areas which could be improved to facilitate more effective management of JOT performance? *e.g. tools, processes, MI, guidance, etc*

Staff attitudes to JOT (all)

D1.   Does JOT measure the outcomes of the right labour market activities and are there areas for improvement?

D2.   Does anything else offer a better measure of the right labour market activities, how many you do and the quality/success of doing them?

D3.   Overall, what are your views on JOT and what do you see as:

      a) the benefits/potential benefits of the target?

      b) any disadvantages or negative consequences of the target?

Ask this question even if a number of benefits and disadvantages have already been raised throughout the interview. Use it to get them to summarise what they see as the main benefits and disadvantages and to state if they feel any are more or less important than others. Probe for evidence which supports the views expressed.

Off-Flows measures to support JOT (all)

E1.   Do you currently look at any off-flows from benefits information in relation to your labour market activities or JOT?
If so, how?
What are the advantages/disadvantages/risks?

E2.   Do you currently use off-flows in any way?
If so, how?
To what extent?
What are the advantages/disadvantages/risks?

E3.   Do you think using an off-flows measure would support JOT performance?

E4.   If the organisation were using an off-flows measure, do you think a focus on achieving JOT would be maintained?

Other OPtE Issues (all)

F1. Are there any other issues related to JOT or off-flows measures that you would like to raise that we have not covered in this discussion?

WAVE ONE OPtE PILOT EVALUATION TOPIC GUIDE:
DISTRICT AND PERFORMANCE MANAGERS ONLY

Background

A1.   What is your job role?

A2.   How long have you been in this role, and with the organisation?

Understanding of OPtE

B1.   What is your understanding of OPtE?
       i.e. purpose, importance, how measured, etc

B2.   How are you and your team involved with OPtE performance?

B3.   Do you think staff in the district/offices understand OPtE as a measure
       compared to JOT?

Management of OPtE

C1.   Tell me about the OPtE data you have been working with during this pilot?

           a) What OPtE data have you been receiving?
              *Explore how received and who from, frequency, timeliness,
              breakdown, presentation, etc*

           b) Have you worked on the OPtE data?
              e.g. broken it down further, amended presentation, etc

           c) How have you communicated the OPtE data to the district/offices?
              Explore method, recipients, frequency, timeliness, etc

C2.   How useful has the OPtE data been?
       Who for?

C3.   How have you been using the OPtE data to manage district/
       office performance?

C4.   Could the OPtE data be improved to make it more useful as a performance
       management tool?
       If so, how?
       Explore how received, frequency, timeliness, breakdown, presentation, etc

Impact of OPtE

D1. What impact, if any, has OPtE had on district/office performance and staff behaviour?

D2. Are you managing the performance of the district/offices any differently? If so, how?
Do you view this change as positive or negative and why?

D3. In comparison to JOT, do you think OPtE is a good motivational tool for the district/offices?

Attitudes to OPtE

E1. How useful are you finding OPtE as a performance management tool?

E2. Compared to JOT, how accurate do you feel OPtE is?
i.e. do you trust the data – do you believe it captures everybody flowing off benefits?

E3. Compared to JOT, how appropriate do you feel OPtE is as a measure of performance?
i.e. is measuring people flowing off benefits a useful thing to measure?

E4. Compared to JOT, how appropriate do you feel OPtE is as a method of managing district/office performance?
i.e. does it better reflect what districts/offices do and how well they do it?

E5. Compared to JOT, how much influence do you feel districts/offices have over OPtE?

Good practice

F1. Can you give me any examples of where OPtE has had a positive impact?

F2. What have you learnt from working with OPtE that could be used to improve performance in the future?

F3. Are you aware of any offices/teams/individuals doing any additional activities to try to influence OPtE performance?
If so, what?
How successful are these additional activities being?
Do you see these activities as sustainable in the long term?

F4. What else could be done to improve OPtE performance?

Other OPtE Issues

G1. Are there any other issues related to OPtE that you would like to raise that we have not covered in this discussion?

WAVE TWO OPtE PILOT EVALUATION TOPIC GUIDE A: DISTRICT AND PERFORMANCE MANAGERS AND STAFF

Background

A1.   What is your job role?

A2.   How long have you been in this role, and with the organisation?

