

Research report

# The Jobseeker's Allowance Skills Conditionality Pilot

by Richard Dorsett, Heather Rolfe and Anitha George

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 768

# **The Jobseeker's Allowance Skills Conditionality Pilot**

Richard Dorsett, Heather Rolfe and Anitha George

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# Summary

## Background

The Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) Skills Conditionality Pilot was launched in April 2010 with the aim of exploring the labour market effects of mandating participation in training. The pilot targeted JSA claimants entering stage 3 of the Jobseeker's Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) who had an identified skills need. It was based on a random assignment design whereby the requirement to participate would be imposed on the basis of National Insurance number (NINO) to half of those referred to training. If carried out effectively, differences revealed through a comparison of outcomes post-randomisation can be viewed as being **caused** by the conditionality.

This report presents the findings from two parallel studies of the pilot. The quantitative analysis used administrative data to provide details on the implementation of the pilot and whether it could be used to provide valid estimates of the impact of mandating. The qualitative analysis explored the experiences and views of participants in the pilots: principally mandated claimants and Jobcentre Plus advisers, but also training providers.

## Part One: Quantitative account of implementation

The quantitative analysis presents evidence from the first few months of the Skills Conditionality Pilot on how well the pilot was implemented and whether it can provide credible estimates of the effect of conditionality. Central to this is the question of whether random assignment took place as intended. The design of the evaluation used individuals' NINOs to achieve this: those with an even NINO were to be assigned to the Test group (for whom referred training was compulsory) while those with an odd NINO were assigned to the Control group (for whom referred training was voluntary). Since NINOs are randomly generated, mean differences in outcomes between these two groups can be viewed as being caused by the requirement to train.

The quantitative analysis used Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) administrative data from the DWP to:

- examine whether the right people were being targeted;
- check that those eligible were being assigned correctly;
- check that those assigned to the Test group were having conditionality applied, where appropriate;
- consider whether the implementation of the pilot was suitable for producing estimates of the impact of conditionality.

A caveat to the results is that the DWP data did not allow skills needs and training participation to be perfectly observed. The original intention was to link the DWP data to Individual Learner Record data but, in the event, that was not possible. With this in mind, the results identified several ways in which the implementation of the pilot appeared to deviate from the evaluation design:

- In more than half the sample, individuals were identified through basic skills screening as having no potential skills need (this finding does not imply they had no **actual** skills need – we cannot observe this in the data – but may at least give cause for some concern).
- Nearly one-fifth of people were not assigned to the Test or Control group.
- A small proportion of people were assigned to the wrong group.
- Referrals to training as part of the pilot were much lower than expected.

These points raise concerns about the extent to which the pilot can be viewed as providing reliable evidence of the effects of conditionality for the target group. If the objective of the pilot – to understand the effect of conditionality – is to be met:

- implementation issues need to be better understood and, possibly, addressed;
- accurate training data are required;
- longer-term outcomes need to be observed.

For individuals in the pilot who were identified through basic skills screening as having a potential skills need and who had a valid pilot marker, the analysis can provide estimates of the impact of conditionality **as operationalised in this pilot** on training, sanctions and early labour market outcomes. There is no evidence of any impact, but this finding has a caveat attached to it in view of the low level of referrals and, for some outcomes, the nature of the available data.

## Part two: Findings from the qualitative research

The aim of the qualitative evaluation was to gain an understanding of the experiences of mandated claimants and of Jobcentre Plus staff. The perspectives of training providers were also included.

### **Introduction of the pilot**

Advisers in most of the Jobcentres visited were not given training to deliver the pilot and were informed about it through email and at staff meetings. Supporting materials and procedures were found to be complicated by advisers and training providers. Advisers expressed uncertainty about aspects of the pilot, including eligibility, the definition of ‘skills need’ and random assignment. Other factors contributed to low referral rates, including the proliferation of Jobcentre Plus initiatives and pilots, pressure of time during the Stage 3 interview and uncertainty over the continuation of the pilot following the General Election in May 2010.

### **The availability of training for the pilot programme**

Although perceptions varied, advisers reported that one of the biggest barriers to progressing claimants through the pilot was the availability of training which could address skills barriers, with particular problems identified with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, long waiting times and uncertain start dates. Shortages were also identified in sector skills training in some Jobcentre Plus districts.

Some claimants felt they had been given little choice in the courses which they were sent on and would have preferred a different course. Some advisers believed that, rather than directing claimants to training, their role should include motivating claimants to address their own barriers to employment. These advisers believed it was best that claimants actively agree to take part in training and see it as their own decision.

### **Claimant response to the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot**

Many claimants were positive about attending training because it might help them address skills gaps and find work. Others welcomed the activity or thought it would help improve their confidence. Those who wanted training with a sector-based skills element were among those most motivated to take part, but some were disappointed when the courses they had wanted were not offered. Claimants who were neutral, ambivalent or opposed to training included those who had previous bad experiences of training offered by Jobcentre Plus, or felt they did not need it. Some had their own strategies to find work; including volunteering and training they had organised themselves, and did not want these disrupted.

## Experiences and outcomes of the training

Training is generally viewed positively by claimants who had enjoyed attending courses as well as the positive outcomes they had experienced. These included improving basic skills and obtaining certificates to work in industries such as security and construction. A few had found work or felt optimistic that they would do so.

Dissatisfied claimants referred to courses below their ability level, to courses with poor teaching and repetitive content, and having been sent on repeated courses in areas like CV writing and job search.

## Mandation

All claimants in the evaluation were mandated and, while almost none were aware they had taken part in the Pilot, most were aware of having been mandated. Some who said they had not been told this had felt obliged to attend the training, or were willing to do so. However, others were unhappy at being mandated because they did not wish to take part in the training. The research findings suggest that many claimants would have taken part in the training had they not been mandated because they were both willing to participate in training and felt obliged to do this and other activity in order to improve their job prospects.

Both claimants and advisers expressed a range of views on mandated training as a practice. Claimants in favour of mandation cited the benefits of training, expectations on JSA claimants and the need to deal with the minority of 'work-shy' claimants. Arguments against it included the view that training is of benefit where the individual is motivated and willing to take part, rather than compelled. The approach was also viewed as treating all claimants as 'work-shy' and as disregarding claimants' own strategies for finding work. Training providers' views on mandation indicated that identifying mandated claimants to providers could result in de-selection of those who are 'hard to help'.

Some advisers said they preferred to be able to use their own judgement about when to mandate a claimant. The view was also expressed that where training is mandatory, it must be of good quality and meet the individual needs of participants. It was also argued that training is not the only barrier to employment and that claimants' other needs should be addressed.

## Sanctions

Customers who said they had been sanctioned, or who faced sanctioning, included some who declined to take part in training, had left their courses, had been late or forgotten to attend. Poor organisational skills, rather than unwillingness to comply with mandation, led to some claimants being sanctioned. Because of the circumstances in which they were sanctioned, it was unlikely to have been effective in ensuring participation of these claimants in future Jobcentre courses.

Family members and friends were sources of support for sanctioned claimants during the period without benefit. This sometimes caused stress and affected family relationships where incomes, including benefits, were pooled or where other family members were on benefits or low pay.

### Policy recommendations

The report recommends the following:

- Improvements to the implementation and operation of future pilot programmes, including control of the number of pilots operating in Jobcentre Plus offices, preparation of advisers, briefing of training providers and information to claimants.
- Measures to address problems in the supply of training, including delays in training which occur through 'roll-on, roll off' courses and closures during the summer months.
- Fuller claimant engagement in decisions about their training needs and improved internal communication between Next Step and JSA advisers to ensure that claimant Skills Action Plans are used to best effect.
- No mandate to training for claimants already engaged in training aimed at improving their employment prospects and use of discretion for claimants who are volunteering, setting up their own business or have other clear strategies for finding work. Advisers should be able to use judgement and discretion.
- Clear explanation to claimants of the benefits of training and to motivate attendance and commitment and, in mandatory programmes, referral to good quality training which meets individual needs and which takes account of claimant preferences.
- Discretion in application of sanctions where claimants have made genuine errors affecting attendance and reminders to those who are likely to forget to attend.
- Awareness that sanctioning may not affect future compliance and of the wider impact that sanctioning may have on low-income families where benefits and wages are pooled.
- Personalised attention to the non-skill needs of some claimants who are hardest to help, such as ex-offenders.

# Introduction

The Skills Conditionality Pilot (SCP) was launched on 26 April 2010 in 11 Jobcentre Plus districts within England.<sup>1</sup> The aim was to explore the effect of making participation in training compulsory where an adviser had made such a referral. Non-compliance carried the risk of benefit sanctions. Only individuals entering stage 3 of the Jobseeker's Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) with an identified skills need were to be included in the pilot. Furthermore, suitable training had to be available locally.

To assess the effect of conditionality, individuals in pilot areas were divided into a Test group (for whom participation in adviser-referred training became compulsory) and a Control group (for whom it was voluntary). Allocation was made on the basis of the claimant's National Insurance number (NINO). Those with an even NINO were to be assigned to the Test group while those with an odd NINO were to be assigned to the Control group. Since NINOs are randomly generated, allocation on this basis should result in two groups that are similar. If allocation is carried out effectively, differences revealed through a comparison of outcomes post-randomisation can be viewed as being caused by the conditionality.

This report presents the findings from two parallel studies of the pilot:

- The quantitative analysis used DWP administrative data to identify whether the pilot had been implemented as intended and therefore whether it can provide credible estimates of the effect of conditionality.
- The aim of the qualitative evaluation was to gain an understanding of the experiences of key players in the pilot – claimants, Jobcentre Plus staff and training providers – and to offer explanations for attitudes and behaviour.

The findings from the two analyses are combined in a final concluding chapter.

---

<sup>1</sup> Greater Manchester Central; Greater Manchester East and West; Birmingham and Solihull; Coventry and Warwickshire; Staffordshire; Black Country; The Marches; Norfolk; Suffolk and Cambridgeshire; Central London; and Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth.

# **Part one: Quantitative account of the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot implementation**



# 1 Introduction

The quantitative analysis presented in Part One of the report is based entirely on Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) administrative data for those recorded as entering the pilot up to 27 August 2010. Although such data have the advantage of recording details on all individuals, they lack some important information. Originally, it was intended to combine the DWP data with Individual Learner Record (ILR) data but, in the event, this was not possible. Consequently, there are points in the analysis where the DWP data are used to explore a particular feature of implementation, despite the fact that they are not ideally suited for the purpose. This applies particularly to the issue of skills needs, as discussed later. Such findings are presented with a clear caveat.

It should also be noted that the analysis relates to only the first four months of the pilot. As such, it can only capture the experiences of the early pilot period. It is common for new initiatives to take some time to ‘bed-down’. Furthermore, at this stage it is only possible to capture short-term outcomes for individuals, especially since the availability of outcome data is subject to delay.

The remainder of this part of the report has the following format: Chapter 2 reports the broad characteristics of those included in the sample. Chapter 3 considers particular aspects of implementation. Chapter 4 examines how the experiences of individuals differ across the Test and Control groups. Chapter 5 takes the key findings and draws some conclusions about the success of the pilot and consequently how informative the results are likely to be. These findings are also combined with those of the qualitative analysis and presented later in an integrated chapter.

The following table summarises the pilot volumes.

**Table 1.1 The pilot in numbers**

<b>The pilot in numbers</b>	
Number of people in the pilot	5,585
of which:	
• number with valid assignment	4,554
of which:	
• number in Test group (subject to conditionality)	2,357
of which:	
• referred to training	1,012
• sanctioned (any reason)	130
• number in Control group (not subject to conditionality)	2,197
of which:	
• referred to training	832
• sanctioned (any reason)	138

## 2 Characteristics of those in the pilot

Those eligible for the pilot should have an identified skills need and be in stage 3 of the Jobseeker's Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) in one of the 11 participating Jobcentre Plus districts. In this section, the extent to which the characteristics of the pilot sample align with these criteria is considered. All analysis in this section is based on individuals rather than referrals. In fact, not all individuals in the pilot are recorded as being referred to training. This point is explored in more detail in Chapter 4. For now, we note that among the full pilot sample, 4,911 people were recorded as being referred to some type of activity and 2,198 people were referred to an activity that could be identified as training.

First, in keeping with when the pilot began, we note that the data showed the earliest randomisations to take place on 26 April 2010 and the intake to be steady up until the last observed randomisations on 27 August 2010.

All randomisations took place within the 11 participating Jobcentre Plus districts. Table 2.1 shows considerable variation across districts in the size of the pilot sample. Two districts – Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth and Greater Manchester East and West – stand out as particularly large.

**Table 2.1 Pilot sample, by Jobcentre Plus district**

Jobcentre Plus District	Number	Column %
Greater Manchester Central	100	1.8
Greater Manchester East and West	1,330	23.8
Birmingham and Solihull	431	7.7
Coventry and Warwickshire	174	3.1
Staffordshire	181	3.2
Black Country	214	3.8
The Marches	455	8.1
Norfolk	91	1.6
Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	306	5.5
Central London	429	7.7
Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth	1,874	33.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,585</b>	<b>100</b>

It is not possible to observe skills needs in the available Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data. The skills screening process which takes place with Jobcentre Plus advisers identifies a 'potential need' and claimants are then referred to Next Step or skills providers for an assessment of whether there is an actual skills need and, consequently, whether training will be required. Ideally, we would use data from Next Step or Provider assessments to identify skills needs.

The Jobcentre Plus systems (LMS) do not require the LMS screening field to be updated following Provider or Next Step assessments. Furthermore, where a claimant has been screened before, advisers are not prompted by the system to update the screening result at subsequent interviews. In such cases, a record of 'no potential skills need identified' may not correspond to the referral decision made in the context of the pilot.

With these caveats in mind, it remains of interest to examine the extent to which individuals in the pilot are identified as having a potential skills needs. While this is not the ideal measure for the reasons discussed above, it seems justifiable to consider on the two grounds. First, one would expect referrals to Next Step or skills providers to be concentrated among those identified as having a potential skills need. Second, although the results of screenings will not always be up to date, one would imagine that individuals identified as not having a potential skills need who are subsequently identified as having a potential skills need are relatively uncommon.

Since the skills Conditionality Pilot (SCP) was intended to target those with a skills need, it is surprising to see from Table 2.2 that the most common result of the screening, accounting for more than half of the sample, is for individuals to be identified as not having a potential skills need.

**Table 2.2 Pilot sample, by result of basic skills screening**

Screening result	Number	Column %
No	4	0.1
Basic Skills Assessment (BSA) not required	388	6.9
BSA required	78	1.4
ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages)	23	0.4
ESOL Skills Need	226	4.0
Basic Skills Need	851	15.2
Severe Basic Skills Need	31	0.6
Generic Work Skills Need	432	7.7
Specific Work Skills Need	441	7.9
No Skills Need	2,888	51.7
Missing	223	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,585</b>	<b>100</b>

Lastly, Table 2.3 shows the distribution of JRFND spell lengths among the pilot sample. In 13 cases, this is missing, indicating individuals who are recorded as not being on JRFND at the time of randomisation. Guidance from DWP is that individuals beginning JRFND typically enter stage 3 of the programme 6-12 months into their JSA claim. Others are fast-tracked to enter stage 3 more quickly. Consequently, we would expect pilot sample members to have JRFND spells of up to a year at the time of stage 3 entry. For the most part, this has been achieved. However, in seven per cent of cases, the spell is 13 or more months long at the time of JRFND entry. The explanation for this is less clear but may reflect linking rules.

**Table 2.3 Pilot sample, by length of JRFND spell**

<b>Months on JRFND at randomisation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Column %</b>
	264	4.7
1	124	2.2
2	119	2.1
3	197	3.5
4	154	2.8
5	513	9.2
6	1,888	33.8
7	447	8.0
8	358	6.4
9	305	5.5
10	299	5.4
11	265	4.7
12	226	4.0
13+	413	7.4
Missing	13	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,585</b>	<b>100</b>

# 3 Implementation of the random assignment

## 3.1 Introduction

In principle, all those in the pilot sample should be randomly assigned into the Test group or the Control group. In practice, some people were not assigned to either group. Others were assigned, but with indications that the assignment process had been problematic.

In this section, implementation of the assignment is considered. It begins by examining the assignment status of individuals and presents details of the characteristics of those who are either not assigned or who are assigned in a way that appears flawed. To proceed with the analysis, such cases are then dropped. Of the remaining individuals, everyone is either assigned to the Test group or the Control group. The extent to which this assignment has been carried out as intended is considered and the characteristics of the Test and Control groups are compared.

The relevance of this section is that it is not possible to obtain impact estimates for those people with an incorrectly set pilot marker. Consequently, any impact estimates based on comparing the Test and Control groups are only informative of that subgroup of individuals for whom the pilot marker is correctly set. If there are systematic differences between those individuals and individuals with incorrectly set pilot markers, the impact estimates are not necessarily representative of the full pilot population. This is despite the fact that it is perfectly possible that, among those with a problematic pilot marker, individuals with an even National Insurance number (NINO) have generally been subject to conditionality while those with an odd NINO have not. There is no way of knowing from the available data whether problematic pilot markers are simply the result of failing to set the marker on LMS or whether they instead are the result of not imposing conditionality in the way intended.

## 3.2 Examining the characteristics of those not correctly assigned

Table 3.1 shows the assignment outcome in the sample (after excluding those 13 individuals recorded as not being on Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) at the time of randomisation). It is striking that 14 per cent of the sample is not assigned to either the Test group or the Control group.<sup>2</sup> For about three per cent of the sample, the only assignment outcome recorded is 'Exit Test' or 'Exit Control'. This is a valid entry in the case where individuals had initially been assigned to the Test or Control group, respectively. However, where this is the only recorded assignment outcome, it is suggestive of an error in the assignment process.

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, this is after ignoring those instances where an individual is initially 'non-selected' but is later assigned to the Test or Control group.

**Table 3.1 Assignment outcomes for pilot sample**

Assignment outcome	Number	Column %
Non-selected	800	14.4
Test	2,415	43.3
Control	2,199	39.5
Exit test	106	1.9
Exit control	52	0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,572</b>	<b>100</b>

In total, 1,018 individuals had assignments that were problematic in some sense.<sup>3</sup> Since the evaluation of the pilot relies on comparing the outcomes of the Test group with those of the Control group, such cases have to be excluded from the analysis that examines the effect of conditionality (Chapter 4).

Table 3.2 is the first of a series of tables comparing individuals who have a problematic pilot marker with individuals who have been validly assigned to either the Test or Control group. The first twin columns relate to the 4,554 individuals with a valid pilot marker while the second twin columns relate to the 1,018 with a problematic pilot marker. The percentages are row percentages so, for example, the results show that 18 per cent of men had a problematic pilot marker and 18.9 per cent of women. A *p-value* showing the statistical significance of the association between sex and having a problematic pilot marker is given at the bottom of the table. This can take values between 0 and 1; the closer the *p-value* is to 0, the stronger the association. So, we see that there does not appear to be a tendency for men and women to differ in the extent to which they are likely to have a problematic pilot marker.

