

Research report

Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal Evaluation: A report on qualitative research findings

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Department for Work and Pensions

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Work and Pensions

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Abbreviations

6MO	Six Month Offer
ADF	Adviser Discretion Fund
ASM	Advisory Services Manager
BOC	Better Off Calculation
BtWS	Back to Work Session
BYB	Backing Young Britain
CETL	Customer Engagement Team Leader
DASO	Diary Administrative Support Officer
DEA	Disability Employment Adviser
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
DM	District Manager
DMA	Decision making and appeals
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESF	European Social Fund
FJR	Fortnightly Jobsearch Review
FND	Flexible New Deal
IB	Incapacity Benefit
IS	Income Support
JRFND	Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
JSAg	Jobseeker's Agreement
LMS	Labour Market System
LPO	Lone Parent Obligation
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
NDYP	New Deal for Young People

NJI	New Jobseeker Interview
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
PA	Personal adviser
PRaP	Provider Referral and Payments system
PSA	Public Service Agreement
PSI	Policy Studies Institute
RS	Recruitment Subsidy
SNU	Support for Newly Unemployed
SPA	State Pension age
TPPM	Third Party Provision Manager
WCA	Work Capability Assessment
YPG	Young Person's Guarantee

Glossary of terms

Caseloading

A jobcentre process for establishing greater continuity of advisory support where customers are assigned to a dedicated adviser whom they will meet on a regular basis.

Taxi Ranking

A system used in Jobcentre Plus offices to coordinate and maximise the flow of customer-staff meetings where the customer sees the first available Adviser or Fortnightly Review Officer.

Summary

This evaluation presents qualitative process study findings on the Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) which was introduced from April 2009 in 28 Jobcentre Plus districts in England, Scotland and Wales. JRFND is delivered jointly by Jobcentre Plus and external providers. It is divided into four stages based on the length of a Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claim. The first three stages (the 'Jobseekers Regime') are delivered by Jobcentre Plus, and last up to 12 months. If a person is still claiming benefit after 12 months, they are then referred to a Flexible New Deal (FND) provider for further work preparation support.

The overall aims of this study were to:

- assess the delivery of JRFND by Jobcentre Plus and contracted providers;
- examine the customer experience of JRFND;
- determine what elements of JRFND appear to help customers; and
- contribute to future policy development.

The qualitative evaluation gathered evidence in Jobcentre Plus offices throughout the first year of implementation. Separate studies were undertaken with customers and FND providers. The report covers the first year of the Jobseekers Regime and the initial months of FND.

Implementation findings

The research confirmed that the new Jobseekers Regime had bedded in so that, by the end of the first year of implementation, customers moving through Stages 1, 2 and 3 were receiving the standard elements of the regime. Staff generally associated JRFND with bringing about a cultural change to Jobcentre Plus services, requiring advisers to work more flexibly with customers, together with a greater focus on customer obligations. But the flexibility to adapt services to customers' needs was restricted to a considerable extent by the structure of JRFND and the pressure on advisers' time.

Jobcentre Plus staff welcomed the coordination of service supplier information through an online database. Still, managers and advisers reiterated the need to build relationships with providers, and suggested that this had become more difficult because of the move towards regional and national service contracts.

Overall, the new Jobseekers Regime was felt to meet the needs of most customer groups. Customers with disabilities or health conditions and 18-24 year olds were considered well served. There were concerns that the extra recession support for young people, introduced in January 2010, had drawn attention away from other customers. The level of support available for ex-offenders, people with literacy and numeracy needs, and those with poor English language skills was regarded as less satisfactory than that provided to all 18-24 year olds.

JRFND Stage 1: 0 to 13 weeks

At the start of a claim, customers are required to attend a New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) where a Jobcentre Plus adviser relays an overview of the regime, assesses basic skills needs and agrees job search activities with the customer in a Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg). In addition, the customer is required to attend a Back to Work Session (BtWS) between weeks six and nine of a claim. For

the remainder of Stage 1, the customer is required to engage in 'self-directed job search' which is monitored through mandatory Fortnightly Jobsearch Reviews (FJR) at Jobcentre Plus.

Over time, staff reported increased familiarity and confidence with the conduct of the NJI. Managers indicated that many advisers had embraced the idea of tailoring the interview and services they offered to the needs of the customer and, where appropriate, following up with additional support. The time allowed for the NJI was still seen as a problem by staff in some offices. To address this, some advisers were arranging additional meetings with customers (support for 18-24 year olds or Support for Newly Unemployed (SNU) one-to-one sessions) if they were not able to cover everything intended in the NJI.

Most customers recalled little detail about their NJI and those who did described the meeting as largely an administrative process. Few remembered having been offered any job search advice or additional services. Overall reactions to the NJI were neutral and most respondents said that they had encountered more supportive staff later in their claim.

The style and quality of BtWSs varied greatly between offices. The better sessions observed by researchers were those delivered by dynamic, welcoming facilitators who focused on job search and support, and made genuine efforts to interact with participants. Some staff felt that the sessions were a helpful reminder of the material covered in the NJI. But others believed that the content was too basic for many customers and that it was inappropriate to require all customers to attend the sessions – particularly those who had already attended the same session during a previous claim. The value of the 3-Step Plan¹ was questioned by both staff and customers. Customers indicated that the information about Jobcentre Plus services was the most useful content of the session.

JRFND Stage 2: 13 to 26 weeks

From 13 weeks of a claim, customers attend an Initial Stage 2 Review where their JSAg is reviewed and extended in terms of travel distance to work, working hours and the occupations considered. They are also required to attend weekly signing meetings for a six-week period after which fortnightly signing continues. Based on their support needs, some customers will be selected to attend two Targeted Review meetings where they will receive extra advisory support, a more in-depth skills screening and they will devise an Action Plan for their job search.

Staff reported increased confidence in the delivery of the Stage 2 Review meetings and welcomed the longer 30-minute meeting time. Because many customers had not received adviser contact since the NJI, some advisers felt the time for the Initial Stage 2 Review was insufficient to cover any additional customer concerns that were raised. Customers mainly perceived that Jobcentre Plus support had increased in Stage 2, and the Review meeting compared favourably to contacts during Stage 1. However, there were tensions between the desire to find work and resistance to broadening job search criteria too far, leaving customers less open to applying for jobs they perceived as unsuitable.

Weekly signing was scheduled to occur during the first six weeks of Stage 2. Staff and customers were more positive about weekly signing when there was sufficient time given for an extensive job search and when there was continuity of staff week to week. Some customers who received more personalised support felt this led to more job searching and helped to set up a worthwhile routine. Otherwise, weekly signing was perceived to be no more than an administrative procedure that placed a strain on the time of both parties involved.

¹ The 3-Step Plan is a handout given to customers at BtWS. Customers are encouraged to record how they will approach their job search.

Targeted Reviews were operating in all the study offices, although eligibility was being restricted in a minority of offices where staff capacity was a factor. The purpose and scope of the reviews varied considerably and there was some confusion over the 20 per cent target and eligibility among the 25 plus age group. Some staff viewed the extra meetings as an opportunity to cover or follow-up on topics from the Initial Stage 2 Review. Customers' accounts differed in relation to perceptions of support received, the approach and manner of advisers, the suitability of jobs presented and the extent to which the Targeted Reviews were regarded as helpful and worthwhile.

JRFND Stage 3: 26 to 52 weeks

After six months of claiming JSA, customers attend an Initial Stage 3 Review where they agree an Action Plan for their job search. From this point they are required to engage more regularly with a Jobcentre Plus adviser and take part in mandatory job-related activities. They are also required to attend weekly review meetings for six weeks, after which fortnightly signing continues as normal. Three hours of advisory support are available, which advisers may schedule flexibly according to needs and circumstances. Some customers are fast-tracked to receive Stage 3 services earlier in their claim.

In general, Jobcentre Plus staff felt that Stage 3 was working well. Most offices had sufficient staff to cope with the volume of customers and advisers were said to be adept with procedures. Overall, the support available during Stage 3 was seen as a significant improvement over the previous JSA regime. Customers generally welcomed having more customised support and more training opportunities, although some were frustrated that they had not been given the same level of support earlier in their claim.

Most Jobcentre Plus advisers were confident in their handling of the Initial Stage 3 Review. However, the 40-minute timeslot was seen as insufficient for all of the tasks, data entry and information which needed to be covered. Various coping strategies had been adopted: running the Initial Stage 3 Review as a group meeting, delivering some of the information about Stage 3 to customers during Stage 2, and using additional advisory meetings to complete some tasks.

Caseloading was occurring in all offices. Advisers working in offices where they were free to decide the frequency and duration of meetings (in accordance with policy intent) were most positive about caseloading and found it easier to work within the average three-hour allocation of contact time. Customers who had had regular meetings with their advisers during Stage 3 were generally positive about the additional support.

There were mixed views among Jobcentre Plus staff about weekly signing at Stage 3. Staff generally felt that the usefulness of weekly signing depended on the customer's needs and attitude. Some believed that it was of little benefit to the majority of customers and felt the practice should be reserved for those who needed additional support or might not be complying with JSA rules. Customers' views were largely negative and most viewed weekly signing as a means for Jobcentre Plus to monitor them rather than as a form of support.

The assignment of mandatory activities by advisers varied greatly and was sporadic in some offices. Advisers often struggled to find suitable activities to engage customers in. Some staff believed that mandatory activities should generally be avoided as it was more effective to collaboratively agree participation with customers as opposed to making activities a formal condition of their claim.

Mandatory fast-tracking was taking place in all offices, while voluntary fast-tracking was rare. Jobcentre Plus staff believed that voluntary fast-tracking was appropriate if there was a specific reason for it – for instance, if a customer wanted to access a certain type of support which was only available at Stage 3.

Referral to the Flexible New Deal

When customers approach 12 months on JSA, they attend a pre-provision interview which was typically a 30-minute meeting with a Stage 3 adviser conducted in a Jobcentre Plus office. This is followed by an electronic referral to an FND provider. Most pre-provision interviews followed a standard format that included the collation and verification of customer data, updating of the Action Plan and relaying basic information on conditionality and FND provision.

Offices practiced variations to the electronic handover which entailed either telephone or face-to-face provider contact at the time of a referral. This direct contact was often referred to as a 'warm handover'. Most Stage 3 advisers reported that they telephoned the FND provider to supply additional information about sensitive cases or when they felt extra detail about a customer would assist the provider to supply adequate support. But the nature of the handover process also depended on the organisation of FND suppliers in a district; when FND was delivered through a large service network it was not known at the time of referral which supplier the customer would transfer to. In these cases, the referring adviser felt at a disadvantage because they could not supply any detail on the nature of provision. In contrast, partly due to the close geographical proximity of the provider, one study office trialled a group pre-provision interview on provider premises. This tripartite meeting was well received by all parties involved. For the most part, advisers agreed that a warm handover created a more seamless transition for the customer moving on to FND.

Jobcentre Plus staff generally felt uneasy about their lack of knowledge on the FND process and local FND services. It was felt this could be addressed by establishing regular communication links between office staff and local FND providers.

Customers in the study had participated in pre-provision interviews during autumn 2010. Those who had received detailed information about FND provider services, sometimes through direct contact with the provider, commented more favourably about FND. However, customers typically reported they had received little or vague information about what providers can offer and commented they would have appreciated more details to help them anticipate the next stage of the process. Those who had developed strong ties with their Stage 3 adviser were more likely to feel disappointed about the transition to FND.

Flexible New Deal

Ten prime contractors for FND services were operating in the six study districts. All were experienced in welfare-to-work delivery. The data from prime providers, Jobcentre Plus staff and customer experiences reflect the early months of FND delivery.

The role of Jobcentre Plus office staff in FND was acknowledged to take the form of a fortnightly review meeting conducted by FJR staff. Stage 3 advisers had minimal contact with FND customers and this tended to only occur when a customer proactively contacted them for help while waiting for their time on FND to start. Some Stage 3 advisers expressed a sense of loss at the change, accompanied by feelings of powerlessness and frustration at the lack of information about FND provision. Communications with FND providers generally took place at district level only. On the whole, the providers were positive about communications with Jobcentre Plus and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

For the most part, Jobcentre Plus staff reported that customers were finding FND provider services useful. Negative feedback mainly related to delays to FND starts which were attributed to initial 'teething problems'. For customers, the nature and duration of activities varied, reflecting the flexible nature of the FND approach. They were aware of the conditionality attached to participation and

understood the consequences of non-compliance. Customers either found provider services to be no different in comparison to Jobcentre Plus services or were more positive about the FND provider whom they found to be more proactive and helpful. However, across the study districts, it was evident that some FND providers were creating a more positive participant experience than others.

FND delivery structures varied considerably, ranging from an all in-house model with specialist partners to an all outsourced model, embodying a network of sub-contractors. Hybrid models with varying degrees of sub-contractor and specialist partner involvement were also developed. Despite the range of delivery models, prime providers were delivering, or overseeing, a very similar range of services. All followed a participant-centred approach and offered enhanced services for participants with special needs. There was variation in the timing of work-related activity and, at the time of the fieldwork, some providers were finding it difficult to source work placements. Although service innovation appeared limited, there were examples found of front-line staff skill sets and innovative tools being used to work with participants.

Policy implications

The findings from the evaluation have implications for the design and delivery of future support for JSA customers as delivered through Jobcentre Plus or contracted welfare-to-work suppliers. There are currently policies and initiatives under development which address these issues.

The skill levels of advisory and other front-line staff are key to the delivery of JRFND. The research evidence suggests that standards of support for customers deviated considerably. Staff familiarity and confidence with procedures grew with time and not all staff had the aptitude to perform all aspects of JRFND delivery, like group facilitation or advisory support. The research also identified the importance of FJR staff in representing the role of Jobcentre Plus to customers who have continued on to FND provision. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of attracting and retaining staff with appropriate skills, ongoing training, and the sharing of best practices. An emphasis on adviser discretion warrants further investment in developing diagnostic skills in addition to familiarity with services and programme processes.

Greater flexibilities within the programme process would contribute to a more personalised customer journey. The interventions could be timed to better coincide with customers' needs rather than the duration of a claim for JSA. More flexibility and adviser discretion over standardised procedures and restrictions on service eligibility are needed to improve the responsiveness of the programme to individual circumstances. This may involve introducing services sooner, such as relaxing restrictions on training support or referring to extra advisory support at an earlier point in a claim (but without the added restrictions to the job search as is the practice for fast-tracked customers). This may also involve waiving mandatory requirements, such as weekly signing or mandatory activities, for customers who are capable of independent job search activities. Removing all restrictions on service eligibility might be unachievable, given available resources, and would be inefficient if it led to services being offered to customers who would quickly find work without them. But greater flexibilities, combined with more sophisticated tools for identifying customer support needs, could lead to more effective targeting of services. The current process does not adequately account for the different rates at which customers develop on the journey into work.

Improved communication links would ensure more seamless operations between Jobcentre Plus and FND provision. The evaluation findings have implications for welfare-to-work programmes that operate in a mixed supplier economy. Overall, greater synergy between Jobcentre Plus offices and FND prime and sub-contracted providers is warranted to create a more joined up customer experience. This can be achieved through more personal contact among the staff at Jobcentre Plus

and contracted providers and 'warm handovers' involving tripartite meetings between customers, Jobcentre Plus staff and FND staff. Knowledge of local FND processes and services would enhance the information advisers relay to customers at the pre-provision interview and would better inform FJR staff who are in regular contact with FND participants.

More research is needed to improve understanding of shared Jobcentre Plus and contracted services. More information is needed about how prime providers are managing the FND process, how service networks are operating, how effective links are maintained between Jobcentre Plus office staff, prime providers and local FND suppliers, and how customers are experiencing the contracted provision.

1 Introduction

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned a research consortium, led by the Policy Studies Institute, to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND).² The Labour Government introduced JRFND in April 2009 to reform the existing Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) regime, and the New Deals for those on JSA. This is a report of findings from qualitative research conducted during the first year of JRFND and forms part of the overall evaluation.

This chapter sets out the policy background to the reforms, describes the JRFND process and outlines the research methods for the evaluation.

1.1 Policy background

The JRFND was launched in April 2009. The Jobseekers Regime is delivered by Jobcentre Plus and the Flexible New Deal (FND) by external providers. Further details of the reforms are set out in the Command Paper, *Ready for Work: Full-time employment in our generation* (DWP, 2007a).

JRFND constituted a key development in the Labour Government's welfare reform and skills agenda which included changes for lone parents, people with health conditions or disabilities and older workers. The key principles underpinning the revised agenda were:

- a stronger framework of rights and responsibilities for jobseekers, progressively increasing obligations with the duration of a claim;
- help for jobseekers to find work that offer opportunities for progression – supporting customers to progress in work and obtain relevant skills through pre-employment and in-work training opportunities; and
- innovation in all sectors of the labour market programme, contracting on the basis of what works in order to maximise employment outcomes.

More details on the Labour Government's vision for a personalised welfare state were outlined in the White Paper, *Raising expectations and increasing support: Reforming welfare for the future* (DWP, 2008). It proposed increasing adviser flexibility to exercise their discretion when matching customers to services and escalating sanctions for customers who do not comply with the regime.

The Command Paper, *Opportunity, Employment and Progression: Making skills work* (DWP and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), 2007), outlined how DWP and the then DIUS would work together (in England) to ensure that people are able to gain the training and support they need to move from benefits into work and have access to ongoing training in order to progress in work. The Labour Government also set out proposals in *Work Skills* (DWP and DIUS, 2008), to place a greater focus on the role of individuals and employers. The paper reinforced the need to develop a skills system, shaped by employers, which places individuals in charge of their learning.

Welfare reforms to enhance employment rates for lone parents, people claiming disability-related benefits and people approaching State Pension age (SPA) were announced in the documents, *In work, better off: Next steps to full employment* (DWP, 2007b) and *Ready for Work: Full employment in our generation* (DWP, 2007c).

² The evaluation consortium consists of the Policy Studies Institute (PSI), IFF Research, PriceWaterhouseCoopers International Survey Unit, MDRC New York, Professor David Greenberg from UMBC and Professor Jeff Smith from the University of Michigan.

Before November 2008, lone parents with a youngest child up to the age of 16 could claim Income Support (IS). The introduction of Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) meant that, from November 2008, lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 or over lost entitlement to receive IS solely on the grounds of being a lone parent. This was then lowered to age ten and over from October 2009. The age of the youngest child will reduce to seven from October 2010.

In the June 2010 Budget statement, the new Coalition Government announced that the IS entitlement conditions will change to include those lone parents whose youngest child has reached five years of age. This change is expected to be implemented in early 2012. Lone parents leaving IS in these circumstances may claim either JSA, if they are capable of work, or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), if their capability for work is limited by a disability or health condition.

ESA was introduced in October 2008, replacing Incapacity Benefit (IB) and IS paid on incapacity grounds for new and repeat customers. As part of the implementation, a new Work Capability Assessment (WCA) is applied to new customers (and will eventually be applied to existing customers), with those found 'Fit for Work' not eligible for ESA and required to actively seek work. These changes have increased the proportion of JSA customers with mild to moderate health conditions and related barriers to work. In addition, between April 2010 and 2020, SPA will gradually equalise for men and women. Over this time, people aged 60 to 64 who are out of work will increasingly remain on, or make a claim to, JSA.

The implications of these reforms are that JSA customers are becoming increasingly diverse.

The policy reforms leading to the JRFND, therefore, introduced a new welfare-to-work approach which applies the concepts of personalised conditionality, increased adviser flexibility and mandatory work-related activities. It involved a substantial shift in expectations for both the service providers and participants in labour market programmes.

1.2 Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal

JRFND aims to increase the support offered to those out of work while increasing the obligations of jobseekers. The Jobseekers Regime replaces the former JSA regime; the FND replaces the New Deal 25 plus, the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) (including the New Deal for Musicians and Self-Employment provision), Employment Zones, New Deal 50 plus, and Private Sector-Led New Deal.

JRFND was introduced nationally in two phases: In April 2009, Phase 1 commenced in 28 Jobcentre Plus districts in England, Scotland and Wales. The FND was rolled out in these districts in October 2009. Phase 2 began in the remaining 22 Jobcentre Plus districts in April 2010 with transitional arrangements for the New Deals. As a result of revisions announced in June 2010 by the new Coalition Government, the FND will not be rolled out in Phase 2 districts.

Jobcentre Plus remains at the centre of the system, managing the enhanced regime and working in partnership with providers who deliver the Flexible New Deal. The JRFND programme comprises four stages, based on the length of a claim:

- Stage 1: 0 to 13 weeks;
- Stage 2: 13 to 26 weeks;
- Stage 3: 26 to 52 weeks;
- Flexible New Deal: after 52 weeks (in Phase 1 districts).

The first three stages are delivered by Jobcentre Plus, and last up to 12 months. If a person is still claiming benefit after 12 months, they are then referred to a Flexible New Deal provider for further work preparation support. The four stages are described in more detail below.

1.2.1 Stage 1 – Day One to 13 weeks

At the start of a claim, customers are required to attend a New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) with a Jobcentre Plus adviser. During the meeting the customer is required to sign a Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg) containing agreed job goals and job search activities. They also receive an overview of what is expected of them at later stages in their claim if they remain unemployed. The adviser assesses basic skills needs and refers the customer to Basic Skills training, if appropriate. For the remainder of Stage 1, the customer is required to engage in 'self-directed job search' which is monitored through mandatory Fortnightly Jobsearch Reviews (FJR) at Jobcentre Plus. In addition, the customer is required to attend a Back to Work Session (BtWS) between weeks six and nine of a claim. Failure to attend a BtWS can result in a benefit sanction.³

Some customers are fast-tracked to join Stage 3 of the revised regime from day one of their claim.⁴ It is mandatory for advisers to fast-track 18 year olds who have been 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET) for at least six months, and longer-term unemployed people (who have previously claimed JSA for 22 out of the last 24 months). Advisers may also offer the option of fast-tracking to other jobseekers whom they deem to be at a disadvantage in the labour market.

1.2.2 Stage 2 – 13 to 26 weeks

If an individual is still claiming JSA after three months they attend an Initial Stage 2 Review, a meeting with a Jobcentre Plus adviser (lasting approximately 30 minutes) in which the JSAg is reviewed and additional training needs are assessed. From this point on, if they have not done so already, customers are expected to extend their job search in terms of travel distance to work, working hours and the occupations considered. There is also more intensive monitoring of job search activity during this period through the requirement to attend weekly signing meetings for a six-week period. Subsequently, FJR continue for the remainder of Stage 2.

Two additional Targeted Reviews were implemented from October 2009 to provide support for the most disadvantaged customers. Targeted Reviews are expected to be tailored to the individual's circumstances and may include a review of the JSAg job search goals, collaborative agreement of an Action Plan, and depth skills screening with referral to skills and learning support, if appropriate. Customers selected for Targeted Reviews are those who are not identified for mandatory entry into Stage 3 but who still require extra support. Eligibility is restricted to customers who have been unemployed for 12 out of 24 months, or the adviser has decided that they require the additional support.⁵ From January 2010, Targeted Reviews became mandatory for all JSA customers aged 18 to 24 years, as a temporary recessionary measure.

1.2.3 Stage 3 – 26 to 52 weeks

After six months of claiming JSA, customers are obliged to engage more regularly with a Jobcentre Plus adviser and take part in job-related activities. At the Initial Stage 3 Review, the customer agrees an Action Plan, which outlines the activities they will take up in order to move closer to

³ If the customer fails to attend the session they will be offered the opportunity to attend it on two further occasions. Each failure to attend can result in a one week benefit sanction.

⁴ Customers can be fast-tracked at any point during the first six months of a claim.

⁵ Guidance suggests that 20 per cent of customers would receive Targeted Reviews.

work. The review should include a depth skills screening and subsequent referral to skill support, if appropriate and if not already conducted within a Targeted Review. They are required to take up mandatory activities, agreed between the adviser and customer, which may involve attending job preparation or pre-employment training, Work Trials or volunteering. Failure to comply may result in a sanctioning of benefit. As in Stage 2, customers are required to attend weekly review meetings for six weeks, after which fortnightly signing continues as normal. They will also see a personal adviser (PA) at regular intervals during Stage 3. An additional three hours of advisory support are available, which advisers may schedule flexibly according to customer needs and circumstances.

1.2.4 Flexible New Deal (52 to 104 weeks)

Since October 2009, customers who do not find work by the end of Stage 3 are referred to the FND, which is delivered by external providers. FND consists of a flexible 'black box' package of work preparation and job search support tailored to individual customer need. Customers agree an Action Plan of mandatory activities, which should include a minimum of four continuous weeks of full-time paid employment or work-related activity. All activity in the Action Plan is enforceable and can result in benefit sanctions by Jobcentre Plus for non-compliance.

Throughout the FND, customers are also required to attend Jobcentre Plus on a fortnightly basis to sign a declaration stating that they are available for employment and are actively seeking work. FND providers will typically support a customer for up to 12 months. However, if a customer remains unemployed after 24 months, by agreement between the provider and customer, provision may be extended for another six months.

1.2.5 Extra recessionary support for jobseekers

From Stage 1, a customer is eligible for Support for the Newly Unemployed (SNU). Introduced in April 2009, SNU offers supplementary job preparation and job search services for people who have no recent experience of current job search channels and need a small amount of support to improve their chances of moving back into work. This support is available at the adviser's discretion and take-up by the customer is voluntary. Specialist help is also available for professionals/executives who have started a JSA claim. SNU is the subject of a separate evaluation (Vegeris *et al.*, 2010).

A package of support for jobseekers unemployed for six months, called the Six Month Offer (6MO), was introduced in April 2009. There are four voluntary strands to the 6MO which are offered to customers at the adviser's discretion. A recruitment subsidy (RS) to the value of £1,000 is paid to employers in exchange for hiring an applicant who has been claiming JSA continuously for six months. Work-focused training offers college-based courses to customers who would benefit from upskilling or reskilling to expand their employment opportunities. Volunteer placements arranged through third sector brokers can provide work-related experience. Finally, self-employment support is available from specialist providers and a Self-Employment Credit (SEC) offers financial assistance for those customers who become self-employed. The 6MO is the subject of a separate evaluation (Adams *et al.*, 2010b; Vegeris *et al.*, 2010).

Backing Young Britain (BYB)⁶ was announced in April 2009 and changes in the delivery of Jobcentre Plus services to 18-24 year olds were introduced in January 2010 (Young Person's Guarantee (YPG)). These entail more enhanced advisory support during the first 26 weeks of a claim and signposting to additional services. Additional support throughout the JRFND process includes: a named adviser from Day One; more advisory support in Stages 1 and 2; more intensive support in Stage 3; more

⁶ Following the change of government in May 2010, the term 'Backing Young Britain' is no longer in use.

fast-tracking to Stage 3. After 26 weeks, 18-24 year old customers become eligible for additional opportunities under the YPG: an offer of a job, training, or work experience for up to 26 weeks on a full-time basis.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Evaluation plan

The overall aim of the evaluation is to test the extent to which JRFND leads to additional employment outcomes for individuals and to provide possible explanations for the outcomes.

The full evaluation to be delivered by the research consortium consists of a mixed method design. It includes a process study (research with customers, Jobcentre Plus, service providers); quantitative impact analyses; and a synthesis of the evidence.

The current study should be considered together with previously reported findings from the full evaluation (refer to Adams *et al.*, 2010a and 2010b; Knight *et al.*, 2010; Vegeris *et al.*, 2010).

1.3.2 Qualitative fieldwork for this report

Findings in the current report contribute to the evaluation process study which aims to address the following objectives:

- to assess the delivery of JRFND by Jobcentre Plus and contracted providers;
- to examine the customer experience of JRFND and to determine what elements of JRFND appear to help customers;
- to contribute to future policy development.

Qualitative research techniques were used to record information on service delivery processes and accounts of stakeholder experiences. The research followed a case study approach and focused on six Jobcentre Plus districts (one in each of Scotland and Wales, and four in England). Primary data collection took place with: Jobcentre Plus staff (district and office level), JSA customers and FND providers. All respondents provided informed consent when taking part in the studies. Interviews were digitally recorded (with respondent permission), transcribed verbatim and anonymised. Data were collated and analysed thematically.

Further information on the research methods and the research instruments can be found in the appendices.

Research with Jobcentre Plus staff

Three waves of fieldwork were carried out during the first year of JRFND implementation in order to observe the development of services over time, during May-June 2009, August-September 2009 and February-March 2010. On each occasion, site visits were conducted with 12 Jobcentre Plus offices (two in each of the study districts). Qualitative data were collected through interviews (telephone, one-to-one and group formats) and observations of staff and customer interactions.⁷ Over the course of the research, interviews collected the views and experiences of a range of DWP and Jobcentre Plus staff:

⁷ Details on skills assessment tools and the nature of training referrals were beyond the scope of the research.

- District Managers (DMs);
- District Implementation Managers;
- Third Party Provision Managers (TPPMs);
- FND Contract Managers;
- Advisory Service Managers (ASMs);⁸
- Customer Engagement Team Leaders (CETLs);
- Stage 1 Advisers;
- Stage 2 Advisers;
- Stage 3 Advisers;
- FJR Officers;
- BtWS facilitators.

JRFND customer research

Face-to-face, depth interviews, lasting approximately 60 minutes, were conducted with 59 JSA customers. The research took place between December 2009 and March 2010 and mainly reflected JRFND Stages 1, 2, and 3 as it was experienced in summer-autumn 2009. The sample included 12 customers who participated in Stage 2 Targeted Reviews from November 2009. Interviewees were quota sampled within the six study districts and included variation by gender, age, and ethnicity.

FND provider research

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with managers from ten FND providers that operated in the six study districts. Respondents represented organisations that held the primary FND contract. Interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and took place between February and May 2010.

1.4 Report outline

The remainder of the report is structured by the customer journey through the four stages of JRFND:

- Chapter 2 provides an update on general implementation issues, changes to services and delivery structures;
- Chapters 3 to 5 report findings from JRFND Stages 1, 2 and 3 respectively;
- Chapter 6 describes the referral process from Jobcentre Plus to FND providers;
- Chapter 7 reports findings on the FND from Jobcentre Plus staff and customer perspectives;
- Chapter 8 reports findings from the interviews with representatives from FND providers;
- Chapter 9 discusses the key research findings with implications for further policy development.

⁸ From July 2010, ASMs became known as Advisory Team Managers.

2 Implementation and delivery

This chapter begins with an update on the general implementation issues affecting the Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND), with a focus on key developments which occurred during the first year of operation. It looks at the success of the new regime in changing the service culture of Jobcentre Plus, with reference to adviser flexibility, conditionality and sanctioning. The extent to which JRFND was seen by staff to meet the needs of different customer groups is discussed, and emerging delivery practices are identified. Finally, the methods by which advisers received information and feedback on third-party services are discussed.

2.1 Implementation update

An earlier report (Knight *et al.*, 2010) detailed various difficulties which impeded the delivery of JRFND during the first months of operation: understaffing, high staff turnover, advisers' lack of familiarity with the new processes and services, and insufficient space at Jobcentre Plus offices. These difficulties were exacerbated by the recession, which had led to a substantial increase in Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) customers in the quarter leading up to the introduction of JRFND in April 2009.