A3.   How are you involved with the OPtE pilot?

Understanding of OPtE

B1.   What is the purpose of OPtE?
i.e. what is it there for.

B2.   Why is OPtE important to Jobcentre Plus?
i.e. the extent to which they feel OPtE does or does not support the aims of Jobcentre Plus.

B3.   How is OPtE performance measured?

B4.   How does OPtE fit with the other targets and KMIs Jobcentre Plus works towards?
e.g. JOT, KMIs, LEP targets, IDT (not Marches), etc.
Explore their views on the relative importance of the various targets and the emphasis placed on them by themselves and offices.
Are there any tensions/contradictions between OPtE and any of the other measures?

B5.   If not already covered by q.B4's answer:
How does OPtE fit with the new JSA Off-Flows KMI?

Pilot Roll-Out

C1.   What has been happening in relation to the OPtE pilot in your district to date?

C2.   What OPtE information are you receiving?
Explore when they first started receiving OPtE information, how it is received and who from, how frequently they receive it, how timely it is, how it is presented and how it is broken down.

C3.   What guidance and/or training on OPtE have you received?
Explore what was received and from whom, usefulness, gaps/other issues and any suggested improvements.

C4.   What are you doing with the OPtE information you are receiving?
e.g. disseminating it further analysing it, monitoring it, comparing it to other data sets, breaking it down further, amending its presentation, etc.

Using OPtE

Need to rephrase if participants have not yet seen or used the OPtE data.

D1.   Have you been using OPtE to manage office performance?
       If so, how?
       If they do not currently, explore why (e.g. not had full download yet), whether they plan to and how they plan to.

D2.   Have offices been using OPtE to help drive performance?
       If so, how?
       If they do not currently, explore why (e.g. not had full download yet), whether they plan to and how they plan to.

D3.   Have there been any changes to the way offices work because of OPtE?
       Do you envisage any changes/further changes in the future?
       Probe whether OPtE has impacted on use of available resources.

D4.   Have any new initiatives or working practices been introduced as a result of the OPtE pilot?
       If yes, what?
       Are these useful/beneficial?

D5.   Can you think of anything else that could be done to improve OPtE performance?
       In relation to working practices, etc.

Impact of OPtE

E1.   Are you managing the performance of offices any differently because of OPtE?
       If yes, how?
       Do you view this change as positive or negative?

E2.   Does OPtE encourage any new or different behaviour from offices and/or particular front-line staff?
       If yes, what? Do you think this has any impact on customers (positive or negative)?
       If no, do you think it will in the future?

E3.   *If not already covered by q.E2's answer*:
       Under OPtE, are front-line staff targeting different customers, or being encouraged to?
       If yes, which and why?
       If no, do you think they will in future?
       Explore whether they are targeting harder to help customers more or less (due to the OPtE office data being raw numbers of people rather than points based on customers' priority groups).
       Also whether they are targeting JSA customers more than those on other benefits because of the Off-Flows KMI.

E4. Do you think front-line staff treat customers any differently because of OPtE?
If yes, what are they doing more/less of?

E5. Do you think using OPtE will result in any changes to the outcomes for customers?
If yes, what and why?

E6. Do you think OPtE motivates front-line staff to sub customers to appropriate jobs?
If yes, why?
If no, do you think it will in the future?
Ensure answers focus on appropriate jobs (i.e. jobs suited to customers' skills and experience) rather than just any jobs.
Need to benchmark OPtE against other measures in relation to this so explore whether they feel OPtE motivates staff in relation to this more, less or the same as former employment outcome targets such as JOT and JET.

Attitudes and Next Steps

F1. How appropriate do you feel OPtE is as measure of Jobcentre Plus' performance?
i.e. is measuring people flowing off benefits a useful thing to measure?
Explore how they feel OPtE compares to other performance measures in this respect.

F2. How appropriate do you feel OPtE is as a method of managing office performance?
i.e. does it reflect what offices do day-to-day and how well they do it?
Explore how they feel OPtE compares to other performance measures in this respect.

F3. Do you feel offices are able to influence OPtE performance?
Explore to what extent.
Explore how they feel OPtE compares to other performance measures in this respect.