**Table 3.2 Problem with pilot marker, by sex**

Sex	Problem with pilot marker				Total number
	No		Yes		
	Number	Row %	Number	Row %	
Men	3,197	82.0	701	18.0	3,898
Women	1,357	81.1	317	18.9	1,674
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,554</b>	<b>81.7</b>	<b>1,018</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>5,572</b>

Pearson chi2(1) = 0.7124, *P-value* = 0.399

Table 3.3, on the other hand, shows a relationship between being white and having a problematic assignment. Specifically, 21 per cent of non-whites had a problematic pilot marker compared to a little over 16 per cent of whites. The *p-value* indicates that this is statistically significant.

<sup>3</sup> Of the 5,572 people in the pilot, 958 are shown in Table 3.1 to not be assigned to the Test or Control groups. For a further 60 people, their assignment outcome was recorded as changing. In total, 1,018 individuals were observed to have a problematic assignment. Excluding these people gives a sample size of 4,554.

**Table 3.3 Problem with pilot marker, by whether white**

Ethnicity	Problem with pilot marker				Total number
	No		Yes		
	Number	Row %	Number	Row %	
Non-white	1,780	78.9	475	21.1	2,255
White	2,774	83.6	543	16.4	3,317
Total	4,554	81.7	1,018	18.3	5,572

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 19.8091$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.000

There is also a statistically significant difference when considering disability. Table 3.4 shows that those without a (self-reported) disability are three percentage points more likely to have a problematic pilot marker than those with a disability.

**Table 3.4 Problem with pilot marker, by whether disabled**

Disability	Problem with pilot marker				Total Number
	No		Yes		
	Number	Row %	Number	Row %	
Not disabled	3,725	81.2	862	18.8	4,587
Disabled	829	84.2	156	15.8	985
Total	4,554	81.7	1,018	18.3	5,572

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 4.7408$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.029

There is no significant variation with age. Table 3.5 shows the rate of exclusion to be fairly constant between the ages of 18 and 59. There is then a leap with the oldest age group (60-64), nearly two-fifths of whom have a problematic pilot marker. However, this is based on only 26 individuals and therefore does not register as a significant difference.

**Table 3.5 Problem with pilot marker, by age**

Age group	Problem with pilot marker				Total number
	No		Yes		
	Number	Row %	Number	Row %	
18-24	1,782	81.6	403	18.4	2,185
25-29	585	82.4	125	17.6	710
30-39	821	82.2	178	17.8	999
40-49	866	81.9	191	18.1	1,057
50-59	484	81.3	111	18.7	595
60-64	16	61.5	10	38.5	26
Total	4,554	81.7	1,018	18.3	5,572

Pearson  $\chi^2(5) = 7.5774$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.181

Table 3.6 shows marital status similarly to have no significant association with the probability of having a problematic pilot marker.

**Table 3.6 Problem with pilot marker, by marital status**

Marital status	Problem with pilot marker				Total number
	No		Yes		
	Number	Row %	Number	Row %	
Not known	17	70.8	7	29.2	24
Single	3,488	81.7	782	18.3	4,270
Married	436	80.9	103	19.1	539
Widowed	15	88.2	2	11.8	17
Divorced	156	79.6	40	20.4	196
Separated	230	85.2	40	14.8	270
Cohabiting	207	83.5	41	16.5	248
Missing	5	62.5	3	37.5	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,554</b>	<b>81.7</b>	<b>1,018</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>5,572</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(7) = 7.8916$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.342

It is clear from Table 3.7 that there is considerable variation across Jobcentre Plus districts in the probability of having a problematic pilot marker. This ranges from just over one per cent in central London to just less than one-third in Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth. The  $p$ -value confirms this variation to be significant.

**Table 3.7 Problem with pilot marker, by Jobcentre Plus district**

Jobcentre Plus District	Problem with pilot marker				Total number
	No		Yes		
	Number	Row %	Number	Row %	
Greater Manchester Central	91	93.8	6	6.2	97
Greater Manchester East and West	1,089	82.2	236	17.8	1,325
Birmingham and Solihull	386	89.6	45	10.4	431
Coventry and Warwickshire	157	91.3	15	8.7	172
Staffordshire	175	96.7	6	3.3	181
Black Country	207	96.7	7	3.3	214
The Marches	434	95.6	20	4.4	454
Norfolk	73	80.2	18	19.8	91
Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	249	81.4	57	18.6	306
Central London	423	98.8	5	1.2	428
Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth	1,270	67.8	603	32.2	1,873
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,554</b>	<b>81.7</b>	<b>1,018</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>5,572</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(10) = 482.8674$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.000

Table 3.8 considers potential skills needs identified through screening at Jobcentre Plus. As discussed previously, there are problems interpreting this variable as representing actual skills needs. However, with this caveat in mind, the results show that those identified as having no potential skills need were more likely than others to have a problematic pilot marker. Again, the  $p$ -value identifies this to be a statistically significant result.



**Table 3.8 Problem with pilot marker, by result of basic skills screening**

Screening result	Problem with pilot marker				Total number
	No		Yes		
	Number	Row %	Number	Row %	
No	3	75	1	25	4
BSA not required	337	87.5	48	12.5	385
BSA required	68	88.3	9	11.7	77
ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages)	19	86.4	3	13.6	22
ESOL skills need	197	87.2	29	12.8	226
Basic skills need	812	95.6	37	4.4	849
Severe basic skills need	28	90.3	3	9.7	31
Generic work skills need	397	91.9	35	8.1	432
Specific work skills need	407	92.3	34	7.7	441
No skills need	2,095	72.6	790	27.4	2,885
Missing	191	86.8	29	13.2	220
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,554</b>	<b>81.7</b>	<b>1,018</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>5,572</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(10) = 354.5215$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.000

Also significant is the relationship with sought occupation (Table 3.9). A clear relationship is visible with those individuals looking for employment in higher-level occupations more likely to have a problematic pilot marker than those seeking more elementary or manual types of work.

**Table 3.9 Problem with pilot marker, by sought occupation**

Sought occupation	Problem with pilot marker				Total number
	No		Yes		
	Number	Row %	Number	Row %	
Managers and senior officials	120	71.9	47	28.1	167
Professional occupations	100	70.9	41	29.1	141
Associate professional and technical occupations	278	78.1	78	21.9	356
Administrative and secretarial occupations	357	75.5	116	24.5	473
Skilled trades occupations	505	81.7	113	18.3	618
Personal service occupations	306	81.4	70	18.6	376
Sales and customer service occupations	913	80.9	215	19.1	1,128
Process, plant and machine operatives	392	85.6	66	14.4	458
Elementary occupations	1,464	85.4	251	14.6	1,715
Missing	119	85	21	15	140
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,554</b>	<b>81.7</b>	<b>1,018</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>5,572</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(9) = 58.7285$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.000

### 3.3 Characteristics of the Test and Control groups

The analysis in this section is based on the subgroup of individuals with a valid assignment to either the Test or Control group. This reduced sample is made up of 4,554 individuals. We begin by comparing assignment outcome with an indicator of whether the individual has an even NINO. The design of the pilot was such that the Test group should consist of everybody with an even NINO while the Control group should consist of everybody with an odd NINO.

Table 3.10 shows that this was achieved in most but not all cases. Among the Test group, 95 per cent had an even NINO. Among the Control group, about 94 per cent had an odd NINO. The presence of individuals who are wrongly assigned (even NINOs in the Control group and odd NINOs in the Test group) raises concerns about whether it is possible to regard comparison of outcomes between the Test and Control groups as capturing causal effects of the conditionality. These concerns surround the possibility that individuals may be non-randomly selecting into or out of the treatment being considered (in this case, conditionality). It is common for random assignment evaluations to encounter practical issues of this type and, if necessary, analytical techniques can be used to address such problems. As a general point, the higher the level of disagreement, the more one should be concerned.

**Table 3.10 Assignment outcome, by whether NINO even**

Assignment outcome	Even-numbered NINO				Total number
	No		Yes		
	Number	Row %	Number	Row %	
Test	121	5.1	2,236	94.9	2,357
Control	2,071	94.3	126	5.7	2,197
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,192</b>	<b>48.1</b>	<b>2,362</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>4,554</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 3618.4480$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.000

If there were non-random selection into the Test group or the Control group, one might expect there to be differences between the two groups with regard to observable characteristics. The remainder of the tables in this section examine this issue.

Tables 3.11 - 3.20 compare the composition of the Test and Control group according to a number of characteristics. Summarising, the results show that the Test and Control groups are not statistically significantly different with regard to sex, the proportion who are white, the proportion who are disabled, age, marital status, parent status or sought occupation. There are, however, statistically significant differences with regard to Jobcentre Plus district and the result of basic skills screening. Specifically, Greater Manchester East and West is disproportionately concentrated in the Control group as are those found in the skills screening to have no potential skills need.

Imbalances such as these may be cause for concern since they are consistent with non-random selection. It should be stressed though that the more tests that are carried out, the more likely it becomes that a seemingly significant result will be found just by chance. In other words, it is in the nature of such tests that were we to carry out 10 tests we would expect one of them to register as significant at the 10 per cent level even if there were in fact no true effects. This phenomenon arises from the random variation that exists when dealing with samples. However, while this may provide some hope that the significant differences found when considering Jobcentre Plus district and screening result may be capturing nothing more than random variation, the  $p$ -values for these tests would tend to refute that since they point to highly significant associations. More likely then is that there is non-random selection into the Test and Control groups.

**Table 3.11 Assignment outcome, by sex**

Sex	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
Men	1,638	69.5	1,559	71.0	3,197	70.2
Women	719	30.5	638	29.0	1,357	29.8
Total	2,357	100	2,197	100	4,554	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 1.1671$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.280

**Table 3.12 Assignment outcome, by whether white**

Ethnicity	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
Non-white	944	40.1	836	38.1	1,780	39.1
White	1,413	59.9	1,361	61.9	2,774	60.9
Total	2,357	100	2,197	100	4,554	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 1.9085$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.167

**Table 3.13 Assignment outcome, by whether disabled**

Disability	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
Not disabled	1,948	82.6	1,777	80.9	3,725	81.8
Disabled	409	17.4	420	19.1	829	18.2
Total	2,357	100	2,197	100	4,554	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 2.3774$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.123

**Table 3.14 Assignment outcome, by age**

Age group	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
18-24	959	40.7	823	37.5	1,782	39.1
25-29	303	12.9	282	12.8	585	12.8
30-39	428	18.2	393	17.9	821	18
40-49	418	17.7	448	20.4	866	19
50-59	241	10.2	243	11.1	484	10.6
60-64	8	0.3	8	0.4	16	0.4
Total	2,357	100	2,197	100	4,554	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(5) = 8.0613$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.153

**Table 3.15 Assignment outcome, by marital status**

Marital status	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
Not Known	9	0.4	8	0.4	17	0.4
Single	1,836	77.9	1,652	75.2	3,488	76.6
Married	212	9	224	10.2	436	9.6
Widowed	11	0.5	4	0.2	15	0.3
Divorced	79	3.4	77	3.5	156	3.4
Separated	102	4.3	128	5.8	230	5.1
Cohabiting	105	4.5	102	4.6	207	4.5
Missing	3	0.1	2	0.1	5	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,357</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,197</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4,554</b>	<b>100</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(7) = 10.9625$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.140

**Table 3.16 Assignment outcome, by parent status**

Lone parent indicator	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
Not known	311	13.2	281	12.8	592	13
Lone parent	140	5.9	117	5.3	257	5.6
Couple	186	7.9	201	9.1	387	8.5
No (not a parent)	1,720	73	1,598	72.7	3,318	72.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,357</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,197</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4,554</b>	<b>100</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(3) = 3.0282$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.387

**Table 3.17 Assignment outcome, by Jobcentre Plus district**

Jobcentre Plus District	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
Greater Manchester Central	43	1.8	48	2.2	91	2
Greater Manchester East and West	516	21.9	573	26.1	1,089	23.9
Birmingham and Solihull	219	9.3	167	7.6	386	8.5
Coventry and Warwickshire	96	4.1	61	2.8	157	3.4
Staffordshire	104	4.4	71	3.2	175	3.8
Black Country	105	4.5	102	4.6	207	4.5
The Marches	218	9.2	216	9.8	434	9.5
Norfolk	26	1.1	47	2.1	73	1.6
Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	135	5.7	114	5.2	249	5.5
Central London	226	9.6	197	9	423	9.3
Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth	669	28.4	601	27.4	1,270	27.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,357</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,197</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4,554</b>	<b>100</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(10) = 32.2011$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.000

**Table 3.18 Assignment outcome, by result of basic skills screening**

Screening result	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	1	0	2	0.1	3	0.1
BSA not required	170	7.2	165	7.5	335	7.4
BSA required	39	1.7	29	1.3	68	1.5
ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages)	7	0.3	12	0.5	19	0.4
ESOL skills need	101	4.3	94	4.3	195	4.3
Basic skills need	441	18.7	363	16.5	804	17.7
Severe basic skills need	20	0.8	8	0.4	28	0.6
Generic work skills need	239	10.1	158	7.2	397	8.7
Specific work skills need	210	8.9	195	8.9	405	8.9
No skills need	1,032	43.8	1,074	48.9	2,106	46.2
Missing	97	4.1	97	4.4	194	4.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,357</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,197</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4,554</b>	<b>100</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(10) = 28.4890$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.002

**Table 3.19 Assignment outcome, by whether identified as lowest qualified**

Lowest qualified indicator	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
None selected (default)	1,371	58.2	1,233	56.1	2,604	57.2
Yes	281	11.9	257	11.7	538	11.8
No	701	29.7	702	32	1,403	30.8
Preferred not to say	4	0.2	3	0.1	7	0.2
Missing	0	0	2	0.1	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,357</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,197</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4,554</b>	<b>100</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(4) = 4.9122$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.296

**Table 3.20 Assignment outcome, by sought occupation**

Sought occupation	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
Managers and senior officials	51	2.2	69	3.1	120	2.6
Professional occupations	53	2.2	47	2.1	100	2.2
Associate professional and technical occupations	154	6.5	124	5.6	278	6.1
Administrative and secretarial occupations	196	8.3	161	7.3	357	7.8
Skilled trades occupations	248	10.5	257	11.7	505	11.1
Personal service occupations	161	6.8	145	6.6	306	6.7
Sales and customer service Occupations	473	20.1	440	20	913	20
Process, plant and machine operatives	188	8	204	9.3	392	8.6
Elementary occupations	769	32.6	695	31.6	1,464	32.1
Missing	64	2.7	55	2.5	119	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,357</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,197</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4,554</b>	<b>100</b>
Pearson $\chi^2(9) = 11.3853, P\text{-value} = 0.250$						

# 4 Differences in outcomes between the Test and Control groups

## 4.1 Introduction

This section presents results showing how the Test and Control groups compare with regard to their training experiences and subsequent outcomes. It begins by presenting results based on the 4,554 individuals who were assigned to either the Test or Control group, as in the previous section. In line with the concerns already noted regarding the possibility of non-random selection into the Test and Control groups, the results are not presented as impacts, merely as Test-Control comparisons. The characteristics of those in the Test group who are sanctioned are also summarised. Finally, the extent to which it is possible to make causal statements on the basis of the Test-Control comparisons is considered and results that may have a stronger causal interpretation are presented.

## 4.2 Test-Control group differences in training experiences and outcomes

Table 4.1 shows the extent of training referrals. In principle, everyone in the pilot should be referred to training. It is striking therefore that only two-fifths of people are in fact referred. It should be noted that it is not possible using the available data to observe training referrals perfectly. This arises from the fact that the variable that records the type of activity to which an individual is referred includes some categories with both training and non-training elements. The approach taken in this analysis is to regard all such referrals as referrals to training. In view of this, the referral rate in Table 4.1 should, if anything, be an over-estimate. The fact that it is so low suggests the rate of training referrals is much lower than anticipated. It should be noted that referral activity in general – that is, referrals to training or non-training activities – is much higher (88 per cent).

With regard to Test-Control group differences, the rate of training referrals among the Test group is five percentage points higher than among the Control group. This difference is shown by the *p-value* to be statistically significant.

**Table 4.1 Test-Control group differences in training referrals**

Referred to training	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	1,345	57.1	1,365	62.1	2,710	59.5
Yes	1,012	42.9	832	37.9	1,844	40.5
Total	2,357	100	2,197	100	4,554	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 12.1116$ , *P-value* = 0.001

Table 4.2 presents information on the number of training starts as recorded on the LMS, the only source of the training information available for this analysis. It should be noted that training starts are not required to be recorded on LMS. Responsibility for recording starts on training rests with the training providers and is kept on the ILR (Individual Learner Record). It is likely that the actual level of starts is higher than that shown. To count the number of training starts more accurately, the data would have to be matched to the ILR. However, this was not possible within the timeframe of the current report.

While training participation is not reliably recorded in the LMS, it is still of interest to compare the Test and Control groups. As long as the tendency for starts to be imperfectly recorded is similar across the two groups, such comparisons can be informative of whether conditionality has had the intended effect of increasing training. In fact, Table 4.2 suggests there to be no difference between the Test and Control groups in the proportions starting training. In both cases, just under 12 per cent of individuals are recorded as starting on a training course at some point post-randomisation.

**Table 4.2 Test-Control group differences in training starts**

Started training	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	2,081	88.3	1,943	88.4	4,024	88.4
Yes	276	11.7	254	11.6	530	11.6
Total	2,357	100	2,197	100	4,554	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 0.0244$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.876

Despite this, those in the Test group are no more likely to be sanctioned than those in the Control group. Table 4.3 shows that the incidence of sanctioning in the Test group is actually below that of the Control group, although this difference is not statistically significant. It should be noted that sanctions among the Control group will be for reasons other than non-attendance at referred training since, for them, this remains voluntary. However, differences in sanctioning levels between the Test and Control group are still informative of the extent to which sanctioning was affected by conditionality. Furthermore, it should also be remembered that the sanctioning process takes time. It may be that non-attendance among the Test group may result in eventual sanctioning, but that it is too early to capture the full extent of this. The length of time taken for sanctions to be imposed may in part be due to delays in providers supplying the required forms to Jobcentre Plus.

**Table 4.3 Test-Control group differences in sanctions**

Sanctioned	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	2,227	94.5	2,059	93.7	4,286	94.1
Yes	130	5.5	138	6.3	268	5.9
Total	2,357	100	2,197	100	4,554	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 1.2040$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.273



Table 4.4 presents Test-Control group differences in the probability of having left Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) to a destination other than training. This variable is taken from JUVOS data and is designed to approximate the situation of no longer being a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) claimant. It is of interest since the ultimate objective of the pilot had originally been to assess the effect of conditionality on sustained employment outcomes. While it is too soon to provide evidence on this, it is interesting to see what the early indications of a short-term effect might be. As can be seen, there is no difference between the Test and Control groups.