By March 2010, Jobcentre Plus staff reported that these issues had largely abated. Most of the study offices had sufficient staff numbers, although there were concerns about what would happen when the contracts of temporary staff expired later in 2010. Managers in several offices said that they had inexperienced teams who still needed considerable support (and, in some cases, managers themselves were relatively new) but the overall level of staff understanding and confidence regarding JRFND was higher than observed in the earlier research. During the first wave of site visits in June 2009 there had been some disquiet about the amount and quality of training on JRFND, with complaints from some members of staff that they had been '*thrown in at the deep end*'. In September–October 2009 there was still some uncertainty about the mechanics of JRFND, especially Flexible New Deal (FND) (which was not rolled out until October 2009), but by February–March 2010 the lack of training was no longer a live issue as the new regime was familiar to most staff. Pressures on office space had been eased by building work during 2009.

Some disruption, however, accompanied three major developments between October 2009 and January 2010: the introduction of the Provider Referral and Payment (PRaP) system, the replacement of Programme Centre provision with the Support Contract, and the launch of the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG).

2.1.1 PRaP

PRaP, an automated referral system which links directly with the Labour Market System (LMS), was introduced in October 2009 to replace the traditional paper-based procedure for referring customers to external providers. It was used initially for referrals to FND and Support Contract providers. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus staff reported technical teething problems during the first weeks of operation, partly as a result of delays in completing security clearance procedures which temporarily forced providers to access the PRaP system through DWP-provided laptops.

These difficulties, together with a lack of familiarity with the referral system, led to delays in referrals to providers. The technical difficulties were mainly addressed by January 2010, and by March most providers had direct access to PRaP. During the February–March 2010 site visits, however, Jobcentre Plus managers were still reporting backlogs of customers requiring initial interviews with FND

providers. In some cases, this was attributed to the provider's not updating the information held on PRaP, which meant that Jobcentre Plus staff had limited knowledge of what was happening to customers referred to the local FND provider.

Otherwise, advisers and managers generally agreed that the new referral process was working well and was an improvement on the previous system because it was faster, easier to use and reduced the burden of paperwork:

'Once you've pressed that 'refer' button, then everything has gone through...the actual sending of the information over to providers has become a whole lot easier and just less stressful on the advisers.'

(Adviser, District 2)

2.1.2 Support Contract

The Jobcentre Plus Support Contract replaced Programme Centre provision for JSA customers, and contracted New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) provision, in December 2009, and allowed advisers to refer customers to specific, predominantly short-term support 'modules' from a menu of available provision. This presented advisers with several challenges. In many cases they were dealing with a new provider about whom they knew little, and some advisers were unclear about what the new service involved. During the February-March 2010 site visits, it was reported that some providers had visited local Jobcentre Plus offices to introduce themselves and explain their services. Staff in other offices indicated that their Support Contract providers should do the same.

The modular structure of the new service represented a break from the previous model, under which the provider had been responsible for diagnosing a customer's needs and designing an appropriate programme. From December 2009 Jobcentre Plus advisers were required to select Support Contract services from a range of modules. While many advisers welcomed the ability to choose from a variety of options, some initially lacked the confidence to do so, and managers suggested that it would take time for all advisers to become comfortable using the new provision. In the meantime, some advisers were referring customers to non-contracted providers with whom they were more familiar. For example:

'[I'm] not as confident as I'd like to be. I'm still getting used to [it]. I've only made a few referrals to it as of yet but, because there are quite a few different modules, and there's flow diagrams if you follow it through and try and work out which customer would benefit from which module. But if it's not clear in your head it's not quite easy to do. So it tends to be, out of the provision that we've got available, the least I've referred to at the moment.'

(Adviser, District 1)

These difficulties were exacerbated by the fact that Support Contract referrals were made using PRaP and therefore, suffered from the initial backlogs described above.

2.1.3 Extra recessionary support for young people

Changes in Jobcentre Plus services for 18-24 year olds were made nationally from January 2010. These included enhanced advisory support during the first 26 weeks of a claim and access to the YPG, including the Future Jobs Fund, after 26 weeks. The changes were accompanied by a reorganisation of staff in many offices so that a dedicated team of advisers and Fortnightly Jobsearch Review (FJR) staff worked exclusively with the younger customers. Staff resources were strained as established teams of advisers were disrupted, and members of staff had to learn new rules regarding eligibility for services:

‘Throughout the office, there’s a lot of confusion as to which customers can do what...with the Day One offers, like the mentoring, the work experience further along in the process, and the Graduate Academy stuff...You’ve got to think, “Hang on, now, who’s eligible for that, and which age group?”’

(Manager, District 3)

2.2 New service culture

JRFND is intended to intensify the obligation on jobseekers to perform work-focused activities as their claim progresses, particularly after 26 weeks. Part of the role of advisory staff is to ensure that customers understand their responsibilities in this respect, and to provide guidance and additional support where needed. The majority of Jobcentre Plus staff in the study regarded this as a significant culture change, requiring a diagnostic approach to customer interviews and more flexibility on the part of the adviser, with greater reliance on the adviser’s interpersonal skills, knowledge of third-party services, and familiarity with the local labour market.

Most Jobcentre Plus offices structured their advisory teams according to JRFND stages which nurtured the development of specialist skills. Larger offices had a dedicated management and advisory team for each of Stages 1, 2 and 3. Teams in smaller offices tended to straddle more than one stage; advisory teams covering Stages 1 and 2 were common. In January 2010, many offices reorganised their staff to provide a dedicated team of advisers and FJR staff to work with 18-24 year olds.

Other variations in delivery practices were noted. One study district had FJR teams specifically for FND customers. Offices in this district had upskilled their FJR teams by training them as ‘Assistant Advisers’. This enabled them to address customers’ Action Plans, follow up service opportunities, identify candidates for Work Trials and conduct training needs assessments. Each FJR Officer was assigned a particular group of customers to provide continuity at FJR meetings, along the lines of an adviser’s caseload. These changes were well received among the staff.

2.2.1 Flexibility

Interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff over the first year of JRFND implementation indicated that advisers were exercising greater flexibility than under the previous JSA regime, and were becoming increasingly confident as time progressed.

Examples of areas in which advisers were able to act flexibly included: matching appropriate services to customers at the New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) and subsequent interviews; fitting in ad hoc meetings when requested by customers; deciding how often to bring in customers for interview during Stage 3 and how long those interviews should last; making telephone calls rather than arranging face-to-face interviews during Stage 3; and choosing when to start weekly signing during Stage 3. These flexibilities improved the responsiveness of the support according to customer need, as explained by one adviser:

‘Some clients don’t need much help...Whereas previously with such things as New Deal, it [didn’t] matter who you were, what you did, you had to go into this, you had to go and do that. Now it’s like [we are] able to say, “That’s okay, I’m just going to keep in contact with you, I’ll be in contact with you to see if there’s anything you need.” And then having that time then to spend with somebody else who does need help, who does need provision, I think that flexibility has been really good.’

(Adviser, District 3)

There were, however, limits to the flexibilities, especially during Stages 1 and 2. For instance, advisers could not necessarily offer additional interviews, or certain forms of provision, to newly unemployed customers unless they were fast-tracked to Stage 3. All customers were required to attend a Back to Work Session (BtWS) during Stage 1 and to sign on weekly for six weeks during Stage 2, regardless of whether an adviser thought these measures appropriate or not. Some advisers also felt that their ability to work flexibly was hampered by the high volume of customers and the lack of space in their diaries, which forced them to get through interviews quickly and reduced the scope for additional meetings.

Not all managers were convinced that advisers were fully equipped to work flexibly in the manner required by the new regime. It appeared that little or no training had been provided in new advisory skills (as opposed to substantive knowledge of JRFND) and some managers felt that longstanding advisers who were used to following a rigid process had found it hard to adapt. Concerns about individual performance may also have played a role. One manager thought that the urge to ‘look good on productivity’ had initially led to Stage 3 advisers ‘filling all their diaries up’ and becoming ‘stuck in the routine of booking appointments’. In addition, less experienced advisers often lacked the confidence to work flexibly, which posed a problem for offices with high levels of staff turnover:

‘I feel a lot more confident than I did when I started, but I think that’s probably just because my confidence has grown from when I’ve been doing it. When I started it was just a tick list to make sure I did everything, but now it’s more like I know what I’m doing so I can pick and choose what to use for them.’

(Adviser, District 4)

Many Stage 3 advisers welcomed the move to caseloading, because they found the ongoing contact professionally rewarding and believed that continuity of contact was beneficial to the customer. Advisers at Stage 1, on the other hand, pointed out that they rarely saw the same customer more than once. This was in part because most Jobcentre Plus offices had separate management and advisory teams covering different JRFND stages. Within each stage, attempts were made to book additional meetings with the same adviser for continuity, but this was not always possible due to staff training, illness and leave.

2.2.2 Conditionality and sanctioning

Alongside greater adviser flexibility, JRFND places an emphasis on conditionality and sanctioning, in line with the expectation that more is required of customers who have been on the register for longer.

Advisers varied in their level of confidence at initiating sanctions against customers who had infringed JSA rules, through the ‘decision making and appeals’ (DMA) process. New recruits generally found this more difficult. Overall, however, the view of managers in February-March 2010 was that advisers’ confidence had improved in recent months, and interviews with advisers confirmed this.

Advisers in some offices reported that they had benefited from training on sanctioning. Those who regarded themselves as confident said that, when informing a customer that they faced a sanction, they took care to avoid making it ‘personal’. Instead, they would tell the customer that the decision would be made by another team of staff who would look at the facts and judge whether a sanction was warranted:

‘I would say [to the customer], “It’s not specifically down to me that I have to take DMA action. It’s just that if you’re late this is something that happens, and unless you have a valid reason then this is something that’s going to happen...and someone who’s going to be impartial is going to make a decision whether or not your claim will be stopped”.’

(Adviser, District 2)

There were concerns among staff about the amount of time taken up by sanctioning, especially in relation to non-attendance at BtWS. One manager felt that the process could be made more efficient if advisers were able to initiate the procedure electronically instead of having to deal with added paper work.

2.3 Responding to different customer groups

Jobcentre Plus staff were asked about the effectiveness of the JRFND regime for all customer groups. In particular, they were asked about the customer groups covered under Public Service Agreement (PSA) 16: care leavers, offenders under probation supervision, adults receiving secondary mental health services and adults with learning disabilities.

2.3.1 PSA 16 groups

Many office staff were not aware of specific provision for PSA 16 customer groups, but the general view was that there was a wide range of support available which could address customer needs, and that it was for advisers to identify the most appropriate support in each case:

'As long as the adviser is savvy and they pick it up, there's lots and lots of help out there at the moment. I think there's an awful lot more help out there now than there ever was.'

(Adviser, District 1)

Young customers who had previously been in care were generally seen by 18-24 specialist advisers. In one district, it was reported that a specialist adviser had recently been appointed to respond to staff queries regarding this group.

Provision for ex-offenders was considered inadequate given the difficult circumstances of many of these customers and the potential for negative employer attitudes towards them.

2.3.2 Customers with disabilities or health conditions

Individuals identified with health conditions or disabilities were usually referred to a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) based at the same Jobcentre Plus office. Advisers found it helpful to have the DEA working with them to provide extra support to these customers from the start of their claims, whenever possible. Overall, support for customers with disabilities was seen as adequate. The transition to the FND external provider was seen as potentially problematic, however, with staff in one district expressing concern that the intensive help provided by Jobcentre Plus might not be available once customers with disabilities proceeded to the next stage.

Staff in at least one district had received training in mental health issues. This training, together with the specialist advice of the DEA, enabled advisers to give adequate support to customers accessing mental health services. However, it was pointed out that these issues were often compounded by substance misuse, for which Jobcentre Plus was said to have little help to offer:

'Our customer client group with mental health issues...tend to come hand in hand with addiction – drugs and alcohol addiction. We've really struggled to be able to support these people.'

(Manager, District 6)

2.3.3 18-24 year olds

As stated above, the Backing Young Britain (BYB) initiative introduced in January 2010 and the YPG provided a range of new services for 18-24 year olds. The universal view among Jobcentre Plus staff was that, as a result, there was now far more support for this age group than in the past. Several

staff compared the new services favourably with the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) programme, which they saw as less flexible:

'I think at the moment there's a buzz, there's an excitement going on and I think it is working for everybody but working better for 18 to 24s.'

(Manager, District 3)

There was some concern that the focus on young people meant that other customers might not be receiving the support they needed – especially customers aged 50-plus, whom Jobcentre Plus staff felt were particularly disadvantaged in the labour market:

'I feel at the moment there's a big emphasis on the 18-24s and if the over 25s were aware of that, they might be maybe a bit more miffed about the fact that in some ways the older people perhaps need more help. And I know on the signing side of things that a lot of older people do feel that.'

(Manager, District 5)

2.3.4 Customers with basic skills or ESOL requirements

Staff identified two further groups of customers for whom they thought there was insufficient support: customers with literacy or numeracy needs, and those with poor English language skills. For these groups, staff thought that more basic skills training as well as a wider range of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses were needed. Some advisers expressed frustration that, in the meantime, they were under pressure to submit non-English-speaking customers for jobs which they had little chance of getting.

2.4 Service awareness and feedback mechanisms

In all three waves of research, Jobcentre Plus advisers and managers highlighted the difficulties faced in keeping abreast of a large, constantly changing range of third-party provision.

By the time of the February-March 2010 site visits, advisers in all six fieldwork districts had access to an intranet-based district provision database (for example, a District Provision Tool, Tree of Knowledge or Adviser Portal). These databases contained details of local providers – both contracted and non-contracted – and their services. The Third Party Provision Teams were satisfied with the databases and reported that office staff feedback. It was noted that keeping the information up-to-date was a challenge because of frequent changes in non-contracted services.

In addition, the Third Party Provision Team emailed 'gatekeeper notices' about services to managers based in Jobcentre Plus offices, who then filtered these notices to delivery staff. In several districts, the Third Party Provision Team had visited offices to alert advisers to changes in provision and to run workshops on how to use the District Provision Tool.

Although staff felt that these communication systems were efficient, they did not always have the time to consult the provider database or to read all the email communications. Accessing information from the District Provision Tool during a customer interview was said to be difficult, *'there's too much to do with the customer in front of you'*.

Jobcentre Plus managers and advisers also received information directly from providers, who sent them leaflets and, in some cases, visited offices to talk about their services. Advisers also reported finding out from customers about certain third-party services, which they would then look up on the District Provision Tool to investigate eligibility.

A recurring theme throughout the research was the importance of direct contact between Jobcentre Plus staff and providers. Advisers felt more comfortable referring customers to a provider if they had met or at least spoken to a staff representative. A first-hand view of provider facilities was considered to be good practice and some advisers requested that this should occur more often:

'Do you know what would be good? ...Actually going out there and meeting the providers and seeing what they actually do for customers...[provider] – they came to visit us, which is good, so at least I can have a feel [for] what they do, what service they provide to the customers. Whereas these other services, I'm not really sure, even though it says what they actually do. But going there and seeing it for yourself is different.'

(Adviser, District 4)

In the past, Jobcentre Plus staff were able to establish relationships with local providers, but this changed under JRFND with the move towards regional and national service contracts. For instance, certain FND providers had sub-contracted some or all of their services to local providers, with whom Jobcentre Plus had no direct contact. This made it difficult for advisers to inform customers what to expect from the provider.⁹ One manager made a similar point in relation to training providers used for Stage 3 customers:

'It was good because we built up good relationships with [provider]. We knew what they could offer. If a customer came in and said, "Oh, I need such-and-such a certificate," we knew immediately – yeah, the council can do that, or a different training provider. Whereas now, because most of them are, like, national companies, that perhaps are sub-contracting, we've got to go through the national company, we just don't know who's doing what at the moment...'

(Manager, District 3)

2.5 Summary

The difficulties which hampered the delivery of JRFND in the early months, such as staffing, training and space issues, had largely been resolved towards the end of the first year of implementation. However, three developments – the introduction of PRaP, the Support Contract and the YPG – caused further disruption to delivery processes which were still being managed at the time of the February-March 2010 fieldwork.

Staff generally associated JRFND with bringing about a cultural change to Jobcentre Plus services, requiring advisers to work more flexibly with customers, together with a greater focus on customer obligations. But the flexibility to adapt services to customers' needs was restricted to a considerable extent by the structure of JRFND and the pressure on advisers' time.

Office staff welcomed the coordination of service supplier information through intranet-based databases. Third Party Provision Teams supplemented this information by sending 'gatekeeper notices' via email to Jobcentre Plus offices which would be filtered to front-line staff. Yet sometimes busy schedules, coupled with the volume of information coming through, made it difficult for advisers to remain apprised of developments. Managers and advisers reiterated the need to build relationships with providers, and suggested that this had become more difficult because of the move towards regional and national service contracts.

⁹ Recent research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Finn, 2008) reviewing externally contracted employment programmes has also highlighted that wider awareness of operations and 'what works' is limited as a consequence of the contracting model.

Overall, JRFND was felt to meet the needs of most customer groups. Two groups in particular, customers with disabilities or health conditions and 18 to 24 year olds, were considered well served. There were concerns that the focus on young people after the introduction of the YPG had drawn attention away from other customers, especially those aged 50-plus. The level of support available for ex-offenders, people with literacy and numeracy needs, and those with poor English language skills was regarded as less satisfactory.

3 Stage 1: 0 to 13 weeks

This chapter reports findings on the first 13 weeks of a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) within the Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) regime (Stage 1). It describes the structure of support and highlights variations among the Jobcentre Plus fieldwork sites. This is followed by a discussion of staff and customer views, focusing on the New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) and Back to Work Sessions (BtWS).

3.1 Service structure and variations

This section describes practices as observed over the 12 offices included in the study.

Stage 1 begins with the NJI. As reported in the research, the NJI lasts approximately 35 minutes (20 minutes for a Rapid Reclaim¹⁰). Following the NJI, the customer attends five Fortnightly Jobsearch Review (FJR) meetings which run for approximately four minutes. At these meetings the customer is asked to confirm that they are still eligible for JSA and to demonstrate that they have been carrying out the job search activities set out in the Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg). Approximately six to nine weeks after the NJI, the customer is required to attend a BtWS. This is a classroom- or boardroom-style group session lasting approximately one hour. It is delivered by Jobcentre Plus facilitators (usually Stage 1 or Stage 2 advisers) who follow a standardised script covering the conditions for claiming JSA, job search techniques, and support services available through Jobcentre Plus. Other elements of support during Stage 1 are:

- extra help through the Support for Newly Unemployed (SNU)¹¹;
- the Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF) which supports costs incurred for job search and work preparation¹²;
- Work Trials;
- additional support for 18-24 year olds, from January 2010.

Following initial teething problems in some Jobcentre Plus offices, only minor variations in the overall service structure were identified. One was the length of the NJI: advisers mostly referred to a 40-minute diary slot, but in some offices the time allowed had been reduced to 30 or 35 minutes, to cope with the high volume of new customers. Four-minute FJR meetings were the norm in all offices, and all offices were delivering BtWS.

¹⁰ An individual is assigned to a Rapid Reclaim if they have reapplied for JSA within 12 weeks of a previous claim.

¹¹ The SNU package of support is designed for people who have recently become unemployed and have little or no experience of modern job search techniques. Support delivered by Jobcentre Plus can either take the form of a group session or one-to-one job search coaching. Separate contracted providers supply job search support for non-professionals and professional/executive customers.

¹² ADF is mainly for Stage 3 customers but is available during Stage 1 for certain purposes, such as Criminal Records Bureau checks.

3.1.1 18-24 year olds

Additional support for 18-24 year olds during Stage 1 was introduced in January 2010 as part of the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG). In Stage 1 this support is optional for the customer. It includes access to a named personal adviser (PA) from whom the customer can receive up to one hour of one-to-one support, one-hour voluntary group sessions for 18 year olds, two weeks' work experience, and mentoring support from an external provider.

All offices in the study had taken steps to introduce the support quickly. Several had split their advisory teams so that customers aged 18-24 were seen by a specialist 18-24 adviser from day one. In some offices, 18-24 year olds were seen by regular advisers at the NJI but signposted to a specialist 18-24 adviser if they wished to take up additional support. Offices varied in the extent to which this additional advisory support was being promoted at the NJI. In some cases, customers were given the name and telephone number of an adviser whom they could call if they needed extra help. In contrast, NJI advisers in one office were encouraged to offer and immediately book an appointment with an 18-24 adviser if they felt that the customer might benefit from such support. Most offices were delivering the support as intended – one-to-one sessions with a PA. One office was instead providing small workshops which were said to be tailored to the wishes of each participant: the facilitators contacted the participants in advance to discuss their needs and prepared the workshop accordingly.

By February-March 2010, voluntary group sessions for 18 year olds were being delivered or were about to start in most offices. Referrals rates were low, however, and it was reported that customers who agreed to participate were often failing to attend the sessions.

3.1.2 Fast-tracking

Fast-tracking to Stage 3 is mandatory for two groups of customers who should be identified automatically by the Labour Market System (LMS): those who have been unemployed for 22 of the last 24 months and 18 year olds who have not been in employment, education or training (NEET) for six months. In addition, advisers, at their discretion, can offer voluntary fast-tracking to customers deemed to be at a disadvantage in the labour market, such as ex-offenders and people with drug, alcohol or mental health issues.

Mandatory fast-tracking was taking place in all study offices, although there were concerns that some mandatory fast-trackers were being missed, because of problems with LMS markers or because advisers were not following the correct procedure. Voluntary fast-tracking was rare. In some offices, advisers had been instructed by managers not to offer voluntary fast-tracking because of a lack of capacity at Stage 3. In offices where voluntary fast-tracking was occurring, Stage 1 advisers were sometimes reluctant to offer it out of concern that the requirements of Stage 3 were too stringent for vulnerable customers who were new to JRFND.

3.2 Staff and customer views and experiences

Twenty-three customers were asked about their experiences of Stage 1, during in-depth interviews conducted in November 2009-March 2010. They included men and women of different ages and ethnic backgrounds, from a range of occupations, including skilled and unskilled manual workers, administrative and retail workers, professionals and managers, as well as those with little experience of employment.

It is important to note that the JSA claim dates of the respondents had started at least six months before the time of fieldwork (in many cases, only just after the introduction of JRFND in April 2010). As a result, many of the customers who were interviewed had only a vague recollection of the NJI and recall of details was poor in some instances. All customers reported that, following the NJI, they did not see a personal adviser until the Initial Stage 2 Review. Their only interactions with Jobcentre Plus staff during Stage 1 were the NJI, FJR meetings and, for some, a BtWS. The one exception was a customer who was referred to a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) by an FJR officer. FJR meetings were said to be brief: respondents were asked to report what they had done to look for work and, occasionally, the FJR officer would conduct a job search.

Interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff were conducted during three waves of site visits between May 2009 and March 2010. Therefore, it should be noted that the information related by staff about Stage 1 is more up-to-date than that of the customers. This mismatch in time may explain part of the gap between the two groups' perceptions of the level of support available at Stage 1, particularly at the NJI.

3.2.1 New Jobseeker Interview

Typically during the NJI an adviser would construct a JSAg with the customer, screen for basic skills and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) needs, conduct a job search and, in some cases, offer further help, such as SNU services. Over time, staff reported increased familiarity and confidence with the conduct of these interviews. Managers indicated that many advisers had embraced the idea of tailoring the meeting and services they offered to the needs of the customer, and, where appropriate, following up with additional support. In a minority of offices, there were concerns that certain advisers were still influenced by the culture associated with the previous JSA regime which required less use of diagnostic skills at the new claims stage.

However, time was still a concern in some offices, especially those where the interview length had been reduced to meet the three-day booking target for a new customer, and in these instances staff felt that the quality of the NJI had suffered as a result. Rapid reclaim NJIs in particular were seen to be hard to fit into the 20 minutes allowed for them, because customers' circumstances had sometimes changed significantly since the previous NJI. Advisers in some offices were using additional advisory interviews (support for 18-24 year olds or SNU one-to-one sessions) if they were not able to cover everything intended in the NJI. A common view was that newly unemployed customers could not always take in all the information they were given at the NJI, and some advisers felt that it was better to divide discussions between two meetings.

During the February-March 2010 fieldwork, Jobcentre Plus staff expressed concerns about the new practice of asking customers to bring their CV to the NJI. Managers and advisers acknowledged that it was important for customers to possess an up-to-date CV, but some believed that advisers lacked the skills needed to assess a CV and therefore, to know when to refer a customer to a CV counselling service. One adviser reported that if customers did not bring a CV to the NJI (and most did not) they had to return with the CV for an additional 15-minute adviser interview. The adviser believed that this requirement wasted advisers' and customers' time, and thought that customers should be able to email the CV instead, or bring it to their next FJR meeting.

Customer perspectives

Customers' overall reactions to the NJI were generally neutral. The two respondents who had been given job search advice said that it had been useful. Another respondent described the interview as '*very fair*', and several said that it had been '*okay*' or '*fine*'. Most respondents viewed the NJI as a purely administrative procedure. Some disliked the fact that much of the interview involved the

adviser filling in 'paperwork' or completing fields on the computer screen – one customer said that it made him feel like 'another number that's unemployed'. The following comment, made by a professional respondent new to Jobcentre Plus, describes the experience of many respondents:

'It's not terribly memorable. I don't feel I walked away [thinking] "Yes, I've taken this from it, I've taken that from it." ...[adviser] wasn't looking at me. She was very much looking at the forms.'

(Customer, District 5)

When asked what had been discussed at the NJI, some customers remembered the JSAg and being instructed on what they were required to do to retain their benefits. None recalled being told by the adviser what to expect in the coming weeks. Few customers reported they had been asked about their qualifications nor did they remember being offered job search advice or additional support during the NJI. Additional support that was taken up included debt advice and basic skills training.

Customers were asked if they had understood what they needed to do in order to claim JSA. Most confirmed that the NJI adviser had explained the main requirements; others could not remember but assumed that the adviser had done so. The three requirements most often recalled by respondents were: to sign on every fortnight at the appointed time, to keep actively seeking work and to record their job search activities. All respondents said that they had understood the requirements (they were described as 'common sense') with one exception relating to a respondent who had been unaware that he needed to get permission to do voluntary work.

Most respondents thought that the basic requirements were reasonable. They were less positive about the activities detailed in the JSAg. A small minority found it useful to have specific activities set out in writing. In contrast, other customers felt they had been forced to carry out pointless tasks, such as applying for jobs which they had no hope of getting. Most said that the JSAg was irrelevant to them as they would be carrying out the same activities in any case. No one recalled having been told precisely what would happen if they failed to comply with the rules – they reported the NJI adviser had simply told them that their benefits would be stopped. Similarly, none of the customers in the study recalled having been told about the stages of JRFND or the principle of escalating conditionality.

A small group of respondents for whom the NJI was their first encounter with Jobcentre Plus reported negative experiences. In each case the individual felt that the NJI adviser had been rude to them or had made them feel guilty for losing their job. A respondent who had been made redundant after 26 years said, 'I went in quite cheerful, optimistic and hopeful and came out most depressed'. Another respondent, who had also been made redundant said, 'You felt almost criminalised, like they were doing you a favour by talking to you'. Most of these respondents said that they had encountered more supportive staff later in their claim. Several made the point that it was vital for advisers – especially those conducting initial interviews – to be welcoming and have good people skills.

3.2.2 Back to Work Sessions

BtWS were taking place between six and nine weeks of a claim with the exception of one office where the sessions occurred after the Initial Stage 2 Review (post-13 weeks). Due to staff capacity issues, this measure was taken in the knowledge that fewer sessions would be required given a reduction in customers by Stage 2.

The frequency of BtWS varied from four per week (spread over two days) to three per day. Most offices were holding at least one session per day. In several offices, the frequency had been increased to this level to enable customers to attend a session on their signing day, and attendance rates were said to have risen as a result. Attendance rates reported by staff ranged from approximately 50 to 80 per cent.

The content of the BtWS observed during the February-March 2010 site visits was similar across all offices, but the style and standard of presentation varied considerably. Each session was delivered by one or two Jobcentre Plus facilitators. At one office, the facilitators were sometimes joined by an outside provider, such as a provider of SNU support for professionals/executives. Some offices had a dedicated BtWS team who delivered all of the sessions, while others rotated the sessions among their Stage 1 or Stage 2 advisers.

The presentations were based on a standardised script, accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation. Each session covered three main areas: 'conditionality' (customers' responsibilities), job searching, and support services available through Jobcentre Plus. Participants were given – and in some cases asked to complete – a 3-Step Plan handout which they could fill in to outline what they would do to look for work, together with an information pack to take home. At the end of the session, participants were usually told that they could speak to the facilitator if they wanted to know more about a particular service. In some offices, participants were given a list of available services which they could refer to when approaching a member of staff. The degree to which facilitators followed the script varied between offices: some were amending it – adding detailed local labour market information, for instance – while others followed the official text.

The manner and quality of presentation observed during the February-March 2010 site visits varied greatly, as did the level of participants' attention. Participants were more attentive and gave more positive feedback when facilitators were lively and welcoming, focused on job search and support rather than conditionality, and made genuine efforts to interact with the audience by encouraging feedback and discussion. For example, one facilitator helped to create a friendly, light-hearted atmosphere. He addressed participants individually from the start of the session, covered the section on conditionality quickly and then focused on job search and Jobcentre Plus services, giving relevant, local examples. In contrast, at a poorly received session, the facilitator read out the slides in a monotone and did not encourage questions. No local labour market information was provided, except for printouts of vacancies placed on participants' chairs.

No disruptive behaviour was seen at the observed sessions. Jobcentre Plus managers said that occasionally an aggrieved participant might try to '*work the audience*' but that, so far, BtWS had not turned into '*World War Three*', as some staff had feared.

Office staff expressed a range of views about the value of BtWS. Some thought that they were useful because they reinforced what customers had been told at the NJI. The information about Jobcentre Plus services was seen as particularly valuable. Several staff believed that the sessions were prompting more customers to request referrals to external providers (often through a one-to-one session with an adviser). Managers in several offices also felt that facilitators had become more skilled at delivering the sessions as they gained experience.

Other staff were less enthusiastic. They were concerned that the job search information was too basic for many customers, and that the information about conditionality and Jobcentre Plus services should be given at the start of the claim. The 3-Step Plan was singled out by several members of staff as ineffective because customers often did not complete them or act on them, and the plans were rarely followed up at the Initial Stage 2 Review.

A number of managers felt that the 'one-size-fits-all' nature of the BtWS was misguided. One thought that it was at odds with the idea that JRFND was about tailoring support to the needs of the individual customer. Some believed that there was little point in requiring all customers to attend BtWS, especially those who had attended one during a previous claim. Several staff thought that the script was '*boring*' – for facilitators as well as participants – and wanted more flexibility to introduce their own material. Indeed, some offices had introduced rotas of facilitators to counter the tedium of delivering the same presentation day after day.

Managers in most offices said that BtWS diverted staff resources from other important tasks. For instance, facilitators were unable to conduct customer interviews while delivering the sessions. Time was also spent telephoning customers to remind them to attend the sessions, and in following up and sanctioning those who failed to attend.

Customer perspectives

In-depth interviews with customers who had started signing on after the introduction of JRFND revealed that only a minority had attended a BtWS, either because they had never been invited to one or because they had been unable to attend the one booked for them and had never been asked again. Some of those who had attended a session remembered little about it, and one respondent with English language needs reported limited understanding of the session.