F4. Do you have confidence in the OPtE data?
i.e. is it accurate and capturing everybody it is supposed to be capturing?
Explore how they feel OPtE compares to other performance measures in this respect.
Explore whether the 'potentially' to employment aspect of OPtE affects their confidence in it.

F5. Do you think OPtE is workable on a front-line level?
i.e. do they think OPtE could be rolled out across the country.

F6. Are there any amendments you think are needed to OPtE before it is rolled out further?
E.g. data presentation, timeliness, target setting, guidance, etc.

F7. Overall, what are your views of OPtE and what do you see as:

a) the benefits/potential benefits of the measure?

b) any disadvantages or negative consequences of the measure?

Ask this question even if a number of benefits and disadvantages already raised throughout the interview. Use it to get them to summarise what they see as the main benefits and disadvantages and to state if they feel any are more or less important than others.

Other OPtE Issues

G1. Are there any other issues related to OPtE that you would like to raise that we have not covered in this discussion?

WAVE TWO OPtE PILOT EVALUATION TOPIC GUIDE B: OFFICE BASED MANAGERS AND STAFF

Please note that questions require rephrasing if you are speaking to a manager (suggested wording in red).

Background

A1.   What is your job role?
If PA/ASM, check which customer/benefit groups they work with.

A2.   How long have you been in this role, and with the organisation?
If been with organisation longer than current role, briefly explore kinds of roles held previously (e.g. front line, benefit processing, central performance team, etc) as this can provide useful context for viewpoints held.

A3.   How are you, and the team you work with/manage, involved with the OPtE pilot?
Focus on how OPtE affects the way they work (e.g. whether they are just receiving OPtE data for information, whether they are using the OPtE data and how, whether they are monitoring performance against OPtE, whether they feel they are not really involved with the pilot, etc).

Pilot Roll-Out

B1.   How has the OPtE pilot been implemented in your office and district?

B2.   What guidance and/or training on OPtE have you (and your team) received?
How useful was this?
Any issues?
Any suggested improvements?
Anything else you want to know about OPtE?

B3.   What OPtE information are you (and your team) receiving?
How clear is this?
If a manager: check how clear the information is both for them and for their team. Explore whether they are acting as a gatekeeper and only passing limited/amended OPtE information on to their team (and why) or whether they are sharing it all.
How timely is this?
If raising the four month timelag for the data as an issue, explore their views on whether the two month timelag Jobcentre Plus are hoping to reduce it to in the future would be acceptable.
How useful is this?
Any issues?
Any suggested improvements?
Any other OPtE data you would like to receive?

Understanding of OPtE

C1.   What is the purpose of OPtE?
        i.e. what is it there for.

C2.   Why is OPtE important to Jobcentre Plus?
        i.e. the extent to which they feel OPtE does or does not support the aims of Jobcentre Plus.

C3.   How is OPtE performance measured?
        Are they aware it is off-flows from benefit minus those definitely not going into work (e.g. those who have died, gone to prison, moved abroad, etc)? Are they aware that the office level data is raw numbers of people not points as used in JOT? Do they know what OPtE stands for (Off-Flows Potentially to Employment) and what that means in terms of the 'potentially' aspect?

C4.   Thinking generally now, which of your current targets and KMIs do you think are most important in terms of driving your performance?

C5.   How does OPtE fit with the other targets and KMIs you work towards?
        e.g. JOT, KMIs, LEP targets, IDT (not Marches), etc.
        Explore their views on the relative importance of the various targets and the emphasis placed on them by themselves and their managers/the regional performance team.
        Are there any tensions/contradictions between OPtE and any of the other measures?

C6.   *If not already covered by q.C5's answer:*
        How does OPtE fit with the new JSA Off-Flows KMI?

Using OPtE

Need to rephrase if participants have not yet seen or used the OPtE data.

D1.   How do you, and the team you work with/manage, contribute to OPtE performance?
        i.e. what do they and their team do in their roles that helps contribute to off-flows from benefit?

D2.   Do you think you (and your team) can accurately assess individual performance under OPtE?
        If not, explore what level they feel OPtE performance can be accurately assessed down to (e.g. team level, office level, etc).
        Explore with all whether they are happy with the level OPtE performance can be assessed down to and why.