**Table 4.4 Test-Control group differences in probability of exiting benefit (taken from JUVOS)**

Left JSA/JRFND	Assignment outcome				Total	
	Test		Control			
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	1,928	81.8	1,791	81.5	3,719	81.7
Yes	429	18.2	406	18.5	835	18.3
Total	2,357	100	2,197	100	4,554	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 0.0590$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.808

Table 4.5 uses JUVOS data to focus more directly on employment rather than benefit exit. About one-third of the exits from benefit shown in Table 4.4 are accounted for by entering employment. Here the Test and Control groups are again quite similar. In fact, employment levels among the Control group are slightly higher than those among the Test group. This difference is significant at the 10 per cent level.

**Table 4.5 Test-Control group differences in probability of entering employment (taken from JUVOS)**

Started work	Assignment outcome				Total	
	Test		Control			
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	2,210	93.8	2,033	92.5	4,243	93.2
Yes	147	6.2	164	7.5	311	6.8
Total	2,357	100	2,197	100	4,554	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 2.6948$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.101

### 4.3 Characteristics of individuals who are sanctioned

Tables 4.6 - 4.13 show the characteristics of those sanctioned and tests whether they are significantly different from those not sanctioned. Note that these results are based on the Test group only and are purely descriptive rather than having any causal interpretation. The results suggest that young people are more likely than older people to be sanctioned, but there are no other significant differences between those who are sanctioned and those who are not.

**Table 4.6 Sanctions among the Test group, by sex**

Sex	Sanctioned				Total	
	No		Yes		Number	Column %
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %		
Men	1,540	69.2	98	75.4	1,638	69.5
Women	687	30.8	32	24.6	719	30.5
Total	2,227	100	130	100	2,357	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 2.2512$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.134

**Table 4.7 Sanctions among the Test group, by whether white**

Ethnicity	Sanctioned				Total	
	No		Yes		Number	Column %
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %		
Non-white	891	40	53	40.8	944	40.1
White	1,336	60	77	59.2	1,413	59.9
Total	2,227	100	130	100	2,357	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 0.0296$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.863

**Table 4.8 Sanctions among the Test group, by whether disabled**

Disability	Sanctioned				Total	
	No		Yes		Number	Column %
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %		
Not disabled	1,839	82.6	109	83.8	1,948	82.6
Disabled	388	17.4	21	16.2	409	17.4
Total	2,227	100	130	100	2,357	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 0.1379$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.710

**Table 4.9 Sanctions among the Test group, by age**

Age group	Sanctioned				Total	
	No		Yes		Number	Column %
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %		
18-24	891	40	68	52.3	959	40.7
25-29	286	12.8	17	13.1	303	12.9
30-39	406	18.2	22	16.9	428	18.2
40-49	402	18.1	16	12.3	418	17.7
50-59	234	10.5	7	5.4	241	10.2
60-64	8	0.4	0	0	8	0.3
Total	2,227	100	130	100	2,357	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(5) = 10.5915$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.060

**Table 4.10 Sanctions among the Test group, by marital status**

Marital Status	Sanctioned				Total	
	No		Yes		Number	Column %
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
Not Known	9	0.4	0	0	9	0.4
Single	1,726	77.5	110	84.6	1,836	77.9
Married	206	9.3	6	4.6	212	9
Widowed	11	0.5	0	0	11	0.5
Divorced	76	3.4	3	2.3	79	3.4
Separated	100	4.5	2	1.5	102	4.3
Cohabiting	96	4.3	9	6.9	105	4.5
Missing	3	0.1	0	0	3	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,227</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,357</b>	<b>100</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(7) = 9.8759$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.196

**Table 4.11 Sanctions among the Test group, by Jobcentre Plus district**

Jobcentre Plus District	Sanctioned				Total	
	No		Yes		Number	Column %
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
Greater Manchester Central	42	1.9	1	0.8	43	1.8
Greater Manchester East and West	495	22.2	21	16.2	516	21.9
Birmingham and Solihull	209	9.4	10	7.7	219	9.3
Coventry and Warwickshire	93	4.2	3	2.3	96	4.1
Staffordshire	99	4.4	5	3.8	104	4.4
Black Country	101	4.5	4	3.1	105	4.5
The Marches	200	9	18	13.8	218	9.2
Norfolk	26	1.2	0	0	26	1.1
Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	123	5.5	12	9.2	135	5.7
Central London	209	9.4	17	13.1	226	9.6
Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth	630	28.3	39	30	669	28.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,227</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,357</b>	<b>100</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(10) = 14.5093$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.151

**Table 4.12 Sanctions among the Test group, by result of basic skills screening**

Screening result	Sanctioned				Total	
	No		Yes		Number	Column %
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	1	0	0	0	1	0
BSA not required	158	7.1	12	9.2	170	7.2
BSA required	37	1.7	3	2.3	40	1.7
ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages)	7	0.3	0	0	7	0.3
ESOL skills need	93	4.2	8	6.2	101	4.3
Basic skills need	415	18.6	24	18.5	439	18.6
Severe basic skills need	18	0.8	2	1.5	20	0.8
Generic work skills need	226	10.1	15	11.5	241	10.2
Specific work skills need	192	8.6	18	13.8	210	8.9
No skills need	985	44.2	44	33.8	1,029	43.7
Missing	95	4.3	4	3.1	99	4.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,227</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,357</b>	<b>100</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(10) = 10.8838$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.367

**Table 4.13 Sanctions among the Test group, by sought occupation**

Sought occupation	Sanctioned				Total	
	No		Yes		Number	Column %
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
Managers and senior officials	48	2.2	3	2.3	51	2.2
Professional occupations	51	2.3	2	1.5	53	2.2
Associate professional and technical occupations	145	6.5	9	6.9	154	6.5
Administrative and secretarial occupations	183	8.2	13	10	196	8.3
Skilled trades occupations	234	10.5	14	10.8	248	10.5
Personal service occupations	151	6.8	10	7.7	161	6.8
Sales and customer service occupations	453	20.3	20	15.4	473	20.1
Process, plant and machine operatives	173	7.8	15	11.5	188	8
Elementary occupations	730	32.8	39	30	769	32.6
Missing	59	2.6	5	3.8	64	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,227</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,357</b>	<b>100</b>

Pearson  $\chi^2(9) = 5.6121$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.778

#### 4.4 Moving towards an impact estimate

The results presented above are Test-Control comparisons that we would hope to interpret as representing estimates of the causal impact of conditionality for those individuals with a legitimate value for the pilot marker. However, as shown in Table 3.10, roughly five per cent of such individuals

were assigned to the wrong group. It is the randomness of the National Insurance number (NINO) that is the basis for the assertion that the Test and Control groups do not systematically differ. The fact that assignment to Test or Control group did not align perfectly with whether the individual had an even or odd NINO means that it is not possible to assert a priori that the Test and Control groups should not systematically differ. And if they do differ, the case for regarding Test-Control group comparisons as unbiased impact estimates is weakened.

More positively, it may be argued that the fact that only five per cent of individuals are misallocated is unlikely to substantially corrupt the design and that it is therefore reasonable to regard the Test-Control comparisons as good estimates of the impact of conditionality. Whether this is in fact the case is a matter of judgement, but we can be helped in reaching a decision by considering whether the Test and Control groups are similar in terms of background characteristics. Tables 3.11-3.20<sup>4</sup> show that, on many dimensions, the two groups are similar. Importantly though, those with no potential skills need are over-represented among the Control group. For this difference between the Test and Control groups not to affect impact estimates, we would have to assume that having a potential skills need is unrelated to the effectiveness of training: a potentially unrealistic assumption.

The pilot was never intended to target those with no skills need. Consequently, a simple way of dealing with this difference between the Test and Control groups is simply to drop from the analysis those individuals recorded not to have a potential skills need. For the purpose of brevity, tables comparing the Test and Control groups are not shown for this subgroup. However, the key finding is that focusing on those with a skills need results in there being no Test-Control group differences that are significant at the five per cent level for any of the characteristics shown in Tables 3.11-3.20. On this basis – bearing in mind still that potential skills needs are not the same as actual skills needs (which we do not observe in the data) – it seems reasonable to view the Test-Control differences for this group as representing impact estimates.

The remainder of this section provides estimates of the impact of conditionality on training, sanctions and labour market outcomes for those with an identified potential skills need. Table 4.14 shows that there is no impact on the probability of being referred to training. This stands in contrast to the corresponding result for the sample that includes those recorded not to have a skills need. It is also more in agreement with the design of the evaluation which intended that everybody in the Test and Control groups would be referred. It is still noticeable that only about half of the sample are referred to training. However, this is an improvement on the two-fifths who were found to be referred to training in the earlier analysis that included those recorded not to have a skills need.

**Table 4.14 Estimated impact on training referrals**

Referred to training	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	649	48.9	553	49.1	1202	49
Yes	679	51.1	573	50.9	1252	51
Total	1328	100	1126	100	2454	100
Pearson chi2(1) = 0.0142 Pr = 0.905						

<sup>4</sup> At the ten per cent level, one significant association was found; those with no recorded disability were more likely to be in the Test group. However, in view of the number of tests carried out, finding one difference that is significant at the ten per cent level is not surprising and is not inconsistent with the Test and Control groups being similar within sampling variation.

Table 4.15 shows that the proportion observed in the LMS to start training is also slightly higher once those identified through screening to have no potential skills need are excluded. It nonetheless remains low, at about 16 per cent. However, as noted previously, training starts are not well recorded in the LMS so it is only the difference between the Test and Control groups that is of real interest. This is shown not to be statistically significant. On this evidence then, the conditionality does not seem to result in increased participation in training.

**Table 4.15 Estimated impact on training starts**

Started training	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	1,122	84.5	941	83.6	2,063	84.1
Yes	206	15.5	185	16.4	391	15.9
Total	1,328	100	1,126	100	2,454	100
Pearson chi2(1) = 0.3832 Pr = 0.536						

JUVOS data can be used to identify whether an increased number fail to attend (FTA). As Table 4.16 shows, there is no evidence of an impact.

**Table 4.16 Estimated impact on failure to attend (taken from JUVOS)**

FTA	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	1,212	91.3	1,037	92.1	2,249	91.6
Yes	116	8.7	89	7.9	205	8.4
Total	1,328	100	1,126	100	2,454	100
Pearson chi2(1) = 0.5494 Pr = 0.459						

The probability of being sanctioned also appears not to have been affected so far by conditionality. Table 4.17 shows that, as with the sample including those identified through screening to have no potential skills need, sanction rates are not significantly different across the Test and Control groups.

**Table 4.17 Estimated impact on sanctions**

Sanctioned	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	Total
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	1,242	93.5	1,043	92.6	2,285	93.1
Yes	86	6.5	83	7.4	169	6.9
Total	1,328	100	1,126	100	2,454	100
Pearson chi2(1) = 0.7617 Pr = 0.383						

The last two tables again use JUVOS data to examine the impact on benefit off-flows. Table 4.18 considers all observed exits from JSA to something other than a government programme or training as a means of capturing whether somebody has ceased to be a DWP claimant. Nearly one-fifth of people are observed to have exited in this way and there is no significant difference between the Test and Control groups. The same is true when considering recorded JSA exits to employment (Table 4.19). Overall then, there is no evidence yet of an effect of conditionality on benefit exit or employment entry.

**Table 4.18 Estimated impact on benefit exits (taken from JUVOS)**

Left JSA/JRFND	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	Total
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	1,076	81	916	81.3	1,992	81.2
Yes	252	19	210	18.7	462	18.8
Total	1,328	100	1,126	100	2,454	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 0.0423$  Pr = 0.837

**Table 4.19 Estimated impact on employment entry (taken from JUVOS)**

Started work	Assignment outcome					
	Test		Control		Total	Total
	Number	Column %	Number	Column %	Number	Column %
No	1,256	94.6	1,053	93.5	2,309	94.1
Yes	72	5.4	73	6.5	145	5.9
Total	1,328	100	1,126	100	2,454	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 1.2348$  Pr = 0.266

# 5 Conclusion

The ultimate objective of the pilot was to assess whether requiring Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants who are identified as having skills needs to take part in training, with the potential application of sanctions for non-participation, has an impact on sustained employment outcomes. To achieve this, those eligible were to be randomly assigned either to be subject to this requirement (the Test group) or not (the Control group). A comparison of post-randomisation experiences should then provide robust evidence of the effect of conditionality.

This report presents evidence from the first few months of the pilot following its introduction on 26 April 2010. A number of points highlight deviations in practice from the pilot design, or are suggestive of a possible deviation:

- **More than half the individuals in the sample were found in their basic skills screening to not have a potential skills need.** An important caveat to this result is that the pilot is concerned with individuals who have an identified skills need, while all that is observable in the available data is whether individuals have a **potential** skills need. Nevertheless, this finding at least raises a question over whether the pilot was effective in reaching its target population.
- **Nearly one-fifth of people have an incorrectly set pilot marker.** Such cases were concentrated among particular groups of people – those from minority ethnic groups, those without a disability, those with no identified skills need and those who were looking for work in higher-level occupations. There was also considerable variation across Jobcentre Plus districts. The implication is that impact estimates based on Test-Control comparisons are specific to the subgroup of individuals with valid pilot markers and do not necessarily represent the impact for the full pilot population.
- **The remaining cases were not always assigned to the Test or Control group in the way they should have been, based on their NINO.** The level of agreement was quite high (about 95 per cent) but if those wrongly assigned are a non-random group, the strength of the estimation approach is reduced. The results do provide some evidence of non-random selection, with significant differences with regard to Jobcentre Plus district and the results of basic skills screening.
- **Many individuals in both Test and Control groups are not recorded as being referred to training.** Close to 90 per cent of individuals are recorded as being referred to some type of activity at the time of randomisation or later. However, only two-fifths are referred to training. In principle, everybody should be referred to training. This finding significantly alters the interpretation of observed differences in outcomes between the Test and Control groups. It is not appropriate to view such differences as capturing the impact of mandated referrals if only a proportion of individuals are actually referred.

Taken together, these points raise concerns about the extent to which the pilot can be viewed as providing reliable evidence of the effects of conditionality. On a number of dimensions, it appears that the pilot was not implemented as intended.

Turning to substantive findings, the analysis has provided estimates of the impact of conditionality **as operationalised in this pilot** on training, sanctions and early labour market outcomes for individuals who were identified through basic skills screening as having a potential skills need and who had a valid pilot marker. There is no evidence of any impact. Interpreting this is not straightforward. One concern is that the apparent low level of referrals to training means that the impact estimates cannot capture the effect of enforcing training attendance among a group of



people referred to training (as intended in the evaluation design) but instead can only capture the effect of enforcing training attendance among a group of people **some of whom** have been referred to training. This is certain to be a weaker effect and it may be that a significant impact would be found were everyone referred.

A separate concern relates to the quality of the data. The Labour Market System (LMS) is not a reliable source of information on training starts (it is not a requirement that training starts be recorded in the LMS) so the finding that there was no effect on participation in training cannot be regarded as definitive. To achieve a better estimate of the impact on training would require linking the LMS data to Individual Learner Record (ILR) data, which records training participation more reliably. Similarly, the finding that conditionality has not increased sanctions may in part reflect the fact that the sanctioning process is not instantaneous but, instead, it takes time for sanctions to register in the data. It is possible that an impact on sanctioning will become visible in time, but that the data on which the analysis in this report is based covers too short a period to capture it. If this is the case, the finding that the impact of conditionality on sanctions is not statistically significant may reflect data shortcomings rather than a failure to enforce conditionality.

The findings of the report point to a number of issues that should be addressed if the objective of the pilot – to understand the effect of conditionality – is to be met. First, the reasons why implementation of the pilot appeared to deviate from what was intended need to be better understood. The qualitative analysis can be informative here and may, in particular, help identify means of achieving a higher referral rate for the remainder of the pilot period. Second, better data are needed. The original intention of the evaluation was to combine Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) administrative data with ILR data on training. The timeframe for the phase 1 report ruled out the use of ILR data. In the longer run, however, the only way of accurately assessing whether conditionality increased training is to use the ILR data. Third, and related to the second point, the analysis presented in this report relates to only the first four months of the pilot. As such, it can only capture the experiences of the early pilot period. It is common for new initiatives to take some time to ‘bed-down’ and this may have been particularly the case for this pilot given the ongoing uncertainty over its future. Furthermore, at this stage it is only possible to capture short-term outcomes for individuals, especially since the availability of outcome data is subject to delay. Further analysis at a later stage would allow a fuller understanding of the effect of conditionality, together with a better appreciation of how rigidly it was enforced.

# **Part Two: Qualitative evaluation of the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot**

# 6 Introduction

## 6.1 Policy context of the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot

The practice of making benefits conditional on job seeker behaviour has been in place for many years and has been increasingly widened so that it is now included in a range of programmes<sup>5</sup>. One of the most common types of conditionality is to undertake work-related activity, such as participation in training. The case for benefit conditionality includes the belief that it confers an expectation on claimants, which increases movement into work; that it clarifies rights and responsibilities of individuals receiving State support; while the case against includes concerns that vulnerable people may suffer disproportionate financial hardship or be pushed into unsuitable and short-lived employment (Gregg, 2008). The circumstances under which sanctions are applied can be varied, but a distinction has been made between sanctions resulting from an ‘administrative failure’ for example not completing paper work or failure to attend a meeting with an adviser; and behavioural ‘misdemeanour’ where a claimant refuses an offer of employment or is not actively seeking work (Griggs and Evans, 2010). The coalition Government supports conditionality and the White Paper, *Universal Credit: Welfare that Works* includes a central proposal of a new ‘claimant commitment’ with sanctions for those who refuse job offers or do not engage with activity to prepare for work (DWP, 2010).

## 6.2 Aims and objectives of the qualitative evaluation

The purpose of the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot was to test the effect of being mandated to training through random assignment of customers at Stage 3 of their claim (corresponding in most cases to six months of unemployment) to a ‘test’ group, where they were mandated or to a ‘control’ group where participation was voluntary. The purpose of the qualitative evaluation was to gain an understanding of the experiences of participants in the pilot: principally claimants and Jobcentre Plus staff, and in addition the perspectives of providers who deliver the training. We were also asked to investigate with all research participants (Jobcentre Plus staff and claimants) any harm resulting from participation in the pilot, for example loss of time or motivation for job search and, for claimants who are sanctioned, financial and other hardship, reduced motivation and effects on health and wellbeing. The research also explored with claimants their attitudes towards the pilot, towards the training they were offered and towards mandation and sanctioning. The research explored both the effects on claimant attitudes and behaviour of the threat of sanctions and the effect of sanctions themselves.

## 6.3 Research methods

The qualitative evaluation included interviews with claimants as well as visits to Jobcentre Plus offices to interview staff. In addition, a small number of training providers were interviewed.

### 6.3.1 Visits to Jobcentre Plus offices

The evaluation included visits to five Jobcentre Plus offices. The purpose of these visits was to look at how the pilot had been introduced and was operating and the experiences and views of staff delivering the pilot. The Jobcentres were selected from pilot districts to provide a range of settings

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of conditionality see Gregg, P. (2008). *Realising Potential: A Vision for Personalised Conditionality and Support*. London: DWP.

from inner city to rural localities.<sup>6</sup> The Jobcentres were visited during September 2010. They are anonymised in the report, and referred to as Jobcentres A,B,C,D and E.