Those with sufficient recall tended to have strong views – ranging from extremely positive to extremely negative. For instance, a customer with multiple barriers to work – including homelessness, alcohol problems and a criminal record – said, *‘Basically the Back to Work Session made me want to go back to work...I thought it was a fantastic session’*. In contrast, a customer who had stopped work due to health problems and was trying to change career commented, *‘That was probably the most...useless...thing that I’ve ever been to in my life...it was just no help whatsoever’*.

Feedback collected following a BtWS in February-March 2010 indicated that the facilitator’s manner and style of delivery were key factors. Participants tended to give positive feedback about sessions delivered by enthusiastic facilitators who avoided a ‘them-and-us’ situation by showing empathy and encouraging discussion rather than sticking to the script – where the facilitator had been *‘reassuring’* and *‘didn’t treat you like kids’*, for instance. One respondent was grateful that the facilitator *‘wasn’t looking down his nose’* and had started the session by telling the participants that he had *‘been in the same boat’* and knew what it was like for them. Sessions delivered by less skilled facilitators usually attracted negative comments.

The behaviour of other participants was also a factor. Several respondents felt that the fact that the sessions were compulsory created a *‘bad atmosphere’* and that the sessions had been spoiled by participants chatting or *‘messaging around’*.

Positive comments about the content of the sessions related mainly to the information about Jobcentre Plus services, including Work Trials, self-employment advice and funding for a Security Industry Authority licence. Some respondents remembered being given useful job search information, such as a list of recruitment websites and the fact that it is not necessary to mention a criminal record when applying for a job unless asked to do so. A number of respondents said that they had been struck by the pie chart showing that 51 per cent of jobs are not advertised.

Negative comments tended to relate to the content of the sessions, which were felt to be too basic – the job search material was viewed as ‘obvious’ or ‘common sense’ and the other topics repeated what the customers had been told at the NJI (or knew already from previous claims). No respondents said that they had found the 3-Step Plan useful. Some felt that it repeated what they were already doing and no one recalled mention of the 3-Step Plan at subsequent meetings.

3.2.3 General views on Stage 1

Previous research has shown that Jobcentre Plus staff welcomed the additional services – such as the extension of ADF to newly unemployed customers and the introduction of SNU support for professionals/executives – which accompanied the introduction of JRFND (Knight *et al.*, 2010). Managers reiterated this view during the February-March 2010 site visits and noted that the YPG had added to the services available for 18-24 year olds. Only a few had negative comments and

these mainly related to the replacement of the Programme Centre with the Support Contract: there were perceived to be problems with the new referral system (Provider Referral and Payments (PRaP) system) which had temporarily interrupted referrals to the Support Contract, and in one office there was confusion about whether it was possible to refer Stage 1 customers to the Support Contract, other than to the SNU module.

There was some concern among staff about the perceived low level of customer support during Stage 1. Customers were unlikely to see an adviser following the NJI unless they were offered, and took up, additional advisory support (up to one hour for 18-24 year olds; 20 minutes of SNU one-to-one coaching for those aged 25 and over). Advisers and managers recognised that Stage 1 was intended to be a 'self-directed job search' and that many customers would find work with minimal adviser input, but some thought that advisers should be able to arrange additional meetings if they believed that a customer might otherwise do little to look for work, for example:

'What would be nice in Stage 1 is having some additional advisory support...the whole idea of FND is that it's self-managed, which is a good idea, but a lot of customers don't really do much within that first 13 weeks. Yes, a lot of them do find work through themselves but some of those customers that have really basic needs or barriers, it's a nice idea to try and address those at the initial stage.'

(Manager, District 2)

There was a widespread perception that the additional interviews for 18-24 year olds had increased pressure on adviser resource and reduced the amount of time available for other customers. Several staff questioned whether it was right to offer additional advisory support to 18-24 year olds only, instead of customers whom advisers judged to be in greatest need of help, regardless of their age.

Some advisers were reluctant to offer voluntary fast-tracking to vulnerable customers – such as those transferring to JSA from Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) – despite the fact that additional advisory support is a feature of Stage 3. They felt that the requirements of Stage 3 (mandatory activities, six weeks of weekly signing, and wider job search criteria) might be too demanding for these customers.

Customer perspectives

Two distinct views were reported by customers regarding the level of support they received during the first 13 weeks of their claim. A minority of customers were satisfied with the perceived low level of support they received. Several felt that they knew what to do to look for work, and that the main problem was the scarcity of jobs rather than a lack of support on the part of Jobcentre Plus. One respondent felt that she could not expect Jobcentre Plus staff to be able to offer specific advice about her specialist field of work.

Other customers were disappointed not to have had more support (although the views of customers with previous experience of claiming JSA appeared to be moderated by their low expectations). The most common complaint was the lack of job search guidance at FJR meetings. Respondents said that they would have liked FJR officers to flag up appropriate vacancies or give some advice, for example:

'On the whole the staff I saw fortnightly did nothing. It was checking of the boxes...I know they've got a lot of numbers to get through but instead of just looking back and seeing what you've done and saying, "Okay, you've done it," perhaps saying, "Right, let's look at what you've done. You've perhaps been going wrong there".'

(Customer, District 5)

Some advisers and customers felt that a second meeting was warranted following the NJI. It was suggested that the initial meeting could be about setting up the claim while the second could focus more on getting back to work. Other improvements suggested by respondents included having more information about benefit entitlements, Work Trials and greater access to training courses.

3.3 Summary

The structure of Stage 1, the first 13 weeks of a JSA claim, was similar across all of the Jobcentre Plus fieldwork sites. BtWS were running in all offices; their frequency varied from four per week to three per day. Mandatory fast-tracking was taking place in all offices while voluntary fast-tracking was rare, mainly because of a lack of adviser capacity at Stage 3. Services for 18-24 year olds had been introduced in all offices, although additional adviser interviews were more readily offered in some offices than others.

Over time, staff reported increased familiarity and confidence with the conduct of the NJI. Managers indicated that many advisers had embraced the idea of tailoring the interview and services they offered to the needs of the customer, and, where appropriate, following up with additional support. The time allowed for the NJI was still seen as a problem by staff in some offices. To address this, some advisers were arranging additional meetings with customers (support for 18-24 year olds or SNU one-to-one sessions) if they were not able to cover everything intended in the NJI.

Most customers recalled little detail about their NJI, and those who did said that it had mainly involved administration. Few remembered having been offered any job search advice or additional services – although it should be noted that respondents' claims had started at an early stage of implementation. Overall reactions to the NJI were neutral and most respondents said that they had encountered more supportive staff later in their claim.

The style and quality of BtWS varied greatly between offices. The better sessions observed by researchers were those delivered by dynamic, welcoming facilitators who focused on job search and support, and made genuine efforts to interact with participants. Some staff felt that the sessions were a helpful reminder of the material covered in the NJI. But others believed that the content was too basic for many customers and that it was inappropriate to require all customers to attend the sessions – particularly those who had already attended the same session during a previous claim. The value of the 3-Step Plan was questioned by both staff and customers. Customers indicated that the information about Jobcentre Plus services was the most useful content of the session.

4 Stage 2: 13 to 26 weeks

This chapter reports findings on Stage 2 of Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) which runs from 13 to 26 weeks of a Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claim. Variations in the implementation of Stage 2 services are described followed by more detailed findings on the Initial Stage 2 Review, weekly signing and Targeted Reviews.

4.1 Service structure and variations

In Stage 2 of JRFND, customers enter a 'directed job search' where there is more intensive contact with Jobcentre Plus. An Initial Stage 2 Review meeting is conducted, followed by weekly signing with a Fortnightly Jobsearch Review (FJR) officer for a period of six weeks, and fortnightly signing thereafter. Advisers can also schedule two further meetings of 30 minutes – Targeted Reviews – for customers aged 25 and over judged to need extra help and support (intended to be approximately 20 per cent of jobseekers). This section describes the Stage 2 process as observed in the 12 study offices.

By March 2010, Initial Stage 2 Review meetings were conducted in a one-to-one format and typically lasted 30 minutes in the study offices. Weekly signing was scheduled to commence after the review meeting, with the exception of one of the smaller offices which restricted weekly signing to 18-24 year olds only, due to resource constraints. The time allocated for signing on weekly ranged from four to ten minutes plus, again according to the staff resource that was available.

Targeted Reviews had been introduced in all study offices and when two reviews were taking place, these were typically scheduled at 17 and 21 weeks of a claim. Some variations in the scope of Targeted Reviews were observed. For example, in two of the offices, Targeted Reviews were only being offered to 18-24 year-olds. Similarly, in other offices, staff resource limitations restricted the number of Targeted Reviews to one, or it was left to the adviser's discretion whether to arrange a second review.

Some offices had reorganised staff into specialist teams which dealt exclusively with 18-24 year olds.

4.2 Staff and customer views and experiences

Feedback on Stage 2 was collected through face-to-face interviews with 23 customers, 12 of whom had participated in a Targeted Review. Customers represented a range of work histories, which included long-term unemployment and recent redundancies. Recall was an issue among some of the customers, particularly those who took part in Targeted Reviews.

The majority of the data reported from Jobcentre Plus staff about their experiences of Stage 2 was collected during the February-March 2010 fieldwork period.

4.2.1 Initial Stage 2 Review

Jobcentre Plus office staff overwhelmingly welcomed the extra time allotted for the Initial Stage 2 Review, which increased from 20 to 30 minutes. This extra contact time was viewed as particularly important as advisers were increasingly required to use their diagnostic skills in assessing customer training needs, for instance, or the option to refer customers for a Targeted Review. As explained by one office manager:

'That's much better since it's been increased to 30 minutes. So people are finding that they can have more of a meaningful discussion just with having that extra 10 minutes...because beforehand it was more like a conveyor belt, just get customers through.'

(Manager, District 4)

Advisers were aware that by the time customers reach Stage 2, part of their role was to review the JRFND process, what will happen during Stage 2, and what they can expect if they reach Stage 3. With experience, plus the extended length of the review meeting, advisers generally reported they were confident with delivering the new regime and the associated increasing conditionality:

'As time goes on, I get more and more confident in doing them. At first, they were quite difficult, just because you are having to tell people that sometimes their job goals aren't broad enough and you know, people who have been working in the same field for maybe 30 years, you have to tell them that they need to start looking for different things, broadening their search, maybe looking outside the local area...'

(Stage 2 Adviser, District 5)

However, a minority of advisers reported that 30 minutes was still insufficient to complete the necessary administration, explain the support available, listen to individual circumstances and make referrals as required. It was also felt that since customers had not seen an adviser for a number of weeks they could introduce a different agenda into the meeting:

'People are actually quite happy because they haven't seen anybody for a few months and some of them have felt a little bit lost if you like, in that it seems like they're just coming in and signing and we're not interested in them. When they come to that Stage 2 Review they've got lots of things to talk about, lots of questions, lots of things to say.'

(Stage 2 Adviser, District 1)

Customer views

Interviews with customers confirmed that they had received a Initial Stage 2 Review as intended. Their job goals were reviewed and broadened, acceptable travel distance to work increased, and they were informed of the requirement to attend weekly signing. However, none of the customers interviewed recalled a 3-Step Plan from their Back To Work Session (BtWS).

There was an overall perception that Jobcentre Plus support was increasing in intensity by Stage 2, with some customers describing how much longer or better the Stage 2 initial interview was compared with the New Jobseekers Interview (NJI). For some customers the Initial Stage 2 Review was

a timely reminder of what they needed to be doing to find work and an indication that Jobcentre Plus staff were being supportive. These customers described the interview as psychologically motivating and a demonstration, for one, that staff *'actually did care'*. In terms of the extent to which support was tailored to the specific needs and experiences of individuals, opinions varied. On the one hand, one customer from a professional background felt the meeting had focused on her particular circumstances, compared to the NJI:

'I definitely felt the interest was far more relevant. He [adviser] was like...“we will find you something”. So it was definitely a lot better, the second one, way more positive. The first one I didn't get that feeling.'

(Customer, District 5)

In contrast, other customers perceived that everyone encountered the same process, as stated by another customer from a professional background:

'Like I said it's just, it's just obviously the same thing with every person so it's not really specific.'

(Customer, District 4)

For customers with very specialist skills and job histories, however, it was suggested that Advisers at the Initial Stage 2 Review were out of their depth, unable to offer useful advice or suggest appropriate support services.

There were tensions at this stage between the desire to find work and resistance at broadening the Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg) too far, leaving customers less open to applying for jobs perceived as unsuitable. In some cases customers did not want to apply for jobs that they viewed as beneath them, such as *'washing up in a supermarket'* or *'mucking out pigs on a farm'*. They expressed concern at potentially losing their established skills by moving too far away from their previous occupational experience. Salaries were also a concern, with some jobs they were asked to consider not worthwhile when travel costs were factored in. Where Better Off Calculations (BOCs) had been done, the financial gain was often judged as minimal.

While an extension to the terms of the JSAg was normally agreed collaboratively, there were examples of Action Plans being changed without agreement from the customer. One person explained how 'retail' was added as an additional job category on her Action Plan despite her reservations, meaning that her vocation – hairdressing – was given less of a priority:

'...so they put hairdressing at the bottom and...reception in the middle and then they put retail and I did not want retail on there...But they is like, "Well you have to put it down for now to find a job to get you into work"...they changed the Action Plan.'

(Customer, District 1)

4.2.2 Weekly signing¹³

Discussion of weekly signing provoked very mixed responses from Jobcentre Plus staff. Most questioned the value of bringing customers in more frequently. This was particularly the case in offices that could only schedule the shortest time slots, usually four minutes in length, due to staffing constraints. In one office where weekly signing had recently become reinstated after staffing shortages were addressed, a manager expressed reservations:

'To be honest, I've never seen the point in it, and I don't think there is much of one. It just seems an excess of resource that we put towards it and for very, very little return. I'm not sure with the 18 to 24 year olds how much they're getting out of that, but certainly, for 25 plus, it doesn't really seem to be much point.'

(Manager, District 3)

In most offices, weekly attendance mimicked the same format as a fortnightly meeting where customers would see the first signing officer available in a 'taxi rank' system. Staff expressed frustration over what they viewed as a largely administrative exercise. Some felt they needed to manage customer expectations, as the extra contact time did not substantially amount to added support. In one office where weekly signing did not qualitatively differ from fortnightly signing, one member of staff explained:

¹³ Evidence based on Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) internal analysis suggests that more frequent signing can enhance benefit off-flows.

‘What should happen in my opinion is that they should at least get a job search, which we do try and do but it’s rare. It’s more common now that they come in and they sign on and we ask them if there’s been any changes, we ask them if they’ve had any applications, any interviews in the last week...Then they get their expenses and then they go. And they think it’s a waste of time and I don’t blame them to be quite honest, because I think they’re under the impression, rightly or wrongly, that they’ll come in and we’ll do a full job search for them.’

(FJR Officer, District 6)

The introduction of the Young Person’s Guarantee (YPG) put offices under increased pressure as they struggled to implement weekly signing for 18 to 24 year olds for the duration of Stage 2.

For those staff who viewed weekly signing in a positive light, three factors appeared to contribute: sufficient capacity, longer signing times to allow more intensive job searches, and caseloading. Some offices were able to organise their signing team so that customers regularly met with the same FJR staff; sometimes this was arranged by assigning staff to a ‘signing box’ of time that recurred week to week or alphabetically by the customers’ surname. Some offices were able to dedicate staff to signing 18 to 24 year old customers who were required to sign weekly for the duration of Stage 2. FJR staff were generally satisfied with these systems and they gained professional fulfilment from being able to provide ongoing support to customers. An FJR Officer based in one of the larger offices which scheduled ten-minute appointments and followed one of these weekly signing systems explained:

‘You’d check their job search...and go through them in much more detail to make sure it is really fitting in with what they’re doing...because on weekly signing you’re usually there for a while, so you can build up that rapport with them and see how they’re getting on. And then obviously follow up the jobs and see how they’ve got on.’

(FJR Officer, District 5)

In order to improve the Stage 2 weekly signing process and to address limitations on staff resource it was suggested that weekly signing at Stage 2 should not be an automatic requirement for all customers. Instead, staff should be able to use their discretion to bring in those customers who they viewed as needing extra help. Other customers who were capable of managing their job search effectively could then continue with fortnightly meetings.

Customer views

The majority of customers in the sample were negative about their weekly signing experiences and considered the procedure to be unnecessary. Negativity arose particularly where customers felt they were already doing all that they could to secure employment, in which case the weekly visits were a waste of time, for example:

‘I think it’s a waste of time, waste of everything. What’s the point of having a weekly signing? It doesn’t improve anything, nothing happens in one week...’

(Customer, District 2)

For others, disappointment with weekly signing was associated with the limited scope of the visit, which was restricted to a brief meeting with no further offer of support or services. Weekly signing was also a source of irritation in terms of the time wasted while waiting to sign at a busy Jobcentre Plus office, in addition to the extra travel time and costs.

There was, however, acknowledgement among some customers that the weekly signing led to 'more job searching' and helped to set up a worthwhile routine. This corresponded to meetings that included more personal time and continuity of support. These customers were mainly grateful for the extra attention, regarding it as an opportunity to talk through issues. For example, one male customer who had previously worked in security contrasted his weekly signing with the brevity of fortnightly meetings:

'...She said, "If you don't mind, next time you come in we'll have another longer chat". And it was just to like top up what we couldn't actually get in on the first one. So, yeah, that was fine. I preferred signing weekly.'

(Customer, District 3)

4.2.3 Targeted Reviews

Twelve Targeted Reviews were observed during the February-March fieldwork. These tended to take the form of extended job searches. To a lesser extent, advisers introduced topics on volunteering, Work Trials (or Training for Work), training opportunities, the BOC and CV advice. Customers also sought clarification on sanctioning, weekly signing, basic skills training, a careers advice website, confidence building and the Backing Young Britain (BYB) initiative.

Targeted Reviews were taking place in all study offices for the 18 to 24 year olds but there was some confusion among advisers about the guidance for eligibility among the 25 plus age group and the 20 per cent target¹⁴. This was described by one manager, who suggested that more training was needed:

'I'm finding that we're not targeting as many as we should be targeting. I think there was a bit of confusion around who they should target and who they shouldn't. New advisers [...] aren't targeting and I was wondering whether that's a bit of a gap in training.'

(Manager, District 1)

This was echoed by a relatively new adviser based in another district, commenting on the content of a Targeted Review, *'I feel a bit lost as to, you know, where to start and what I should be discussing'*.

Perceptions differed among advisers on how Targeted Reviews should be used. One office referred to the meetings as *'Stage 2 caseloading'* and endeavoured to provide more personalised support with the job search. But some advisers saw the additional meetings as an extension of the Initial Stage 2 Review when time to cover the material was insufficient. For example, in one office, all customers were booked in for a Targeted Review so that advisers could do a BOC or process a referral. As explained by one adviser:

'I use this Targeted Review for customers where I haven't had enough time at the 30-minute interview to do all that I can for them. Because there's a lot of form filling to refer them to providers...As I said, they're booked in at the end of the day, we shut at five, conscious of that. So, for instance, last night my customer didn't get here 'til quarter to five so there was no way I could do what I should be doing.'

(Stage 2 Adviser, District 4)

Time pressures and staffing constraints also shaped the structure of the reviews. One office was unable to conduct more than one Targeted Review while, in another, advisers used discretion over whether customers were booked in for a second Targeted Review, depending on support needs.

¹⁴ As noted in Chapter 1, the extension of Targeted Reviews to 18-24 year olds is a temporary recessionary measure.

Management in some offices were concerned that advisers were not applying the time for Targeted Reviews effectively:

'I mean the idea's great but I think it's down to probably experience. I would like to see advisers using the first and second Targeted Review really to do a more analytical review and see where the problem is, how they can support the customer best and that's the purpose of the Targeted Review. At the moment probably a lot of advisers, they don't distinguish between the Targeted Review or any other review [Initial Stage 2 Review].'

(Manager, District 2)

It was also suggested that advisers should have more flexibility over assigning Targeted Reviews, rather than adhering strictly to the guidance:

'...there may be people who don't come under the criteria who would benefit from the Targeted Reviews. So at the moment I'm asking my staff to pull them in under caseload and work with them...I think the staff would prefer to have that flexibility to be able to target the customers that they think need the help.'

(Manager, District 6)

Customer views

Feedback from customers immediately after they had attended a Targeted Review tended to be more positive when the meeting was perceived to have addressed individual concerns and agendas for help. Three found the session to be helpful, with one customer singling out the BOC as particularly useful and another commenting that the level of support was greater compared to the Initial Stage 2 Review meeting. Two were less positive about the experience: one woman felt frustrated that her dyslexia was not being addressed directly; the other viewed the review as pointless and repetitive, covering no new ground when compared with previous sessions with advisers. A further customer gave a neutral response, concluding that the Targeted Review offered nothing new but was uncritical about this.

Additionally, depth interviews were conducted with 12 customers who had taken part in a Targeted Review. Six of these people were under 25 years and therefore met the age criteria. All had various labour market disadvantages: lack of qualifications, limited work experience, single motherhood, mental health issues, and general health conditions or disabilities.

Recall was patchy as customers struggled to distinguish Targeted Reviews from other scheduled meetings with advisers. Of those who did recall having a Targeted Review, most were positive about the more regular contact they had had with an adviser and perceived the meetings to be more personalised. Some customers commented that their adviser knew them well and had taken an interest in their welfare. In these instances, Targeted Reviews provided a more individualised service compared to earlier adviser meetings, as these younger customers recounted:

'I thought that the person who actually first did my PA interview, I think she was just doing her job, like it was all by script. But with the person I'm seeing now she honestly knows how I tick. She knows what I'm looking for...She calls me every now and then...just to see how I'm doing and how the job search is going, whether I need any help and it's great, really good, I really like that...'

(Customer, District 2)

'...with seeing a new person all the time I would find myself a bit uncomfortable each time. But seeing the same person, she already knows your past and what's going on and stuff, she's got your case.'

(Customer, District 3)

Another customer, in his 50s, viewed the Targeted Review as an opportunity to 'top up' discussion topics that did not get adequately covered during the Initial Stage 2 Review.

Among those who were less positive, customers questioned the added benefit of Targeted Reviews when they were perceived to be no different from other adviser meetings, but with an added infringement on their time. A number of customers said they felt pressured to apply for jobs they perceived to be inappropriate and which did not match their interests, qualifications or work experience (for example, factory or call centre work). Some customers selected for Targeted Reviews wished to continue their job search on their own with minimal Jobcentre Plus involvement.

4.2.4 General views on Stage 2

With the exception of the enhanced support introduced for young people, many advisers felt that they had little to offer customers during Stage 2. Referrals during Stage 2 tended to be to training courses in basic skills and work preparation.

The most common means of Stage 2 support described by customers in the sample was help with CVs and an intensified job search. Overall, most customers concluded that the advice and support they received during Stage 2 was limited. Most said they were already conducting the range and type of job searches set out by the advisers and felt reasonably self sufficient. For instance, one customer, when asked by the researcher if they felt they had received sufficient support during Stage 2 replied, *'But I wasn't looking for support'*.

Customers expressed both positive and negative views on the quality of advisory staff they encountered. Some were content with the service provided, commenting that advisers were friendly and made an effort to assist them. By contrast, others had a rather demeaning experience after encountering rude or unhelpful staff. Others reported that Jobcentre Plus staff had failed to look at their CVs or discuss their skills or interest in training.

Customers also commented on the lack of training opportunities. Several said their request for training was not met with relevant courses or appropriate training was associated with long waiting times. Some expressed their frustration after being told they must wait until they have been unemployed for six months before they were eligible for further training opportunities.

Box 4.1: Customers who found work

Interviews were conducted with six individuals who entered work since joining JRFND. It should be noted that the respondents are not representative of the jobseeker population but were purposively selected for illustrative purposes. All had JSA claim dates that preceded the April 2009 roll-out and, therefore, their experiences of the programme reflect the very early days of implementation. All six started work in July 2009. Jobs were sourced through media advertisements, speculative applications or family contacts; one of the vacancies had been advertised through Jobcentre Plus. Three of the respondents were still in work at the time of the research interview; the others had since lost their jobs and had restarted a claim. Individuals represented a range of occupational backgrounds.

Respondents reported little experience of the new features of JRFND. For instance, only one remembered attending a Back to Work Session. This is likely due to the time at which the customers were exposed to JRFND since, according to the research, not all services were fully operational from the start.

Overall impressions of Jobcentre Plus services were negative. Fortnightly signing meetings, which served as the main contact points, were viewed as too rushed and respondents said that would have liked more individual attention. Some respondents felt that the way they had been treated reflected a lack of understanding about their circumstances.

4.3 Summary

By March 2010, Initial Stage 2 Review meetings were conducted in a one-to-one format and typically lasted 30 minutes in the study offices. Staff reported increased confidence in the delivery of the meeting and welcomed the increase to the time allotted for these meetings. Because many customers had not received adviser contact since the NJI, some advisers felt the time for the Initial Stage 2 Review was insufficient to cover any additional customer concerns that were raised. Customers mainly perceived that Jobcentre Plus support had increased in Stage 2, and the review meeting compared favourably to contacts during Stage 1 as it was perceived to be more personalised. There were tensions between the desire to find work yet resistance at broadening the JSAG too far, leaving customers less open to applying for jobs perceived as unsuitable.

Weekly signing was regularly occurring during the first six weeks of Stage 2, with the exception of one of the smaller offices which restricted weekly signing to 18-24 year olds only, due to resource constraints. Staff and customers were more positive about weekly signing when there was sufficient time given for an extensive job search and when there was continuity of staff week to week. Otherwise, weekly signing was perceived to be no more than an administrative procedure that placed a strain on the time of both parties involved.

Targeted Reviews were operating in all the study offices, although eligibility was being restricted in a minority of offices where staff capacity was a factor. The purpose and scope of the reviews varied considerably. There was some confusion over eligibility among the 25-plus age group and the 20 per cent target, and some confusion existed over the content of Targeted Reviews. Some staff viewed the extra meetings as an opportunity to cover or follow up on issues or paperwork from the Initial Stage 2 Review. Customers' accounts differed in relation to perceptions of support received, the approach and manner of advisers, the suitability of jobs presented and the extent to which the Targeted Reviews were regarded as helpful and worthwhile.

5 Stage 3: 26 to 52 weeks

This chapter focuses on Stage 3 of the Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) process. It describes the service structure and variations observed among Jobcentre Plus fieldwork offices. This is followed by a discussion of staff and customer views on the key features of Stage 3: Initial Stage 3 Review, caseloading, weekly signing and mandatory activities, and fast-tracking.

5.1 Service structure and variations

Stage 3 of JRFND covers weeks 26 to 52 of a Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claim and commences with the Initial Stage 3 Review. Typically lasting 40 minutes, it follows a one-to-one format, during which the adviser updates the Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg), introduces the Six Month Offer (6MO)¹⁵ and creates an Action Plan which may require the customer to undertake up to three mandatory work-related activities. Customers are caseloaded from this point, allowing them to see the same adviser for up to three hours of contact time over the proceeding six months. Additionally, customers are required to attend weekly signing sessions for six weeks at some point during Stage 3, the timing of which is determined by their adviser.

A small number of minor variations in this structure were observed. One office conducted the Initial Stage 3 Review as a group session, followed by a 40-minute one-to-one meeting with each customer. In some of the smaller offices, full diaries meant that advisers were unable to see each customer more than once every six to eight weeks, and some customers were receiving less than the full three hours of support by the end of Stage 3. By February-March 2010, weekly signing was operating in all offices, although it had been slow to start in one due to staff shortages and in another, weekly signing was restricted to customers aged 18-24 years.

5.2 Staff and customer views and experiences

Thirty customers were interviewed about their experiences of Stage 3. In most cases, their claims had started in September-November 2008, meaning that in April 2009 they had joined JRFND at the end of Stage 2 or just after the beginning of Stage 3. The group included men and women from skilled and unskilled manual occupations as well as managers and professionals. Some had little work experience. Barriers to work identified by customers included poor basic skills, a lack of qualifications or work experience, a criminal record, mental illness, alcoholism and age discrimination.

As in previous chapters, the data referred to here relating to Jobcentre Plus staff views were mostly collected during the third wave of site visits in February-March 2010. The perspectives of staff were, therefore, more up-to-date than those of customers, who had entered Stage 3 almost one year earlier, when JRFND had only recently been introduced.

¹⁵ The 6MO was introduced in April 2009 as extra support for jobseekers during the recession. After six months, a JSA customer is eligible for volunteering opportunities to improve employability, a recruitment subsidy (RS), help to become self-employed and enhanced access to training.

5.2.1 Initial Stage 3 Review

Jobcentre Plus staff reported that the Initial Stage 3 Review generally lasted 40 minutes, in accordance with policy guidelines. In addition to standard tasks such as updating the JSAG, advisers reported that they might use the interview to conduct a 'skills health check', introduce the 6MO, explain about Work Trials, offer help with CVs, advise on financial assistance, conduct a job search or make a referral to an external service provider. When interviewing 18-24 year olds they would also offer support available under the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG), such as Future Jobs Fund opportunities and the Community Task Force.

Advisers were generally confident about their handling of the Initial Stage 3 Review. Managers regarded advisers as skilled in their ability to adapt the interview to suit the needs of individual customers:

'The advisers, because they are more confident in dealing with it, they definitely don't stick so formally to the full structure as it was initially laid down. If the customer asks a question, they will flow with the question and respond but go back to where they left off.'

(Manager, District 6)

Staff generally felt the 40-minute interview slot was insufficient, however, especially since the introduction of additional support for 18-24 year olds. Some advisers reported that the need to deliver a large amount of information and complete numerous administrative tasks during the interview prevented them from asking customers the open-ended questions needed to understand their barriers to work and construct an effective Action Plan; some said that there was not always enough time to adequately address customers' queries:

'I would only reiterate that if we had a bit more time I think we could do a lot more, if we didn't have to repeat so much paperwork.'

(Adviser, District 5)

Offices managed this time pressure in different ways. In one office, the Initial Stage 3 Review was run as a group meeting, in which opportunities such as the 6MO were introduced, and was followed by a 40-minute one-to-one interview for each customer. This approach was viewed as a means to optimise the time advisers spent with customers in one-to-one meetings. Another method of alleviating the load of the Initial Stage 3 Review was to shift some of the information to Stage 2: advisers in some offices reported that customers were being told about the 6MO and the YPG prior to entering Stage 3. Finally, some advisers said that they were using additional advisory interviews for tasks which they had not been able to complete in the Initial Stage 3 Review – these often included drawing up an Action Plan. In at least one office, advisers were being actively encouraged by managers to adopt this practice.

Customer views

Customers had varying experiences of the Initial Stage 3 Review. Most remembered their adviser updating the JSAG to broaden the job search criteria in terms of occupation, salary and location. Other customers recalled information about the 6MO, the Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF), Work Trials and basic skills training. Several customers had been referred to an external provider and one had received a Better Off Calculation (BOC).

Some customers found the Initial Stage 3 Review to be more in-depth and personal than previous adviser interviews. Those who had been referred to a provider were particularly appreciative. Others felt that the meeting had been similar to previous interviews, and in some cases it had not met their expectations. For instance, a 59-year-old professional customer who had anticipated being offered

extra support after six months' unemployment was disappointed to be told that there was nothing suitable for her:

'You sort of get your hopes up and think – well, they'll put me in touch with somebody or a careers adviser or somebody...Absolutely nothing...She just said to me, "I don't see that you can do any more. You're doing everything that you ought to be doing. I can't add anything".'