D3. Do you monitor your own/team's performance under OPtE?
If so, how?
(Even if they feel they can accurately assess individual performance (Q14) they may not do so, and even if they feel they cannot accurately they may still try to do some rough monitoring).
If they do not currently, explore why, whether they plan to and how they plan to.
If a manager: explore whether they assess OPtE performance both for the team as a whole and for individuals.

D4. Has your manager/have you been using OPtE to help drive performance?
If so, how?
If they do not currently, explore why (e.g. not had full download yet), whether they plan to and how they plan to.

D5. Have there been any changes to the way you (and/or your team) work because of OPtE?
Do you envisage any changes/further changes in the future?
Probe whether OPtE has impacted on use of available resources.

D6. Have any new initiatives or working practices been introduced as a result of the OPtE pilot?
If yes, what?
Are these useful/beneficial?

Impact of OPtE

E1. Does OPtE encourage any new or different behaviour from you or your manager/staff?
If yes, what? Do you think this has any impact on customers (positive or negative)?
If no, do you think it will in the future?

E2. *If not already covered by q.E1's answer:*
Under OPtE, are you/your staff targeting different customers, or are you being encouraged/encouraging them to?
If yes, which and why?
If no, do you think they will in future?
Explore whether they are targeting harder to help customers more or less (due to the OPtE office data being raw numbers of people rather than points based on customers' priority groups).
Also whether they are targeting JSA customers more than those on other benefits because of the Off-Flows KMI.

E3. Do you think you/your staff treat customers any differently because of OPtE?
If yes, what are you/they doing more or less of?

E4. Do you think using OPtE will result in any changes to the outcomes for customers?
If yes, what and why?

E5. Does OPtE help motivate you/your staff to submit customers to appropriate jobs?
If yes, why?
If no, do you think it will in the future?
Ensure answers focus on appropriate jobs (i.e. jobs suited to customers' skills and experience) rather than just any jobs.
Need to benchmark OPtE against other measures in relation to this so explore whether they feel OPtE motivates their staff in relation to this more, less or the same as former employment outcome targets such as JOT and JET.

Attitudes and next steps

F1. Do you feel the OPtE data relates to what you do day-to-day?
Also, if a manager: do you feel the OPtE data relates to what your staff do day-to-day?
Explore to what extent.

F2. Do you feel able to influence OPtE performance?
Also, if a manager: do you feel your staff are able to influence OPtE performance?
Explore to what extent.

F3. Do you have confidence in the OPtE data?
Also, if a manager: do your staff have confidence in the OPtE data?
i.e. do they think it is accurate and captures what staff do.
Explore whether the 'potentially' to employment aspect of OPtE affects their confidence in it.

F4. Do you think OPtE is workable on a front-line level?
i.e. do they think OPtE could be rolled out across the country.

F5. Are there any amendments you think are needed to OPtE before it is rolled out further?

F6. Overall, what are your views of OPtE and what do you see as:

a) the benefits/potential benefits of the measure?

b) any disadvantages or negative consequences of the measure?

Ask this question even if a number of benefits and disadvantages already raised throughout the interview. Use it to get them to summarise what they see as the main benefits and disadvantages and to state if they feel any are more or less important than others.

Other OPtE Issues

G1. Are there any other issues related to OPtE that you would like to raise that we have not covered in this discussion?

Appendix B
Staff interviews

	Pre-pilot	Wave 1	Wave 2	Total
District and performance team managers and staff				
South London	2	2	8	12
The Marches	3	5	8	16
South Yorkshire	3	1	9	13
West London	2	n/a	n/a	2
Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Swindon	3	n/a	n/a	3
West Yorkshire	2	n/a	n/a	2
Office-based managers (ASMs and JCMs)				
South London	2	n/a	10	12
The Marches	3	n/a	7	10
South Yorkshire	4	n/a	6	10
West London	4	n/a	n/a	4
Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Swindon	5	n/a	n/a	5
West Yorkshire	5	n/a	n/a	5
Office-based front-line staff (PAs, FJRs, etc)				
South London	17	n/a	11	28
The Marches	13	n/a	12	25
South Yorkshire	16	n/a	12	28
West London	17	n/a	n/a	17
Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Swindon	14	n/a	n/a	14
West Yorkshire	14	n/a	n/a	14
Total number of interviews conducted	129	8	83	220