A total of 25 staff were interviewed. These included, in each Jobcentre, the member of staff responsible for overseeing the pilot or lead adviser for Stage 3 claimants, and other advisers working with Stage 3 claimants. To preserve anonymity, pseudonyms are used for all staff quoted or referred to in the report. In addition, a small number of interviews with claimants were observed.<sup>7</sup> Interviews with advisers were carried out using a semi-structured topic guide which included questions on their experiences of referring claimants, the training they received to deliver the pilot, claimant responses, finding appropriate training for claimants and the effects of mandation and sanctions. For a copy of the topic guide, see Appendix A.

### 6.3.2 Interviews with claimants

Interviews with claimants were aimed at understanding claimants' experiences of involvement in the pilot, including referral to training and mandation, the training itself, the effect of sanctions, where experienced, and the wider benefits or drawbacks of the scheme. Interviews with 40 claimants were carried out by telephone in October and November 2010. Interviews were carried out using a semi-structured topic guide, which forms Appendix B of the report.

All interview data was analysed using a framework method in which responses are coded and themes are identified from the accounts, explanations, views and perspectives of the research participants. This approach is a standard qualitative research method and is generally known as 'grounded theory'<sup>8</sup>. In keeping with the methods of research and analysis, the findings are presented qualitatively. This approach aims to convey the range of experiences, perspectives and attitudes of research participants and, where possible, to offer explanations for these. This differs from quantitative approaches which can measure the prevalence of responses and compare test and control groups. The number of claimants (40) and advisers (25) interviewed allowed for a range of experiences and perspectives to be identified. Although it is not appropriate to quantify responses to research using qualitative methods, we indicate whether there was a degree of agreement or communality in responses, and where there was greater diversity.

The claimants were sampled from the DWP database of claimants mandated to the pilot and were from across the 11 pilot areas. Characteristics of the claimants interviewed are presented in Appendix C of the report. Most were male (29 men compared to 11 women); 15 were aged 18-24, 13 aged 25 to 40, and 12 aged 41 to 65. Of those whose ethnicity was known, 26 were white British and two were white non-British (European) while eight were from an ethnic minority. Five claimants were identified as having a disability and others told us they had health problems which affected the work they could do. Ten of the respondents had no qualifications and six had qualifications at entry level. Four had level 1 qualifications, seven had level 2, which included GCSEs, three had level 3 qualifications and four were graduates or had postgraduate qualifications. The qualifications level was not known for six claimants. At the time they were referred to the pilot, one claimant was working part-time and three were studying for qualifications.

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<sup>6</sup> Their locations were: London inner city, North West inner city, Midlands city outskirts, Midlands market town and East of England small town.

<sup>7</sup> We had intended to observe interviews between advisers and customers who have been referred to the scheme to gain further insight into customers' reactions to the pilot and the mandatory aspect in particular. However, the participating jobcentres could not identify such cases during the research visits so that, the interviews observed were not with customers who had been referred to the pilot.

<sup>8</sup> Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.

The Skills Funding Agency (SFA)<sup>9</sup> training programmes to which claimants could be referred are presented in Table 1.1<sup>10</sup>.

**Table 6.1 SFA Programmes eligible for referrals under the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot**

	<b>Key features</b>
Employability Skills Programme	Employability, basic numeracy, literacy and language skills delivery in the context of generic employability skills, e.g. time-keeping, communication. Full or part-time training open to all Jobcentre Plus claimants with basic skills needs
Six Month Offer	For adults aged 19 and over who have been unemployed for six months or who have been fast-tracked. The training will focus on the achievement of a full level 2 or 3. The expectation is that the qualification will be started while the participant is funded under this offer and completed in the workplace under mainstream funding with an expectation that the learner progresses while in work.
Response to Redundancy	For those over 18 who are under notice of redundancy or who have been made redundant. The training will focus on sector offering current vacancies now or in the near future.
Young Persons Guarantee – Work Focused Training	Training initially for up to 12 weeks in sector-based skills, targeted at young people aged 18-24 who have been unemployed for six months. Duration usually three months, but can be extended for up to six months.
Young Persons Guarantee – Routes into Work	Preparation of claimants to fill identified vacancies with full-time training up to eight weeks. Training is shaped around the relevant Sector Skills Council Employability Toolkit. Target claimant group is young people aged 18-24 who have been unemployed for six months.
Skills For Jobs	For clients aged 19+; who are not currently in employment; sector specific training to those and who lack the skills and qualifications to enter the labour market. The aim is to help people find employment and then to progress to level 2 where appropriate. (This is locally arranged and managed provision).
Adult Learner Responsive Mainstream Provision	For those aged 19+ a range of levels provision delivered through a variety of providers. This offer covers a range of vocational training in classroom based approach.

### 6.3.3 Interviews with training providers

Telephone interviews were carried out with representatives of seven colleges and training providers contracted to deliver under the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot. Email correspondence took place with a further two providers. These nine organisations represented two types of provider: colleges of further education (5) and independent training providers delivering throughout England (4). All providers were located in one of the five Jobcentre Plus areas where Jobcentre Plus staff were interviewed.

The aim of interviews with training providers was to explore their experiences of delivering services to claimants referred through the pilot programme. This included providers' views on the benefits of training and needs of the claimants referred by Jobcentre Plus. Interviews were also intended to explore the effects of mandation on student commitment and motivation. It was not possible to fully meet these aims because the providers reported receiving very few referrals through the pilot.

<sup>9</sup> The SFA is responsible for funding and regulating adult Further Education and skills training in England. The mission of the SFA is to ensure that people and businesses can access the training they need.

<sup>10</sup> These represent some, but not all, of the list of provision managed by the SFA. Table 6.1 was provided by the SFA.

## 6.4 Structure of the report

The report synthesises the findings of the three components of the qualitative research: visits to Jobcentre Plus offices, interviews with claimants and interviews with training providers. This allows for the views and experiences of these participants in the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot to be compared and for their perspectives to be presented and explained.

- Chapter 7 looks at the implementation of the pilot, how advisers were prepared, their understandings of eligibility and random assignment and the methods of skills assessment used. It looks at the wider context into which the pilot was introduced and at training providers experiences of involvement in the pilot.
- Chapter 8 looks at claimant experiences of the pilot, at their interest in training, their views on the training they took part in and any outcomes.
- Chapter 9 looks at the issue of mandation, presenting the perspectives of both claimants and advisers, both in relation to their personal experiences and their wider views.
- Chapter 10 looks at sanctioning and presents the experiences and views of claimants who were sanctioned and of advisers.
- The concluding section draws some conclusions and recommendations from the findings of the evaluation. Recommendations are intended to inform any proposals to mainstream the programme as part of Jobcentre Plus services. These are included in the body of the conclusions, listed separately at the end of the report and in the summary.

Chapters 7 to 10 of the report conclude with a list of key points.

# 7 Implementation of the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot

## 7.1 Introduction

At the time of the visits to Jobcentres in September 2010, the pilot had been in operation for almost five months. At this stage in the pilot, referral rates differed substantially between the Jobcentres visited: in Jobcentre A more than 200 claimants had been allocated to the pilot with around 100 referred to training, while in Jobcentre C fewer than 10 had been taken on to the pilot and only three referred to training. In the other three Jobcentres referrals to the pilot ranged from around 15 to 70<sup>11</sup>. The qualitative research identified a number of reasons for these low referral rates. In this section we describe the introduction of the pilot to Jobcentres, the referral process and advisers' understandings of the pilot and of the random assignment method. We look first at the introduction of the pilot and then at the influence of the wider context at the time of its planned implementation and the availability of training to the pilots. We also look at training providers' experiences of involvement in the pilot.

## 7.2 Introduction of the pilot into Jobcentres

Differences were found between Jobcentres in the way that the pilot was introduced to Jobcentre Plus staff. Most staff had received an email about the pilot, at around the time of its introduction, and supporting materials including a flow chart. In some Jobcentres, senior staff had also produced their own materials for advisers. The key difference found between Jobcentres was in the degree of formality with which they introduced the pilot. It was the intention of the pilot design that

*'Formal guidance and training will be given to Jobcentre Plus advisers so that they are aware of the referral process, the training courses available and what actions will constitute a potential benefit sanction.'*<sup>12</sup>

However, methods of introduction were largely informal rather than through formal training, as shown in Table 7.1.

<sup>11</sup> In the other three Jobcentres the referral rates were roughly 70/40, 40/10 and 15/10 for the pilot and for training referrals.

<sup>12</sup> Office of Public Sector Information (2010) The Jobseeker's Allowance (Skills Training Conditionality Pilot) Regulations 2010: Explanatory Memorandum, London: OPSI. Available at [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2010/9780111489451/pdfs/ukdsiem\\_9780111489451\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2010/9780111489451/pdfs/ukdsiem_9780111489451_en.pdf)

**Table 7.1 Approaches to training advisers in the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot**

Jobcentre	Method of introduction
Jobcentre A	Information session led by senior adviser with several visits by District manager
Jobcentre B	Training during 'comms' meeting led by senior adviser
Jobcentre C	Training 'cascaded' to staff individually by senior adviser
Jobcentre D	'Group chat' at general staff meeting
Jobcentre E	Staff group briefing by 'cluster coach'

Only in Jobcentre A was the pilot introduced with any degree of formality, through an information session. Elsewhere Jobcentre Plus staff had been informed of the pilot through methods including circular emails, staff meetings and one to one talks by a senior adviser. A number of advisers had missed meetings where the pilot had been explained, and had received information from emails and from other staff.

Advisers had access to material and guidance about the pilot. Some advisers found these materials useful but others felt that procedures were unnecessarily complicated, and did not understand explanatory material about the pilot. The flow chart produced for advisers on the referral process was found by some advisers to be over-complicated and difficult to follow. An information sheet was produced for claimants, but some advisers believed the information it contained was inadequate, and that it did not explain the purpose of the pilot. In recognition of this problem, some Jobcentres and senior advisers had produced their own, simplified, materials.

Support from the District appears to be one factor in whether the pilot was introduced effectively and understood by advisers. In Jobcentre A, where referrals were relatively high, one senior adviser reported that a member of staff at district level had periodically been in contact with the Jobcentre, and that the adviser had also contacted the district with queries or when problems arose.

### 7.3 Understanding aspects of the pilot: skill needs and mandation

The way in which the pilot was introduced to Jobcentres had consequences for advisers' understandings of the pilot and therefore how it was implemented. A number of advisers reported having been confused about aspects of the pilot, including procedures, eligibility, exemptions, the use of mandation and the random assignment method. The main differences in interpretation, understanding and practice were found in relation to 'skill needs' of claimants and in relation to mandation.

Advisers generally interpreted skills needs widely, as including the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, skills of job search and application, and specific needs in relation to technical skills, qualifications and licensing. However, there were differences in interpretation of what constitutes a skills barrier and therefore in who should be referred to the pilot programme. One adviser explained that initially,

*'I didn't realise that it was only for customers with a skills need, so I was putting everyone in the pilot.'*

(Bob, Jobcentre A)

The other misunderstanding, found largely in one Jobcentre (E), was that the pilot was aimed at claimants with basic skills needs, which had led some advisers to refer only those in this group.



The random assignment method was generally well understood, as a means of testing the effectiveness of an intervention. However, some advisers believed that only claimants with a National Insurance number (NINO) ending in an even number were eligible for the pilot at all, rather than being the claimants who were to be mandated. A number felt that the nature of an intervention should not be decided by random assignment and did not accept the aims of the pilot. Therefore, claimants in the control group were seen to be potentially treated more leniently than they deserved, and those in the test group treated more harshly than might be warranted. Some advisers felt that random assignment would not be found acceptable by claimants.

Some advisers were concerned about mandating some claimants to training, fearing that they might be sanctioned and face hardship. Consequently, some advisers said they had not put eligible claimants into the pilot where they would have been in the Test group. One adviser gave two examples of claimants she had purposely left out of the pilot: the first was a lone parent with two disabled children, who she worried would not cope with training and could face additional family hardship; the second was a lone parent with three children who the adviser believed was doing her best to improve her job prospects:

*'She's got a part-time job and she's doing voluntary work. She does have skill needs, her maths is very poor, but what would be the point in mandating her? She would end up being sanctioned if she didn't attend and she's got children. It would be unreasonable to mandate her to training.'*

(Anne, Jobcentre E)

Some advisers also followed the reverse practice of effectively mandating claimants in the Control group to training where they felt this might be necessary to ensure their attendance. In one Jobcentre it was decided that this was legitimate practice, as two advisers in this Jobcentre explained:

*'The staff said, "What if I had an odd number and I think they should go on the training?" so we decided that they could impose their own sanctions if they thought that was best for the customer.'*

(Jackie, Jobcentre B)

*'We had to have a test and control but, to us, there's no difference. If we want to mandate someone we'll do it. We've always got the fallback of a jobseekers direction... I know this goes against the idea of the pilot, but you can't just let them off.'*

(Eddie, Jobcentre B)

Individual advisers in other Jobcentres were also following this practice with claimants in the Control group who they thought might not take up a referral to training. Some advisers also believed that claimants should not know that they are or are not mandated, on the grounds that this might affect their behaviour or because they would comply in any case and did not need the additional pressure. If these adaptations to the pilot had been made across participating Jobcentres, they will have compromised the random assignment method and are likely to have affected the validity of outcomes from the pilot (see Part 1).

## 7.4 Workload

Many advisers explained their own low referral rates to the pilot in relation to workload. Referring claimants to the pilot was reported to be time-consuming. Identifying skills gaps, through a literacy and numeracy assessment, was reported as taking up to 15 minutes, and explaining the pilot was also found to take time. It was also difficult for some advisers to remember to deliver the pilot, among their other tasks. As one adviser put it.

*'We have to remember umpteen other things.'*

(Eddie, Jobcentre B)

The initial Stage 3 interview is scheduled at 40 minutes, including administration. Advisers found the timing of this interview to be tight, with much to be covered in the available time. The interview is expected to cover a number of key steps which include the following: explaining the role of the personal adviser, reminding the claimant about their responsibilities, an exploration of the claimant's job goals, including through the Customer Assessment Tool, reviewing and updating the job seekers agreement, reviewing job search skills and referring to appropriate sources of help, conducting a skills screening, raising Work Trials, the recruitment subsidy and providing advice on in-work financial help. Advisers found these requirements very demanding and difficult to meet within the scheduled 40 minutes.

### 7.5 Contextual issues

There was evidence that the low-key implementation of the pilot was a consequence of wider contextual issues operating in Jobcentres and in the political climate. Advisers talked about the number of pilot projects which had recently been introduced, and the difficulty they experienced keeping up with these. One senior adviser remarked, 'It's said that [the district] has more pilots than British Airways'. As a consequence she explained, 'there's information overload'. The same adviser also remarked on the high volume of email messages from district and centrally, which required decisions to be made about priorities. It was in this atmosphere that the pilot was treated as of lesser importance than other claimant inventions.

Advisers felt that the expectations of what should be done within the initial Stage 3 interview were not only high, as described above, but subject to change in provision and emphasis. As one adviser explained:

*'There are so many initiatives and there's always a flavour of the month and we only have a certain amount of time. Things change all the time and we usually end up doing those with targets.'*

(Mark, Jobcentre C)

Advisers remarked that the pilot had been introduced at a time of change in their Jobcentre when other new initiatives had been introduced, for example adviser flexibility, and the volume and range of claimants was wider in the past as a consequence of economic recession. The pilot period was a time of record levels of new claims and rising registers. Although new staff were recruited to deal with this, Jobcentre staff also said that having new advisers made it more difficult for them to introduce new initiatives: existing staff were helping new staff to deliver the basic service, and ongoing offers, to Jobseekers. In one Jobcentre, 75 per cent of staff were relatively new to the service, having been recruited since the onset of the recession, and had completed their initial training earlier this year (Jobcentre C). Some of the newer members of staff were least confident about the pilot because of its perceived complexity and uncertainty that they were following procedures correctly. The contracts of many of the newer recruits were coming to an end, and this may have been a factor in their apparent reluctance to incorporate the pilot into their practice.

A further factor contributing to the low key introduction of the pilot may have been uncertainty surrounding the continuation of the pilot, and speculation that the pilot had ended, following the change of government in May 2010. This was not raised by Jobcentre staff but was a view expressed by a training provider (see Chapter 9) and other stakeholders in the research.<sup>13</sup>

## 7.6 Putting the pilot into operation: identifying skill needs and referring claimants to training

Where advisers said they had used a method to screen claimant skill needs at the initial Stage 3 interview, and therefore eligibility for the pilot, this was usually the Fast Track Assessment, a self-completion form designed to test literacy and numeracy skills through a description of a job vacancy and mock application process. This was felt to be a useful tool in identifying basic skills needs. Advisers used the results of the screening to either refer directly to training, often for basic skills or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision or to refer for an in-depth assessment by a training provider or the adult careers service Next Step.

Some advisers interpreted the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot as solely for claimants with basic skills needs of literacy and numeracy, and were not therefore referring those with other skills gaps. However, this is a misunderstanding of the pilot: the pilot is aimed at addressing skills needs for claimants for whom skills are a key barrier to competing in the labour market, and which can include employability and job-focused skills.

While basic skills needs were relatively straightforward to diagnose and to address through training (where available), practice varied considerably between advisers in relation to claimants with other skills needs. One approach was to explore with claimants the training they would like and need to get them into work and to refer them to an assessment at a training provider.

Where advisers were not sure what a claimant's skills gaps were, some said it was their practice to refer claimants for a Skills Health Check, a more in-depth assessment of skills carried out by Next Step, the adult information, advice and guidance service funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). The actions agreed between claimant and Next Step are recorded in a Skills Action Plan. Advisers expressed some concern that they rarely had sight of this plan which was clearly of potential value in planning claimant training. This reiterates the findings of a much larger study evaluating the Integrated Employment and Skills Service (Levesley *et al.*, 2009).

## 7.7 Claimant accounts of the skills assessment and the training offered

We asked claimants about how their skills needs were assessed. Many respondents said they had a skills assessment of some type. This was most usually a basic skills assessment of some type, most usually the Fast Track Assessment described earlier. These respondents were among those with the lowest qualifications. A few respondents said they had been asked about their skills by an adviser, sometimes earlier in their claim. A small number described a more in-depth skills assessment. They reported mixed experiences of this assessment: two respondents reported the adviser as apologising for wasting their time, one because 'he knew there was no work in this area' (Thomas), and the other because he held postgraduate qualifications. A number of other respondents, while

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<sup>13</sup> In particular, Jobcentre Plus believes that by the end of June, Jobcentre Plus advisers had received incorrect messages from various sources stating that the pilot had ended. It was not until the end August that Jobcentre Plus received confirmation that the pilot was continuing.

not objecting to a skills assessment, had also not understood its purpose and may have been more positively inclined to it had this been explained to them.

### 7.7.1 Finding a training course

It is a requirement that Colleges and Skills Training Providers identify and respond to local skill needs as they arise. Provision is offered to individuals in a variety of different ways to accommodate the needs of all of the different types of individuals they serve. It is often the case that courses are of differing lengths and as such provision is often offered on a roll-on roll-off basis and when one course finishes another will begin. This means that a provider may run multiple instances of the same course throughout the year and that these instances may run concurrently or sequentially according to need.