(Customer, District 1)

5.2.2 Caseloading

Caseloading from 26 weeks of a claim is a key feature of JRFND. It took some months to be fully implemented as advisers familiarised themselves with procedures, against the background of high customer volumes and staff shortages (Knight *et al.*, 2010).

Advisers tended to use the subsequent customer meetings to conduct a job search and to agree on activities which the customer would undertake between meetings. Most advisers scheduled the meetings so they met with a customer for 30 minutes each month. The policy intention was that the frequency and duration of the meetings should be determined by advisers in accordance with each customer's needs, but offices varied in the amount of flexibility they allowed advisers. In some offices, 30 minutes was said to be the minimum permitted duration for a meeting. In others, this rule did not apply or had been relaxed, and advisers were seeing some customers for short meetings every fortnight. In one office, advisers were required to record at the Initial Stage 3 Review how they planned to use the three hours of advisory time.

Caseloads had been extremely high in some offices, to the extent that, at one point, advisers in one office had substituted monthly telephone calls for face-to-face meetings. By February-March 2010, most advisers reported that their caseloads had become more manageable. In a minority of offices, however, caseloads remained heavy and in one there was said to be a six-week backlog.

The majority of staff were positive about caseloading and indicated that an average of three hours per customer was sufficient, especially in offices where advisers were able to schedule meetings flexibly:

'It is about right really. As I said, it depends, because some people you know, yes they're okay and they don't really need all that time. There are others that do need more time, so we can be a little bit more flexible. And I do get to talk to them on the phone a lot as well.'

(Stage 2-3 adviser, District 1)

Customer views

Customers' reports on their experiences of regular meetings differed notably. In one district, all interviewed customers had attended multiple 40-minute meetings over the course of Stage 3. In another, no respondents recalled having had any contact with their adviser following the Initial Stage 3 Review. These differences may partly be due to the time when customers experienced Stage 3 which was early in the implementation of JRFND when not all services were available.

Customers who had seen their advisers regularly during Stage 3 generally welcomed the additional support. They valued the chance to develop a relationship with a single adviser, and some felt that this was the first time in their claim that they had received a personalised service from Jobcentre Plus. Respondents spoke of advisers who listened to them, understood their needs, and were helpful and enthusiastic. This was the case even where the adviser had been unable to offer suitable services for them besides regular meetings. Friendliness on the part of an adviser could go a long way to improve how customers felt about their predicament:

'It is quite nice sometimes: "How are you getting on? Have you tried this...?" You know, a few little tips in the right direction...'

(Customer, District 1)

At best, the extra support was seen as flexible and responsive to the respondent's changing circumstances. For example, one respondent recounted how her meetings increased in frequency to twice a week when she was close to getting a job.

Customers who were less positive did not understand the purpose of regular meetings. One customer talked about attending meetings which were *'too repetitive'* and which he felt were *'wasting the adviser's time'*. In these cases, it would appear that advisers had scheduled meetings as a matter of course without checking with customers whether these would really help them.

5.2.3 Weekly signing

Advisers were free to decide when a customer would start the six-week block of weekly signing. Many initiated it immediately unless there was a reason to delay, for instance if they had referred the customer to training or volunteering. Other advisers left weekly signing until the end of Stage 3 because they believed that this would make it easier to work with the customer.

The length of the signing sessions depended on how busy the office was at the time. On average, sessions were reported to last ten minutes.

The usefulness of weekly signing was said to depend on each individual customer's needs and attitude. Staff believed that some customers welcomed the increased contact and benefited from it, while others resisted it. It was also said that weekly signing helped to identify customers who were not complying with JSA rules, provided that FJR officers were sufficiently skilled to spot them. Some members of staff pointed out that weekly signing put pressure on FJR staff and believed that it was of little benefit to the majority of customers. They thought that it should be reserved for customers who advisers believed needed additional support or might not be actively seeking work.

Customer views

Customers' views of weekly signing ranged from mildly positive to negative. A small minority felt that it had been worthwhile for the additional job search, with one customer reporting that it had led to her finding out about local job fairs. Those with negative views described the experience as a *'waste of time'* and suggested that it *'didn't help at all'*. Weekly signing was interpreted by some customers as Jobcentre Plus *'checking up'* on them, and those with travel problems resented the inconvenience.

According to the customers interviewed, weekly signing was short (less than seven minutes) and identical in content to the regular fortnightly review meetings.

5.2.4 Mandatory activities

As reported previously (Knight *et al.*, 2010), advisers' use of mandatory activities varied greatly. While advisers in some offices had begun to assign mandatory activities routinely from the early days of JRFND, in February-March 2010 the practice was still sporadic in offices, and in several cases advisers were unfamiliar with the term, thinking that it referred to the job search activities set out in the JSaG, or to activities which all customers were required to undertake during Stage 3, such as weekly signing.

There had been some confusion in the early months of JRFND about the sorts of activities which could be made mandatory. In particular, some advisers had been mandating customers to pursue 6MO options such as volunteering and training. This issue appeared to have been resolved by

February-March 2010, with advisers reporting that they had been instructed not to mandate any 6MO or European Social Fund (ESF) provision. Common examples of mandatory activities assigned by advisers were: creating a CV; attending a Support Contract course; obtaining careers advice from Next Step; signing up with an employment agency; and taking specified job search actions.

Advisers often struggled to find suitable mandatory activities, especially for professional customers and those who already had a CV and up-to-date skills. Some said that the task had become harder since the replacement of Programme Centres because they found it difficult to identify appropriate Support Contract modules. For these reasons, and to avoid overwhelming customers, one manager encouraged advisers to assign one carefully chosen mandatory activity instead of assigning three activities 'for the sake of it'.

Other office staff believed that mandatory activities should be avoided whenever possible. They felt that a softer approach, in which voluntary activities were agreed collaboratively with the customer, was more effective:

'If you've got customers and you're engaging with them and you're looking at what their aspirations are and if you've got provision, which we have had, that can meet most of those aspirations. I would say to an adviser, you don't need to mandate someone to go...you should ask them to go to it.'

(Manager, District 5)

Customer views

Few, if any, customers who were interviewed about their Stage 3 experiences appeared to have been assigned mandatory activities. Some talked about being required to apply for a certain number of jobs per week – which may already have been part of their JSAg. Others said that they had not been assigned a mandatory activity, but were aware that this would have been a possibility if they had not taken the steps agreed with their adviser. Some customers were not sure whether a course they had attended had been a mandatory activity, as in the case of a customer who had attended a basic skills course who explained, 'she [the adviser] just made the decision, sent me there'.

5.2.5 General views on Stage 3

By March 2010, except in a few offices, Stage 3 teams were reported to be fully staffed so that advisers could cope with customer volumes. Advisers were more confident and were said by managers to be learning to work flexibly with customers. The new services for young people introduced by the YPG were welcomed by a large majority of staff and regarded as having enhanced Stage 3. Among these, the Future Jobs Fund was viewed as particularly successful.

There were concerns about certain aspects of Stage 3, however. Some staff felt there was insufficient guidance for advisers on how to conduct customer interviews, which made it easy for them to develop bad habits:

'It would be nice if there was some sort of framework – criteria that you should be meeting within an interview. Because again, from my experience and from people I started the job with, you very much learn it as you go along from other people, and you can learn bad habits, which people have, and you make up your own sort of how-to guide. There's not enough support.'

(Manager, District 2)

The replacement of the Programme Centre by the Support Contract had received a mixed welcome, with some advisers struggling to cope with the modular format:

'It is slightly more in-depth and complicated, and they [customers] can't go directly to the CV module without doing one of the other modules. So it does take a little bit more planning from the adviser's perspective.'

(Manager, District 3)

Overall, the support now available to customers during Stage 3 – in particular, the additional advisory support, 6MO and new support for young people – was seen to be a significant improvement over the previous JSA regime. Some staff believed that, when there was recognised need, a similar level of support should be available to customers before six months.

Customer views

Customers generally appreciated the more customised service they received at Stage 3 and the greater range of support on offer. In some cases, this positive view was tempered by frustration that they had not received the same level of service earlier in their claim.

Higher-skilled customers were somewhat less enthusiastic than others. They tended to feel that advisers were not well qualified to help them and that the available support was less relevant to them.

Customers particularly welcomed the fact that there were more training opportunities at Stage 3. Some, however, described the range of courses as too basic, and one criticised the fact that one-off funding was provided only for courses linked to concrete job offers.

5.3 Fast-track customers

As explained in Chapter 3, mandatory fast-tracking was taking place in all offices during the February-March 2010 site visits. Voluntary fast-tracking was rare, partly because of a lack of capacity at Stage 3.

Stage 3 advisers and managers believed that voluntary fast-tracking was appropriate if there was a specific reason for it – for instance, if a customer wanted to access a certain type of support which was only available at Stage 3. One adviser gave an example of a successful fast-tracker – a young woman who had been keen to access the Future Jobs Fund:

'She wanted to be able to take advantage of the Backing Young Britain programme. And it has benefited her because she's come in, I saw her maybe once or twice and now she's in full-time employment. But again, she was a focused customer, she knew what she wanted. She knew how she wanted to get there and so it was a benefit to her.'

(Adviser, District 2)

There was disagreement as to whether less motivated customers were suitable candidates for voluntary fast-tracking. Some thought that customers could benefit from the personalised support provided at Stage 3; others felt that such customers were hard to help at any stage.

Only two of the 30 customers interviewed had been fast-tracked: a lone mother with no experience of work, and a single man with a history of benefit cycling. Both were unaware of the structure of JRFND and the fact that they had been fast-tracked, and so were unable to say how they had felt about being fast-tracked. The fact that some other customers expressed frustration at having had to wait six months to access the support available at Stage 3 suggests that they might have considered voluntary fast-tracking, had this option been available to them.

5.4 Summary

The structure of Stage 3 was similar across all fieldwork offices during February-March 2010; only minor variations were observed. Jobcentre Plus advisers were generally confident in their handling of the Initial Stage 3 Review and were regarded by managers to have learned the necessary skills. However, the 40-minute timeslot was seen as insufficient for all of the tasks and information which needed to be covered. Various coping strategies had been adopted: running the Initial Stage 3 Review as a group meeting, delivering some of the information about Stage 3 to customers during Stage 2, and using additional advisory meetings to complete some tasks.

Caseloading was occurring in all offices. Offices varied in the amount of flexibility they allowed advisers to arrange the meetings. Advisers working in offices where they were free to decide the frequency and duration of meetings were most positive about caseloading and found it easier to work within the average three-hour allocation. Customers who had had regular meetings with their advisers during Stage 3 were generally positive about the additional support.

Except in one office, weekly signing was taking place for all customers. There were mixed views among Jobcentre Plus on this measure. Staff generally felt that the usefulness of weekly signing depended on the customer's needs and attitude. Some believed that it was of little benefit to the majority of customers and should be reserved for those who needed additional support or might not be complying with JSA rules. Customers' views tended to be negative. A small minority felt that the weekly signing had been worthwhile for the additional job search. Others saw it as a way for Jobcentre Plus to monitor them rather than as a form of support.

The assignment of mandatory activities by advisers varied greatly, and in some offices the practice was still sporadic. In the early months of JRFND there had been some confusion about the sorts of activities which could be made mandatory; by February-March 2010 this issue appeared to have been resolved. However, advisers often struggled to find suitable activities to engage customers in. Some staff believed that mandatory activities should generally be avoided as it was more effective to agree voluntary activities with customers. Few, if any, of the customers who were interviewed appeared to have been assigned mandatory activities. Several were not sure whether the training which they had attended during Stage 3 had been voluntary or mandatory.

Regarding the general service process, Jobcentre Plus staff felt that Stage 3 was now working well. Most offices had sufficient staff to cope with the volume of customers, advisers were said to be more confident, and the introduction of the YPG was widely welcomed. Overall, the support available during Stage 3 was seen as a significant improvement over the situation under the previous JSA regime. Customers generally welcomed having more customised support and more training opportunities, although some were frustrated that they had not been given the same level of support earlier in their claim.

Mandatory fast-tracking was taking place in all offices, while voluntary fast-tracking was rare. Jobcentre Plus staff believed that voluntary fast-tracking was appropriate if there was a specific reason for it – for instance, if a customer wanted to access a certain type of support which was only available at Stage 3. There was disagreement as to whether less motivated customers were suitable candidates for voluntary fast-tracking.

6 Referral to the Flexible New Deal

Once customers have received Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for 12 months, they are transferred to the Flexible New Deal (FND) which is delivered by an external provider. When the customer reaches this point a pre-provision interview is conducted.

This chapter covers the practices for the referral to the FND as observed in the study offices. It provides insights from the perspectives of Jobcentre Plus staff and customers.

6.1 Procedures and variations

At the end of Stage 3, when the customer approaches 12 months on JSA, Jobcentre Plus advisers conduct a pre-provision interview (also known as a 'handover') to refer the customer on to the FND. The customer information is transferred to the provider via Labour Market System (LMS)/Provider Referral and Payments (PRaP) system and from then onwards the FND provider is responsible for the customer's journey into work. The customer continues to sign fortnightly at Jobcentre Plus.

6.1.1 Pre-provision interviews

The predominant format for the pre-provision interview was an individual meeting with a Jobcentre Plus adviser, typically the same adviser the customer had been seeing throughout Stage 3. Meetings lasted approximately 30 minutes and the communication of a referral was electronically recorded on the LMS. Subsequently, the customer would be contacted by the FND provider to arrange an induction meeting.

Jobcentre Plus staff felt that the interviews were going well. Initially, there were perceived to be teething problems with the electronic referral system (PRaP), which caused backlogs and delays (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion). But by the time of the February-March fieldwork, advisers highlighted that the interviews had bedded in, for example:

'The pre-provision process I think is fine. It's short and it's sweet and it does what it needs to do.'

(Stage 3 Adviser, District 2)

There was little variation across the districts with regards to the content of the pre-provision interview. The data from the staff interviews and observations suggest that commonly, staff covered the following elements in the meetings:

- explanation that the customer would be entering the FND given that they had been claiming JSA for 52 weeks;
- brief information about the FND (job searching with a provider, intensive support, etc.);
- review of personal information;
- review of the Action Plan;
- informing the customer of the mandatory nature of FND activities with the provider;
- reinforce the requirement to sign at the Jobcentre Plus office on a fortnightly basis;
- electronic entry of the referral via the LMS;
- printed documents (letter of confirmation, FND leaflet and provider information, if available).

Four of the study districts had two prime contractors for FND¹⁶, also referred to as ‘choice districts’. For the most part, customers were being assigned to one of the two providers equitably, on a 50:50 basis. Sometimes this was performed through an electronic algorithm case by case while other offices were operating a ‘provider of the day’ system where the referral provider would alternate. It was also possible for advisers to use their discretion when assigning a customer to an FND provider. For instance, if the geographical location made it difficult for the customer to access a provider or if the customer had previously attended a provision with the designated provider, then the adviser might choose to ‘override’ the system.

Offices also practiced variations to the electronic handover which entailed either telephone or face-to-face contact with a provider at the time of a referral. This direct contact with a provider was often referred to as a ‘warm handover’. Most Stage 3 advisers reported that they telephoned the FND provider to supply additional information about a customer in cases where the information was sensitive (e.g., ex-offenders who had committed serious crime) or when they felt extra detail about a customer would assist the provider to supply adequate support. Advisers in one study office were endeavouring to telephone the FND provider during a pre-provision interview so that the customer had the opportunity to speak with one of the FND staff.

In one choice district, the referral process differed according to the FND provider, one of which operated referrals electronically through the LMS and PRaP, while advisers were in frequent contact with the other provider. A description of this scenario is presented in Box 6.1.

Box 6.1: Choice District – different referral processes

In one choice district, the two providers followed different referral models. Provider 1 sub-contracted all services to a network of local providers. Referrals of customers to a local provider were routed via a central contact centre which would then arrange an initial FND interview with the customer. In contrast, Provider 2 operated a warm handover where the adviser would ring up the provider in the presence of the customer and arrange an induction meeting. At Jobcentre Plus, the allocation to a provider was done electronically and the Jobcentre Plus adviser did not know at the start of the pre-provision interview which provider the customer would be referred to.

Jobcentre Plus advisers felt that the handover process via telephone was much more effective than the purely electronic exchange, for example:

‘Personally, I find it easier to refer them to [Provider 2] because you are phoning up and actually speaking to a person, with [Provider 1] it’s just the electronic transfer...so there’s not that element of control. We’re just telling [customers] they’ll get a letter in the post.’

(Stage 3 Adviser, District 1)

One of the managers pointed out that due to the direct contact with Provider 2, the referral process was running smoothly and there had been no issues. In contrast, referrals to Provider 1 were seen as impersonal.

‘With [Provider 1] it’s cold, it’s totally the opposite. There’s no telephone contact with anybody, you just refer on the PRaP system. So because they’ve got all these sub-contractors underneath them, you don’t know where that customer’s going to go, so you’re referring blindly really.’

(Manager, District 1)

¹⁶ Prime contractors hold the contract with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and are responsible for managing the supply of FND services.

Another variation on the handover to FND was a tripartite meeting between the customer, adviser and FND provider. This was described as the ‘ideal’ warm handover by some management staff. This model was used in one of the study offices and it was reported that one other district had abandoned the tripartite approach because it was found to be too resource intensive. Box 6.2 describes the pre-provision interview conducted by one study office as a group session on the provider premises.

Box 6.2: Tripartite referral

One inner city Jobcentre Plus office instated a tripartite pre-provision interview as a means of addressing high fail-to-attend rates at initial FND interviews and to combat negative feedback about the FND provision. These were arranged as group sessions on the provider premises¹⁷. The meeting was intended to ease the customers’ transition into FND by familiarising them with the provider and premises. This arrangement was possible because the provider was located within close proximity of the Jobcentre Plus office.

In order to manage the approach, the Jobcentre Plus office dedicated two Stage 3 advisers and one Administrative Support Officer to liaise directly with the provider. The content of the group session did not differ substantially from an individual pre-provision interview with the exception that a representative from the provider would give a brief introduction about their services and the support available. The FND advisers commented favourably on this approach, although they described it as more resource intensive. It allowed them to follow up specific cases directly with the provider and thus streamlined operations for both entities. The initial outcome of these group sessions was described favourably by one Stage 3 adviser:

‘They [provider] say that people are coming in, they’re aware of what’s going to happen, they’re aware of the rules and responsibilities, they’re aware of what is available and what isn’t available to them. They’re all singing from the same hymn sheet if you like, and also consultants [provider advisers] are getting better feedback as well from customers, and they are finding it easier as well as having the group conducted up there, they can come in and they can have a chat, so again the customers are more aware before they actually start the... journey.’

(Stage 3 Adviser, District 3)

6.2 Jobcentre Plus staff views and experiences

There was a general view among staff that a warm handover was the preferred referral approach because it entailed a more streamlined and joined-up transition for the customer.¹⁸ Direct contact with the FND provider (via telephone or in person) supplied immediate confirmation that a referral had been communicated; details on the customers’ case could be elaborated upon; and, sometimes, the customer was given the opportunity to speak with FND staff as a means of introduction. Regular contact with the FND provider was also invaluable for building a professional relationship and thus to establish greater rapport between the two entities. A warm handover provided continuity for the

¹⁷ For some customers, for instance those with sensitive case histories or those who were uncomfortable in a group setting, an individual pre-provision interview was still offered, but it would also be held on the provider premises.

¹⁸ These positive views on the ‘warm handover’ referral are corroborated in recent research on the DWP Commissioning Strategy (Armstrong *et al.*, 2010, Section 10.4).

customer and established a point of contact while the transition to the provider was in progress, as explained by one office level manager:

'I think it would be nice for [customers] to have that initial contact, because otherwise you're kind of out in a bit of limbo, because you're not really wanted by us [Jobcentre Plus] anymore, you're not getting that adviser contact which you may have been used to in quite an intensive way. So I think it would be useful because then they've got a point of contact.'

(Manager, District 2)

However, it was acknowledged that contact with the customer's assigned FND provider was not practical given customer volumes and it was considered time resource intense. It was also not possible in districts where there were multiple suppliers and the ultimate supplier of FND services was not known to Jobcentre Plus staff.

Jobcentre Plus staff highlighted a general lack of knowledge about FND provider(s) and their services, particularly in districts where multiple providers delivered the service or where local provision was sub-contracted. In offices where there was little direct communication with the FND provider, advisers frequently pointed out that they felt they lacked knowledge about the providers and their services. This seemed to be partially attributed to the 'black box approach' of the FND design which gave providers the freedom to manage and design the customer journey. One manager expressed frustration in not knowing details about the FND process:

'...just some greater knowledge for the people doing the pre-provision interviews...just so that we actually knew what we were sending them to rather than some big black hole which it seems to be at times.'

(Manager, District 1)

It was also pointed out that printed materials on FND provider services were vague and contained little detailed information about services and no information about the local provision.

In at least three offices advisers were given the opportunity to visit the provider's premises or providers gave presentations at Jobcentre Plus about their services. However, this practice depended on the proximity of the provider and the delivery model of the provider – for instance, visits were less likely to take place where services had been sub-contracted to a number of local providers. In cases where advisers had toured premises or attended presentations they felt more confident to promote FND and its features.

'So a lot of them will say, "Ah, I don't know what they're trying to do". I say, "Well, they're trying to help you. They want to see what skills you've got to match you to what training they can send you on to." So I mean I was quite impressed with what I saw on the day when I went on the visit there.'

(Stage 3 Adviser, District 2)

While advisers were generally positive towards the opportunities offered through the FND providers to customers, some identified a loss of control over the referral process, which often seemed to be associated with the 'black box' approach and the lack of knowledge about FND provision. One commonly cited issue, which related to the lack of local contact with providers, was the adviser's inability to follow up on a specific referral to ensure a quick and seamless transition to the provider services. Other advisers, particularly in smaller offices who tended to have built up a strong rapport with customers, said they had difficulty letting go of customers, for instance:

'In previous workings with providers with the old New Deal, we had very strong links at the local

level, and in a small community like this, advisers would be able to discuss individual cases with the provider because they knew the ins and outs...It's very hard, I think, to just let go, refer through and accept that the provider is going to take them forward over that next stage.'

(Manager, District 3)

This suggests that advisers often saw themselves as gatekeepers, responsible and protective of their customers. This seemed triggered by a combination of factors including a lack of knowledge about local providers and the services they offered and the lack of direct contact with providers.

Advisers were critical of the Jobcentre Plus leaflet outlining FND provision, although it was recognised that it could only provide very generic information. They felt that the positive aspects of FND should be emphasised more in the presentation. Many commented that the leaflet was too focused on conditionality and the threat of sanctions to benefits. It was felt that the leaflet contained too little practical information about the process, the transition to the provider and the support available at FND. One adviser commented:

'...then we've got the FND leaflet, and that doesn't really explain a lot about FND. It just says about if they don't attend that they're going to have DM [District Manager] action taken on them. ...I don't like it either, it doesn't make FND sound great. It's just telling them off before they've even started.'

(Adviser, District 4)

6.3 Customer views and experiences of the referral process

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 21 customers who had taken part in pre-provision interviews which occurred between October and December 2009.

Customers with sufficient recall of the interview were generally ambivalent about the handover process. Most recalled meeting an adviser at the jobcentre which often coincided with their signing day, although one customer said he had received the FND information over the phone. Customers described the pre-provision interview as a meeting where advisers filled in forms on the screen and most recalled being told that the provider would contact them within a certain time frame to arrange an induction interview. Very few of the interviewed customers said the adviser rang the provider up in front of them and arranged the first interview confirming the restricted practice of warm handovers.

The amount of information received about FND varied greatly. Some customers reported they had received detailed information about the referral process and the purpose of FND, while the support the provider could offer was presented in leaflet form. Many were vague and summed the services up by saying that the provider was going to *'help them get back into work'*. Others indicated that they had the impression their adviser did not know what they were referring them to. One customer, an experienced catering manager in his early 50s, commented:

'The thing is the jobcentre don't know what [provider] are doing 'cos [provider] are just bringing in the new contract. So I asked the jobcentre what I will be doing at [provider] and they said, 'We haven't got a clue''.'

(Customer, District 1)

Customers who supplied feedback after being observed in a pre-provision interview, were generally neutral about being transferred to an external provider. This frequently coincided with an experience where the adviser gave limited or vague information about the FND provider and their services.

Some customers, felt disappointed to be moved onto a new service because they felt comfortable with their adviser and were satisfied with the support they received. A young male customer who had a steady employment history in the building trade before being made redundant, expressed unease in finding out Jobcentre Plus would no longer be supporting him and were unable to provide detail about the services of the new provider:

'I was quite disappointed because she was quite good with me, like a really nice agent. And then she goes, "Okay, we're going to send you to [a provider] because there's nothing else we can do for you" and I just felt like I'd been dumped.'

(Customer 3, District 4)

Many of the interviewed customers said they had received an information leaflet from Jobcentre Plus, although some, particularly in smaller offices, said they had not because the office ran out or had not received them yet. Most customers had no opinion about the leaflet because they had not read it or they could not recall the detail. Others perceived it to be rather more threatening than informative.

Overall, customers moved on to the new services with low expectations of what the new provider would be able to do for them, partially due to the vagueness of information supplied by their Stage 3 adviser and partially due to disillusionment with their employment situation. This contrasted with the experience of customers observed during the group tripartite meeting on the provider premises. These customers expressed expectations of what the provider would be able to do for them and had a good grasp of what lay ahead.

6.4 Summary

By March 2010, Jobcentre Plus staff generally reported that the referral process to FND providers had bedded in. The pre-provision interview was typically a 30-minute meeting between a customer and a Stage 3 adviser that was conducted in a Jobcentre Plus office. The referral was logged electronically via LMS. The content of pre-provision interviews was fairly standardised and focused on the collation and verification of customer data, updating of the Action Plan and basic information on conditionality and FND provision.

Offices also practiced variations to the electronic handover which entailed either telephone or face-to-face provider contact at the time of a referral. This direct contact was often referred to as a 'warm handover'. Most Stage 3 advisers reported that they telephoned the FND provider to supply additional information about sensitive cases or when they felt extra detail about a customer would assist the provider to supply adequate support. But the nature of the handover process also depended on the organisation of FND suppliers in a district; when FND was delivered through a large service network it was not known at the time of referral which supplier the customer would transfer to. In these cases, the referring adviser felt at a disadvantage because they could not supply any detail on the nature of provision. In contrast, partly due to the close geographical proximity of the provider, one office trialled a group pre-provision interview on provider premises. This tripartite meeting was well received by all parties involved. For the most part, advisers agreed that a warm handover created a more seamless transition for the customer moving on to FND.

Jobcentre Plus staff generally felt uneasy about their lack of knowledge on the FND process and local FND services. It was felt this could be addressed by establishing regular communication links between office staff and local FND providers.

Customers in the study had participated in pre-provision interviews during autumn 2010. Those who had received detailed information about FND provider services, sometimes through direct contact with the provider, commented more favourably about FND. However, customers typically reported they had received little or vague information about what providers can offer and commented they would have appreciated more details to help them anticipate the next stage of the process. Those who had developed strong ties with their Stage 3 adviser were more likely to feel disappointed about the transition to FND.

7 Flexible New Deal – Jobcentre Plus and customer perspectives

When individuals have claimed Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) for 12 months they enter the Flexible New Deal (FND) (Stage 4 of the Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND)). This chapter sets out Jobcentre Plus staff perspectives and knowledge of the services and describes experiences of customers during the early months of FND.

7.1 Role of Jobcentre Plus in FND

Once customers had moved to contracted FND provision, contact with Jobcentre Plus offices consisted of fortnightly meetings where they would ‘sign on’ and confirm their eligibility for benefit. In most of the study offices this was carried out by the same Fortnightly Jobseeker Review (FJR) team as per Stages 1 to 3 of the JRFND. In one office the task was delegated to Diary Administrative Support Officers (DASOs) as a temporary measure due staff constraints among the FJR team. In the office where the FND provider was in close proximity (refer to Chapter 6), Jobcentre Plus advisers signed customers on FND provider premises.

Contact time with FND customers was short, approximately four minutes and sometimes less (this was sometimes referred to as a ‘speed signing’). The primary aim of the fortnightly signing was to check for any ‘change in circumstance’ and to ensure that customers were continuing to seek employment as per their Jobseeker’s Agreement (JSAg), as one FJR Officer explained:

‘I’ll see them when they sign on once a fortnight but that’s all I really have to do with them.’

(FJR Officer, District 6)

Some staff indicated that during the short time they had with customers they asked how they were getting on with the provider but staff knew it was not their role to conduct a job search:

‘The rule of thumb that I’ve been told is once they’re on FND you sign them on and they’re not given any further assistance unless they’ve got general queries and it’s all for the provider to take care of.’

(FJR Officer, District 2)

On the whole, adviser contact with customers ceased after the pre-provision interview. Any subsequent contact was initiated by the customer. This occurred more frequently during the early months of FND implementation when customers experienced delays. While waiting to start with the provider, it was not uncommon for customers to request extra help such as financial support for job interview expenses or a Better Off Calculation (BOC). Stage 3 advisers indicated they were happy to lend assistance and noted that the extra time with FND customers was manageable.

Both FJR staff and advisers expressed some regret at the reduced level of involvement they had with FND customers and felt that a more interactive role with these customers could be helpful. As explained by one staff member, a history with the customer could contribute to continuity of support:

‘It’s a bit of a shame really that we can’t do anything else with them...we’ve got quite a good rapport with our clients to be honest because we’re seeing the same ones each fortnight...It would be nice to know how they’re getting on...’

(FJR Officer, District 1)

Apart from this emotive aspect of continued contact, staff indicated some practical reasons for engaging more with customers. There was concern among FJR staff that they no longer knew how ‘actively’ a customer was seeking work once they moved onto FND provision. Staff overall were concerned about the lack of contact with customers, saying that there was not enough time during fortnightly signing-on appointments to get a sense of how customers were progressing in FND. Advisers and managers expressed feeling powerless due to the lack of information about what was happening with customers and were frustrated because they felt that Jobcentre Plus was no longer in control of the process. As noted by one office manager:

‘It’s been quite frustrating from our point...Customers now can come into us once a fortnight to sign on and we’ve no idea what they’re doing for the rest of the fortnight...We’ve no idea whether they are attending as often as they should, we don’t know if they go, if they don’t go, whether the provider will come down on them for that or whether the provider might be more flexible or generous than maybe we would be.’

(Manager, District 4)

7.1.1 Communications and awareness of FND provision

Formal communications between FND providers and Jobcentre Plus were taking place at the district level. Within Jobcentre Plus offices, direct contact with FND providers was more likely to occur with managers and advisers than the FJR staff, despite their role in the FND signing process. Most front-line Jobcentre Plus staff, however, had no direct communication with FND providers and they were not receiving collated feedback on customer progress. This lack of communication was highlighted as an issue by some staff.