Perceptions of the availability of training varied. However, advisers said that one of the biggest barriers to progressing claimants through the pilot was the availability of training which could address the skills barriers they had identified in the claimant. As we indicated above, advisers interpreted skills needs differently, but the courses they were typically seeking for claimants included ESOL, basic skills, employability skills and sector-based skills and certification/licensing in areas such as retail, warehousing, security and construction. In Jobcentres A and C, which were located in city areas, availability of all courses was reported to be generally good, but poorer than in the past and less consistent because of unstable funding. In both these Jobcentres, provision of employability training (e.g. CV writing, job search) was reported as more plentiful than training with a sector skills element. Advisers in the other three areas perceived shortages of provision, particularly in sector skills training. These included traditional manual trades such as plumbing, gas fitting and electrical work, and training for service occupations, such as health and social care. In addition, particular problems were reported with the following:

- shortages in ESOL provision;
- long waiting times for courses;
- uncertain/delayed and cancelled start dates for some courses;
- lack of local availability of some sector-skills training of interest to claimants;
- a gap in provision over the summer months.

At Jobcentre B, advisers said long waiting times for ESOL courses had resulted in claimants being withdrawn from the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot. Advisers at this Jobcentre also said that colleges and training providers had been unable to give start dates for other courses and that there was a 6-8 week waiting time for sector skills courses in areas such as warehousing and security. This problem was reported elsewhere and advisers believed it was because courses were sometimes run when colleges have sufficient numbers enrolled. Waiting times of this length did not fit in with the design of the pilot, which requires training to commence within six weeks of referral. A particular problem was identified in the gap in provision over the summer, spanning the school summer holiday period from July to September when some college providers instructed Jobcentre Plus to suspend referrals. While they generally remained open to take bookings for initial interviews, many of these actually took place in September, so that training was delayed for many claimants.

## 7.8 Training providers' experiences of the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot

Providers offered a range of provision aimed at addressing barriers to employment such as basic skill needs, job search and basic employability skills, and key skills in selected occupational areas. These were offered to students referred through Jobcentre Plus, both through mandation and voluntary attendance, and were also available to students enrolling independently or through other referral routes. Much provision for which they were contracted through JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot and other Jobcentre Plus programmes combined a mixture of basic employability skills training with occupational key skills, with basic skills addressed through initial training where necessary. The Skills Funding Agency programmes which providers delivered to were presented in Table 1.1. Courses included literacy and numeracy, ESOL, employability (including job search and applications) and sector-based skills training in areas such as warehousing, security and IT.

Training providers said that most of the courses they delivered on behalf of Jobcentre Plus were of between four and 12 weeks and either part time or full time. Courses went ahead only when they had sufficient enrolments, and because most students came through these routes rather than through self-referral, Jobcentre Plus referral rates were critical. Providers said they had no waiting lists or start dates as such, but that courses would run once sufficient numbers, usually ten to 15, had enrolled (see Chapter 7). The enrolment process included interviews and assessments of potential students referred by Jobcentre Plus. These were to test for basic skills and ESOL needs and to check for eligibility for the training to which they have been referred.

Although they were contracted to deliver training to claimants on the pilot, a number of the providers approached for the research said they had received no referrals through the Skills Conditionality Pilot. Some of these thought it possible that some of their students were on the pilot but that this had not been flagged up in the referral process, while others said that this was not likely. Another possibility raised is that Jobcentre Plus claimants are on 'overlapping' programmes, with only one of these included in the referral note. Others believed that referrals through the pilot were just low. The lack of experience of training providers with the pilot meant that we were not able to ask about how students had fared on the training and discussions had to be of a more general nature, including mandation (see Chapter 9).

Training providers said they had attended a presentation about the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot at a regional location, organised and led by the SFA and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This presentation included an explanation of the referral process, which in some cases made use of the flow chart referred to earlier. Some respondents felt that procedures were unclear or too complex, echoing the views of advisers. There was speculation that this had resulted in procedural errors and low referral rates from Jobcentre Plus. Providers were not always certain about which programmes Skills Conditionality pilot claimants were eligible for. Providers also referred to contextual issues including uncertainty about continuation of the Pilot following the change of government and spending review, changing initiatives in Jobcentres and staffing changes at Jobcentre Plus.

## 7.9 Key points

- The pilot was intended to be introduced formally to Jobcentre Plus but in the Jobcentres visited, Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) advisers were informed about the pilot largely through email and at staff meetings. Supporting documentation was seen as poor and complicated. As a consequence, some advisers had been left unsure about aspects of the pilot, including eligibility and the use of mandation and random assignment.

- Some advisers disliked having to treat claimants according to the requirements of a pilot and had made changes. These included mandating claimants in the Control group, where they felt this was needed and not mandating claimants who they felt this would result in harm. Some advisers believed that claimants should not know that they were involved in a pilot or that they were mandated, because this might affect behaviour or because they would attend in any case.
- The widely differing rates of referral between the Jobcentres visited are likely to reflect different interpretations of eligibility, referral practices and availability of training. Some advisers interpreted skills needs narrowly, as basic skills.
- Low referral rates were also explained by pressure of time during the initial Stage 3 interview, competing initiatives and the perceived complexity and time required to explain the pilot to claimants. They were also explained with reference to the pilot's introduction during a period of change in Jobcentres, when other new initiatives were introduced, when claimant numbers were increasing, new staff were recruited and the Government had changed.
- Where advisers used a method to screen claimant skill needs, this was most usually the Fast Track Assessment, which tests basic skills needs. Claimants were sometimes referred to Next Step, the advice and guidance service. Communication problems led to advisers rarely having sight of the Skills Action Plan resulting from this assessment, so that they could not use it to plan claimant training. Claimants sometimes did not understand the purpose of the skills screening they had been given.
- Although perceptions varied, advisers said that one of the biggest barriers to progressing claimants through the pilot was the availability of training which could address skills barriers. Problems included a shortage of ESOL courses, long waiting times for provision and uncertain start dates. Shortages were also reported in sector skills training, for example in manual trades.
- A number of training providers said they had received no referrals of Jobcentre Plus claimants through the pilot. This might be explained by low referral rates, referral of claimants with no indication that they were on the pilot, or 'overlapping' programmes. This was not an issue for providers, whose focus was on training delivery, but meant that the evaluation could not ask about pilot claimants specifically.
- Some training providers said they had not found introductory sessions on the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot helpful. They felt that the referral process was complex and that this may have led to low referral rates. However, the sample was small and may not reflect the experiences of other training providers.

# 8 Claimants' experiences of the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot

## 8.1 Introduction

As we explained in Chapter 6, a key aim of the research was to understand some of the attitudes and experiences of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants who were allocated to the pilot and mandated to training. This included their experiences of the training which was covered by the research because of its potential influence on claimant views on mandation and willingness to comply. In this section we describe the views of claimants on being referred to the pilot and the experiences of claimants who attended training. This includes their views on the training, what they gained from it and any problems which they encountered. We also present the accounts of Jobcentre Plus staff about the feedback they received from claimants.

When asked whether they knew that the training they had been sent on was part of the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot, only one claimant thought they recognised the pilot by name. The other 39 had not heard of the pilot programme and did not know that they were on it. Similarly, very few claimants could name the course they had attended, although they could describe what the training had entailed, for example basic skills, CV writing or job search. Because respondents did not know they were involved in the pilot programme, we had to infer that the training they talked of was within the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot through information they gave about dates and the stage of their claim.

## 8.2 Claimant response to the training offer

The majority of respondents attended job search and CV workshops, with some claimants saying they had an element of job search in their training and others stating that their training included advice on their CV. The next most commonly attended courses were basic skills courses, covering literacy and numeracy. Other courses included interview skills, application orientated IT skills such as Word or PowerPoint training, customer services, and industry specific skills courses to obtain the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card or Security Industry Association (SIA) licence. Claimants tended to have a combination of two or more activities as part of their training, for example, job search and CV workshop.

Some respondents said they had been given a choice in the course they were sent on, or were able to choose their training provider, although most had not. Some respondents said they had not wanted a choice of training, since their minds were set on a particular type of training and this was offered. This was most commonly training including sector-based skills leading to certification such as CSCS for construction or SIA for security.

Some respondents said that they would have chosen a different course had they been able to. These included claimants who had wanted sector-based skills training. One claimant had understood that he would have a choice of sector-based skills training, including carpentry and plumbing, but found himself on a basic skills course, which he left and was sanctioned (see Chapter 10). A claimant who was studying for AAT accountancy qualifications independently of Jobcentre Plus said she would have preferred to choose an IT course which would complement her current training.

Respondents described a range of reactions to being offered training by their adviser. Many who described their first reaction as positive gave one of four main reasons for this: it would help them to get a job; they welcomed the activity; it might improve their confidence; or it would give them sector-based skills.

Claimants who welcomed training as a means of getting them back to work included some who recognised that their basic skills were poor and needed improving to compete in the current labour market. They also included claimants who felt they needed help with their CV. For example, a respondent who was asked to go on a CV writing course explained that.

*'They said it will all help. You see in my life I've had no need for CVs and all this. I am 62 nearly; I am a bit old fashioned. I needed the help so I just agreed with it.'*

(Alfred)

One claimant described how he welcomed the training as a form of activity and also to meet requirements:

*'It gets you out there doing something proactive. Learning is good; it's paid for so I saw it as positive. I also saw it as an obligation.'*

(Jonathan)

One claimant who was offered a computer course and security industry training described his reaction to the training offer:

*'I thought it was brilliant, you know. I said thank you because I was really struggling to find work anyway and I could see that is the only way of getting into work to be honest at the time.'*

(Ben)

Respondents who had been sent on basic skills training generally recognised that poor literacy and numeracy was a barrier to employment which could be addressed by training. A number of respondents said they agreed with their adviser's opinion that they needed additional help to look for work, including how to complete an application form and perform well at interview.

Some claimants said they were interested because they felt that training would help improve their confidence, which was low through not having worked or having experienced periods of unemployment. The small number of claimants who were offered training with a work experience or where training was linked to specific vacancies felt that their employment chances would be increased and that they would be more attractive to employers.

Among the claimants who were most keen on training were those who were interested in the sector-based skills on offer as part of the course. Training which included certification in areas like construction skills safety, forklift truck safety and the security industry (SIA) certificate were attractive to some claimants. One respondent described himself as 'over the moon' when he was offered a place on training which included a CSCS card, since he had been trying to get this training for some time.

Some claimants had a particular interest in sector-based skills areas which were not offered by their adviser and their initial enthusiasm for training dissipated when they realised this. They included a claimant wanting to qualify as a fitness instructor to do youth work and another who was interested in training which included a construction certificate but who was not given a place. Among the disappointed claimants was one who believed she would be able to gain a license to work in the drinks industry, but was sent on a CV writing and job search workshop. Problems such as these appeared to arise either from misunderstandings about what courses Jobcentre Plus could refer claimants to or changes in course availability.



Some claimants described their response to the training as either neutral or ambivalent. These included a claimant who said he was 'not really enthusiastic' about attending a basic skills course because he had little confidence in his abilities, but at the same time wanted to improve his employment chances. A few respondents appeared to accept training as part of the JSA process. One claimant explained that.

*'It's just a procedure that you just go through... Once you lose your job and signing on for a while they just put you there.'*

(Damien)

Therefore, claimants including this one, while uncertain about how the training would benefit him, accepted that they should attend.

## 8.2 Claimants who did not welcome the training

A number of claimants described their response as opposed to the training and gave a number of reasons for this. Some claimants had previous bad experiences of training which made them ill-disposed to training for unemployed people. One 19 year old respondent, who had previously been on a job search course which he had not found useful, described his initial response as:

*'I just thought "Oh no, [training provider name] all over again". It didn't benefit me at all. The way I look at it is they take me off their books even though I'm still signing on.'*

(Aiden)

Other respondents shared this belief that assigning claimants to training was a means of reducing the claimant count.

Some claimants did not object to training in general, but did not want to go on the course they were offered. These included claimants who had been offered training which included occupational skills in areas which did not interest them and others who had been offered basic skills training but felt they did not need it. One claimant found his objection was supported by the training provider who he had been referred to:

*'The lecturer who was teaching me...actually said I don't know why you've come on this course because your English is fine, your maths was a little bit bad but you've overcome that, there's nothing wrong with your maths now at all.'*

(Nicholas)

Others who responded negatively to the idea of training included claimants who were already taking part in training they had organised themselves. Two claimants were following job-related courses separate to those offered by the Jobcentre. One was trying to get the qualifications necessary to become an electrician and another was doing examinations to qualify to be an accountancy technician. Both these individuals felt that the training they attended through the Jobcentre gave them less time to study their other courses, which they would have preferred to do. Some claimants who had been referred to job search and CV writing courses felt they did not need this help, because they either had these skills, had attended such courses already or felt they had little to put on a CV.

Some respondents did not agree that their barriers to work could be addressed by training. These included claimants with barriers to work, including health problems and anticipation or experience of employer discrimination on grounds of age or criminal record. Two respondents who had been sent on CV writing and IT courses felt that their criminal record and addiction problems made them unattractive to employers and that a well-presented CV would not change this. As one of these

respondents, aged 46, who had been on Incapacity Benefit for 20 years and had also served time in prison remarked:

*'[the course] was basically how to use a computer setting up a CV but I had nothing to put on the CV because I haven't worked, unless you count being a cleaner in prison, so I didn't find that helpful at all.'*

(Pedro)

Another respondent who raised criminal record as a barrier to employment believed he should be assisted in applying to employers who will recruit ex offenders. Other respondents referred to health problems, including heart conditions and Repetitive Strain Injury, and a few respondents aged 50 and over felt that age discrimination was a barrier to employment.

### 8.3 JSA advisers' accounts of claimant response to the pilot

JSA advisers reported that the initial response of claimants to the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot was varied. Some claimants were said to be interested in the idea of training, while others said they had already taken training courses during their current spell of unemployment, or would prefer help of a different kind. Some interest was seen to come from boredom at having little to do while unemployed. Their reports corresponded closely to claimant accounts of their reactions described above.

Some advisers reported that claimants are often interested in training, and that some request it, particularly as their period out of work extends beyond the first few months. As one adviser explained, *'If it's the barrier [to finding work], they will leap at it'* (Eddie, Jobcentre B). Some advisers remarked that it is easier to promote training as an option currently, in a period of recession and rising unemployment than when jobs are more easily available. Although advisers said that claimants were often interested in training, they also said that claimants were not necessarily interested in the type of training they were offered. For example, many were not interested in basic skills training, but in sector-based skills courses. They were also reported to be interested in training leading to qualifications.

Some advisers saw part of their role as motivating claimants to take action to improve their opportunities. They tried to get claimants interested in the pilot and in the training on offer. One adviser, recruited to Jobcentre Plus from a background in sales, described his approach as 'getting the customer to buy into it', explaining that 'I build the interest up and essentially I sell it to them so that they see it as their idea' (Dominic, Jobcentre D). Another adviser took a similar approach and explained '95% will come round to it if they are steered in the right direction' (Eddie, Jobcentre, B). An adviser in Jobcentre A, where referral rates were relatively high, explained:

*[claimant response] depends on how you explain it. It's important that it is positively put, especially to customers in the mandation group...There aren't usually concerns or objections because they are coming to the realisation that they need to do something, so it's not that difficult to make it their idea, which is better than seeing it as our plan for them.'*

(Carla, Jobcentre A)

Some advisers said that that the long-term unemployed generally accept that they will have to go on training courses, as part of the jobseekers agreement, and out of general expectations that they will be active in seeking work and improving their chances of getting a job. This corresponds closely to the perspectives of some claimants, described above. Some claimants were seen as accepting the idea of the pilot but more from resignation than active interest.

## 8.4 Claimants' concerns about the training

We asked claimants whether they had any concerns about the training. Those who did have concerns were sometimes worried about the training environment, particularly that it would be like a 'classroom'. Some referred to previous bad experiences of training or bad memories of their school days. The prospect of using a computer, for example with job search or to write a CV was also daunting for some. Some respondents were nervous about the prospect of training. An 18-year-old claimant who had never worked explained that:

*'I was concerned about the amount of people that was there. I don't like big groups of people. [My adviser] just said I just got to go on one. I felt that wasn't very good because I'm not really good with big groups of people. I get all panicky and my heart pounds and everything.'*

(Cheryl)

Another respondent, aged 20 explained that.

*'I was quite nervous. I mean I'm a nervous person. Whenever I do something new or see someone new I'm actually quite a nervous person as to what they are, their personality, their reactions to me.'*

(Dai)

Some claimants had been concerned that the training would be a 'waste of time', either because they would learn little or that it would take time away from their own job search activities. One respondent was aware that this concern came from the portrayal of Jobcentres and work-focused training in comedy as inflexible and punitive, for example in the series *The League of Gentlemen*, and had tried to overcome this preconception.

A number of claimants had been concerned at the time away from job search or other productive activity. One claimant was concerned that the demands of attendance would reduce the time available for her accountancy studies. She explained that.

*'It was going to clash with the course that I was doing at the time and the exams were coming up so it meant that I had to work harder and I'm still a single parent on top.'*

(Soraya)

Another respondent was concerned that the training would involve time away from his projects, which included voluntary work and setting up his own business. He explained that.

*'It wasn't exactly helpful to me because I'm trying to get my own income going in my own way, but I'm obliged by the Jobcentre to take on what they're offering me. So they were my concerns, that basically it was going to disrupt my plans.'*

(Jonathan)

Some of the respondents who had concerns about disruption to their own plans for finding work had raised these with their adviser but had been told they would have to attend in any case. It was at this stage that some claimants had been told that they were mandated to the training, which some accepted while others did not (see Chapter 9).

As we described earlier, some respondents were concerned that the training they were being sent on was not right for them, for example that they needed sector-based skills rather than improvement of their basic skills. The short length of some courses was a concern to some. One respondent who had been sent on a business administration course argued:

*'I couldn't see how I could learn anything in the two weeks...I thought it was going to be two weeks of actual learning but more than half of it was on job search.'*

(Saul)

Claimants had rarely been concerned about the costs of transport to training since they had been told they could claim travel costs. However, some claimants in isolated areas had faced long and difficult journeys to their training provider, which was a matter of concern to them.

### 8.5 Claimants' experiences of the training

The majority of respondents attended job search and CV workshops, with some claimants saying they had an element of job search in their training and others stating that their training included advice on their CV. The next most commonly attended courses were basic skills courses, covering literacy and numeracy. Other courses included interview skills, application orientated IT skills, customer services, and industry specific skills courses to obtain the CSCS card or SIA licence. Claimants tended to have a combination of two or more activities as part of their training, for example, job search and CV workshop.

Most claimants viewed the courses to be at a basic or beginner level. Some claimants felt it was the appropriate level for them or felt that they had gained useful knowledge regardless of the course level. However, some were dissatisfied at the level or pace of the course and one claimant was sanctioned for leaving a course which he felt was below his ability (Greg). When asked what they thought of the teaching, some claimants felt that their tutors were good or helpful. There were claimants, however, who were unhappy with the teaching either because they felt the course to be irrelevant or too easy, or questioned the commitment of the tutors. In the case of job search training some claimants said they had received minimal teaching or assistance. A 40-year-old claimant who was sent on a basic skills course explained:

*'I didn't find it very constructive, I found it was quite babyish really because he would come in and you would do different quizzes and everything else like that...and then one day they asked us all to go outside and play football.'*

(Nicholas)

In relation to the amount of individual help given, a number of claimants felt that they received a good or sufficient amount of attention. However, a few claimants were unhappy with the amount of individual help or the level of help given to them.

### 8.6 Practicalities and impact on job search

Nearly all the claimants who attended courses found them easy to get to, usually within a half-an-hour journey. Claimants were asked if the course affected the time they had to look for work. Generally this was not the case, as much of the training involved an element of job search or there was sufficient time outside the course to continue looking for work. However, some claimants felt it did impact on the time they could spend giving their CVs in person to potential employers.

Two claimants were also following job-related courses separate to those offered by the Jobcentre. One was working towards electrician qualifications and another was doing examinations to qualify to be an accountancy technician. Both these individuals felt that the training they attended through the Jobcentre gave them less time to study their other courses, which they would have preferred to do.

Some claimants were confused about whether their training took precedence over a job interview, although others had been told that a job interview would take priority. A number of claimants felt that their training would have been problematic if they had obtained interviews because of the hours or duration of the course. However, none of them had an interview in that period and do not appear to have clarified what the procedure would have been if they had had one.

Few claimants stated that they had existing health problems that would be a barrier to them working, and none of them thought that the course had been detrimental to their health.

## 8.7 Outcomes and benefits of the training

When asked what types of things they had learned on the course, some claimants discussed maths-related knowledge and computer-related skills, though not all of them felt that they had greatly increased their knowledge. A number of respondents said that they had learned how to improve CV writing and interview skills. Claimants also mentioned 'soft' skills of team work and interpersonal skills in difficult situations. Some respondents had obtained qualifications as a result of attending the training. These were largely in basic skills, but a small number had gained certificates in areas such as IT and security. Some respondents felt proud of their achievements and some were more confident about finding work. However, others stated that they had not benefited from the training because they had not learned anything new. These were claimants who had been on job search, CV writing and interview courses.

We asked claimants whether they had enjoyed the course, and many said that they had. Reasons for this included having something to get up and go to, the social aspect of meeting and mixing with people, learning something new and the helpfulness of the tutors. One claimant who had been reluctant to attend an interview skills and CV writing course, feeling she did not need it, explained:

*'I really enjoyed it because the instructor was really cool and very, she was very helpful. I did, I enjoyed it. I thought I was going to fall asleep... but I went there and she made it very interesting and I think we all liked it.'*

(Sophia)

Most of the claimants who had not enjoyed the training had attended job search training, which they had found repetitive. Some of these said their attitude towards training was more negative than before they went on the course.

Many claimants thought that their training would benefit them in future by assisting them in finding work, particularly through improvements to their CV or to job search techniques; others felt that they had gained experience; and the small number who had attained work-related qualifications such as the SIA licence thought this would assist their job prospects. A small number of claimants had found jobs and two respondents believed their training had contributed to their success.

Although many claimants believed that training may have improved their job prospects, they felt it had not helped them to overcome other barriers which were sometimes more serious. Many referred to the current economic situation and shortage of jobs in their locality. Others wanted work placement opportunities to give them the experience that they believed employers were looking for. Some had specific barriers which they wanted help in addressing. For example, a claimant who had a criminal record and long-standing health problems remarked:

*'I don't think a course is going to help me, what I need is, I've been telling them I need employers that are prepared to take on ex-cons, that is my main problem my work scope is pretty limited as well because of my physical health.'*

(Pedro)

Other claimants also expressed the view that the Jobcentre had not responded to their particular needs and preferences and some argued that a more tailored service should be offered to JSA claimants.

### 8.8 Key points

- Only one out of the forty claimants interviewed for the research was aware of having taken part in the pilot programme. Some claimants had accepted that they needed the help that training could provide, while others felt they had other barriers to employment which could not be addressed by training.
- Some claimants said they were given little or no choice in the training offered to them. Others said they had a degree of choice, and some said they would have liked different training.
- Many claimants described their initial reaction to training as positive because it might help them into work and address skills gaps. Others welcomed the activity or saw it as good for improving their confidence. Claimants assigned to training which included sector-based skills were among the keenest. Some were disappointed to find that the courses they wanted were not available.
- Some claimants were neutral or ambivalent about the training they were offered while others were opposed because of previous bad experiences or because they felt they would not benefit. Some advisers saw their role as including motivating claimants to address their own barriers to employment and believed it was better that claimants actively agree to take part in training rather than simply being compelled.
- Before starting the training, claimants' concerns included nervousness about meeting other people, that the course would not benefit them and would take time away from their own job search activities or the training they had arranged for themselves. Few respondents reported problems with transport to colleges and providers or with the costs of travel.
- Claimants reported a range of experiences with the training they had attended. Many had enjoyed attending training, for the social aspect, the activity and the help they received from tutors.
- Training did not generally affect the amount of time that claimants could spend on job search or whether any could attend interviews. However, some claimants found it affected the time they could spend on training they had arranged themselves.
- Claimants who were most satisfied with the training had either gained skills they had wanted or something tangible such as a certificate. Sector-based skills or key skills such as team-working were particularly valued. Dissatisfied claimants felt the training did not address their skills needs, or relate to their occupational interests or experience. Some had found the level of training too low and complained about repetitive content, lack of individual attention and poor teaching. Job search courses attracted more criticism than other courses.
- Outcomes of the training included finding a job and increased confidence and optimism about getting back to work. Although generally a positive experience, many claimants felt that training was not the key to improving their employment prospects, referring to the economic downturn and shortage of vacancies in their area. Some wanted more help than the Jobcentre had offered or provided. These included claimants with a criminal record.

# 9 Mandation

## 9.1 Introduction

In this section of the report we look at the experiences and views of advisers and claimants on mandation. This includes whether claimants believed they were mandated to training and their views on this. We also discuss the wider views of advisers and claimants on mandating unemployed people to training courses.

## 9.2 Advisers' accounts of claimant response to mandation within JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot

Advisers had found that claimants generally accept mandation, and believed this was because of increasing expectations on claimants at each stage of their claim. Some advisers also observed that some claimants will have experienced mandation before, including in previous claims. However, some advisers found it necessary nonetheless to explain the mandatory aspect of the programme sensitively to claimants in the Test group. As one adviser explained:

*'Customers tend to accept what you throw at them, as long as you present it in a positive way, if you can make them see the benefit. It's a question of gaining rapport, talking through issues and concerns and making them realise that they need to take steps themselves to get into work.'*

(Ricky, Jobcentre E)

Therefore, some advisers felt that mandation was not just a question of telling claimants they had to do something, but that they should be also be encouraged to be committed to the proposed intervention.

One perception of advisers was that claimants with a history of unemployment are less likely to object to mandation to training, while younger people who saw their main barrier to employment as lack of experience, are more likely to object. Some advisers explained that, while mandation in itself was not met with open hostility by claimants, some objected to being mandated to the training on offer. Therefore, one adviser remarked that, while claimants do not usually object to mandation, *'Objections arise when training is found and discussed and it doesn't suit them'* (Robert, Jobcentre B). Another adviser made a similar point:

*'They want a choice of training, but this isn't available. They would feel different about being mandated if they had a choice.'*

(Imran, Jobcentre C)

While open hostility and objection to mandation was reported to be unusual, some advisers felt that mandation meant that claimants do not commit to training unless they are convinced of its value and relevance to them. As one adviser explained:

*'If they don't understand its relevance and importance then they won't go. If they go under pressure because they're mandated then they'll go but they haven't bought into it.'*

(Dominic, Jobcentre D)

Some advisers had found that a small number of claimants sign off JSA when they are mandated. Advisers were not sure of the reasons for this, but believed that in some cases, claimants were not available for training because of illicit employment, or caring responsibilities. Some advisers felt that mandation therefore could serve a useful purpose in ‘flushing out’ benefit claimants who are not available for work. Some other claimants were felt to be ‘working the system’ by temporarily signing off in order to re-start a new claim.

### 9.3 Advisers’ views on mandation

Because of their limited experience of the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot, advisers were asked for their views more generally on the use of mandation and sanctions for JSA claimants. Advisers expressed a range of opinions, with these falling into two broad groups: advisers who felt that mandation helps ensure cooperation; and those who believed other methods were preferable to mandation. However, many advisers did not have strong views in favour or against, with more nuanced opinions often expressed. A number of advisers, both in favour and against mandation, felt uncomfortable about mandating claimants because it is perceived as a punitive measure.

### 9.4 In favour of mandation

Some advisers felt that mandation was a useful tool which should be widely used with claimants. It was seen by some advisers to be most appropriate for the long-term unemployed, from 26 weeks onwards, and for claimants with barriers to employment and who may refuse the help and services offered to them. One adviser referred to the need to mandate ‘hard-core’ unemployed claimants, some of whom are ‘resigned’ to unemployment. The view was also expressed that claimants requiring English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision should be mandated, because of the barrier that poor English presents to finding employment. Some advisers expressed the view that mandation within a programme, rather than the use of a jobseeker’s direction, was better because it was seen by claimants as less ‘personal’ and could diffuse potential conflict. A senior adviser described it as a ‘*safety blanket*’ for advisers (Tracy, Jobcentre D).

A number of advisers rejected the proposition that claimants who are mandated to a programme, such as training, may be less focused or committed than those who are there by choice. One adviser stated:

*‘It’s all too easy to receive money and agree that they’re doing all they can, but if they don’t go [to training] and there’s no consequence, it’s a waste of time and resources. I know some say a pressed man is not a happy man, but that isn’t my view.’*

(Linda, Jobcentre D)

At the same time, she felt that claimants should be given an initial ‘trial’ to see if they cooperate, rather than be mandated from the start (see below). Another adviser felt that mandation gives a sense of ‘ownership’ to the claimant because they know that their attendance will be monitored and that there are expectations which they have to meet.

Some advisers said that, while they supported the idea of mandating claimants to provision, it was only effective if suitable training was available to refer them to and felt that this was not always the case. Some of these referred to the problems with the availability of training at the time of the pilot (see Chapter 7).



## 9.5 In favour of adviser discretion

A number of advisers said they preferred not to mandate claimants, except where they felt there was a strong possibility that a claimant would not attend training or other intervention arranged for them. A senior adviser in Jobcentre C said of her staff:

*'They don't like mandating. It's not the sort of job you do if you're not interested in customers and, because you build up a relationship with the customer, a lot are not happy with that. They want to use their own judgement. It's a management grade so they may decide that it's not the right thing to do and it's not right to mandate them.'*

(Kerry, Jobcentre C)

Some advisers felt that the most effective approach is to build claimant commitment to finding work and to overcoming barriers which they face. Claimants who volunteer for training, or other intervention, and who saw it as their idea were seen to be more motivated and more likely to succeed than those who were sent with the minimum of consent. Therefore a number of advisers described their preferred approach as one of 'selling' training to claimants. One adviser, Dominic from Jobcentre D, had worked in sales and had developed a range of persuasive approaches, including that training 'will look great on your CV'. He felt that these techniques were particularly effective with claimants from white collar backgrounds, who had recently increased in number.

A number of advisers expressed the view that mandation undermines this approach. One adviser felt that having mandation at the start of Stage 3 'puts you on a bad foot' because the emphasis should be on the help that the Jobcentre can offer, rather than on what the claimant must do to keep their benefit. Some advisers talked about the relationship of understanding and trust between advisers and claimants, illustrated by the following remarks from two respondents:

*'We tend to belittle people, saying we know best and whatever we say you should do, you've got to do, even if they are already helping themselves. This doesn't build trust and it isn't the right way to get results from people.'*

(Imran, Jobcentre C)

*'It's best to leave [mandation] with the adviser, they get to know the customer, their domestic life and the barriers they face. Mandating ignores the other barriers, like drug abuse, and childcare and makes it more difficult to build up trust and rapport.'*

(Anthony, Jobcentre A)

Other advisers also referred to the need to address barriers to employment other than training, which included lack of work experience. Some advisers saw it as their role to judge how seriously a claimant is in finding work, and to tailor their approach accordingly, including whether or not to mandate or use a jobseekers direction. This perspective is illustrated by the statements of two advisers:

*'When I have someone in front of me I make a mental calculation, for example if it's a 40-year-old who has worked for 20 years but has recently become out of work I'll treat their case differently to someone who has never worked. I'll use different approaches.'*

(Bob, Jobcentre A)

*'We have to move with the times and accept that our customers are changing, that only small percentage of customers are demotivated.'*

(Dominic, Jobcentre D)

Some advisers believed that widespread use of mandation was not necessary because most claimants are willing to go on training or accept other types of intervention aimed at getting them back to work. One adviser described how his previous beliefs about claimants had changed through experience in the job:

*'Before I started working here I had a pre-conceived idea about anti-establishment people claiming benefits and not wanting to work but I found I was wrong and 99 per cent are looking for work.'*

(Mick, Jobcentre C)

Some advisers felt that mandated claimants were less likely to benefit from training than those who attended voluntarily. As one adviser stated:

*'Mandating makes them turn up but not necessarily take part in training and this could be a downside... You can't measure what they do while they are there.'*

(Robin, Jobcentre B)

A number of advisers did not express strong views either in favour or against mandation, because they felt that the issue was more complex. Some said they supported the idea of mandation, but preferred that claimants were given the chance to attend voluntarily at first and that this was their usual practice, in non-mandatory programmes. Another practice used by some advisers was to make the initial meeting with a provider mandatory, but not the training itself. This practice had developed from their experience that the major barrier to training is attendance at the initial session with a training provider, after which the claimant is likely to attend voluntarily.

One senior adviser argued that claimants agree, in principle, through the Jobseekers Agreement to seek work:

*'It's best to have a choice within an overall expectation'*

(Anthony, Jobcentre A)

What the claimant does should be seen as part of their 'development' aimed at getting them back to work, and the detail of that development should depend on what is agreed between them and the adviser.

## 9.6 Delivering training to mandated students: training providers' views

Respondents were asked about their experiences of delivering training to mandated Jobcentre Plus students. While it seemed that most providers knew when a referral was mandatory and when it was not, this was not always the case and some providers said that, with the exception of when students were on mandatory programmes, they did not know which individual students were mandated. It was argued that providers should not have such information, or know that a potential student was being referred as 'hard to help'. The main reason for this is that these Jobcentre Plus claimants might find it harder to get a training place. As an independent training provider explained:

*'Providers might cherry pick if they knew that someone was mandated, because it suggests that they might present problems. They might fail part of the assessment process, if you get my drift.'*

(Training Provider 1)

Some of the providers talked about whether wider application of mandation could reduce levels of drop out from courses. One independent training provider said that around 50 per cent of referrals do not show up for their initial assessment or introduction and then a further 50 per cent of those who start will subsequently drop out. It was not clear whether these included mandated students, but this training provider expressed the view that an increase in the use of mandation would help to improve attendance. However, another training provider reported relatively high dropout among mandated students. This provider dismissed around 10 per cent of students for poor attendance, which they explained with reference to students' social background and multiple barriers to employment.

Other providers felt that, while mandated students might not initially be motivated to attend training, that good results could be achieved nonetheless. This independent training provider explained:

*'Many of the 19-24 are disengaged but it's not impossible to work with them. Some will say they don't want to do it and if we think they're going to be disruptive then we'll reject them, but many have a change of attitude and it works out fine'*

(Training Provider 6)

It was also argued that, to minimise drop out, training providers should have a say in who they recruit to their courses, and it was important that mandated students were suitable for the provision.

## 9.7 Claimant views on mandation within JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot

All claimants in our sample were recorded as mandated. We asked claimants a number of questions to explore their views on mandation and conditionality of benefits. They were asked whether they were told that they were being mandated and about their response to this. We asked more generally whether they felt that unemployed people should be required to go on training courses and lose their benefits if they don't. They were also asked whether taking part in training had changed their views on this.

## 9.8 Claimant responses to being mandated

We asked claimants whether they were told that their benefit might be stopped if they did not go on the course or if they didn't turn up. All 40 respondents were recorded on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) database as in the test group, and therefore mandated. However, seven respondents said they had been told this. Of those who said they had not, one could not remember but had been agreeable to the idea of training in any case. Of the six who said they had not been told this, three felt they were obliged even though they had not been told this, or had got the impression it was not optional. One of these respondents explained that, as a lone parent with two dependent children she did not want to risk loss of benefit for non-compliance with the Jobseekers Agreement. Another respondent, who was sent to a basic skills and job search course explained that:

*'The sort of impression they gave, they didn't actually tell me, but they gave the impression that if I didn't go there...you feel threatened sort of thing that they stop [your benefits], everything stops.'*

(Samuel)

Other than in these seven cases, respondents said they could recall being told that they would have to go on the training they were offered or risk losing benefits.

Respondents expressed a wide range of responses to being mandated to the training. The two most common responses of claimants who were happy with mandation was that they preferred to attend training than to be inactive, that it would help them or that it was generally acceptable to them. Therefore one respondent explained that,

*'I don't mind to be honest because, if it increases my chance of employability then I'm willing to do that. It don't really bother me too much.'*

(Oliver)

A number expressed the view that they welcomed the activity of training or that it was 'better than doing nothing'. Some claimants said they were happy with being mandated because it was training that they had wanted, and two of these were then disappointed that the training did not materialise because courses were full or not available (see Chapter 8).

A few claimants were agreeable to mandation because they accepted the reasons for it, which they saw as ensuring that unemployed people take action to improve their prospects of finding work, and also that they were not carrying out undeclared work while claiming benefit. One claimant expressed the view that the requirement was:

*'Fair enough, at the end of the day there's too many people not working. If they put a little threat on that, they know that person isn't going to sit on their arse all day and watch daytime TV because they know if they don't arrive they won't get their money next week. So in a way that is a good thing.'*

(Keeley)

An 18-year-old respondent explained that his reaction to being mandated was:

*'Fair enough because if I'm on the dole and I want to get a job and they're helping me to try and get one, I should go out of my way to try and do it as much as I possibly can.'*

(Marcus)

However, this claimant's views changed as a result of being sanctioned for lateness and through his negative experiences of the basic skills course he attended.