The nature of communications also varied by providers. The FND delivery model was a key factor behind the extent and nature of communications that jobcentre staff were able to develop with both prime and sub-contracted providers. It was reported that some Jobcentre Plus offices received weekly feedback through the Contract Manager but this was not consistent as some providers were more proactive about providing feedback on their services and customer progress than others. In a few districts, prime provider staff had visited Jobcentre Plus offices to discuss their services. In addition, joint meetings between provider and Jobcentre Plus office advisers were being organised by the Third Party Provision Team to strengthen communications, for example:

‘...they’re able to sit down and iron out any issues and concerns. They are talking about customers and about the processing side...what action are they supposed to take. So clarifying those [issues].’

(Manager, District 5)

It was suggested that frequent meetings with providers would be useful during the initial referral and transition stages and also for quickly addressing emerging issues and customer concerns. This would be useful in allaying staff concerns in relation to the adequacy of provision in meeting customer needs during FND:

‘I’d like the advisers to be talking directly to the providers and making the arrangements.’

(Stage 3 Adviser, District 4)

At the office level, staff knowledge of provider services was patchy and limited. Most Jobcentre Plus office staff only knew about the location of providers, although in some cases they had working relationships with providers who had previously supplied other services to Jobcentre Plus. Staff were generally aware that a customer could potentially stay with a provider for up to 12 months during which time they would receive individualised support and would engage in mandatory work-related activities. Beyond that they knew very little about the details of FND services:

‘...it’s up to them what they do with that customer. It’s very much a black box approach, so you don’t know what they’re going to do with them.’

(Manager, District 1)

As already noted in Chapter 6, this lack of knowledge was considered to be a disadvantage as front-line staff were unable to provide any detailed information to customers at the handover stage and signing staff were not familiar with services and processes referred to by the FND customers they saw. Possibly a result of the ‘black box’ approach, staff in one office said that the reality of the type of provision did not match the information that staff had relayed to customers:

‘For a lot of customers I think [compared to] how we sort of sold [the provision]...what it’s turned out to be is a lot less in terms of what they’re actually doing and what they’re actually provided with.’

(Manager, District 4)

The views that staff had formed were mostly ‘second hand’ based on what customers had told them. Most of the information that FJR Officers had about provider services came directly from the customers they saw, and this was filtered to the other staff within the office. Generally, those office staff who were in regular contact with FND providers (through meetings or telephone contact) were more confident with and possessed greater understanding of the local provision that the customers were experiencing.

7.2 Customer views and experiences

Customer feedback on FND experiences was gathered from Jobcentre Plus staff and through depth interviews with 17 customers who had started with an FND provider. It should be noted that these experiences occurred early in the implementation of FND when services may not have been fully established.

Managers responsible for provider contracts reported that while performance monitoring systems were in place, it was still quite early in the delivery of FND for these systems to be fully functional. In most districts there had been a concerted effort to collate customer feedback. Third Party Provision teams were active with ‘customer experience monitoring’ visits to prime and sub-contracted providers and customer satisfaction was being gauged via telephone feedback. Managers at district level indicated that these types of monitoring had yet to be implemented in all districts.

At an informal level, some FJR Officers were recording customer feedback on their files (on the Labour Market System (LMS)). Others, if they thought that the feedback required more attention, were taking the initiative to discuss the issue with advisers. On a more formal level, in one office which had received mainly negative feedback, an adviser had been assigned to collate and report the feedback to the Third Party Provision Manager (TPPM) Team.

Although the contact time that customers had with Jobcentre Plus staff during FND was limited, across all study offices, staff received feedback on customer experiences, mostly during the fortnightly signings. Generally, the feedback was sporadic as some customers were more open to speaking to staff. Some of the comments related to possible differences between providers and the variability in the types of services and the level of personalised support that providers offered. It was also evident that some FND providers were ‘stronger’ or more positively perceived, in terms of customer care, than others. Previous experience with providers also coloured impressions. For example, in one district where there were two prime FND providers, one was favoured over the other partly due to previous performance:

‘Both [FND providers] have different reputations, shall we say? We’ve had different experiences with both companies in the past.’

(Stage 3 Adviser, District 5)

In all study districts, Jobcentre Plus staff reported both positive and negative reactions from customers. Some staff thought that negative comments might be attributed to ‘teething problems’ providers were encountering during implementation or due to a lack of understanding of the provider delivery model on the part of both Jobcentre Plus staff and customers. For example:

‘We are getting good and bad feedback. Some people are liking the process, some people are hating it. Some people, because of its compulsion, absolutely detest it.’

(FJR Officer, District 2)

‘I have heard good comments about the [provider] as well, but the majority of it’s been quite negative.’

(FJR Officer, District, 6)

Another staff member emphasised that feedback often only came through if customers were dissatisfied with the support they had been receiving and the FJR meeting presented an opportunity to air their grievances with the system:

‘...to be completely fair I will generally only hear about the negative aspects of it because it’s when people do want to get things off their chest and do think we’re the natural outlet for that, so it may be going great but it’s just that you tend not to hear the positive side of it.’

(Stage 3 Adviser, District 2)

Interviews with customers

On the whole customers did not seem to have a clear understanding of the process they were going through. Some were not aware why the change from Jobcentre Plus support to provider had taken place and others expressed disappointment at the change because they had found their Jobcentre Plus adviser to be supportive and were happy with the services they were receiving through Jobcentre Plus. Some indicated that they did not know how long they would be staying with their assigned provider. For example, one male customer with a history of temporary jobs stated:

‘...you’re only there for, like, six weeks, after six weeks then you’re...I think you are back on your own...back to the jobcentre, signed on there.’

(Customer, District 2)

Customers appeared to know about the conditionality attached to participation in FND activities and understood that non-compliance or failure to attend mandatory activities could result in benefit sanctions. Generally, concern about missed appointments and mandatory participation in activities related specifically to being sanctioned:

'I have to go there [provider premises]...if I don't go there I wouldn't get my money, yeah that's how it works.'

(Customer, District 4)

'...just have to grin and bear it...if you don't like it, that's tough...you do anything just to keep your money basically, do anything without them getting your money sanctioned.'

(Customer, District 3)

Given the freedom providers had in the design of FND, it is understandable that customers experienced different services and processes. Within specific parameters, the package of work-oriented activities was expected to be personalised and based on individual customer needs. FND activities mentioned by customers included the development of an Action Plan, computer-based job searches, CV development, training in interview techniques, training in softer skills related to work (for example, getting to work on time) and attending job interviews. Support from advice staff at the provider appeared to be intensive and, in some instances, very hands-on. Support tended to be delivered face-to-face and on a regular basis, it also included a detailed initial interview and being accompanied to a job interview. The frequency of contact and attendance at activities varied across the different customer experiences, reflecting the flexible nature of the model.

For the most part, customers were positive about the support available through their FND provider and there was broad consensus on the helpfulness of providers. Many compared their experience favourably to the help from Jobcentre Plus advisers, although some noted little difference in the level of support received. Many customers perceived their provider to be more proactive and delivered quicker results in terms of arranging job interviews. Positive views of provider support also related to the more emotive aspects and 'softer' skills. For instance, one customer noted that the provider provision was helpful in building their confidence:

'...they are, to be honest with you, quite helpful because they're always, like, pushing you towards finding more jobs and basically building your weaknesses up to help you...'

(Customer, District 4)

Customer assessments of the support also depended on individual preferences and personalities. In one instance, the more intense FND advisory support was viewed highly:

'I think it's just the fact that they're there for you as well because that's...that they're behind you, you just don't feel as if you're on your own.'

(Customer, District 6)

Other customers viewed the level of intervention with more annoyance than appreciation. For example, one individual who had entered work found that their FND adviser would ring up every morning to ensure that they were awake and preparing to go to work. This kind of hands-on support was viewed as interference and was resented by the person.

On the other hand, a number of customers in the sample commented on feeling 'less pressured' by the FND provider. This could be because these customers perceived Jobcentre Plus support to be more intense and structured in contrast to the FND activities. As an illustration, one customer preferred the 'step by step' approach to work preparation that was followed by their provider:

'I think because I'm more relaxed with it, you know, it's not so much pressure as it is at the jobcentre...Because they're not pushing you out straight away.'

(Customer, District 3)

One common area of concern highlighted by customers related to timetabling conflicts with regard to attending provider meetings. Two customers who were enrolled on training courses when they started FND provision found the provider to be inflexible. Instead of arranging meetings to accommodate the courses, customers had been forced to give up their training because provider appointments conflicted with course attendance. The customers felt disappointed as they thought that the course was a constructive activity that would have improved their employability and were perplexed that the provider expected them to stay on provider premises conducting job searches instead of completing the training.

Aside from participating in the activities with the FND provider, customers were required to sign on at their Jobcentre Plus office in order to continue receiving benefits. Most of the customers found this to be tedious and resented the extra travel time, particularly if it conflicted with an appointment they had at the provider. One customer who had to rush between the Jobcentre Plus office and provider premises on their signing-on day related:

'...to go down and come back up, go down and come back up...is a bit of a nuisance.'

(Customer, District 6)

7.3 Summary

The data from Jobcentre Plus staff and customer experiences reflect the early months of FND delivery. The role of Jobcentre Plus office staff in FND was acknowledged to take the form of a fortnightly review meeting conducted by FJR staff. Stage 3 advisers had minimal contact with FND customers and this tended to only occur when a customer proactively contacted them for help while waiting for their time on FND to start. Some of these staff expressed a sense of loss at the change, accompanied with feelings of powerlessness and frustration at the lack of information about FND provision.

Communications with FND providers generally took place at district level only. Jobcentre Plus office staff expressed concern about their lack of contact with the local providers. Strategies to enhance FND delivery were in place within one district where monthly meetings between Jobcentre Plus advisory staff and the provider were being held. Some districts were beginning a formal customer experience monitoring process to gather customer feedback. At the office level, customer feedback was collected informally relayed mainly to FJR staff who received information on customer experiences during the fortnightly reviews.

On the whole, staff felt that customers were finding FND provider services useful. Negative feedback mainly related to delays to FND starts which were attributed to initial 'teething problems'. For customers, the nature and duration of activities varied, reflecting the flexible nature of the FND approach. They were aware of the conditionality attached to participation and understood the consequences of non-compliance. Customers either found provider services to be no different in comparison to Jobcentre Plus services or were more positive about the FND provider whom they found to be more proactive and helpful. All districts considered, it was evident that some FND providers were creating a more positive participant experience than others.

8 Flexible New Deal – Prime providers

This chapter reports findings from the early implementation experiences of Flexible New Deal (FND) prime providers across the six study districts. It describes provider delivery models, gives an overview of FND services, considers referral processes (both referrals from Jobcentre Plus to providers and from providers to sub-contractors) and ends by examining relationships between FND providers, Jobcentre Plus and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Face-to-face interviews were undertaken with ten prime provider managers approximately five months after FND went live. The majority of FND prime providers were experienced in the delivery of a wide range of welfare-to-work programmes in the UK. Two were new to welfare-to-work in the British market. Eight of the prime providers were operating in ‘choice’ districts while two were single providers of FND services in the district.

8.1 Delivery models

There was a range of delivery models across the sample of FND prime providers.¹⁹ Table 8.1 presents a typology of the service contracting arrangements among prime and sub-contracted FND providers in the study. At one end of the spectrum was an **all in-house service delivery model** in which the prime provider delivered FND services in-house with some use of delivery partners for specialist support services. At the other end of the spectrum was the **all out-of-house delivery model** in which the prime provider outsourced all participant services and who only had staff to manage the sub-contractors. This provider operated in two of the study districts, managing 12 and 15 sub-contractors respectively. Within this approach, a stepped model of service delivery operated whereby the participant moved to a new provider for each element of the service. This sub-contracting system, in a single provider area, was designed to ensure that no FND sub-contractor had a monopoly of a geographical area, as explained by the provider manager:

‘We do that because we actually believe that offers customer choice to some extent, but also it enables us to create a sense of competition.’

(Prime provider manager)

The majority of FND prime providers followed hybrid models of shared delivery. One approach was the **end-to-end, shared delivery model**. Here, several sub-contractors shared delivery of full FND provision to ensure geographical coverage of services across the district. Within this design, the overall number of sub-contractors varied from two to 20. This approach was typical of providers operating across all types of geographical area (rural, urban and urban/rural) and there was often more than one sub-contractor within the district.

The fourth delivery arrangement was the **partial shared model**. Here providers placed particular emphasis on their strengths whilst acknowledging services that could better be provided by sub-contractors or specialist partners. They typically focused on one or more elements of service delivery and sub-contracted other elements to sub-contractors, as one provider explained:

¹⁹ A comprehensive description of delivery models is available in a report on early implementation findings on the DWP Commissioning Strategy (Armstrong *et al.*, 2010). The types and range of delivery models will be further explored as part of DWP research with providers in late 2010.

‘...it’s the job brokering side that we’re the professional in. So we tend to use sub-contractors for anything other than job-related issues and we’ll bring people in for those.’

(Prime provider manager)

All prime providers made some use of sub-contractors and/or service partners for the delivery of specialist provision, with variation in the delivery approach and mix of services. Examples of specialist provider target groups included the autistic, visually impaired, drug users, people with mental health conditions and lone parents. Thus, configurations of FND delivery agents could be both thematic in their use of specialist providers to support participant needs as well as geographical to support area coverage.

Table 8.1 Typology of FND delivery models

Delivery model	Illustration
All in-house	A prime provider that delivers a range of in-house services supporting, for example, job entry, motivational and employability courses.
Partial shared	A prime provider that delivers one or more elements of FND provision and sub-contracts other elements to one or more sub-contractors.
End-to-end shared	A prime provider that delivers the core elements of FND provision from initial referral through to job entry. The prime provider also sub-contracts FND provision to local, end-to-end providers who mirror a common service design.
All out-of-house	A prime provider that sub-contracts all of its FND provision. The role of the prime provider is to manage the service delivery process, overseeing contract compliance among numerous sub-contractors.

8.1.1 Performance arrangements in the service network

Prime providers were responsible for managing the FND participant journey and this involved different performance agreements among prime providers, their sub-contractors and service partners. In cases where the FND was mainly delivered by the prime contractor, there were informal arrangements in place to oversee relationships with partners delivering specialist services. Providers with a more hybrid delivery model, using a mix of formal sub-contractors and partner agreements, had staff in place to manage the supply chain, described in one case as *‘partnership managers’*. This particular provider had placed much emphasis on communications and had introduced performance indicators to monitor FND services across the supply chain. Providers had also introduced mandatory elements to sub-contracts, for example stipulating the frequency with which participants should be seen. One provider described itself as having a ‘franchise model’ expecting the same approach to delivery and service content among all sub-contractors. This prime provider was amongst those addressing its communications with sub-contractors. It had introduced FND sub-contractor forums, although these were not held frequently due to the large number of sub-contractors. It was also conducting site visits. The prime provider explained the need to respond to varying sub-contractor support needs:

‘...as with anything where you’ve got so many organisations trying to get used to a particular model, there are some that are dealing with it better than others and there are ones that need more support with double timing and those that are not as employability focused.’

(Prime provider manager)

Towards its contract management role, one prime provider that sub-contracted all FND provision had a team of Contract Managers responsible for overseeing the performance of the supply chain. Sub-contractors were encouraged to book a certain number of meetings with jobseekers each day building in an assumption of a certain number of no shows. They were also expected to maintain a preferred degree of regular participant contact, as designated by the prime provider. In addition, Quality Assurance Managers ensured contract compliance and monitored services gaps, discrepancies and failures.

At the time of the fieldwork, all prime providers reported they were working below full capacity.

8.2 FND services and variations

The policy model for the delivery of FND anticipated a black box approach whereby providers took responsibility for the design and management of FND services. All prime providers emphasised their work focus in assisting FND participants. Delivery approaches reflected that some participants may need more time and a greater intensity of support in order to move into employment.

There were two broad approaches for the design of services. Some providers followed a stepped approach whereby all participants receive a core service but additional support was available for participants with greater needs. It was typical for prime providers to use sub-contractors to deliver particular steps of provision to participants with a range of characteristics, for example, lone parents, the over 50s and long-term unemployed. The second approach to delivery that was used by providers was to classify participants at the outset, according to their distance from the labour market, range of barriers and support needs, and then deliver different provision to the different groups.

Despite different frameworks, overall, prime providers were delivering, or overseeing, a very similar range of services which included the following core features:

- use of diagnostic assessments of participant needs and Action Plans;
- employability courses;
- motivational courses;
- work-related activity;
- a range of specialist service provision;
- in work support.

Providers indicated that they drew on their prior experience of work welfare to develop a menu of services. Two providers explicitly noted that their courses had been piloted on other programmes. Nevertheless, prime providers were on a learning curve as they responded to the needs of the range of participants being referred to them.

8.2.1 Prime provider in-house provision

Prime provider, in-house FND services were wide ranging, for example, basic skills courses and motivational and employability courses. They also drew on their specialist provider partnership base, also described as '*organisations with strong reputations*', to bolster the breadth and depth of services. For those prime providers who offered some services in-house, it was common for them to administer the initial assessments, arrange adviser support and then deliver one or two aspects of FND. One provider solely delivered in-work support and was keen to do more work with employers

to develop sustainable employment. Another had tutors delivering employability sessions but was also working with employers to design routeway courses that met employer skills needs in order to enhance participant job outcomes.

All prime providers emphasised the importance of identifying participant barriers to work. Early diagnostic tests to identify participant needs were common, typically administered by prime provider front-line staff (only one provider had completely devolved this activity to its sub-contractors).

Diagnostic tests initially fed into Action Plans and these were updated throughout the provision. The work-focused approach to service delivery imbued the Action Plan process. Providers conveyed that Action Plans were evolving tools. For example, one noted that Action Plans were updated when participants failed to secure work following a job interview. Another described how consultants working with participants adjusted Action Plans over time, following discovery of additional participant barriers that needed to be addressed. While the diagnostic tests and Action Plans contributed to the development of a personalised service, the initial assessments also helped providers to segment participants into particular pathways of provision, linked to their background and support needs.

One provider that delivered the end-to-end service in-house asserted that that their approach facilitated a rapid response to individual participant barriers:

'I would say that within FND every individual is seen as an individual and therefore, because of the whole range of services and facilities we have available in our own units, whatever a person's needs are, we normally have something we can immediately address the barrier with.'

(Prime provider manager)

It was typical for those prime providers working with stepped models of service delivery to provide more intensive support to participants in need of greater help as they progressed through provision. However, providers did not necessarily reserve more intensive help for later in the participant journey of those with greater barriers. For example, one provider who delivered the FND process in-house, sometimes gave more job-ready participants access to a wide range of services and greater intensity of support from the outset. Similarly, one provider, who initially had a high proportion of white collar workers, had channelled them to job searches and employer introductions at an early stage.

One perceived advantage of stepped approaches to FND was that they provided several opportunities to identify and engage with participant barriers. For example, one such provider had a three-step work-focused delivery process which provided ongoing needs assessments along the way:

'...if they don't succeed in getting a job at [an early support stage] they further progress onto a Step Three provider for the final 20 weeks of the 52-week period where there's much more intensive activity and the use of what we call our specialist support providers. So if someone's got challenges relating to mental health, alcoholism, housing problems, debt, they can be picked up at that stage if they haven't been picked up properly earlier in the process.'

(Prime provider manager)

Front-line staff roles

While some providers used the terminology 'consultants' and 'advisers', several prime providers had front-line staff who were described as 'coaches'. For example, one provider had 'coaches' whose role was to meet weekly with participants, assess and nurture skills in order to expedite job entry.

Another provider had job coaches with specialist knowledge, for example, of working with disabled people or local childcare. There were also signs that front-line staff roles were evolving in response to emerging participant needs. For example, one provider had employed enterprise coaches for white collar and professional participants who were interested in pursuing self-employment.

Providers generally emphasised that the frequency of participant contact was determined by need. Again, providers were on a learning curve. One provider described how they had moved from a participant-led approach to a more structured approach with regularly scheduled meetings. In this endeavour, one provider had introduced a contract with the participant to help ensure that their engagement with provision was Action Plan-led. It also acknowledged self-sufficiency and anticipated that a participant who had the capability and internet facilities would be contacted less often.

Mandatory work-related activity and work outcomes

All prime providers were required to deliver four weeks of mandatory work-related activity, engaging participants for 30 hours per week. Typically, providers used the initial meeting with participants to run through the FND process, distinguishing the mandatory and voluntary elements. For example, one provider used a visual ‘road map’ to support this process. Another described its participant information pack which included a DVD spelling out the participant journey.

At the time of the fieldwork, not all providers had implemented their work-related activity programmes. Among those who did, there were variations in the point in time when the activities would occur during the first 12 months of FND. For example, with one provider, if participants had not entered work by month three, they would enter a four-week work placement. A second provider set the mandatory activity after 36 weeks. Another provider emphasised that there was value in work placements taking place as early as possible:

‘...we see it as quite a crucial component part of actually helping people move towards the labour market and also give potential employers an opportunity to meet and understand what a customer can bring to their organisation.’

(Prime provider manager)

There were challenges in providing work placements. A provider noted the need to secure different types of placements for the diverse range of participants:

‘18-24 year olds, they might be looking for their first job, the type of work placement for them will vary greatly to a work placement for someone who might be 30 plus and who’s already worked in the last 10 years.’

(Prime provider manager)

One provider was sourcing work placement opportunities in a variety of ways, including participants searching for their own work placements and account managers, job coaches and sub-contractors searching on their behalf. Another provider was concerned that the employer market was being ‘saturated with welfare-to-work providers looking for placements’. To address a shortfall of work placement opportunities, this provider was considering the possibility of designing a range of four-week programmes that simulated work-related activity, for example, how to run a small business.

The identification of job vacancies was a key priority for providers. To this end it was felt that a partnership approach was essential, working together with employers and sub-contractors. One prime provider who operated with a network of end-to-end sub-contractors explained:

‘...what employers don’t want to be doing is be turned off by too many people knocking on the door, and I think that the way forward is very much how you have partnership vacancies, how you have whole FND area-wide vacancies and how you can all fish in that pond without cheesing off the employer.’

(Prime provider manager)

Several prime providers had incorporated in-work support into their FND delivery, although this was still under development. Those that appeared to have progressed this element of provision deployed support strategies like maintaining contact with participants in work, a telephone help-line, participant mentoring, counselling, financial, legal and benefits advice, and maintaining links with employers. They had also provided a participant help-line and benefits adviser. Again, approaches were evolving as providers were taking process and staff support measures to proactively pre-empt job exits.

8.2.2 Meeting specialist needs

Sub-contractor and partner services were described as reflecting the lifestyle issues and complex needs of participants across FND districts. Prime providers emphasised that sub-contractors and partners were also taking a tailored approach to meeting participant needs, tackling specific barriers. There seemed to be similarity in specialist provision across districts, typically:

- support for people with mental health conditions;
- drug and alcohol addiction;
- debt counselling;
- self-employment.

Other specialist provision, implied variations by provider area:

- ethnic minority groups;
- lone parents;
- ex-offenders;
- childcare;
- homelessness;
- basic skills support.

Providers also noted that they were adding to their list of specialist service suppliers in response to new needs that surfaced among their clientele.

8.2.3 Service innovation

Although there appeared to be great similarity in the range of services delivered to participants through prime provider delivery models, there were some noteworthy innovations. Providers felt that several of the tools being used to work with participants were innovative, for example, one provider’s contract with the participant as part of the Action Plan process and another provider’s competency-based screening tool. One provider implied that the black box approach allowed more freedom to use consultants with distinctive skill sets and for short-term interventions embodying different support needs:

‘...that’s a key strength of our delivery model because in the past we’ve recruited people with a number of different skill sets and interests and we’ve almost asked them to be a generic consultant or adviser...What we’ve done this time is that we’ve recognised that actually it’s a very different skill set [that is required for different parts of our service] and actually it’s a different person...that should be looking at [one part of the service].’

(Prime provider manager)

One provider was proud to have ex-clients amongst its staff and emphasised the value for their expertise in working with FND participants:

‘...a fairly high percentage of the staff we employ were once our clients and that would guarantee to me that they have a very good knowledge and understanding of what the individual sitting in front of them is going through, or has been through, or will get through.’

(Prime provider manager)

Providers also recognised the need to focus on continuous improvement with respect to building the capacity and quality of front-line staff to effectively deliver the contract.

8.3 Referrals and communication processes

8.3.1 Referrals from Jobcentre Plus

Providers described how they received their standard referrals electronically through the Provider and Referral and Payments (PRaP) system and how the referral was typically picked up by the providers’ centralised booking system, processing centre or call centre, from which contact with participants was initiated. Depending on the delivery model, customers could be assigned to either the prime provider or a sub-contractor. Reported negative experiences of PRaP resurfaced in discussions of the referral process, with providers describing the disruption caused to the volumes of referrals.

On the whole, there was little contact between Jobcentre Plus office and FND provider staff. As outlined in Chapter 6, in one district, tripartite pre-provision interviews were taking place on provider premises and this ensured that staff were in regular contact. Another provider reported that there were plans to pilot warm handovers. Clerical referrals were received occasionally for participants with sensitive case information but direct office-to-office communication during a referral was more the exception than the rule.

A recurring concern among prime providers was that Jobcentre Plus advisers lacked knowledge of FND. This lack of awareness was reflected in the poor quality of Jobcentre Plus Action Plans – incomplete or missing – as reported by some providers. For example, one provider described the quality as ‘patchy’, while another more implicitly discussed the importance of its own initial diagnostic tests for shaping an Action Plan. Several providers perceived that Jobcentre Plus advisers were still on a learning curve about FND provision and several were aware that Jobcentre Plus was addressing this through training and awareness raising site visits. Some providers had produced literature about their specific services.

8.3.2 Referrals to sub-contractors

Prime providers described a number of approaches to sub-contractor referrals. A common approach for end-to-end sub-contractors was to refer participants on the basis of geography, so that participants were referred to sub-contractors closest to the Jobcentre Plus office where they signed. In these instances, sub-contractor capacity was factored into the referral process.

A second approach was for referrals to be done on a random basis with providers devising rules to govern referrals in areas with more than one sub-contractor. For instance, one provider that operated with 15 sub-contractors used a 50:50 algorithm when there were two sub-contractors in an area. When there were more than two providers, other criteria came into play, for example, the size of facilities that the sub-contractor had available. Prime provider management information systems were drawn on to support this process.

Referrals to specialist providers occurred on the basis of participant need. While an adequate distribution of participants throughout the supply chain could be important, participant need was often the core criteria.

8.3.3 Relationships with Jobcentre Plus and DWP

On the whole, providers were positive about communications from Jobcentre Plus and DWP. Several experienced welfare-to-work providers noted that communications about FND had been of a higher quality compared to previous contracts that they had held. For example, they highlighted the value of the pre go-live series of information meetings with local offices and stakeholders who would be working on the contract. This was felt to signal DWP's commitment to making FND work and helped to establish ongoing communications between DWP and Jobcentre Plus district level staff. However several weaknesses were outlined reflecting challenges that emerged in FND implementation: the PRaP system for referrals, data security issues, and estimates of participant volumes. There were concerns that DWP gave too short a timescale to implement FND and it was suggested that DWP should revisit timetables for future programmes. For the most part, the initial delivery problems that were identified had been overcome by the time of the fieldwork.

Several providers considered Jobcentre Plus as a local strategic partner. This was illustrated by Jobcentre Plus's role in communicating job vacancy information and by ensuring a smooth flow of participants onto the FND. A further perceived Jobcentre Plus role was that of acting as a point of contact for participants if they were dissatisfied with FND services. Only a minority of prime providers felt that Jobcentre Plus' role in the FND was purely administrative, for example, continuing to pay benefits while participants signed at Jobcentre Plus offices.

Providers felt that it was important to work closely with Jobcentre Plus to minimise any negative impact of sanctions. Respondents saw sanctions as a last resort, to avoid any negative impact on participant attitudes. Most reported they had used the sanctioning procedure. The most dominant reasons for exercising it were failure to attend an FND appointment, followed by failure to accept an employment offer.

8.4 Summary

Ten prime contractors for FND services were operating in the six study districts. At the time of fieldwork, providers were at an early stage of FND implementation. All were experienced in welfare-to-work delivery, drawing on this experience in the design of their services. FND delivery structures varied considerably, ranging from an all in-house model with specialist partners to an all outsourced model, embodying a network of sub-contractors. Hybrid models with varying degrees of sub-contractor and specialist partner involvement were also developed. Despite the range of delivery models, prime providers were delivering, or overseeing, a very similar range of services; for example, use of diagnostic assessments of participant needs to support the tailoring of services, employability courses and mandatory work-related activity. All delivery models seemed to incorporate a participant-centred approach. There was variation in the timing of work-related activity and some providers were finding it difficult to source work placements. Although service innovation appeared limited, there were examples found in front-line staff skill sets and innovative tools being used to work with participants.

Providers were receiving their standard referrals through PRaP. On the whole, where referral processes were automated, there was little or no contact between Jobcentre Plus advisers and provider advisers. A recurring theme was how Jobcentre Plus staff lacked knowledge of FND.

Approaches to sub-contractor referrals included: referring participants on the basis of geography, rules being devised to facilitate referral on a random basis and a needs-based approach. On the whole, providers were positive about communications with Jobcentre Plus and DWP. Several providers emphasised that there had been no issues with the support available and received and that initial delivery problems had been overcome.

9 Conclusions

This evaluation report presented qualitative process study findings on the Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND), that was introduced nationally in two phases, from April 2009 (Phase 1) and from April 2010 (Phase 2)²⁰. The research is part of a wider evaluation of the JRFND and should be read in conjunction with reported surveys of customers and early implementation findings (Adams *et al.*, 2010a; Knight *et al.*, 2010).

JRFND is delivered jointly by Jobcentre Plus and external providers. It is divided into four stages based on the length of a Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claim:

- Stage 1: 0 to 13 weeks;
- Stage 2: 13 to 26 weeks;
- Stage 3: 26 to 52 weeks;
- FND: from 52 weeks (Phase 1 districts only).

The first three stages are delivered by Jobcentre Plus, and last up to 12 months. If a person in a Phase 1 district is still claiming benefit after 12 months, they are then referred to an FND provider for further work preparation support.

The overall aim of the study was to:

- assess the delivery of JRFND by Jobcentre Plus and contracted providers;
- examine the customer experience of JRFND and to determine what elements of JRFND appear to help customers;
- contribute to future policy development.

The qualitative evaluation gathered evidence in Jobcentre Plus offices throughout the first year of implementation. Separate studies were undertaken with customers and FND providers. The report covers the first year of the Jobseekers Regime and the initial months of FND.

When interpreting the findings from the different stakeholders, it is important to bear in mind the different timings of the fieldwork. The Jobcentre Plus office site visits took place at three points in time over the first year of JRFND implementation, approximately two months, five months and 11 months after the new regime was introduced. It reflects the development of the programme, as observed in 12 Jobcentre Plus offices over six districts. These studies are useful for gauging changes in delivery and they provide a benchmark for assessing the maturity of JRFND processes at different points in time. The fieldwork with customers and FND providers was cross-sectional and is, therefore, tied to certain points in the programme implementation. The customer research predominantly reflects experience during the first six months of JRFND delivery (Stages 1, 2 and 3) and during the early months of FND operations. Likewise, the fieldwork with FND providers was conducted approximately five months after the services went live. Given that the fieldwork with customers and FND providers was carried out at a relatively early point in programme implementation, more research is planned with FND providers and customers to examine delivery and experiences once FND has bedded in.