A number of respondents were not happy at being told they would have to attend the training or risk losing their benefits. Some had quite specific concerns which affected their views on being mandated. These included what would happen if they were ill and could not attend. One claimant with children was unhappy that training was arranged for the following day and had to make last minute arrangements for her children to be collected from school. Some claimants were not happy with being mandated because they felt that they did not need the training or would not benefit from it. This corresponds closely with the experiences of advisers reported earlier. One claimant felt angry at being mandated because he felt he would not be able to leave training if he found it unhelpful. However, he was reassured by the course tutor:

*'After he'd spent about ten or fifteen minutes explaining what the course consists of he says "right, I understand a lot of you, I imagine, are told if you don't come here they're going to stop your money". He went, "well no, I'm not having that. If you don't think this is the right thing for you, you just go back to the Jobcentre and tell them, no it's not the right course, you need to go somewhere else".'*

(Patrick)

Many of the claimants who said they responded negatively to mandation expressed their feelings quite strongly. These included a number who thought that mandation as a policy was unfair or wrong, either on the grounds of how it affected them personally or more generally. Therefore some claimants said their response was to feel ‘belittled’, ‘insulted’, ‘intimidated’, ‘threatened’ or ‘angry’. Other descriptions of the policy were that it was ‘outrageous’, ‘disgraceful’, ‘silly’ or ‘out of order’. With regard to how it affected them personally, some said that it interfered with their own plans to find work. These plans included voluntary work and training they had arranged themselves. Some respondents felt that Jobcentre staff had not taken into account these plans, and that mandation involved a rejection of their own strategies to find work.

Some claimants said that being mandated had made them feel like they were untrustworthy, or even ‘criminal’. For example, one claimant who had been offered training in security or childcare, but who was working towards professional accreditation as a psychologist, argued that:

*‘[The Jobcentre] don’t really care to put people and help them improve their specific skill area. I understand people who don’t have skills at all, maybe they can advise them...but for me it’s a different case. I didn’t like it, I felt like I was a bit like a prisoner and have done something wrong.’*

(Sophia)

Some claimants had wider objections to being told they could lose their benefits, arguing for example, that mandation was a means to reduce the claimant count or cut benefits. Mandation and training were also seen by some respondents to be driven by the need for Jobcentre staff to meet targets rather than for the benefit of individual claimants.

## 9.9 Whether mandation affected claimant participation

The research findings suggest that many claimants would have taken part in the training had they not been mandated. This was because most claimants were positively inclined to attend training and to take part in other activity which they believed might improve their employment prospects. Many claimants also felt a sense of obligation to do what their adviser suggested, again to assist their prospects. They were also concerned that their benefits might be affected if they did not cooperate, regardless of mandation. Respondents had been unemployed for in excess of six months, and many had been unemployed before and therefore used to the expectations on JSA claimants. Some claimants who had not been told they were mandated still felt they should attend training and that they risked losing benefits if they did not.

A few respondents said they would not have gone on the training had it been voluntary because they had not expected to benefit from it. In retrospect, they believed that mandation could be beneficial. Some claimants said they had not started training, despite the threat of sanctions and did not regret their decision. This was because they felt the training offered did not meet their needs (see Chapter 10).

## 9.10 Claimant views on whether unemployed people should be mandated to training

Respondents expressed a wide range of views on the wider question of whether unemployed people should be required to go on training courses and lose their benefits if they don’t. Some respondents agreed with this idea giving various reasons for their views. A number believed that training can help to combat inertia and increase motivation. This was not necessarily expressed in relation to training

alone, but included other activity such as volunteering and work experience. Some respondents also referred to particular benefits in training to update skills, or to improve job search, and felt that this should be mandatory where it was needed.

A number of respondents expressed the view that claimants should have a choice in the training they take. The availability and perceived quality of training were also factors which affected some claimants' views on mandation. Therefore, while some respondents said they were not against mandation in principle, that it should only be where training can improve the prospects of the individual claimant.

A few respondents supported mandation as a punitive measure, believing that some claimants put insufficient effort into job search, or prefer to claim benefits rather than to be in employment or training. Some respondents said they knew of people in their communities who had this attitude. One claimant believed that mandation was a way of helping to ensure that people do not work while claiming benefits. The view was also expressed that participation in training is an expression of commitment to finding employment, and that this should be an expectation on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants.

Some claimants were against mandating unemployed people to training, giving a range of reasons for this. A number expressed the view that people who attend training should be motivated, and that those who are 'forced' to go will not have the enthusiasm for it. Some respondents also said they felt it was the 'wrong attitude' towards unemployed people, with one respondent stating that:

*'They're always ordering you about with what to do, which is in some cases the wrong way to go about things really.'*

(Dai)

Some respondents also expressed concern at the consequences of sanctioning, particularly for people with children, and it was also argued that people who have had their benefits withdrawn could turn to crime<sup>14</sup>.

Some other respondents felt that, while there are people who are happy to draw benefits and not to help themselves, mandation treats all claimants as work-shy. Many with mixed views on mandation felt that account should be taken of individual needs and circumstances in deciding whether training is needed, whether it is available and then whether they should be required to attend. Therefore as one respondent stated:

*'For people who don't have the skills, their adviser should help them find their own direction. They should offer specific training for them.'*

(Sophia)

This corresponds to the views of some advisers that a personalised approach is more effective than blanket policies.

Some respondents distinguished between claimants who might benefit from being mandated to training and others who would not. Those who were considered most appropriate for mandation included claimants without the confidence to find work or to take part in training without help, those who are not motivated to work and are resigned to living on benefits. Conversely, some respondents felt that those who are taking steps to find work, for example through volunteering and training they have organised themselves, should not be mandated. Some respondents believed that mandation

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<sup>14</sup> Previous research has found that crime has risen in areas where more people were sanctioned (Machin and Marie, 2004).

can have a demotivating effect and it was suggested that claimants should be given warning rather than given an absolute mandate to attend training.

While there was general agreement that unemployed people should be actively engaged in activity to improve their job prospects, some respondents noted that this was not always achievable where claimants had other barriers to employment. Training was therefore seen as sometimes of secondary importance to measures aimed at overcoming barriers to employment resulting from substance abuse or a criminal record. As with those who were opposed to mandate, a number of respondents who were more ambivalent were concerned about the effects of sanctioning. Again, this was expressed particularly in the case of people with children.

## 9.11 Key points

- Although all claimants in the research were sampled from the database of mandated individuals, not all had been told their attendance at the training was mandatory. Some claimants who had not been told they were mandated felt obliged to attend in any case.
- Advisers expressed a range of opinions on mandating, with some feeling that it helps ensure cooperation, and others preferring the use of methods which rely more on persuasion and encouragement. Advisers found that claimants generally accept mandate at Stage 3 but it was felt that mandate should be explained with sensitivity and while encouraging claimant commitment to training.
- Advisers saw mandate as most appropriate for the long-term unemployed with barriers to employment and who may refuse the help and services they are offered. Some advisers felt that mandate served to 'flush out' claimants who are not available for work.
- Some advisers felt that they should have discretion about when to mandate a claimant to training and it was also felt that claimants should be given the chance to attend training voluntarily at first. Some claimants also felt that it was more appropriate to mandate some claimants than others, that a 'personalised' approach was more effective than blanket policies.
- Training providers often did not know when claimants had been mandated because they did not always know which JSA programme they were on. Two views were expressed: providers should not know when claimants are mandated since they may be seen as 'hard to help'; and providers should have a say in who they recruit.
- There was evidence that many claimants would have taken part in the training had they not been mandated. This was because most respondents were positively disposed towards training which they believed might improve their job prospects. Others felt obliged to do as their adviser suggested and to comply with the JSA agreement.
- Some claimants objected to attending training which they felt they did not need and did not want or which repeated training they had already attended. Others resented the disruption of their own strategies to find work.
- Claimants expressed views both for and against the idea that unemployed people should be required to go on training and to lose their benefits if they don't. Those in favour cited the benefits of training and activity and the expectations on JSA claimants. Those against it talked of the importance of motivation rather than coercion for training to be effective. Some respondents felt that mandate treats all claimants as work-shy or as untrustworthy.
- Many claimants had mixed views, believing that account should be taken of individual needs and circumstances in deciding whether training is needed and should be compulsory. The availability of suitable and good quality training was a factor raised by some respondents.

# 10 Sanctioning

## 10.1 Introduction

In this section of the report we describe the circumstances under which claimants had been sanctioned and their views about what had happened to them. We also describe the views and experiences of advisers on sanctioning.

## 10.2 Being sanctioned: claimant experiences

Eight claimants said they had been sanctioned while on the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot. A further two were sanctioned for other reasons (missing adviser meetings and not applying for vacancies). Three further claimants were facing sanctions, but avoided this for reasons which included having a training provider vouch for his good intentions.

Sanctions were applied to the eight claimants in a range of circumstances. In this section we describe these circumstances before recounting the consequences for claimants of benefit sanctions. The circumstances under which they were sanctioned are summarised in Table 10.1. Other characteristics of these respondents are presented in Appendix C.

**Table 10.1 Claimants who were sanctioned while on JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot**

Name	Circumstances of sanctioning based on claimants' reports
Jonathan	He was mandated to attend a CV writing course and was sanctioned for late attendance. He has since attended training to gain Level 2 maths so that he can work in education. He is still claiming benefits, is volunteering and working part-time for a charity and working to establish himself in the music industry.
Ali	He was sanctioned for leaving his job search training course and had his benefits stopped. Rather than making a new claim, he took a temporary job as a road sweeper through an employment agency. He is still in this job but looking for permanent work as a kitchen porter.
Paul	He was signed off sick following a foot injury but returned to his job search training a day after his sick leave period ended. He had continued to attend, not realising he was sanctioned and is still looking for work.
Aiden	He declined to attend job search training, believing it would not help him to find work, and was sanctioned. He is still looking for work.
Cheryl	She forgot to attend a basic skills training course and was sanctioned. She is considering going to college to study for GCSEs.
Marcus	He was late for basic skills training several times because of transport problems, was dismissed from the course and sanctioned. He is still looking for work.
Sophia	She attended a CV writing course and was sanctioned for late attendance. She was then offered skills training in areas in which she had no interest. Facing sanctions for declining training, she returned to her former part-time job, continued to claim benefits and was sanctioned for overpayment of benefit. She is aiming to get her overseas qualifications recognised so that she can get a full-time professional job in the UK.
Greg	He thought he was being offered a choice of skills courses in manual trades and was interested in a carpentry course. However, on arrival at the college he found he had been sent on a basic skills course which he found too easy. He felt 'insulted' by having to attend, left the course and was sanctioned. He is looking for ground work and driving jobs.
Tim	He was mandated to training arranged by the local authority, but missed a follow-up session by getting the date wrong. Facing sanctions, the training provider vouched for his positive attitude and his benefits were not affected. He recently found work in a specialist retailer.
Jamie	He left his job search and work placement course for health reasons and was transferred from JSA to ESA so was not sanctioned.
Dai	He stopped attending training involving job search and a work placement when his girlfriend started to earn enough for him to sign off JSA.



Two of the claimants who were sanctioned, Aiden and Sophia, had declined to attend the training, while another two, Greg and Ali, had voluntarily left the course before completion. The others (including Sophia on a previous course) were sanctioned for late attendance, forgetting to attend and being confused about dates.

Aiden had declined the training offered to him feeling that:

*'[It] wouldn't have benefited me in any way and I don't see why I should go and do training when it is not going to benefit me.'*

(Aiden)

His view was partly affected by previous disappointment he had experienced with training which he believed would result in him getting a CSCS card to work in construction, but did not. Sophia had attended a CV writing course which she had found quite useful, although she was sanctioned for late attendance. She was then offered skills training in either security or childcare, but was volunteering in work with disabled adults and had career plans to work as a psychologist once her overseas qualifications were accredited in the UK. Therefore, on being sanctioned, she returned to her previous job.

Among those who had voluntarily left the course was Greg, who had been initially interested in attending training, having understood that he would be given a choice of four courses, all in manual trades, and that he could choose a carpentry course. However, his training was in basic skills and job search, which he felt he did not need. Feeling insulted at having to attend this training, and finding the training of a low quality and standard, he left the course.

The other four sanctioned claimants: Jonathan, Paul, Cheryl, Marcus were sanctioned because they missed training sessions through lateness or because they forgot to attend. One of these, Paul, did not intentionally miss any sessions, but failed to attend one because he believed he was still signed off sick with a foot injury.

Jonathan was sanctioned as a result of arriving late for one session. He had not expected that this would lead to a sanction, since the course was overbooked and believed that, under such circumstances, sanctioning would not apply. Tim had also missed a training session, but believed that he was not sanctioned because his training provider vouched for his positive attitude during the job search course he was attending. He explained his mistake with reference to his busy life at the time:

*'I was making all these efforts to kind of attend things and I was volunteering at Mencap and then at Oxfam and I found I was spreading myself thinly in terms of the amount of time I had during the week. I've got computer access now but I didn't at the time, so I was just like at the library every single day.'*

(Tim)

The two least keen participants were Cheryl and Marcus, both aged 18 and with no qualifications. Both were asked to attend basic skills training. Cheryl had expressed some concerns about this training, through lack of confidence in group settings, and forgot to attend. She had expected a reminder letter about the training.

Only one of the sanctioned claimants, Marcus cited practical issues as a reason for late attendance. Marcus lived in a rural area with poor transport links and was late on most occasions to his training course, with the exception of when his mother could give him a lift. However, although his reason for being late was transport problems, he was also dissatisfied with the course, as described above.

Where other sanctioned claimants gave reasons for failure to attend, they included sleeping through the alarm clock and leaving home too late. A number of respondents said they had been sanctioned on other occasions, usually for failing to attend a meeting with their adviser, again suggesting poor organisational skills. If these circumstances are more widely typical of claimants who experience sanctioning, it suggests that poor organisational skills are responsible for some claimants failing to comply with mandation. These findings reiterate those of previous research which found little indication of deliberate non-attendance or non-engagement with programmes. A recent review of sanctions within conditional benefit systems concluded:

*'...failure to attend or participate was more often a product of poor information and non-intentional behaviour such as forgetfulness.'*

(Griggs and Evans, 2010)

Of course, it is also possible that poor motivation and low interest in training contributed to poor organisation and therefore failure to attend, but we do not have this degree of detail about claimant attitudes and behaviour.

### 10.3 The effects on claimants of being sanctioned

The sanction for failure to comply with the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot for mandated claimants is loss of JSA, or reduction of JSA in the case of a joint claim. While some respondents said the period of sanctioning was two weeks, or the period of one claim, others were not clear and it is possible that some were sanctioned for four weeks since they had been sanctioned on other occasions. However, with the exception of the two claimants who went into employment, all had felt the effects of a reduction in their benefit payments. None had appealed against being sanctioned and none had applied for hardship payments. All were single or without dependants and so are unlikely to have been eligible for these.

One of the sanctioned claimants, Ali, signed off benefits when he was sanctioned, and Sophia was working part-time when her benefits were withdrawn. Ali found work road sweeping through an employment agency. The other respondents were largely dependent on family and friends to meet the costs of food and living expenses while their benefit was stopped. A number described how their families had helped them out financially. Others borrowed money from their family and friends. A number of respondents spoke of the consequences of being sanctioned and losing benefit for their family and relationships:

*'It caused family problems and arguments with them saying they can't afford to keep me...I didn't feel there was anyone I could talk to about it. Nothing I could actually do.'*

(Aiden)

*I had to lend off my boyfriend and my mum...My mum was really skint and my boyfriend was finding it hard as well.'*

(Cheryl)

Marcus who had his benefits stopped for four weeks explained that:

*'It was hard [to manage financially], very, very hard. It's quite embarrassing but sometimes my mum would have to fend for me. It was hard on my mum because she's got my little brother and sister to look after as well and that bit of money that I got went to help her as well as me. It was very stressful. They shouldn't do it completely. They should actually give you money to survive.'*

(Marcus)

These findings reiterate those of previous research that found that loss of benefits through sanctioning lead to tensions in personal relationships (Dorsett, 2008). No respondent had appealed against being sanctioned, on the grounds that they would not be successful, and because of the procedure involved, which includes the cost of the telephone call, as one respondent explained:

*'I could have appealed but it was just for one week and they make it very difficult. If you try and phone them for instance, you just end up running up your phone bill and you'll be on there for ages... You have to call Glasgow and it's an expensive number...It's just not worth the stress really so I just took it on the chin.'*

(Jonathan)

This reiterates findings of previous research which found that claimants did not take up the option of appeal, partly through a perception that it would be complicated and futile (Dorsett, 2008). Respondents had mixed views about whether, in retrospect, they could have avoided loss of benefits: those who had been sanctioned for lateness felt that this was simple human error and the small number who had declined training or had left the course felt they had been right to do so. The main reason for this was that the course was not either not useful or not appropriate for them.

## 10.4 Applying sanctions: advisers' experiences

Only two advisers said they had sanctioned a claimant within the pilot. Both cases had involved a claimant not attending an initial appointment with a training provider. One of these claimants signed off benefits.

Some advisers felt they had not needed to sanction mandated pilot claimants because they had 'sold' the pilot scheme to them in a positive way, so that claimants were more willing to take part than they might otherwise have been. However, as we described with reference to the claimants we interviewed, some claimants who were motivated to attend training were dissatisfied with the training they were offered or found it unhelpful, so that claimant 'buy in' may not guarantee compliance with mandation.

Advisers talked of the reaction of some claimants to being sanctioned. When we asked how sanctions affected claimants, the same adviser quoted above replied, 'It affects them a lot: they get angry and abusive'. Others reported similar experiences. A number of advisers commented that one period of sanctioning usually results in a change in behaviour because loss of benefits often has a strong negative impact on claimants' daily life. Therefore, few claimants had needed to be sanctioned more than once.

## 10.5 Key points

- Advisers reported that claimants were found to generally comply with the pilot, rarely requiring sanctions to be applied. Talking generally, rather than about the pilot, advisers saw the effects of sanctioning as serious, often leading to a change in claimant behaviour.
- Eight claimants were sanctioned for a range of reasons. Only two respondents had declined to attend the training and two others had left. The others were sanctioned for being late and forgetting to attend. Although numbers are small, this suggests that poor organisational skills are a factor in non-compliance with mandation, although these may also reflect poor motivation and commitment. Some claimants said they had been sanctioned before.

- Those who declined to attend or left had felt that the training was not right for them and would not improve their job prospects. Two took part-time or temporary work while the other two continued to claim benefits following sanctioning.
- Loss of benefits resulted in dependence on family and friends to meet the costs of food and living expenses. This sometimes put family relationships under stress. Respondents generally felt they could not have avoided being sanctioned, either because they were right to refuse training or to leave, or that they had been penalised for human error.

# 11 Conclusions and recommendations

This final chapter draws together the findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses to present a set of integrated conclusions. These fall under four headings:

- implementation of the pilot;
- experiences of taking part in the training;
- perspectives on mandation and sanctioning;
- tentative impact estimates.

These are considered in turn below. Issues for consideration in deciding whether and how the pilot should be mainstreamed as part of Jobcentre Plus programmes are identified and listed separately at the end.

## 11.1 Implementation of the pilot

There were a number of regards in which implementation deviated in practice from the pilot design. While it is not possible to observe actual skills needs in the data, the fact that the results of basic skills screening showed more than half the individuals in the sample to not have a potential skills need is perhaps a cause for concern. There was also some evidence of the assignment process not proceeding as intended. Some eligible people were not assigned at all and, in other cases, assignment appeared problematic. The rate of referral to training, which should have been close to 100 per cent was less than half that level and there was little evidence of increased sanctioning for those in the Test group.