²⁰ The Flexible New Deal (FND) will not be implemented in Phase 2 districts, following the change of government in May 2010).

9.1 Discussion

This section highlights the themes that emerged from the analyses. The discussion focuses on delivery processes, conditionality and flexibilities, and the transition to the FND.

9.1.1 Programme delivery

Overall, the process study presents a positive picture of JRFND. The fieldwork in Jobcentre Plus offices confirmed that procedures had bedded in so that, by the end of the first year of implementation, customers moving through Stages 1, 2 and 3 were receiving the standard elements of the regime. Early implementation issues relating to staffing and office space limitations were mostly addressed. Feedback on the FND also indicated that customer services were in place but these were still evolving, reflecting an earlier stage of implementation, as providers were building their supply networks and as customers progressed through the activities.

Jobcentre Plus advisers and managers reported increased familiarity and confidence with the conduct of interviews and the range of services they could refer customers to. Most were tailoring the meetings to the needs of the customer, deploying their diagnostic skills and their knowledge of the available support. Staff familiarity and practice with procedures, over a range of different customers, were key. Contrasts observed with the quality of delivery were typically attributable to the level of experience of Jobcentre Plus staff – management, advisers and Fortnightly Jobsearch Review (FJR) staff alike. Jobcentre Plus offices tended to organise their management and advisory teams by JRFND stages and this helped to nurture specialist skills and knowledge.

JRFND was felt to meet the needs of most customer groups. Two groups in particular, customers with disabilities or health conditions and 18 to 24 year olds, following the introduction of the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG), were considered well served. There were concerns that the focus on young people had drawn attention away from other customers, especially those aged 50-plus. The level of support available for ex-offenders, people with literacy and numeracy needs, and those with poor English language skills was regarded as less satisfactory. Prime FND providers emphasised that, along with their sub-contractors and partners, they were taking a tailored approach to meeting participant needs, addressing specific barriers with specialist care, but the evaluation has not as yet collected any data to assess experiences of this provision.

Over the course of the fieldwork, office staff noted that developments to services were ongoing. Transitions to procedures, such as the electronic referral system and extra measures under the YPG, required extra training and familiarisation. Further change was anticipated following the recently announced Work Programme to commence in June 2011.

Back to Work Sessions

Back to Work Sessions (BtWSs) were running in all the study offices and staff had implemented measures to enhance attendance rates. The frequency of sessions was somewhat tedious for staff to deliver and offices had addressed this by sharing the responsibility within teams. From observations of sessions and reports from customer participants it was evident that not all facilitators possessed the necessary skills for an optimum delivery. Feedback tended to be more positive when sessions were dynamic, facilitated audience discussion and incorporated local information. Positive comments about the content of the sessions related mainly to the information about Jobcentre Plus services while customers were more negative about the job search advice which was considered to be too basic.

It should be noted that findings from the current research on BtWS are somewhat more negative than those reported in the Jobseeker's Regime test site research (Bellis *et al.*, 2009). This may be due to a number of study differences such as the number of observations and timeline for data collection, the development of staff and the programme, and the economic context. Nonetheless, more research is needed to inform the policy in this area.

Weekly signing

A period of six weekly signing was a requirement for customers during both Stages 2 and 3 of the JRFND.²¹ Weekly reviews were felt to be most effective when they featured longer signing times to allow more intensive job searches; when the same staff member was available to see the customer week to week; and when there was sufficient staff resource. Otherwise, a weekly signing approach that mimicked the fortnightly signing routine was largely considered by staff and customers to be merely an administrative or tick box exercise. Customers were disappointed when a weekly visit was limited to a brief meeting with no further suggestion of support or services and this was exacerbated by a routine of waiting at a busy Jobcentre Plus office, extra travel time and costs.

Some offices were able to organise their signing teams so that customers regularly met with the same FJR staff; sometimes this was arranged by assigning staff to a 'signing box' of time that recurred week to week or alphabetically by the customers' surname. Some offices were able to dedicate staff to signing 18 to 24 year old customers.

Previous research that examined the effect of a shortened FJR meeting, compared to the standard length, reported no impact on benefit off-flows (Middlemas, 2006).²² The current research examined different practices of delivering weekly signing and Jobcentre Plus staff and customer perceptions of the practices. Further research is needed to help clarify what elements of a review meeting work best and for whom.

Targeted Reviews

Although all study offices were offering Targeted Reviews at the time of the March 2010 fieldwork, it was evident that the target audiences and the scope of the meetings varied across the study offices. This may be partly attributable to the fact that Targeted Reviews were a more recent development introduced to the Stage 2 process in October 2009, so systems were still evolving. Some of the study offices reported they were only able to offer Targeted Reviews to young people or they were not able to offer a second review due to staff limitations²³.

In a similar vein to the weekly review meetings, Targeted Reviews worked best when they were distinguishable from other advisory meetings; that is, less procedure-driven and containing more of a focus on customer work interests and requests for additional support. Customers who were positive about their experience appreciated the regular contact with an adviser and the personalised attention and support received.

²¹ 18 to 24 year olds are required to attend a weekly job search review throughout Stage 2.

²² Evidence based on Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) internal analysis suggests that more frequent signing can enhance benefit off-flows.

²³ According to policy, Targeted Reviews are primarily for customers who have been unemployed for 12 out of 24 months; the extension of Targeted Reviews to all 18-24 year olds was introduced in January 2010 as a temporary recessionary measure.

Caseloading at Stage 3

Extra advisory time after 26 weeks of a claim was valued by both customers and staff, repeating the themes of individual attention and continuity of care. Advisers were able to manage the size of their caseloads by adapting meetings to times of greater need and by focusing on customers with greater need. Thus, some customers received less advisory contact time than others but the support they received suited their circumstances. This ability to budget their time was a recognised advisory skill which developed with experience.

Customers who experienced continuous contact with the same adviser often felt that the meetings were the first time any interest was shown in their situation and needs. Developing a relationship with an adviser was viewed positively. Advisers also commented that it was professionally fulfilling to maintain contact with customers over a period of time and to witness the changes and gains that occurred.

Flexible New Deal

Approximately five months into operations, prime FND contractors described how they had developed processes and networks of services to cater for participant job search and work retention needs. These providers drew on their welfare-to-work expertise to design a menu of services that contained common elements of support in hard and soft skills as well as specialist supports to address work barriers.

Much of the research data on the FND focused on implementation processes and issues as it was considered too early to report on the effectiveness of the service models. Early indications from customers who had experienced the first months of FND provision contained mixed reviews as customers mainly contrasted their experiences to the earlier stages of JRFND.

Customer morale

The research revealed a vast array of customer experiences through interactions with Jobcentre Plus office staff. Considerable inconsistencies in the approach, intensity and manner of support from different members of staff within the same offices were described. Customers would often identify one adviser who was particularly helpful and who stood out from other staff as being more empathetic and supportive. Also, the nature of fortnightly signing reviews provided a limited platform for staff to exercise these skills, leaving some customers feeling they were no more than a number in the system. It was also evident that these skills were more pronounced in staff with greater experience of JRFND delivery. In general, the open plan arrangement in Jobcentre Plus offices was not conducive to private conversations and disclosure of sensitive information.

9.1.2 JRFND customer surveys

Other evaluation evidence has compared the experiences, views and outcomes for JRFND customers (Phase 1 districts) compared with those in districts where the previous JSA regime was in place (Phase 2 districts).²⁴ Refer to Knight *et al.* (2010) and Adams *et al.* (2010a). Findings are generally positive, particularly given that customers in Phase 1 districts were characterised with a higher incidence of long-term unemployment compared to their counterparts in Phase 2 districts. Forthcoming analyses which control for individual differences in the JRFND and comparison areas will confirm the overall impacts of JRFND.

²⁴ Survey data were collected during the sixth month of Phase 1 roll-out for Stage 1 customers and during the tenth and eleventh months of roll-out for Stage 2 and Stage 3 customers.

Surveyed customer experiences of JRFND Stage 1 indicated that, relative to the previous JSA regime, more support services were offered and a greater proportion of customers entered work at this stage of a claim. These results were less marked for those in harder-to-help groups. There were few differences noted between JRFND Stage 2 customers and their counterparts under the previous regime. JRFND customers were no more likely to have entered paid work at this stage of a claim.

At Stage 3, JRFND customers were more positive about their experiences of Jobcentre Plus than those who had experienced the previous regime. A higher proportion of young people under the previous regime had entered work yet there were no differences found in the employment status of customers aged 25 and over, at this stage.

9.1.3 Conditionality and flexibilities

The research identified tensions between the conditions and flexibilities of the regime. This relates to the notions that: a) mandation of activities goes counter to a relationship of trust; b) to implement mandatory activities, a broad range of opportunities is needed; and c) the process-driven approach is not sufficiently flexible to accommodate different customer needs and circumstances.

JRFND was designed to provide both enhanced support and increased customer obligations as a JSA claim progressed. The process frames the customer journey and entails mandatory contact with Jobcentre Plus office staff and job search requirements as standard for all customers. Within this paradigm, advisers are expected to exercise their judgement in identifying customers for additional support, thus improving the responsiveness of the regime to customer need.

First, advisers were not entirely comfortable with assigning additional obligations because, in principle, mandating a customer to an activity could potentially jeopardise trust in the adviser-customer relationship. This perspective was held by some Stage 3 advisers who preferred to approach the mandatory activity requirement more collaboratively with customers on their caseload. In these cases the preference was to generate customer engagement in work-related activities through mutual agreement. It was further noted that unilateral pressure could engender a poor attitude among customers. Advisers would either avoid imposing the requirement entirely, or only resorted to mandation if a more reasoned approach failed to initiate action.

Second, it was found that mandating work-related activities was not entirely practicable when there was a limited choice of opportunities. For instance, Stage 3 advisers often struggled to find suitable mandatory activities for professional customers and those who already had a CV and up-to-date skills. Access to service provision and opportunities was particularly limited in rural areas. A lack of opportunities also contributed to confusion over what activities, such as the extra supports under the Six Month Offer (6MO), could be deemed as mandatory. Additionally, the inclusion of the 6MO blurred the distinction between mandatory and non-mandatory activities during Stage 3 as customers were taking up 6MO options to fulfil the requisite 'mandatory activities'.

Third, it became evident that the JRFND process was not sufficiently flexible to accommodate and be responsive to multiple and different customer circumstances. Most of this pertained to the timing and intensity of customer contact with Jobcentre Plus. Drawing from staff and customer experiences, the research suggests that greater flexibility could be achieved by relaxing the timing of interventions and through waiving some of the requirements altogether, if deemed appropriate by the adviser.

For example, it was noted that the three months between the New Jobseeker Interview and Initial Stage 2 Review was a long gap and some customers would benefit from an earlier intervention. Basing eligibility for certain services, like training opportunities, on the length of a claim was also viewed as too rigid and as not responding to need. It was evident that not all customers were

gaining value from the standardised procedures. In particular, the mandatory BtWS and blocks of weekly signing were not perceived to be universally beneficial. Indeed, some customers were adept and comfortable with performing their own job searches and had access to other supports through employment agencies and redundancy packages. In addition, if some of these standardised procedures became discretionary, this might alleviate pressure on delivery staff resource, as a positive side effect.

9.1.4 Jobcentre Plus and the Flexible New Deal

After 12 months, a JSA customer transfers from the care of a Stage 3 adviser to an external FND provider. The FND stage of the customer journey is then managed by the contractor but regular contact with Jobcentre Plus is maintained through fortnightly reviews.

The early implementation research found that Jobcentre Plus office staff generally lacked awareness of FND and this reduced their ability to prepare customers for the process or to address concerns or queries of customers who were on FND. A recurring theme throughout the research was the importance of direct contact between Jobcentre Plus staff and the external suppliers. Advisers felt more comfortable referring customers to a supplier if they had established communications and familiarity with the provision. In the interests of customers, advisers wished to be confident they knew what the services entailed. In the past, staff were able to establish relationships with local providers, but this changed under JRFND with the move towards regional and national service contracts, and with the introduction of an electronic referral system – Provider Referral and Payments (PRaP) system. On the whole, the process was considered to be less personal.

Some of the FND prime contractors had established large networks of suppliers with internal referral systems. This placed a distance between Jobcentre Plus advisers and front-line FND staff. Jobcentre Plus advisers were also put at a disadvantage because they were not able to identify the exact nature of the FND provider they were referring a customer to as often this decision was made after the customer details had been transferred to the prime provider.²⁵ Stage 3 advisers also felt responsible for case management and wished to ensure the customer's transfer to FND was as seamless as possible. To improve the transition it was felt that a 'warm handover' was the preferred approach. This entailed direct contact with the FND provider at the time of the pre-provision interview, either by telephone or through a tripartite meeting attended by the customer, Stage 3 adviser and a representative from the FND provider. A warm handover provided continuity for the customer and established a point of contact while the transition to the provider was in progress.

Lack of knowledge about the local FND provider was also an issue for FJR staff who were the key Jobcentre Plus contact for FND customers. It was felt that direct links between Jobcentre Plus and FND delivery staff would help in the communication of customer updates and ultimately create a more joined-up service.

It was also noted in the research that the customer Action Plans that were transferred from Jobcentre Plus were not regularly utilised. Instead, FND providers preferred to create their own Action Plans for customers. This suggests that some efforts may be duplicated between stages of JRFND and lessons learned or actions begun may be lost.

At the time of the research Jobcentre Plus offices and FND providers were beginning to address awareness issues through the distribution of printed literature, joint meetings and familiarisation visits.

²⁵ Similar findings on the lack of operational knowledge among partner organisations have been reported for welfare-to-work contracted systems in Australia and the Netherlands (Finn, 2008).

9.2 Policy implications

The findings from this evaluation have implications for the design and delivery of future support for JSA customers as delivered through Jobcentre Plus or contracted welfare-to-work suppliers. There are currently policies and initiatives under development which address these issues.

The skill levels of advisory and other front-line staff are key to the delivery of JRFND. The research evidence suggests that standards of support for customers deviated considerably. Staff familiarity and confidence with procedures grew with time and not all staff had the aptitude to perform all aspects of JRFND delivery, like group facilitation or advisory support. The research also identified the importance of FJR staff in representing the role of Jobcentre Plus to customers who have continued on to FND provision. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of attracting and retaining staff with appropriate skills, ongoing training, and the sharing of best practices. An emphasis on adviser discretion warrants further investment in developing diagnostic skills in addition to familiarity with services and programme processes.

Greater flexibilities within the programme process would contribute to a more personalised customer journey. The interventions could be timed to better coincide with customers' needs rather than the duration of a claim for JSA. More flexibility and adviser discretion over standardised procedures and restrictions on service eligibility is needed to improve the responsiveness of the programme to individual circumstances. This may involve introducing services sooner, such as relaxing restrictions on training support or referring to extra advisory support at an earlier point in a claim (but without the added restrictions to the job search as is the practice for fast-tracked customers). This may also involve waiving mandatory requirements, such as weekly signing or mandatory activities, for customers who are capable of independent job search activities. Removing all restrictions on service eligibility might be unachievable, given available resources, and would be inefficient if it led to services being offered to customers who would quickly find work without them. But greater flexibilities, combined with more sophisticated tools for identifying customer support needs, could lead to more effective targeting of services. The current process does not adequately account for the different rates at which customers develop on the journey into work.

Improved communication links would ensure more seamless operations between Jobcentre Plus and FND provision. The evaluation findings have implications for welfare-to-work programmes that operate in a mixed supplier economy. Overall, greater synergy between Jobcentre Plus offices and FND prime and sub-contracted providers is warranted to create a more joined-up customer experience. This can be achieved through more personal contact among the staff at Jobcentre Plus and contracted providers and warm handovers involving tripartite meetings between customers, Jobcentre Plus staff and FND staff. Knowledge of local FND processes and services would enhance the information advisers relay to customers at the pre-provision interview and would better inform FJR staff who are in regular contact with FND participants.

More research is needed to improve understanding of shared Jobcentre Plus and contracted services. More information is needed about how prime providers are managing the FND process, how service networks are operating, how effective links are maintained between Jobcentre Plus office staff, prime providers and local FND suppliers, and how customers are experiencing the contracted provision.

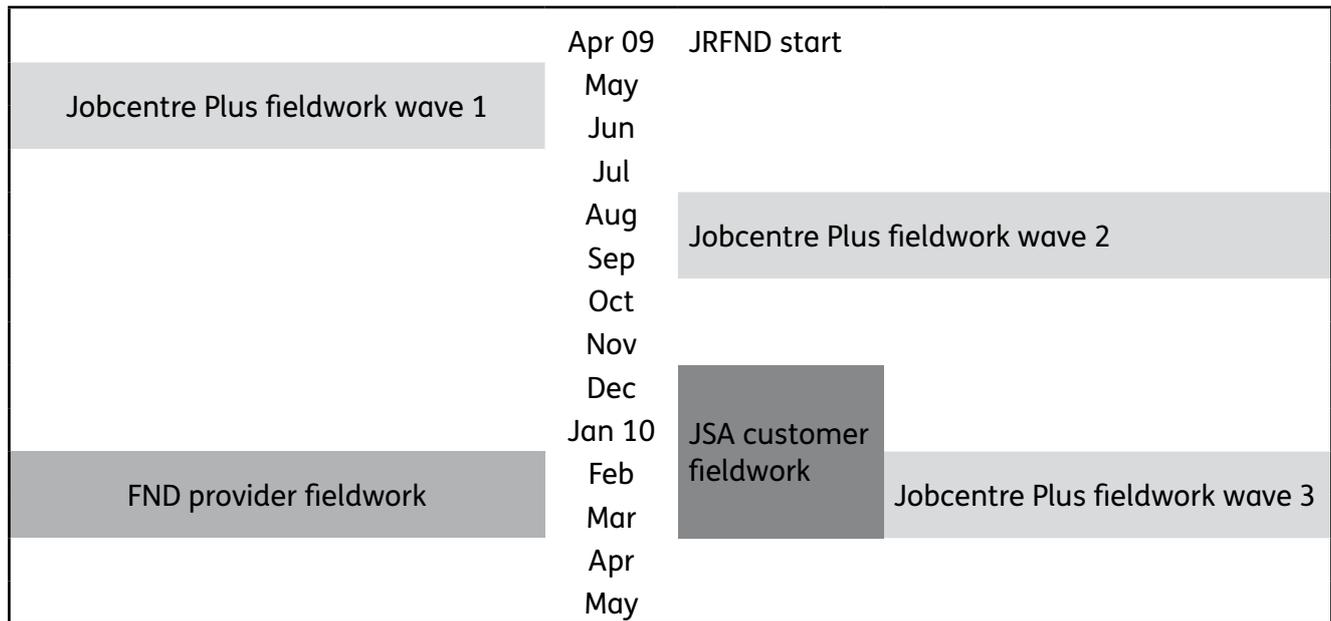
Appendix A Methodology

The study used qualitative research techniques to record information on service delivery processes and accounts of stakeholder experiences. The qualitative evaluation design combined a selection of data collection approaches, incorporating multiple stakeholder perspectives. Primary data collection took place with:

- Jobcentre Plus staff (district and office level);
- Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) customers (including 12 Targeted Reviews);
- Flexible New Deal (FND) providers.

Informed consent was obtained from all research subjects. The research spanned the first year of Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) service operation, between May 2009 and May 2010 but was concentrated in the latter half of the year in order to allow time for services to bed in. The timeline for the various strands of stakeholder research is displayed in Figure A.1.

Figure A.1 Qualitative fieldwork timeline



Site research in Jobcentre Plus districts

Three waves of fieldwork were carried out during the first year of JRFND implementation in order to observe the development of services over time, during: May-June 2009, August-September 2009 and February-March 2010. The site research was timed to optimise the bedding in of procedures but at an early enough stage in delivery to provide formative feedback for programme decision-making.

Data collection took place in six Jobcentre Plus districts in England, Scotland and Wales, and covered 12 Jobcentre Plus offices (two offices in each district). The selection of offices ensured variation in:

- geographical location (England, Scotland and Wales);
- levels of unemployment and deprivation;
- urban and rural areas;
- ethnic mix;
- office size (based on customer volumes); and
- districts with single and multiple FND providers.

Data collection included either telephone or face-to-face interviews with Jobcentre Plus national, district and office level staff. Given the demands on Jobcentre Plus staff, the research was designed to be as unobtrusive as possible. First visits to Jobcentre Plus offices entailed face-to-face interviews with management and advisory staff in order to establish rapport between the research and delivery teams. To reduce disruption and to economise time, visits were coordinated around staff schedules and booking diaries. Telephone interviews were conducted with district management and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) programme operations staff. Likewise, for subsequent office-based fieldwork, interviews with management staff were conducted by telephone in order to limit disruption.

During the office visits, the interview data was supplemented by observations of Jobcentre Plus-delivered Back to Work group sessions, Stage 3 Reviews, Targeted Review meetings and Stage 4 Pre-provision meetings. Voluntary discussions with customers took place after each observation.

Table A.1 outlines the typical fieldwork activity for waves 1, 2 and 3 of the fieldwork.

Table A.1 Three waves of Jobcentre Plus fieldwork activity

Stakeholder	Number of observations		
	Wave 1 (May-June 2009)	Wave 2 (August- September 2009)	Wave3 (February- March 2010)
District Manager interview*	1	1	–
Third Party Provision Manager interview*	–	1	1
FND Contract Manager interview*	–	–	1-2
Advisory Services Manager interviews	1-2	2-3	2-3
Customer Engagement Team Leader or Diary Administrative Support Officer interviews	1-2	1-2	2-3
Stage 1 Adviser interviews	3	–	–
Stage 2 Adviser interviews	–	3	3
Stage 3 Adviser interviews	3	3	3
Fortnightly Jobsearch Review Officer interviews	–	–	2
Back to Work Session facilitator interviews	1	–	–
New Jobseeker Interview observations	2-3	–	–
Initial Stage 2 Review observations	–	2-3	–
Initial Stage 3 Review observations	3	3	–
Back to Work Session observations	2	–	1
Targeted Review observations	–	–	2-3
Pre-provision meeting observations	–	–	2-3
Informal customer chats	Varied according to permission		

Notes: *District level only.

A standardised pro-forma was used for recording observations and a semi-structured approach was used for eliciting responses from interviewees. The topic emphasis varied slightly over the three waves of site visits, and covered:

- implementation issues: staffing, service accommodation, training;
- communications at district and office levels;
- staff awareness of provider services;
- customer introduction to services: flexibilities and adviser discretion;
- service delivery;
- staff views;
- customer initial reactions and receptivity;
- suggestions for improvement.

Details on skills assessment tools and the nature of training referrals were beyond the scope of the research.

Research with Jobseeker’s Allowance customers

Depth, face-to-face interviews were carried out with JSA customers who were participating in JRFND. Interviews were timed so that customers reaching all four stages of JRFND were represented. Participants were identified from DWP administrative records and the fieldwork followed a postal opt-out exercise. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were conducted in private homes or in a public location that was convenient to the respondent. Participants received a £20 shopping voucher to thank them for their time.

The research took place in six of the study districts, in England, Scotland and Wales. In addition to geographical location, respondents were purposively sampled to achieve variation by gender, age, and ethnicity. The characteristics of the JSA customer sample are presented in Table A.2 and show how the research achieved sufficient variation.

Table A.2 JSA customer sample characteristics

Characteristic	JSA customers
Location	
England	40
Scotland	10
Wales	9
Gender	
Male	37
Female	22
Age	
18-24 yrs	16
25-49 yrs	27
50+ yrs	16
Ethnicity	
White	44
Other ethnic group	9
Prefer not to say	6
Total	59

After a two-week opt-out period, customers were contacted by telephone and invited for interview. A quota sample of 59 customers comprised:

- 11 customers who had just started Stage 3 (most had claim dates from March and April 2009);
- 30 customers who had just started Stage 4 (most had claim dates from September to November 2008);
- 12 customers who participated in Targeted Reviews, with dates starting in November 2009 (most had claim dates from July and August 2009);
- six customers who had found employment (who mostly had claim dates from March and April 2009).

Three of the six customers who had found employment had left work by the time they were interviewed. Thirty customers who were recorded as having just started Stage 4, according to DWP records, were in a range of situations when interviewed. Seven customers had left JRFND completely; four had found employment and three had signed off benefit. Of the 23 who remained on JRFND; two customers were back at JRFND Stage 1 after finding and leaving work, ten were either waiting to be referred to a provider or had had their start date to Stage 4 delayed and 11 had been handed over to FND provision.

Topic guides were designed to cover all four stages of the JRFND regime and customers were asked about the most recent stage(s) in order to optimise recall. Information was collected from all respondents about their current circumstances and previous work and claims history and about their experiences and views of Jobcentre Plus services in general. In addition, detailed information was collected on the following stages:

- experiences of Stage 1 (23 respondents);
- experiences of Stage 2 (23 respondents);
- experiences of Stage 3 (30 respondents);
- experiences of Stage 4, including the handover process (21 respondents);
- early experiences of the FND provision (17 respondents).

The majority of interviews took place between December 2009 and February 2010 but customers with experience of Targeted Reviews were interviewed slightly later, during February and March 2010.

The research emphasis was on collecting customer views and experiences on the roles of Jobcentre Plus and service providers in service delivery. Specific interview topics varied depending on the JRFND stage reached by the customer and included:

- customer employment history: difficulties and barriers to finding work;
- experiences of Jobcentre Plus processes: advice and help received from staff;
- reasons and motivations for service take-up (and non-take-up);
- referral processes;
- service delivery;
- customer destinations;
- experiences and opinions on JRFND Stages 1 to 3 and Stage 4 handover;
- experience of Targeted Reviews;
- job search activity and new job suitability and sustainability;
- customer awareness of conditionality and experience of benefit sanctions;
- perceived usefulness of the service;
- customer views on the role of Jobcentre Plus in moving into/towards work;
- support received from other organisations;
- additional service needs;
- suggestions for improvement.

Research with Flexible New Deal providers

Interviews were conducted face-to-face during February and March 2010, although one interview was completed in May 2010. Fieldwork with providers took place once it was determined that these external support agencies had sufficient dealings with customers to be able to reflect on their experiences and feedback on what seemed to be working or not working well. Contact details of all ten contracted providers in the six districts were supplied by DWP and all provider organisations operating in the study districts were interviewed.²⁶ All respondents were senior representatives of the prime provider organisation that held responsibility for managing FND delivery. Interviews typically ran for 90 minutes. Interviews were achieved with all ten providers and included:

- two providers of in-house provision (with delivery partners);
- four providers of mostly in-house provision;
- two providers of mostly outsourced provision;
- two providers whose services were entirely outsourced.

Two of the providers were new to the Great Britain market and one was new to the welfare-to-work sector.

Research with providers was guided by a semi-structured topic guide. Discussion topics included:

- implementation of FND;
- services and delivery of FND;
- referrals from Jobcentre Plus;
- referrals to sub-contractors/delivery partners;
- relationship with Jobcentre Plus and DWP;
- overall views.

Data analysis

Interviews were digitally recorded (with respondent permission), transcribed verbatim and anonymised. The analysis of transcriptions and researcher observation notes used a thematic approach.

This process was facilitated by the Nvivo (version 8) qualitative analysis software package. A separate Nvivo²⁷ project was created for each of the main datasets. For each project, a coding framework was devised to catalogue interview discussions by topic and sub-themes within topics. Nvivo enables the storage of large textual datasets that can be shared within a research team. The search and set features allow for more refined analysis at the individual and group levels. The NVivo 'sets' function was used to organise the data into different sets of respondents which maximised the ability to compare and contrast the different research subgroups.

Data analysis was supplemented by researcher field notes and district level summaries on key observations taken from each wave of the Jobcentre Plus fieldwork.

²⁶ Interviews were arranged and conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers Social.

²⁷ Registered by QSR International.

Appendix B

Research instruments

Jobcentre Plus site visit topic guides

Stage 2 Adviser – Face-to-face interview

Opening

1. Have there been any changes in your role in delivering JRFND over the past few months? *[i.e. since the last round of site visits in Aug-Sep 09]*
 - o How long in post?
 - o How do you feel about delivering JRFND now?
 - Any change in confidence?

Stage 2

2. How are the initial Stage 2 interviews going? *[Researcher to refer to any office specific issues raised during the wave 2 fieldwork]*
 - o Probe on structure: one-to-one/group, length
 - o Is the BtWS 3-Step Plan being discussed?
 - o Do you discuss skills needs or Skills Action Plans?
 - o Do you make referrals to training?
 - o Do you make referrals to Support for Newly Unemployed services?
3. Are customers being identified for Targeted Reviews?
 - If no:
 - o Why not?
 - If yes:
 - o How do you decide who to refer to a Targeted Review?
 - o How are they organised?
 - Are there always two reviews? When do they take place?
 - o Do you think that Targeted Reviews are effective?
 - Are they appropriate for all eligible customers?
 - o Would you make any changes to the Targeted Reviews?
4. How are the Stage 2 weekly signings being organised?
 - o Is this the same for all Stage 2 customers?
5. How is this working out?

6. Has the new, extra advisory support started for young people (i.e., two **mandatory** 30 min meetings)?
 - o If yes, how is this working out?
 - o If no, when will this begin?
7. And has the new requirement for weekly signing started for young people?
 - o If yes, how is this working out?
 - o If no, when will this begin?
8. Are there any improvements that could be made to the delivery of Stage 2?

General JRFND

9. How is the sanctioning process going?
 - o Do you feel confident to sanction customers?
 - o In what circumstances?
 - o Are there any constraints on sanctioning?
10. To what extent do you think the JRFND regime is effective for all groups of customers?
 - o Are there any customer groups who are not adequately served by the regime? Which ones?
 - How about PSA 16 groups?²⁸
 - How about people aged 50 plus?
 - How about lone parents?
 - o How is the regime serving former Employment Support Allowance (ESA) customers who have been diverted to JSA?
 - o How is support working out for 18-24 year olds?
 - How do the new services for 18-24 year olds compare to the New Deal for Young People?
11. How useful do you think the JRFND leaflets are for explaining the regime to customers?
 - o Any suggestions for improvement?

JRFND extra questions

12. Do you work with the FJR (Fortnightly Jobseeker Review) staff in the delivery of JRFND?
 - o In what ways?
 - o If you refer customers to activities, do FJR staff check on these when customers are signing?
 - o Do FJR staff tell customers about provision (or make any referrals to provision)?
 - o Do you think communication or working arrangements between advisers and FR staff could be improved at all?

²⁸ **PSA 16 groups** are: care leavers at age 19, offenders on probation, people in contact with secondary mental health services, people with moderate to severe learning disabilities known to social services.

13. Has the implementation of PRaP affected your role at all?
- o In what ways?
 - o Has it had an impact on your time?
 - o Do you get sufficient information through the PRaP system?
 - o Has the guidance on PRaP been adequate?

Closing

14. Do you have any other comments, anything else you would like to add?

Thank you!

Stage 3 Adviser – Face-to-face interview

Opening

1. Have there been any changes in your role in delivering JRFND over the past few months?
[i.e. since the last round of site visits in Aug-Sep 09]
 - o How long in post?
 - o How do you feel about delivering JRFND now?
 - Any change in confidence?

Stage 4: FND

2. How is the handover of customers to the FND provider going?
 - o Is this process running smoothly? Any teething issues?
 - o How does the referral process work?
 - Are there any problems with it?
 - How has the new PRaP system affected the referral process?
 - o What are fail to attend rates like (for the first interview with the provider)?
 - o How could this be improved?
 - o Any issues with the transfer of personal information?
3. What happens in the FND pre-provision interview? *[Wait for response, then ask:]*
 - o How is the FND provider involved?
 - Is the provider present or do you contact the provider during the pre-provision interview?
 - o How could the procedure be improved?
 - o In your opinion, how useful are information leaflets supplied by:
 - Jobcentre Plus?
 - The FND provider?
4. Do you have any further contact with customers after the handover to the FND provider?
 - o What form does this take?
5. What feedback do you receive about the Flexible New Deal?
 - o Feedback from **customers**?
 - o Feedback from the **provider(s)**
 - About the handover process?
 - About customer progress?
 - o Would any further information be helpful?

Stage 3

6. How are the initial Stage 3 interviews going? [*Researcher to refer to any office specific issues raised during the wave 2 fieldwork, e.g., time*]
 - o Probe on structure: *one-to-one/group, timings*
7. To what extent are you able to work flexibly with customers at this stage?
 - o Can you provide some examples?
 - o How confident do you feel about working flexibly with customers?
 - o What constraints are there to working flexibly?
8. Following the initial meeting, how often would you see a customer?
 - o Would the customer always see the same adviser?
 - o How are the three hours of contact time being utilised? (a half hour per month or scheduled flexibly?)
 - o What happens during this contact time?
 - o Any problems? (e.g. are caseload sizes manageable?)
 - o How useful do you think this additional time is for customers?
 - o Do you think it should be increased? Reduced?
9. How have services for Stage 3 customers changed under the new Support Contract?
 - o Do you feel confident referring customers to the different modules?
 - o What do you think about the quality of provision?
 - Appropriate for customer needs? Gaps?
10. How are you making use of the **mandatory activities** during Stage 3?
 - o How many activities would you normally mandate people to over the six months?
 - o What kinds of activities would you use? *Ask for examples*
 - o How do you decide on what to mandate customers to?
 - o Do you think the provision available is appropriate?
 - o What happens if a customer does not attend a mandatory activity?
 - Do you use Jobseeker's Directions?
 - How/when would **sanctioning** occur?
11. Do you think that being fast-tracked to stage three is helping customers?
 - o Are there any differences between voluntary and mandatory 'fast-trackers'?
12. Has the implementation of PRaP affected your role at all?
 - o In what ways?
 - o Has it had an impact on your time?
 - o Do you get sufficient information through the PRaP system?
 - o Has the guidance on PRaP been adequate?
13. What improvements can be made to the delivery of Stage 3 of the Jobseeker's Regime?

General JRFND

14. To what extent do you think the JRFND regime is effective for all groups of customers?
- o Are there any customer groups who are not adequately served by the regime? Which ones?
 - How about PSA 16 groups?²⁹
 - How about people aged 50 plus?
 - How about lone parents?
 - o How is the regime serving former Employment Support Allowance (ESA) customers who have been diverted to JSA?
 - o How is support working out for 18-24 year olds?
 - How do the new services for 18-24 year olds compare to the New Deal for Young People?

JRFND extra question (if time permits)

15. Do you work with the FJR (Fortnightly Jobseeker Review) staff in the delivery of JRFND?
- o If you refer customers to activities, do FJR staff check on these when customers are signing?
 - o Do FJR staff tell customers about provision (or make any referrals to provision)?
 - o Do you think communication or working arrangements between advisers and FR staff could be improved at all?

Closing

16. Do you have any other comments, anything else you would like to add?

Thank you!

²⁹ PSA 16 groups are: care leavers at age 19, offenders on probation, people in contact with secondary mental health services, people with moderate to severe learning disabilities known to social services.

Fortnightly Jobseeker Review Officer – Face-to-face Interview

Section 1: Opening

1. Can you tell me a bit about your role in the office?
 - o How are you involved in delivering the JRFND regime?
 - o How long in post?
2. Have there been any changes in your role over the past few months? [*i.e. since the last round of site visits in Aug-Sep 09*]

Section 2: Stage 4 FND

3. Do you meet with customers after they've been handed over to the FND provider?
 - o How often?
 - o Where do meetings take place?
 - (*If with the provider*) How is this working out?
 - o What happens in meetings?
 - How are customer's changes in circumstances communicated to the FND provider?
 - o Do you follow up on activities that have been agreed between the customer and the provider?
 - How is this communicated?
 - o Do they differ from meetings during Stages 1-3?
4. What feedback do you receive about the Flexible New Deal?
 - o Feedback from customers?
 - o Feedback from the **provider** about customer progress?
 - o What do you do with this information? (*ask for all types of information received*)
 - o Would any further information be helpful?
5. Could anything be changed to help you in your role with FND customers?
6. Could anything be changed to improve the customer experience?

Section 3: JRFND Stages 1-3

7. What happens in signing meetings with JSA customers during Stages 1, 2 and 3?
 - o How long do meetings last?
 - o What do you cover in the meetings?
 - Does this differ according to what stage a customer is at in the process?
 - o Do you follow-up on activities that advisers have suggested or **mandated** to customers?
 - How is this communicated?
 - o Has this changed at all since the revised regime (JRFND) started (i.e. April 2009) (*if been in post that long*)?

- o With the Stage 3 customers do you discuss or remind them about the Employer Recruitment Subsidy?
 - o In what ways could the meetings be improved?
8. Are you involved in weekly signing at Stage 2? at Stage 3?
- o How do these meetings differ from fortnightly signing? (Length, content)?
 - o How do customers react to attending weekly instead of fortnightly signing?
 - o Do you think it is helpful for customers to come in weekly?
 - Examples where helpful
 - Examples where not so helpful
9. Would you be involved in sanctioning customers?
- o In what circumstances/for what reasons? (ask for examples)
 - o Has this changed since the start of JRFND (*if been in post that long*)?
 - o How does the process work?
 - o Are there any constraints on you sanctioning customers?
10. Do you tell customers about provision/signpost customers to provision?
- o In what circumstances?
 - o What kinds of provision? Probe on:
 - Back to Work sessions
 - SNU (Jobcentre Plus and non-Jobcentre Plus)
 - 6MO services
 - Careers Advisory Service
 - Training/Other
 - o How do customers respond to this?
11. What communication about individual customers do you have with advisers delivering Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3 [*ask about each Stage separately*]?
- o What form does this take?
 - o Could it be improved?

Section 4: Closing

12. Do you have any other comments, anything else you would like to add?

Thank you!

Advisory Services Manager Stages 1-3 – Telephone Interview

Opening

1. Have there been any changes in the delivery of the JRFND regime over the past few months? *[i.e. since the last round of site visits in Aug-Sep 09]*
 - o Any changes in staffing or roles?
 - o In the organisation of the JRFND process (e.g., flow between stages)?
 - o In the provision available?
 - o Have constraints on office space been resolved (if an issue previously)?

Stage 4: FND

2. How is the handover of customers to the FND provider going?
 - o Is this process running smoothly? Any teething issues?
 - o Do PAs have sufficient understanding of the referral process? How has the PRaP system affected the referral process?
 - o What are fail to attend rates like (for the first interview with the provider)?
 - o How could this be improved?
 - o Any issues with the transfer of personal information?
 - o Have any adjustments been made/lessons learnt since handovers to the provider started?
3. Do you have tripartite pre-provision interviews in this office?

If yes:

 - o Who participates in these interviews?
 - o Where do they take place?
 - o What happens in the interview?
 - o Are there advantages to this model of handover?
 - Any impact on fail to attend rates?
 - Any effect on transfer of personal information?
 - o How could the interview be improved?

If no:

 - o What happens in the FND pre-provision interview?
 - o Who participates in these interviews?
 - o How could the procedure be improved?
4. What information do customers receive prior to the handover?
 - o Is this adequate?
 - o How useful are information leaflets provided by
 - Jobcentre Plus?
 - The FND provider?

5. Do Jobcentre Plus staff have any further contact with customers after the handover to the FND provider?
 - o What form does this take?
 - o Contact with the Stage 3 adviser?
 - o Contact with FJR staff?
6. What feedback do you receive about the Flexible New Deal?
 - o Feedback from or about customers?
 - o Feedback from the provider about processes?
 - o Performance information about the provider?

Stage 3

7. How is the delivery of the initial Stage 3 interviews going? *[Researcher to refer to any office specific issues raised during the wave 2 fieldwork]*
 - o Probe on structure: one-to-one/group, timings
8. To what extent are advisers using flexibilities in this stage?
9. Following the initial meeting, how often do advisers see customers?
 - o How are the three hours of contact time being arranged? (a half hour per month or scheduled flexibly?)
 - o What happens during this contact time?
 - o Any problems? (e.g., are caseload sizes manageable?)
 - o What have you heard from advisers on how useful they feel the additional time is for customers?
10. How are advisers making use of the '1-3 mandatory activities' during Stage 3?
 - o What kinds of activities are they mandating people to attend?
 - o Do you think the provision is appropriate?
 - o How do they decide on what to mandate customers to?
 - o What happens if a customer does not attend a mandatory activity?
 - Are advisers using Jobseeker's Directions?
 - How/when would sanctioning occur?
11. How are the Stage 3 weekly signings being organised?
 - o How is this working out?
12. Do you think that being fast-tracked to stage three is helping customers?
 - o Is there any evidence for this?
13. Have the new Support Contracts affected delivery of Stage 3 at all? How?
 - o Are advisers confident with matching customers to the different modules?
 - o Are the modules appropriate for customer needs?
 - o Are there any service gaps?

14. How has the implementation of PRaP gone in this office?
 - o Has the switch to PRaP had an impact on adviser time?
 - o What improvements have you seen (if any)?
15. What improvements can be made to the delivery of stage 3 of the Jobseeker’s Regime?

Stage 2

16. How is the delivery of the initial Stage 2 interviews going? *[Researcher to refer to any office specific issues raised during the wave 2 fieldwork]*
 - o Probe on structure: *one-to-one/group, timings*
17. How are Targeted Reviews being used by advisers?
 - o How do advisers decide who to refer to a Targeted Review?
 - o How are they organised?
 - Are there always 2 reviews? When do they take place?
 - o Do you think that Targeted Reviews are effective?
 - How? Why?
 - o Would you make any changes to the Targeted Reviews?
18. How are the Stage 2 weekly signings being organised?
 - o How is this working out?
19. Has the new, extra advisory support started for young people (i.e., two mandatory 30 min meetings)?
 - o If yes, how is this working out?
 - o If no, when will this begin?
20. And has the new requirement for weekly signing started for young people?
 - o If yes, how is this working out?
 - o If no, when will this begin?
21. Are there any improvements that could be made to the delivery of Stage 2?

Stage 1

22. How is the delivery of Stage 1 going? *[Researcher to refer to any office specific issues raised during the wave 2 fieldwork]*
23. How is the delivery of the BtWS going? *[Researcher to refer to any office specific issues raised during the wave 1 fieldwork]*
24. To what extent is fast-tracking taking place?
 - o Are there any constraints on this?
25. Has the new, extra advisory support started for young people (18-24 yrs)?
 - o If yes, how is this working out?
 - o If no, when will this begin?
26. Are there any improvements that could be made to the delivery of Stage 1?

General JRFND

27. How is the sanctioning process going?
- o How confident are advisers to sanction customers?
 - o Are there any constraints on sanctioning?
28. To what extent do you think the JRFND regime is effective for all groups of customers?
- o Are there any customer groups who are not adequately served by the regime? Which ones?
 - How about PSA 16 groups?³⁰
 - How about people aged 50 plus?
 - o *Probe: How is the regime serving ESA customers who have been diverted to JSA?*
 - *Have these customers been willing to accept their JSA status?*
 - *How prepared are staff to support them?*
 - o How is support working out for 18-24 year olds?
 - How do the new services for 18-24 year olds compare to the New Deal for Young People?

JRFND extra questions (if time permits)

29. How are Fortnightly Jobseeker Review staff involved in the delivery of JRFND?
- o Are customer activities prescribed by advisers followed up by FJR staff when customers are signing?
 - *Prompt on whether this happens at Stage 1? Stage 2? Stage 3?*
 - o Do FJR staff tell customers about provision (or make any referrals to provision)?

Closing

30. Do you have any other comments, anything else you would like to add?

Thank you!

³⁰ PSA 16 groups are: care leavers at age 19, offenders on probation, people in contact with secondary mental health services, people with moderate to severe learning disabilities known to social services.

Third Party Provision Manager (TPPM) – Telephone Interview

Section 1: General

1. Can you provide an update on any changes to services available to JSA customers since August-September 2009 (the last research interview)?
2. How does information on the various provider services reach Jobcentre Plus advisers?
 - o Any mapping of provision in relation to:
 - Customer needs?
 - Local labour market?
 - o Is the District Provision Tool used?
 - How useful is this?
 - Could it be improved?
3. *[If not already mentioned]* How is the new Support Contract working out?
 - o How has this affected the range of provision available for JSA customers?
 - o How is the Support Contract used for delivering the different interventions?
 - JRFND (at different stages)
 - SNU
 - o Could anything be improved?
4. How has the introduction of PRaP affected service provision?
 - o Were there any problems with its implementation?
 - o How has it changed the way advisers work (vis-à-vis referring to provision)?
 - o What feedback have you received from Jobcentre Plus staff?
 - o What are your views on PRaP communications and guidance?
 - o Any suggestions for improvement?
5. For your district, do you feel there is:
 - o Any overlap in services?
 - o Any gaps in services?

Section 2: FND providers

Check notes on FND suppliers in the District. Probe on each provider separately if more than one.

6. Generally, what has been your experience of working with the provider(s) so far?
 - o What has been working well?
 - o What has not been working well?

7. How is performance information about the provider(s) shared between the Contract Manager, yourself and local Jobcentre Plus staff?
 - o What information is circulated? By what means?
 - o To whom (PAs, ASM, etc.)?
 - o Are there any concerns about how performance information is shared?
 - o Could anything be improved?
8. How is the handover of customers from Jobcentre Plus to the FND provider(s) going?
 - o Is this process running smoothly? Any teething issues?
 - o What are fail to attend rates like (for the first interview with the provider)?
 - o How could this be improved?
 - o Any issues with the transfer of personal information?
 - o Have any adjustments been made/lessons learnt since handovers to the provider started?
9. Has there been any feedback from **customers** about their experiences with the FND provider(s) and their sub-contractors?
 - o Ask for examples ...
 - o How is the feedback disseminated?
10. Has there been any feedback from the **provider(s)** about:
 - o The handover process?
 - o Customer progress on FND?
 - o Working with sub-contractors?
 - o Ask for examples ...
 - o How is the feedback disseminated?
11. What is Jobcentre Plus' role with customers once they have started with the FND provider?
 - o Does Jobcentre Plus have a role in monitoring the customer journey?
 - How does this happen?
 - Any suggestions for improvement?
12. How are the relationships between the FND provider(s) and sub-contractors involved in the delivery of JRFND services?
 - o Is the FND provider able to effectively use other services in the area?
 - o Any gaps in what the provider is offering?
13. Overall, how effectively do you feel that the FND programme is operating in this District?
 - o Any suggestions for improvement?

Section 3: Closing

14. Do you have any other comments, anything else you would like to add?

Thank you!

FND Contract Manager – Telephone Interview

Section 1: Respondent background

1. What is your current job title and what responsibilities does your role involve?
 - o Length of time in role
 - o Districts they have contact with

Establish that the interview questions will focus on the work of the [provider] in [district(s)] only. If the provider covers more than one relevant district, you will need to probe them on issues/performance of the [provider] in each of the [district(s)].

Section 2: Contract management

2. What is [provider] contracted to deliver?
 - o Nature of services
 - o Length of contract (and date contract commenced)
 - o Outcome measures/performance targets
3. What has been your experience of working with [provider] so far?
 - o What has been working well?
 - o What has not been working well?
4. *[For each District]* How would you describe the relationship between Jobcentre Plus and [provider]?
 - o Include TPPM, PAs/ASMs in local offices, District management, etc.
 - o How can the relationships be improved?
5. How do you monitor the work of [provider]?
6. How is performance information shared with Jobcentre Plus offices?
 - o What information is circulated? By what means and to whom (TPPM, ASM, Advisers, etc.)?
 - o What is done with the information?
 - o Are there any concerns about how performance information is shared?
 - o Could anything be improved?
7. How has the introduction of PRaP affected FND provision?
 - o Were there any problems with its implementation?
 - o What feedback have you received from [provider]?
 - o How effective do you think it is?
 - o What are your views on PRaP communications and guidance?
 - o Any suggestions for improvement?

Section 3: Handover process and working with customers

8. How is the handover of customers from Jobcentre Plus to [provider] going?
 - o Is this process running smoothly? Any teething issues?
 - o What are fail to attend rates like (for the first interview with the provider)?
 - o How could this be improved?
 - o Any issues with the transfer of personal information?
 - o Have any adjustments been made/lessons learnt since handovers to the provider started?
 - o *[If relevant]* Does this differ by district?
9. Do you have tripartite pre-provision interviews in [district(s)]?

If yes:

 - o Are there any benefits of a tripartite interview?
 - Any impact on fail to attend rates?
 - Any effect on transfer of personal information?
10. How could the pre-provision interview be improved?
11. Has there been any feedback from **customers** about their experiences with the provider?
 - o Who would receive the feedback?
 - o Is this collated/recorded?
 - o *[If relevant]* Does this differ by district?
12. Has there been any feedback from [provider] about:
 - o The handover process?
 - o Customer progress on FND?
 - o Who would receive the feedback?
 - o Is this collated/recorded?
 - o *[If relevant]* Does this differ by district?
13. What is Jobcentre Plus' role with customers once they have started with the FND provider?
 - o Does Jobcentre Plus have a role in monitoring the customer journey?
 - Who is responsible for case management?

14. To what extent do you think the services offered by [provider] are effective for all groups of customers?
- o Are there any customer groups who are not adequately served by the provider? Which ones?
 - o How about PSA 16 groups?³¹
 - o How about ESA customers who have been diverted to JSA?
 - o How about people aged 50 plus?
 - o How is support working out for 18-24 year olds?
15. *[For each district]* How are the relationships between [provider] and sub-contractors involved in the delivery of JRFND services?
- o Is the provider able to effectively use available provision in the area?

Section 4: Closing

16. Overall, how effectively do you feel the FND programme is operating in this *[take each district separately]*?
- o Compared to elsewhere?
 - o Suggestions for improvement
17. Do you have any other comments, anything else you would like to add?

Thank you!

³¹ PSA 16 groups are: care leavers at age 19, offenders on probation, people in contact with secondary mental health services, people with moderate to severe learning disabilities known to social services.

JR&FND evaluation: Topic guide for semi-structured interviews with 10 prime providers of Flexible New Deal (FND)

INTRODUCTION: Check that respondent is aware of the purpose of research and nature of the interview, as explained in the introductory letter. Review key points *briefly* if it seems necessary.

- Background and purpose of this piece of research for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
 - PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) is working with the Policy Studies Institute to understand the experience of those providing Flexible New Deal.
 - Purpose of the research is to gain an understanding of how FND is being delivered covering implementation, delivery of services and any other issues that have arisen
 - All questions are specific to this district [*Interviewer insert district name*] and not the contract package area as a whole
- Previous research
 - You may have completed a telephone interview previously with either a colleague or myself regarding the introduction of the Commissioning Strategy and its impact upon your organisation. Although this interview, as explained, is focusing on how FND is being delivered, there may be some overlap on information previously supplied by you/your organisation but for data security purposes we have treated this research separately so we appreciate your patience.
- Nature of the interview
 - The interview will take about 60-90 minutes.
 - Neither you nor your organisation will be identified to DWP or in any reports of research findings.
 - Policy Studies Institute will be analysing the information gathered from all of our interviews with prime providers – may I have permission to share this interview with PSI? **Permission must be obtained**
- Use of information provided and nature of evaluation
 - Input from different providers will be aggregated and conclusions drawn about delivery of the Flexible New Deal programme, not about individual providers. Where verbatim material is used, it will be anonymised.
 - DWP will publish several reports covering different aspects of its employment programmes and these will be available to you.
- Obtain permission to record interview
 - **May I have permission to record the interview? Permission must be obtained**

Note to interviewers

Elements of multi-part questions are identified using letters, e.g. if Q 2.5 has four parts, they will be shown as a, b, c and d. Each part should be asked unless previous answers have adequately covered that element of the question or shown that it is not applicable.

Instructions in bold indicate that a follow-up question should be asked, if it is appropriate, given the preceding response.

Suggested probes, in italics but not in bold, may be used if time allows and the respondent has not covered the issue raised in the probe. These probes are optional.

Please refer to interviewer briefing notes prior to interview.

BEGIN TAPE RECORDING NOW: This is interview number ____ ____

Interviewer: Read out the three digit number that has been assigned to this candidate in the sample sheets.

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Could you please briefly describe your role within the organisation and what your responsibility is regarding the delivery of FND?
Probe for how long they've been in the role, how many staff within the organisation would be responsible for delivering FND.
- 1.2 What other welfare to work programmes does your organisation currently provide?
Probe for the percentage of staff working on FND compared to other programmes
- 1.3 Can you describe the range of services that you currently offer your customers under FND within this district?
*Probe for examples of interventions and courses and what these involve.
Probe about support to help people find sustainable work, for example in-work support
Interviewer note: we are seeking to understand what is in the provider's black box rather than a list of mandatory actions/tasks*
- 1.4 Which of these services that you have just described are delivered in-house and which are delivered by any subcontractors?
Probe for whether the provider has direct contact with customers, how many subcontractors (direct or indirect) do they have? Ascertain the % of services delivered by subcontractors and the nature of sub-contracted work i.e. end to end versus specialist. Are sub-contractors divided geographically or thematically?

2 IMPLEMENTATION OF FND

- 2.1 How did you ensure all delivery staff were prepared for delivering FND? Did you experience any issues in preparing staff – either your own staff or sub-contractors’?

Probe how they ensured sub-contractors’ staff were prepared..

Probe whether they or their sub-contractors used any specific learning and development packages. If so, how effective were these packages?

Own staff:

Sub-contractor staff:

- 2.2 How are you ensuring that messages are cascaded effectively throughout your entire delivery network (of own staff and sub-contractors)?
- Probe, for example, how were FND aims and objectives communicated within your delivery network? How did you ensure that operational and delivery staff are clear about their roles within the process?*

- 2.3 How effective do you think this approach has been?
- Probe for reasons/examples why effective or not so effective*

- 2.4 Who are your main local strategic partners within this district?

- 2.5 How did you identify these organisations?

2.5b How have you established and developed relationships with them?
Probe for specific examples of joined-up working/delivery of public sector provision

2.6 Have you attended any Provider Engagement Meetings (PEMs)?
If Yes : Probe for how many, how regularly these have occurred

If No: Probe why not and then move to Question 2.9

If answered yes to 2.6

2.7 How useful do find Provider Engagement Meetings for discussing:
a) performance and delivery issues?
Probe for examples

b) improvement activities?
Probe for examples

c) any other areas?
Probe for examples

2.8 Are there any ways in which these meetings could be improved?
Probe for examples

2.9 Overall, what are your views on the implementation of FND, looking specifically at?

a: communication from DWP/JCP

Probe whether communications were appropriate, timely and/or coherent? How were they received? What was the most effective medium (print/electronic/face-to-face)?

b: operational support available/received from DWP/JCP?

Probe for examples of operational support received/ would have liked to have received

2.10 What went well and what could have been improved?

Probe, if needed, for examples

3 REFERRALS FROM JCP

3.1 Overall, how effective is the handover process from JCP in relation to:

a) continuity of customer service? i.e. do customers appear to know where to go and what to expect when they come to you?

Probe whether the customer signs at JCP office or at a provider premises

b) provision of adequate customer information, for example length of unemployment, health conditions, skills plans etc?

Probe specifically regarding the four PSA 16 definition groups i.e. care leavers (at age 19); offenders on probation, people in contact with secondary mental health care service; people with moderate to severe learning disabilities know to social services

c) adequate /sufficiently detailed action plans?

Probe whether they are detailed enough to describe job goals and what work-focused activities have already been undertaken, how useful these are etc

3.2 What suggestions would you have on how to improve the handover process between JCP and yourselves?
Probe for specific examples

3.3 Are you working with Jobcentre Plus to provide joint Pre Provision Reviews for new referrals? (aka 'tripartite PPRs, warm handovers – clarify if necessary)?
Interviewer, refer to briefing notes

If **yes**, how do you think these are working in relation to:

a) improving customer attendance and engagement?
Probe, if needed, for examples

b) continuity of service
Probe, if needed, for examples

c) information sharing?
Probe, if needed, for examples

d) where are these meetings generally held? (i.e. at JCP or provider site)

e) overall, how do feel these types of meetings are working?

If **no**, why have you not been involved in any providing joint Pre Provision Reviews?
Probe how the standard referral process is working (customer attendance issues and handover of information)

4 SERVICE AND DELIVERY OF FND

- 4.1 Earlier you described the services you provide under FND. Could you please describe these in more detail now? For example what types of customers (lone parents, older workers, people with health conditions etc) are these designed for and how are they delivered? *Probe what format is used, i.e. whether face-to-face or text/telephone, one-to-one or group-based? What challenges is the provider facing in terms of handling the different target groups i.e. older people versus specialist group referrals*
- 4.2 How do you assess customers' barriers to work? How do you develop appropriate action plans to deliver a personalised service?
- 4.3 What's the profile of the customers you are receiving from Jobcentre Plus? *Probe on whether this has been what they expected and if they have had to modify their services*
- 4.4 How do you (or your sub-contractors) decide how frequently to see your customers? *Probe for how long customers have to wait between activities, for example, are there waiting lists to get on specific courses/programmes of support?*
- 4.5 What management systems do you have in place to ensure that customers get the required level of contact/support from you and your sub-contractors? *Probe for how they monitor the frequency of appropriate contact with customers so that customers are not 'parked' and left without support*

- 4.6 How do you ensure all customers meet the requirements of at least four continuous weeks of full-time work related activity?
Probe for specific examples
- 4.7 How do you ensure a seamless customer service through your network of delivery partners and sub-contractors?
Probe for examples
- 4.8 How do you present the different services you offer to your customers? i.e. how do you explain what is mandatory and what is voluntary?
Probe on how this differs for each customer group?
- 4.9 Have you needed to ‘raise a doubt’ about any of your customers?
If **Yes**
a) In what circumstances have you had to refer customers for a possible sanction?
Probe for whether the provider has had any difficulties with particular groups of customers and sanctions?
- b) Does it help improve customer attendance or does it put some customers off?
Probe for specific examples
- If **Not**
c) Why are you not referring customers at all for a possible sanction?

4.10 When do you use the ‘threat’ of sanctions with customers?

Probe for specific examples

4.11 In general, what impact do you think FND’s sanctions policy and process has upon effective delivery of the programme?

Probe for specific examples

4.12 How do you obtain feedback on service quality and customer experience under FND from your (a) subcontractors, (b) delivery partners and (c) customers?

Probe regarding performance management and customer satisfaction methods/tools, both informally and formally. Probe for frequency and for examples of any actions taken as a result of feedback.

a) Sub-contractors:

b) Delivery partners:

c) Customers:

5 REFERRALS TO SUBCONTRACTORS/OTHER DELIVERY PARTNERS

5.1 How do you decide which customer should be referred to which sub-contractor? Are there any specific differences between customer groups?

Establish whether it’s based on contractual agreements/agreed rules such as volumes, geography, past performance or whether it’s based on ‘softer’ elements such as previous relationship between the prime provider and the sub-contractor, specific customer need

- 5.2 What methods do you use to refer customers to you sub-contractors/other delivery partners i.e. by emails, forms, phone or bespoke IT?
Probe for process involved/time frame involved and any issues experienced
- 5.3 What information is shared when making a referral to a subcontractor/other delivery partner and how (if not covered above)?
Probe, if needed, for specifics
- 5.4 Finally, overall, how do you perceive FND delivery is going to date? What are your current priorities to improve your delivery and performance?
Probe for examples and what feedback they have received from their subcontractors.

6 CLOSE

Sometimes it is helpful to re-contact people to find out more about their views and experiences or to explore their responses in more depth. Would it be acceptable for PricewaterhouseCoopers to contact you again to discuss topics similar to those we've covered today?

Yes

No

It depends, *specify:*

THANK AND CLOSE

RECORD:

- Your name, date and duration of interview
- Any impressions of the respondent's level of knowledge about FND and attitudes toward JCPs, DWP and FND if these have not emerged clearly in answers already recorded

Customer Interview topic guides

Customers who found work from Stage 2 or 3

Section A: Customer background

1. Tell me a bit about yourself...
 - o Are you working? Claiming JSA? Receiving some other benefit?
 - o Who lives with you in your household at the moment? (include no. and ages of children, clarify whether lone parent)
2. How long have you been/were you claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for?

Refer to JSA claim start date in database. If moved in and out of work since then, establish that interview is about the claim starting on [date given].

- o Have you claimed JSA previously?

[Try and establish a brief claims history, including whether transferred from other benefits (e.g. IB or IS) to JSA.]

- o What is your current/most recent job? Establish details:
 - Job title, type of work
 - Permanent/temporary
 - Full-time/part-time
 - Employee/self-employed
- o Have you always done this type of work in the past
- o When did the job start (and finish)? Why did it finish? (if relevant)

If customer is working:

3. How is the job going?
4. Is there anything that makes it difficult for you to work?
 - o Probe on:
 - Personal circumstances, e.g. childcare
 - Health conditions/disabilities

Prompt on these difficulties in rest of interview when asking about usefulness of Jobcentre Plus services

If customer is now on benefit:

5. What kind of work are you looking for?
 - o Type of work
 - o Permanent/temporary
 - o Full-time/part-time
 - o Employee/self-employed
 - o Level of pay

6. What would you say are the main things stopping you from getting work at the moment?
- o Probe on:
 - Personal circumstances (childcare, health conditions, etc.)
 - Availability of jobs (probe type of job, location, hours, pay, etc.)
 - Skills, qualifications, experience

Prompt on these difficulties in rest of interview when asking about usefulness of Jobcentre Plus services

Section B: JRFND regime overall

Tailor questions depending on whether customer is still in employment or is back on benefit

7. How have you found the experience of using Jobcentre Plus overall during this claim?
8. What were your impressions of the staff you encountered at Jobcentre Plus?
- o Probe separately on:
 - Advisers
 - Signing staff
 - Staff delivering any group sessions
 - o If possible, also probe on:
 - Initial interview
 - three-month interview
 - six-month interview (*if relevant*)
 - o Was there anyone who was particularly helpful? Why?
 - o How much contact did you have with Jobcentre Plus?
 - Was this the right amount?
 - Did it change over time? How?
 - What did you think about this?
 - o Sometimes people are asked to sign on weekly instead of fortnightly for a certain length of time (usually six weeks), did you have to do this?
 - What do you think about that?
9. What do you think about the advice you received from staff?
- o Do you feel that the staff listened to you?
 - o Did they understand your needs?
 - o Did they address your concerns?
 - o Did you ever feel pushed into decisions?

Prompt on whether advice addressed any barriers to work raised previously.

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10. Did you receive help from staff in looking for work?
 - o How useful was this? Why?
 - o Did it change the way you looked for jobs?
 - o Did it change the types of jobs you were looking for?
 - o Did it change the way you feel/felt about finding work?
11. Did staff ask about your skills/qualifications?
 - o Did you talk about what skills you already had? [*probe for examples*]
 - o Did you talk about any skills/training that you needed?
 - o Were you referred anywhere else for advice/help on skills?
 - o Did you talk to anyone about careers advice?
12. What did you think of the range of services/provision (e.g. courses, training) that were available through Jobcentre Plus?
 - o Was there anything missing?
 - o Did the adviser seem to know about appropriate services to refer you to?

If the customer entered stage 3:

- o Did this change at all in the time you have been/were claiming? (*Probe on whether changed after six months, if relevant*)
 - o In what way? What did you think about that?
13. Did you attend any provision/make use of any services while you were claiming?
 - o *Prompt on:*
 - Group sessions at Jobcentre Plus on job search
 - Sessions with another organisation on job search
 - Training (that you were referred to by Jobcentre Plus)
 - Anything else (volunteering, self-employment support)
 - When was this? [Try and establish in which stage of JRFND]
 - How long did it last?

Ask for each activity:

14. Why did you take up/attend this activity/service?
 - o Did you have a choice?
 - o Who identified the provision/service?
 - o Did they give you information about it beforehand? Was this helpful?
 - o What did you think you would gain from the service/provision?

Prompt on whether provision/service addressed any barriers to work raised previously.

If attended training:

- o Did you complete it? Why/not?
- o Did you gain any qualifications?
- o Was it related to what you discussed with the staff? [i.e. skills gaps or job goals?]

If not covered already:

15. Do you remember attending a Back To Work Session?

If not:

- o Why? What happened? Were your benefits affected?

If yes:

- o What did you think of the session?
 - Content
 - Delivery
- o Did it change anything about your job search?
- o Do you remember completing a 3-point plan?
 - Was this useful?

16. Do you remember having a Jobseeker's Agreement?

- o What was in it?
- o Was it useful?
- o Do you remember having an Action Plan (What you would do to find work)? Was this useful?

17. Did you understand what you needed to do in order to claim benefit?

- o What did you think about this?
- o Did it make any difference to what you did?
- o Did the requirements change over time?
 - What did you think about that?

18. Did you ever receive any sanction of your benefit? *If yes:*

- o What was this for
- o What did you think about it?
- o Did it change your behaviour in any way? How?

19. During the time you were claiming were you receiving any help or support from any other organisations? (e.g. community organisations)

- o How did this support compare to that from Jobcentre Plus?

Section C: Finding employment

20. To what extent do you think Jobcentre Plus helped you to find work?

[Probe if not already covered in previous section]

o *Prompt on:*

- Advisers, provision, services
- What role did they play?
- What support was offered/taken up?
- What helped you? What didn't help you?
- Would you have got the job otherwise (without this help)?

21. What methods did you use to look for jobs?

o *Prompt on:*

- Whether used Jobcentre Plus job points, website, telephone service

22. How did you find the experience of applying for jobs?

o How many did you apply for (roughly)?

o What made you apply for these jobs in particular?

o *Probe on:*

- Pay?
- Type of work?
- Location?
- Hours (fitting with childcare)?

23. Why did you decide to accept this particular job?

o Did you have to compromise in any way?

o *Probe on:*

- Pay
- Type of work
- Hours
- Location
- Childcare

24. Were you told about tax credits and other benefits that you could claim once you started work?

o Did this make a difference to your decisions?

25. Do you think you'll stay in the job?

o Why/not?

26. Do you think that the job gives you the opportunity to develop your skills?

- o In what way?
- o Do you have opportunities to progress/work your way up?
- o Is this important to you?

27. Could the job be improved at all? How?

Section G: Concluding questions

28. Is there any aspect of your experiences so far that has been particularly helpful? Unhelpful?

- o What could be improved to help/support you better?
- o What improvements/changes might increase your chances of finding work?

If not in work:

29. Do you think that you are better prepared to start work because of:

- o Advice/support from Jobcentre Plus staff?
- o Courses/activities you have been sent on by Jobcentre Plus?

If in work:

30. To what extent do you think Jobcentre Plus (advisers, provision, and services) helped you to enter work?

- o *Probe if not already covered in previous section:*
 - What role did they play?
 - What support was offered/taken up?
 - What helped you? What didn't help you?

Thank you very much for your help!

Customers who completed in JRFND Stage 2 (in Stage 3 at time of interview)

Section A: Customer background

1. Tell me a bit about yourself...
 - o Are you working? Claiming JSA? Receiving some other benefit?
 - o Who lives with you in your household at the moment? (include no. and ages of children, *clarify whether lone parent*)

2. How long have you been/were you claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for?

Refer to JSA claim start date in database. If moved in and out of work since then, establish that interview is about the claim starting on [date given].

- o Have you claimed JSA previously?

[Try and establish a brief claims history, including whether transferred from other benefits (e.g. IB or IS) to JSA.]

- o What is your current/most recent job? Establish details:
 - Job title, type of work
 - Permanent/temporary
 - Full-time/part-time
 - Employee/self-employed
- o Have you always done this type of work in the past?
- o When did the job start (and finish)? Why did it finish? *(if relevant)*

If customer is working:

3. How is the job going?
4. Is there anything that makes it difficult for you to work?
 - o *Probe on:*
 - Personal circumstances, e.g. childcare
 - Health conditions/disabilities

Prompt on these difficulties in rest of interview when asking about usefulness of Jobcentre Plus services

If customer is now on benefit:

5. What kind of work are you looking for?
 - o Type of work
 - o Permanent/temporary
 - o Full-time/part-time
 - o Employee/self-employed
 - o Level of pay

6. What would you say are the main things stopping you from getting work at the moment?

o *Probe on:*

- Personal circumstances (childcare, health conditions, etc.)
- Availability of jobs (probe type of job, location, hours, pay, etc.)
- Skills, qualifications, experience

Prompt on these difficulties in rest of interview when asking about usefulness of Jobcentre Plus services

Section B: JRFND regime overall

Tailor questions depending on whether customer is still in employment or is back on benefit

7. How have you found the experience of using Jobcentre Plus overall during this claim?

8. What were your impressions of the staff you encountered at Jobcentre Plus?

o *Probe separately on:*

- Advisers
- Signing staff
- Staff delivering any group sessions

o *If possible, also probe on:*

- Initial interview
- three-month interview
- six-month interview (if relevant)

o Was there anyone who was particularly helpful? Why?

o How much contact did you have with Jobcentre Plus?

- Was this the right amount?
- Did it change over time? How?
- What did you think about this?

o Sometimes people are asked to sign on weekly instead of fortnightly for a certain length of time (usually six weeks), did you have to do this?

- What do you think about that?

9. What do you think about the advice you received from staff?

- o Do you feel that the staff listened to you?
- o Did they understand your needs?
- o Did they address your concerns?
- o Did you ever feel pushed into decisions?

Prompt on whether advice addressed any barriers to work raised previously.

10. Did you receive help from staff in looking for work?
 - o How useful was this? Why?
 - o Did it change the way you looked for jobs?
 - o Did it change the types of jobs you were looking for?
 - o Did it change the way you feel/felt about finding work?
11. Did staff ask about your skills/qualifications?
 - o Did you talk about what skills you already had? [*Probe for examples*]
 - o Did you talk about any skills/training that you needed?
 - o Were you referred anywhere else for advice/help on skills?
 - o Did you talk to anyone about careers advice?
12. What did you think of the range of services/provision (e.g. courses, training) that were available through Jobcentre Plus?
 - o Was there anything missing?
 - o Did the adviser seem to know about appropriate services to refer you to?

If the customer entered Stage 3:

- o Did this change at all in the time you have been/were claiming? (*Probe on whether changed after six months, if relevant*)
 - o In what way? What did you think about that?
13. Did you attend any provision/make use of any services while you were claiming?
 - o *Prompt on:*
 - Group sessions at Jobcentre Plus on job search
 - Sessions with another organisation on job search
 - Training (that you were referred to by Jobcentre Plus)
 - Anything else (volunteering, self-employment support)
 - When was this? [*Try and establish in which stage of JRFND*]
 - How long did it last?

Ask for each activity:

14. Why did you take up/attend this activity/service?
 - o Did you have a choice?
 - o Who identified the provision/service?
 - o Did they give you information about it beforehand? Was this helpful?
 - o What did you think you would gain from the service/provision?

Prompt on whether provision/service addressed any barriers to work raised previously.

If attended training:

- o Did you complete it? Why/not?
- o Did you gain any qualifications?
- o Was it related to what you discussed with the staff? [i.e. skills gaps or job goals?]

If not covered already:

15. Do you remember having a Jobseeker's Agreement?
 - o What was in it?
 - o Was it useful?
 - o Do you remember having an Action Plan? What you would do to find work? Was this useful?
16. Did you understand what you needed to do in order to claim benefit?
 - o What did you think about this?
 - o Did it make any difference to what you did?
 - o Did the requirements change over time?
 - What did you think about that?
17. Did you ever receive any sanction of your benefit? If yes:
 - o What was this for
 - o What did you think about it?
 - o Did it change your behaviour in any way? How?
18. During the time you were claiming were you receiving any help or support from any other organisations? (e.g. community organisations)
 - o How did this support compare to that from Jobcentre Plus

Section C: JRFND Stage 1

19. Do you remember what happened at the initial interview?
 - o What did you talk about?
 - o What did you think about the meeting?
20. And what happened after that?
 - o What other contact did you have with the Jobcentre Plus [in first 12 weeks]?

21. Do you remember attending a Back to Work session?

If not:

- o Why? What happened? Were your benefits affected?

If yes:

- o What did you think of the session?
 - Content
 - delivery
- o Did it change anything about your job search?
- o Do you remember completing a 3-point plan?
 - Was this useful?

22. Were you offered any other support or services during the first 12 weeks?

Prompt:

- o Any help with job search?
- o e.g. a session on job searching at Jobcentre Plus or at an outside provider?
- o (If prof/exec) specialist support for looking for work within your field?

23. Did you take up any of these services?

If so:

- o What was the service?
 - Where was it held?
 - What was covered?
 - How long did it last for?
- o Was it helpful? Why/not?

If no:

- o Why not?
 - Were any appointments (referrals) made for you that you didn't attend?
 - Why didn't you attend?
 - Would anything have helped/made it possible for you to attend?

24. Do you think you got enough support during this period? (i.e. in the first 12 weeks of claiming)

- o Was it the right kind of support? Why/not?
- o Did you need all the support you were given?
- o What else would you have liked?

Section D: JRFND Stage 2

25. Was your initial meeting in Stage 2 a one-to-one interview or a group session followed by a one-to-one?
 - o What did you think of this approach?
26. Do you remember what happened at that initial ‘Stage 2’ meeting (or group session)?
 - o What did you talk about?
 - o Were you asked to change your job search at all? How? Why?
 - o Did you find the meeting helpful? Why/why not?
27. What did you think about having to sign on every week for six weeks (if relevant)?
 - o What happened at these meetings?
 - o How useful was it?
 - o Was the discussion you had at the initial (Stage 2) meeting followed up at all?
28. How much contact did you have with Jobcentre Plus staff during Stage 2?
29. What support/services were you offered during Stage 2?
 - o What did you think about the range of services that was offered?
 - Was there anything missing?
 - o Did the adviser seem to know about appropriate services to refer you to?
30. (*If relevant*) Did you take up any services?
 - o Establish details

Ask for each activity:

31. Why did you take up/attend this activity/service?
 - o Did you have a choice?
 - o Who identified the provision/service?
 - o Did they give you information about it beforehand? Was this helpful?
 - o What did you think you would gain from the service/provision?

Prompt on whether provision/service addressed any barriers to work raised previously.

If did not attend anything:

32. Why not?
33. Do you think you got enough support during this period?
 - o Was it the right kind of support? Why/not?
 - o Did you need all the support you were given?
 - o What else would you have liked?

Since [state date] you should have entered a new stage of your claim, called Stage 3, which starts at six months.

34. What do you think of this stage so far?
- o Have you received more services/support?
 - o What do you think about this?
 - o Do you have to do anything extra in order to carry on receiving benefit?
 - o What do you think about this?

Section G: Concluding questions

35. Is there any aspect of your experiences so far that has been particularly helpful? Unhelpful?
- o What could be improved to help/support you better?
 - o What improvements/changes might increase your chances of finding work?

If not in work:

36. Do you think that you are better prepared to start work because of:
- o Advice/support from Jobcentre Plus staff?
 - o Courses/activities you have been sent on by Jobcentre Plus?

If in work:

37. To what extent do you think Jobcentre Plus (advisers, provision, and services) helped you to enter work?

[Probe if not already covered in previous section]

- o What role did they play?
- o What support was offered/taken up?
- o What helped you? What didn't help you?

Thank you very much for your help!

Customers who completed JRFND Stage 3 (in Stage 4 at time of interview)

Face-to-face Interview

Section A: Customer background

1. Tell me a bit about yourself...
 - o Are you claiming JSA? Working? Receiving some other benefit?
 - o Who lives with you in your household at the moment? (include no. and ages of children, clarify whether lone parent)
2. How long have you been/were you claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for?
 - o Can I confirm that you started with a new provider recently (Stage 4)?
 - o What is the name of the provider?
 - o Have you claimed JSA previously?

[Try and establish a brief claims history, including whether transferred from other benefits (e.g. IB or IS) to JSA.]

- o What is your current/most recent job? Establish details:
 - Job title, type of work
 - Permanent/temporary
 - Full-time/part-time
 - Employee/self-employed
- o Have you always done this type of work in the past
- o When did the job start (and finish)? Why did it finish? *(if relevant)*

If customer is working:

3. How is the job going?
4. Is there anything that makes it difficult for you to work?

Probe on:

- o Personal circumstances, e.g. childcare
- o Health conditions/disabilities

Prompt on these difficulties in rest of interview when asking about usefulness of Jobcentre Plus services

If customer is on benefit:

5. What kind of work are you looking for?
 - o Type of work
 - o Permanent/temporary
 - o Full-time/part-time
 - o Employee/self-employed
 - o Level of pay

6. What would you say are the main things stopping you from getting work at the moment?

Probe on:

- o Personal circumstances (childcare, health conditions, etc.)
- o Availability of jobs (probe type of job, location, hours, pay, etc.)
- o Skills, qualifications, experience

Prompt on these difficulties in rest of interview when asking about usefulness of Jobcentre Plus services

Section B: JRFND regime overall

Tailor questions depending on whether customer is still claiming or has found employment.

7. How have you found the experience of using Jobcentre Plus overall during this claim?

8. What were your impressions of the staff you encountered at Jobcentre Plus?

Probe separately on: advisers, signing staff, staff delivering any group sessions

- o Was this what you expected?
- o Was there anyone who was particularly helpful? Why?

9. What do you think about the advice you received from staff?

- o Do you feel that the staff listened to you?
- o Did they understand your needs?
- o Did they address your concerns?
- o Did you ever feel pushed into decisions?

Prompt on whether advice addressed any barriers to work raised previously.

10. Did you receive help from staff in looking for work?

- o How useful was this? Why?
- o Did it change the way you looked for jobs?
- o Did it change the types of jobs you were looking for?
- o Did it change the way you feel/felt about finding work?

11. Did you attend any provision/make use of any services while you were claiming?

Prompt on:

- o *Group sessions at Jobcentre Plus*
- o *Sessions with another organisation*
- o *Training (that you were referred to by Jobcentre Plus)*
- o *When was this? [Try and establish in which stage of JRFND]*
- o *How long did it last?*

12. Did staff ask about your skills/qualifications?
- o Did you talk about what skills you already had?
 - o *Check what respondent's highest qualification is/was (prior to claim)*
 - o Did you talk about any skills/training that you needed?
 - o Were you referred anywhere else for advice/help on skills?
13. Do you remember having a Jobseeker's Agreement?
- o What was in it?
 - o Was it useful?
14. Did you understand what you needed to do in order to claim benefit?
- o What did you think about this?
 - o Did it make any difference to what you did?
 - o Did the requirements change over time?
 - What did you think about that?
15. Did you ever receive any sanction of your benefit?
- If yes:**
- o What was this for?
 - o What did you think about it?
 - o Did it change your behaviour in any way? How?
16. During the time you were claiming were you receiving any help or support from any other organisations? (e.g. community organisations)
- o How did this support compare to that from Jobcentre Plus

Section E: JRFND Stage 3

First question just for fast-trackers

17. Do you remember any discussion (probably in your first meeting at Jobcentre Plus) about getting earlier access to some forms of help and support? *[It would mean moving to a different stage in order to receive extra support]*
- [May need to prompt, e.g. you would have seen an adviser more regularly, had more provision (e.g. training) available to you]*
- o How was this process explained by the adviser?
 - o Can you describe what happened?
 - o Was it presented as an option? Were you involved in the decision?
 - o What did you think about this?

I want to ask you a few questions now about Stage 3 of your claim, which is the six-month period before you started with [name provider].

18. Do you remember what happened at that initial Stage 3/six-month meeting?
 - o What did you talk about?
 - o Were you asked to change your job search at all? How? Why?
 - o Did you find the meeting helpful? Why/why not?
19. Do you remember having an 'Action Plan' with your adviser [detailing the steps you were going to take to find employment, your job goals?]
 - o How useful was this?
 - o Did you get to choose what went in the plan?
 - o Was there any discussion about your skills/qualifications?
 - o Was this included in the Action Plan? How?
 - o Was the Action Plan reviewed? When? Was this useful?
20. What did you think about having to sign on every week for six weeks (*if relevant*)?
 - o What happened at these meetings?
 - o How useful was it?
21. How much contact did you have with Jobcentre Plus staff during Stage 3?
 - o Did you see an adviser regularly?
 - o How often? Was this the right amount of contact?
 - o The same adviser?
 - o What did you think about this?
 - o Any other form of contact apart from meetings? (e.g. phone, text, email)
 - o What type of contact was best? Why?
22. What support/services were you offered during Stage 3?
 - o What did you think about the range of services that was offered?
 - Was there anything missing?
 - o Did the adviser seem to know about appropriate services to refer you to?

23. Did you take up any of the services available?

Prompt on

- o Recruitment subsidy voucher
 - Do they remember receiving this?
 - Did they use it? How?
 - What did they think of it?
- o Training
 - What course?
 - Which provider?
 - How long did it last for?
- o Volunteering
 - Which organisation arranged it?
 - Where was the voluntary work?
 - How long for?
- o Self-employment support
 - Which organisation provided support?
 - What kind of support?
 - How long for?
 - Did you become self-employed? Receive Self-Employment Credit?
- o Anything else?
 - Establish details

Ask for each activity:

24. Why did you take up/attend this activity/service?

- o Did you have a choice?
- o Was there anything you had to attend?
 - What did you think about this?
- o Who identified the provision/service?
- o Did they give you information about it beforehand? Was this helpful?
- o What did you think you would gain from the service/provision?

25. What did you think of the course/provision?

- o Was it helpful? Why/not?

Prompt on whether provision/service addressed any barriers to work raised previously.

If did not attend anything:

26. Why not?

- o Were any appointments (referrals) made for you that you didn't attend?
 - Why didn't you attend?
 - Would anything have helped/made it possible for you to attend?

Ask all:

27. At this stage, did you think there were more things you had to do to keep your benefit?

- o What did you think about this?

28. Do you think you got enough support during this period?

- o Was it the right kind of support? Why/not?
- o Did you need all the support you were given?
- o What else would you have liked?

Section F: JRFND Stage 4 Handover

The final section is about moving over to the new provider *[state name of provider]*

29. How did it go changing from Jobcentre Plus to the new provider?

- o Can you describe what happened *[e.g. meeting with provider beforehand, gap between being referred and first provider meeting, etc.]*?
- o When were you told that this was going to happen?
- o Did you get enough information beforehand?
 - Prompt on whether they received a leaflet on FND and what they thought about it?
- o Is there anything that could be improved about this process?

30. What do you think of this stage so far?

- o How does it differ from the services provided by Jobcentre Plus?
- o Do you think attending this provision will help you to get a job?
- o If yes, why? If no, why not?
- o What do you think is going well? Not so well?
- o What would you do if you weren't happy with how it was going *[with the provider]*?

31. Are there different things that you have to do in order to keep your benefit now?

- o What are they?
- o What do you think about that?

32. Do you still sign on every two weeks?

- o Where does this take place?
- o What do you think about this?

Section G: Concluding questions

33. Is there any aspect of your experiences so far that has been particularly helpful? Unhelpful?
- o What could be improved to help/support you better?
 - o What improvements/changes might increase your chances of finding work?

If not in work:

34. Do you think that you are better prepared to start work because of:
- o Advice/support from Jobcentre Plus staff? From the new provider?
 - o Courses/activities you have been sent on by Jobcentre Plus? By the new provider?

If in work:

35. To what extent do you think Jobcentre Plus or the new provider helped you to enter work?
- [Probe on both Jobcentre Plus and FND provider]*
- o What role did they play?
 - o What support was offered/taken up?
 - o What helped you? What didn't help you?

Thank you very much for your help!

Customers who completed Stage 2 and received Targeted Reviews

Section A: Customer background

1. Tell me a bit about yourself ...
 - o Are you claiming JSA? Working? Receiving some other benefit?
 - o Who lives with you in your household at the moment? (include no. and ages of children, *clarify whether lone parent*)
2. How long have you been/were you claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for? *Refer to JSA claim start date in database*
 - o Have you claimed JSA previously?
 - o Any other benefits?

[Try and establish a brief claims history]

 - o What is your current/most recent job? Establish details:
 - Job title, type of work
 - Permanent/temporary
 - Full-time/part-time
 - Employee/self-employed
 - o Have you always done this type of work in the past? What else have you done?
 - o When did the job start (and finish)? Why did it finish? *(if relevant)*

If customer is working:

3. How is the job going?
4. Is there anything that makes it difficult for you to work?

Probe on:

 - o Personal circumstances, e.g. childcare
 - o Health conditions/disabilities

Prompt on these difficulties in rest of interview when asking about usefulness of Jobcentre Plus services

If customer is on benefit:

5. What kind of work are you looking for?
 - o Type of work
 - o Permanent/temporary
 - o Full-time/part-time
 - o Employee/self-employed
 - o Level of pay

6. What would you say are the main things stopping you from getting work at the moment?

Probe on:

- o Personal circumstances (childcare, health conditions, etc.)
- o Availability of jobs (probe type of job, location, hours, pay, etc.)
- o Skills, qualifications, experience

If prison record, learning disabilities, mental health issues are raised, get as much detail as possible (if interviewee seems comfortable to talk about it)

Prompt on these difficulties in rest of interview when asking about usefulness of Jobcentre Plus services

Section B: JRFND regime overall

Tailor questions depending on whether customer is still claiming or has found employment.

7. How have you found the experience of using Jobcentre Plus overall during this claim?

8. What were your impressions of the staff you encountered at Jobcentre Plus?

Probe separately on: advisers, signing staff, staff delivering any group sessions

- o Was this what you expected?
- o Was there anyone who was particularly helpful? Why?

9. What do you think about the advice you received from staff?

- o Do you feel that the staff listened to you?
- o Did they understand your needs?
- o Did they address your concerns?
- o Did you ever feel pushed into decisions?

Prompt on whether advice addressed any barriers to work raised previously.

10. What help did you receive from staff in looking for work?

- o How useful was this? Why?
- o Did it change the way you looked for jobs?
- o Did it change the types of jobs you were looking for?
- o Did it change the way you feel/felt about finding work?

11. Did you attend any provision/make use of any services while you were claiming?

Prompt on:

- o *Group sessions at Jobcentre Plus*
- o *Sessions with another organisation*
- o *Training (that you were referred to by Jobcentre Plus)*
- o *When was this? [Try and establish in which stage of JRFND]*
- o *How long did it last?*

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12. Did staff ask about your skills/qualifications?
- o Did you talk about what skills you already had?
 - o *Check what respondent's highest qualification is/was (prior to claim)*
 - o Did you talk about any skills/training that you needed?
 - o Were you referred anywhere else for advice/help on skills?
13. Do you remember having a Jobseeker's Agreement?
- o What was in it?
 - o Was it useful?
14. Did you understand what you needed to do to continue receiving JSA?
- o What did you think about this?
 - o Did it make any difference to what you did?
 - o Did the requirements change over time?
 - What did you think about that?
15. Did you ever receive any sanction of your benefit?

If yes:

- o What was this for
 - o What did you think about it?
 - o Did it change your behaviour in any way? How?
16. During the time you were claiming were you receiving any help or support from any other organisations? (e.g. community organisations)
- o How did this support compare to that from Jobcentre Plus

If customer is in work, miss out Section C and go directly to Section D.

Section C: JRFND Stage 1

I want to talk to you next in a bit more detail about the first three months of your claim. This is called Stage 1.

17. Do you remember what happened at the initial interview?
- o What did you talk about?
 - o What did you think about the meeting?
18. And what happened after that?
- o What other contact did you have with Jobcentre Plus [in first 12 weeks]?

19. Do you remember attending a Back to Work Session?

If no:

- o Were you asked to attend?
- o Why didn't you attend?
- o Did you receive a reminder (*if appropriate*)?
- o Were your benefits affected?

If yes:

- o What did you think of the session?
 - Content
 - Delivery
- o Did it change anything about your job search?
- o Do you remember completing a 3-Step Plan?
 - Was this useful?

20. Were you offered any other support or services during the first 12 weeks?

Prompt:

- o Any help with job search?
- o e.g. a session on job searching at Jobcentre Plus or at an outside provider?
- o (If prof/exec) specialist support for looking for work within your field?

21. Did you take up any of these services?

If so:

- o What was the service?
 - Where was it held?
 - What was covered?
 - How long did it last for?
- o Was it helpful? Why/not?

If no:

- o Why not?
- o Were any appointments (referrals) made for you that you didn't attend?
 - Why didn't you attend?
 - Would anything have helped/made it possible for you to attend?

22. Do you think you got enough support during this period? (i.e. in the first 12 weeks of claiming)
- o Was it the right kind of support? Why/not?
 - o Did you need all the support you were given?
 - o What if the SNU support hadn't been available (*would it have made a difference to their views*)?
 - o What else would you have liked?

Ask everyone this section.

Section D: JRFND Stage 2

Next I want to ask you about the period between three and six months of your claim. This is known as Stage 2.

23. Was your initial meeting in Stage 2 a one-to-one interview or a group session?
- o If a group session, was this followed by a one-to-one?
 - o What did you think of this approach?
 - o Who was the interview with (same adviser as at NJI)?
24. Do you remember what happened at that initial Stage 2 meeting (or group session)?
- o What did you talk about?
 - o Were you asked to change your job search at all? How? Why?
 - o Did you find the meeting helpful? Why/why not?
25. How much contact did you have with Jobcentre Plus staff during Stage 2?
26. Were you asked to sign on weekly for six weeks?
- o What did you think about this?
 - o What happened at these appointments?
 - o How useful were they?
 - o Was the discussion you had at the initial (Stage 2) meeting followed up at all?
27. Did you see the adviser again for a review meeting?
- o *Check if had one or two meetings (should have been at around 17 and 21 weeks)*
 - o What did you think about attending these additional meetings?
 - o Were they with the same adviser you saw for the initial Stage 2 meeting?
 - Was this important?
 - o Do you think the adviser listened to you? Understood your needs?
 - o Did you feel able to say what you felt?

If only had one meeting:

- o Was the possibility of a second meeting discussed?
- o *If yes: why did it not happen?*
- o *If no: would this have been useful?*

Ask this question and prompt about each meeting in turn:

28. What happened at the meeting?
 - o How long did it last for?
 - o Did it differ from the initial Stage 2 meeting and/or the first review meeting? How?
 - o What did you discuss? *If necessary, prompt:*
 - Review of JSAg – was it changed? How?
 - Discussion of job search
 - Discussion/assessment of skills
 - Check what qualifications customer has and whether this was discussed
 - How were skills needs discussed? (*ask for detail*)
 - Check if have a skills Action Plan (from NextStep) and if discussed?
 - Review of 3-Step Plan (from BTWS)
 - Better off Calculation?
 - Completion of Action Plan – what was in it?
29. Did you agree some activities with the adviser to complete after each meeting?
 - o What were they?
 - o Did you complete them? Why/why not?
 - o How useful were they?
30. How useful were these meetings?
 - o Did they help you find work/be better prepared for work?
 - o Did you do anything differently as a result of the meeting?
31. Were you referred to any other organisations for support during Stage 2? *If necessary, prompt:*
 - o Further discussion of skills (e.g. a skills health check with NextStep)?
 - o Help with basic skills?
 - o Training courses?
 - o Help with job search?
 - o What did you think about the range of services that was offered?
 - Was there anything missing?
 - o Did the adviser seem to know about appropriate services to refer you to?
32. (*If relevant*) Did you take up any services?
 - o Establish details

Ask for each activity:

33. Why did you take up/attend this activity/service?
- o Did you have a choice?
 - o Who identified the provision/service?
 - o Did they give you information about it beforehand? Was this helpful?
 - o What did you think you would gain from the service/provision?

Prompt on whether provision/service addressed any barriers to work raised previously.

If did not attend anything:

34. Why not?
35. Do you think you got enough support during this period?
- o Was it the right kind of support? Why/not?
 - o Did you need all the support you were given?
 - o What else would you have liked?

Since [state date] you should have entered a new stage of your claim, called Stage 3, which starts at six months.

36. What do you think of this stage so far?
- o Have you received more services/support?
 - o What do you think about this?
 - o Do you have to do anything extra in order to carry on receiving benefit?
 - o What do you think about this?

Ask this section only to those who are in work.

Section E: Finding employment

37. To what extent do you think Jobcentre Plus helped you to find work?

[Probe if not already covered in previous section]

Prompt on:

- o Advisers, provision, services
- o What role did they play?
- o What support was offered/taken up?
- o What helped you? What didn't help you?
- o Would you have got the job otherwise (without this help)?

38. What methods did you use to look for jobs?

Prompt on:

- o Whether used Jobcentre Plus job points, website, telephone service

39. How did you find the experience of applying for jobs?

- o How many did you apply for (roughly)?
- o What made you apply for these jobs in particular?

Probe on:

- o Pay
- o Type of work
- o Location
- o Hours (fitting with childcare)

40. Were you told about tax credits and other benefits that you could claim once you started work?

- o Did this make a difference to your decisions?

41. Do you think you'll stay in the job?

- o Why/not?

42. Could the job be improved at all? How?

43. Have you undertaken any training since you've been in the job?

- o Have you been offered any?
- o *Establish details*

Ask everyone this section.

Section F: Concluding questions

44. Is there any aspect of your experiences so far that has been particularly helpful? Unhelpful?

- o What could be improved to help/support you better?
- o What improvements/changes might increase your chances of finding work?

If not in work:

45. Do you think that you are better prepared to start work because of:

- o Advice/support from Jobcentre Plus staff?
- o Courses/activities you have been sent on by Jobcentre Plus?

Thank you very much for your help!

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This report presents qualitative process study findings from an evaluation of the Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND), which was introduced from April 2009 in 28 Jobcentre Plus districts in England, Scotland and Wales.

This is the third in a series of evaluation reports aiming to understand experience of JRFND from the point of view of customers, Jobcentre Plus staff and provider staff, and establish the extent to which JRFND leads to additional customer employment outcomes.

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