Taken together, these points raise concerns about the extent to which the pilot can be viewed as providing reliable evidence of the effects of conditionality. On a number of dimensions, it appears that the pilot was not implemented as intended.

The pilot was not implemented as planned<sup>15</sup>, with reliance on informal training to advisers through email and general staff meetings. As a consequence, advisers expressed uncertainty about the aims of the pilot, about eligibility and the random assignment method. This is likely to have led to different interpretations of eligibility. Some advisers interpreted skills needs narrowly, as basic skills.

Low referral rates may also be explained by factors including competing pilots and Jobcentre Plus programmes, pressure of time during the initial Stage 3 interview and the availability of training locally. Only two-fifths of the sample were referred to training in the period observed when, in principle, everybody should have been referred to training. Although perceptions varied, advisers identified one of the biggest barriers to progressing claimants through the pilot was availability of training which could address skills barriers, with particular problems identified with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, long waiting times and uncertain start dates. Shortages were also identified in sector skills training. Low rates of referral, both to the pilot and to

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<sup>15</sup> The planned process, which included formal training is described in HMSO (2010) Draft Statutory Instrument, The Jobseeker's Allowance (Skills Training Conditionality Pilot) Regulations 2010.

training, may also be explained with reference to the pilot's introduction during a period of change in Jobcentres, when claimant numbers were rising, new staff were recruited and the Government had changed. If the pilot programme is to be mainstreamed as part of Jobcentre Plus services, it will be necessary to ensure that it is properly introduced and implemented in Jobcentres.

There was evidence that advisers sometimes required Control group claimants to attend through a jobseeker's direction, where they believed they might not attend training. The qualitative findings also suggest that some eligible claimants were not entered into the pilot at all because of concerns that they would not be able to comply with mandation and would be sanctioned. A more substantial problem was that nearly one-fifth of the sample were either not assigned at all or, less commonly, had a nonsensical assignment outcome (such as having exited the Test group without having previously been assigned to it). There was evidence that the tendency to have a problematic assignment of this kind was concentrated among particular groups of people – those from minority ethnic groups, those without a disability, those identified through screening as not having a potential skills need and those who were looking for work in higher-level occupations – which raises concerns about the extent to which those correctly assigned can be viewed to be representative of the full eligible population.

## 11.2 Lessons from claimants' experiences on the pilot

Only one claimant out of the 40 interviewed was aware that they were on the pilot, suggesting that a claimant information strategy was not in place or was ineffective. Likewise, although all claimants interviewed were recorded in administrative data as having been mandated to the pilot, not all knew that they had attended their training under mandation. These generally believed that they were expected to attend, or said that they wanted to do so in any case. However, claimants should be made aware that they are involved in a programme and know that they are required to comply with its terms or could face losing benefits. This can be achieved through having an effective claimant information strategy in place, as was intended. Claimants should also know the reasons why they are being referred for a particular intervention, since this can help empower claimants to develop their own employability strategies.

## 11.3 Whether claimants benefited

Many claimants reaching Stage 3 of their claim are likely to be in need of in-depth skills assessment and careers information, advice and guidance (IAG). However, few of the claimants we interviewed said they had been given this kind of help. Effective referral processes and communication should be in place between Jobcentre Plus and specialist IAG services such as Next Step.

Many claimants said they had reacted positively to being offered training on the grounds that it might help address their skills gaps and to find work. Some simply welcomed activity. Claimants were most keen on the prospect of sector-based skills training. Where claimants were either neutral or opposed to training this was because of previous bad experiences of courses they had attended through Jobcentre Plus referral, because they felt they would not benefit from it.

Some claimants said they would have liked to have had more say in decisions about the training they were offered. A few had made their own requests for training. These were sometimes met, but where they were not, claimants could be disappointed. Claimant preferences were often for sector-based skills training, in areas such as manual trades. Advisers reported problems with the supply of training, including in sector-based skills, which they regretted since they knew that claimants were often interested in this provision. Since this training is likely to improve claimants' employment prospects, these problems should be addressed.

Training was generally viewed positively by Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants. Many said they had enjoyed the training, that it had improved their confidence and believed it had improved their prospects of finding work. Some were pleased to obtain certificates and other tangible outcomes, such as an improved CV. Many claimants anticipate these benefits and, for many, mandation is not necessary. Some advisers said they were already 'selling' training to claimants and this approach may be more effective than directing claimants to this activity.

Dissatisfied claimants referred to courses below their ability level, to courses with poor teaching and repetitive content. Poor quality courses and inappropriate referrals can affect motivation and attitudes towards training as well as learning and employment outcomes and should be addressed through quality control, course inspection and adviser training.

## 11.4 Whether claimants experienced any harm

One of the objectives of the evaluation was to identify any evidence of harm to claimants who took part in the pilot programme. The two areas of potential harm were from referral to training and from the sanctioning of claimants who did not comply with mandation.

The training offered to claimants did not generally cause them any difficulties, for example in job search or availability for interviews. This was largely because the training offered was short, and many courses included a job search element in any case. Few claimants reported having transport difficulties or childcare problems. This may partly reflect the age profile and circumstances of the respondents, with many living in towns or cities and few having dependent children. Claimants who could in some way be described as adversely affected or harmed by the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot were those who found it interfered with other activities aimed at finding work, and those who were sanctioned for non-attendance or for lateness. A further group who might be said to be harmed were those who found that the training did not meet their needs and was a poor use of their time. Some of these rejected the training offered or left, and were sanctioned for this.

Respondents engaged in volunteering or who had arranged their own training felt that the requirement to attend Jobcentre Plus training affected these activities, which were part of their own strategies to find work. It would not seem appropriate to mandate claimants who are already enrolled in skills training. Similarly, where claimants are taking part in voluntary work which is enhancing their employment prospects, or are setting up their own business, discretion might be used in whether they are required to attend training.

## 11.5 The effect of sanctions

For the eight claimants who were sanctioned, loss of benefits resulted in dependence on family and friends to meet the costs of food and living expenses. This sometimes caused stress and affected family relationships, particularly where incomes, including benefits, were pooled or where other family members were on benefits or low pay. Sanctioned claimants also reported being upset and angry.

Sanctioning a claimant who is single and without dependants can have implications for other family members, for example younger siblings of JSA claimants who are living in their parental home. If the pilot is mainstreamed and mandation at Stage 3 becomes more common, sanctioning is likely to increase. It should be acknowledged that when a claimant is sanctioned, the loss of benefits may affect low income families rather than individuals alone, even when the claimant does not have dependants themselves.

## 11.6 Perspectives on mandation and sanctioning

### 11.6.1 The acceptability of mandation

The views of both claimants and advisers on mandation were mixed: mandation was seen as an acceptable practice within Jobcentre Plus programmes by some claimants and advisers, while others preferred it to be used in particular circumstances, for example with claimants who are reconciled to living on benefits. In favour of mandation, claimants cited the benefits of training and expectations on JSA claimants. Against mandation, others felt that training is effective where the individual is motivated, rather than forced, to take part. Some advisers wanted to be able to use discretion over whether to mandate a claimant and the view that discretion should be used over mandation and sanctioning was also expressed by some claimants.

There was evidence that many claimants would have taken part in the training had they not been mandated. This was because most respondents were positively inclined to take part in training and other activity which they believed might improve their job prospects. Others felt obliged to do as their adviser suggested and to comply with the JSA agreement.

If the pilot is to be mainstreamed and claimants mandated to training at Stage 3 as standard practice, the benefits of training should be explained to claimants. We have also recommended that appropriate training is available locally, and that claimants are only mandated to training which meets their needs and preferences.

### 11.6.2 The use and effects of sanctions

Where individuals were recorded in the administrative data as having a skills need and had been appropriately assigned to the Test or Control group, it was possible to estimate the effects of being in the Test group. Doing so, showed no effect on the probability of being sanctioned. This finding has to be treated with some caution since it may be the case that outcomes are not observed for a sufficiently long period to allow the effect on sanctioning to be captured. However, as it stands, it provides no indication that the conditionality being piloted was enforced using sanctions.

Qualitative interviews with claimants who were sanctioned, or who faced sanctioning, included some who declined to take part in training, had left their courses, had been late or forgotten to attend. Poor organisational skills led to some claimants being sanctioned. Reminders by letter or text message might help to prevent broken appointments and sanctioning. Discretion should be taken in cases where claimants do not attend for genuine reasons, although this may already be practised.

Some advisers believed that sanctions could be avoided if training is positively 'sold' to claimants through encouragement and persuasion. While this approach may have merits, it is unlikely to have prevented most of the sanctioning cases reported to us. This applies particularly to the claimants who had missed sessions through human error, but also to claimants who left training because they felt that it did not meet their needs.

There was little evidence of poor motivation to find work among the respondents who experienced loss of benefits through sanctioning. They were upset at being sanctioned, with some finding it unfair when they were taking positive steps themselves to find work. Those who declined or left training still felt they were right to do so, because it had not met their needs, and sanctioning in these circumstances would appear to be ineffective.



## 11.7 Tentative impact estimates

The analysis has provided estimates of the impact of conditionality *as operationalised in this pilot* on training, sanctions and early labour market outcomes for individuals who were identified through basic skills screening as having a potential skills need, and who had a valid pilot marker. There is no evidence of an impact on any of these outcomes. However, in view of the implementation issues discussed above – in particular, the low rate of referrals – such estimates should not be taken as indicative of the effect that conditionality might have were it implemented and enforced as intended.

A separate concern relates to the quality and coverage of the data used to estimate these impacts. Training starts are not required to be recorded in Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) administrative records so the finding that there was no effect on participation in training cannot be regarded as definitive. Similarly, the finding that conditionality did not increase sanctions may in part reflect the fact that the sanctioning process is not instantaneous, but instead it takes time for sanctions to register in the data. It is possible that an impact on sanctioning will become visible in time. In principal, impacts on employment entry and benefit exit could also be seen in the longer term.

## 11.8 Recommendations

- Future pilots should ensure that advisers are prepared through formal training and that eligibility and procedures are fully understood and followed correctly. Jobcentres should not be selected to run more than one pilot programme concurrently.
- If the pilot programme is to be mainstreamed as part of Jobcentre Plus services, it will be necessary to ensure that it is properly introduced and implemented in Jobcentres. Clear guidance should be given about eligibility so that only claimants with skills needs are referred to mandatory training and skills needs are not interpreted narrowly as basic skills. Future pilots should have a claimant strategy, so that claimants are aware that they are taking part in a pilot programme.
- Claimants should be fully engaged in decisions about their skills gaps and training needs. Many claimants reaching Stage 3 of their claim are likely to be in need of in-depth skills assessment and careers information, advice and guidance (IAG). Referrals to IAG should be more common than we found evidence for. Effective referral and communication procedures should be in place between frontline staff working for Jobcentre Plus and specialist IAG services such as Next Step.
- It would seem appropriate that claimants who are already enrolled in skills training should not be mandated to training by Jobcentre Plus. Similarly, mandation to training would seem inappropriate for claimants who are taking part in voluntary work which is enhancing their employment prospects or are setting up a business.
- Training is generally viewed positively by many JSA claimants who had enjoyed attending training as well as positive outcomes such as finding work, obtaining a certificate or finding their confidence had improved. These benefits of training suggest it can be positively sold to claimants, and for many claimants mandation is not necessary.
- Dissatisfied claimants referred to courses below their ability level, to courses with poor teaching and repetitive content, and to having to attend repeated training in areas like CV writing and job search. Inappropriate referrals can affect outcomes as well as motivation. This should be addressed through adviser training and through quality control and inspection of courses.

- There was no consensus among either advisers or claimants about whether mandatory training is the right approach. However, the qualitative research suggests that mandation made little difference to the behaviour of claimants, since most were willing to take part in training, or regarded it as part of their obligation under the jobseekers agreement.
- Poor organisational skills led to some claimants being sanctioned and might be addressed through reminders to claimants by letter or text message. Discretion should be used in the application of sanctions where claimants have made genuine errors affecting attendance.
- There was little evidence of poor motivation to find work among the respondents who experienced loss of benefits though sanctioning. They reacted badly to this measure, with some finding it unfair when they were taking positive steps themselves to find work. Those who declined or left training still felt they were right to do so, because it had not met their needs, and sanctioning in these circumstances would appear to be ineffective.
- Family members were the main source of support during the period without benefit. If the pilot is mainstreamed, sanctioning is likely to increase. It should be acknowledged that when a claimant is sanctioned, the loss of benefits may affect low income families rather than individuals alone, even when the claimant does not have dependants themselves.
- Skills should not be regarded as the only, or even the main barrier to employment for job seekers. Some claimants are likely to need more targeted, personalised and in-depth support which training may not meet.

# Appendix A

## Topic guide for interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff

### A.1 Background

Key questions	Notes and prompts
How long have you been working on the pilot programme?	
Roughly how many customers have you referred to it?	
What are the personal characteristics of the customers you have referred? (Age group, gender or varied)	To get an idea of the variety of customer characteristics
What are their main skills gaps in finding employment?	
What type of work is available in this area?	
Do you think that addressing the skills gaps you have identified will help customers access the available jobs?	
What other barriers do customers have to finding work? Can the programme help to address these? How/why not?	

## A.2 Briefing and training to deliver the scheme

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<b>Key questions</b>	<b>Notes and prompts</b>
How were you trained to deliver the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Off- site vs. on-site</li><li>• Length of training</li><li>• Type of materials</li></ul>	
What guidance materials have you been given to help you deliver the pilot? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paper materials</li><li>• On-line</li></ul>	
Have you had any follow-up training?	
Did the training fully prepare you to deliver the pilot to customers?	
Have you experienced any problems in how to deliver it to customers?	
What do you do if you have any questions about the pilot?	
Do you think that the pilot is operating well in your Jobcentre Plus? Why/why not?	Try to identify what works well and not so well

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## A.3 Referring customers

Key questions	Notes and prompts
Can you describe the process of referring customers to the pilot?	
How do they respond when you tell them about the pilot?	Try to pick up any hostility and adverse responses
Are they interested in going on a training course?	
Why/why not?	
What is their attitude towards training (prior to referral)?	
Do they raise any practical barriers to attending a training course?	E.g. travel, childcare, signing on, time taken out of job search, lack of confidence
What are these?	
Are you able to address these?	
Are they interested in gaining a qualification/certification?	
Is this on offer through the programme?	
If they have any concerns, what are these?	
How do you deal with customers' concerns?	
If they have any objections, what are these?	Again, pick up any hostility
How do you deal with any objections?	
How do you explain the mandatory aspect of the programme?	
How do they respond to this?	
What are their views on the mandatory aspect of the programme before they have been mandated?	Again, pick up any hostility/objections

## A.4 Finding training

If adviser has not been responsible for finding training, these will be asked of the appropriate member of staff

Key questions	Notes and prompts
Can you describe the process of finding training for a customer who you refer to the pilot programme	Ask for as much detail as possible
<p>How do you identify the skill needs of a customer?</p> <p>Is this through the Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) pilot?</p> <p>Is it through a skills health check? Who does this?</p>	
What do you do when a customer has multiple needs?	Try to identify how skill needs are prioritised
How do you decide which needs should be addressed first?	
<p>How do you find a course which can address these needs?</p> <p>What are the main things you are looking for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill content</li> <li>• Level of course</li> <li>• Teaching/learning method</li> <li>• Location in relation to customer's home</li> <li>• Length</li> <li>• Qualification and certification</li> </ul>	
Do you need to find training which will fit in with benefit requirements?	E.g. signing on, availability for work
Do you need to find training which will fit in with job search or with part-time and temporary work?	
Is the training generally full time or part time?	
How easy or difficult is it to find courses to meet the needs of individual customers?	
Are there some types of customers who it is particularly difficult to help?	E.g. customers with disabilities or mental health problems
Where are the main gaps in provision/unmet needs?	
<p>Have you referred customers to the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot who are already on a training course? What happened?</p> <p>Did they have to discontinue in order to join the pilot?</p> <p>What were their reactions to this?</p>	If such examples are identified, get as much detail as possible

## A.5 Customer response and feedback

Key questions	Notes and prompts
<p>What have customers told you about the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot?            Have you had feedback on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practicalities (e.g. travel, childcare)</li> <li>• Course content</li> <li>• Course level</li> <li>• Quality of training</li> <li>• Tutor skills</li> <li>• The other students (e.g. behaviour and attitudes)</li> <li>• College facilities</li> <li>• Anything else</li> </ul>	<p>Intended as a very broad question to pick up anything which customers have said about the pilot</p>
<p>Has this feedback led to any changes either for individual customers or to how the programme is delivered?</p>	
<p>Have you noticed any change in their attitude towards training (positive/negative)?</p>	<p>Probe for any views on what customers have said about the pilot</p>
<p>Have you noticed any change in their attitude towards being mandated (positive/negative)?</p>	
<p>Have customers said anything about how the programme has affected their employment prospects?</p>	<p>E.g. its potential to improve job prospects, time out of job search, availability for temping</p>
<p>What have they said?</p>	
<p>Have you had any feedback from customers about the pilot programme more generally?</p>	
<p>What have they said?</p>	
<p>Have customers said anything about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allowances for travel?</li> <li>Childcare cost payments?</li> <li>The training premium?</li> </ul>	
<p>Have any customers taken part in the pilot early as a result of volunteering for early entry to Flexible New Deal?            Has the experience of these customers differed from others in any way?            How?</p>	

## A.6 Feedback from training providers

Key questions	Notes and prompts
<p>Have you had any feedback from training providers?                      What has this been about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• customer attendance</li> <li>• attitude to learning</li> <li>• level of ability in relation to course requirements</li> <li>• customer achievements</li> </ul>	<p>Try to get as much detail as possible on what providers have passed back to JSA advisers</p>
<p>Have you made any changes to your approach as a result of feedback from training providers?                      What are these?                      If not, why not?</p>	<p>E.g. in allocation of customers to courses</p>
<p>Are there any changes you would like to make to the training but have not been able to?</p>	

## A.7 Applying sanctions

If the JSA adviser has not been responsible for applying sanctions, these questions will be asked of the appropriate member of staff

Key questions	Notes and prompts
<p>Have any customers failed to meet the conditions of the programme?                       Was this for non-compliance with training offer, non-attendance or for misconduct?                       Who deals with cases of non-compliance?                       Have you had to make decisions about non-compliance?                      What for: non-compliance with training offer, non-attendance, misconduct?                       Why didn't they comply with the terms of the pilot?                       What reasons did they give for not complying?                      Were these seen as legitimate or did they lead to sanctions?                      What other circumstances might be seen as legitimate?                      If sanctioned: what did the sanctions involve?                      Loss of benefits – 2 or 4 weeks?                      Were they able to claim hardship payments?</p>	<p>Get as much detail as possible on circumstances of sanctioning</p>
<p>Do you know how this affected customers?                      Do you know how it affected their dependants/families?                      Did it affect the health and well-being of customers (and families)?                      Did it affect customers' motivation?</p>	<p>Probe for any examples of hardship</p>
<p>Have any customers been sanctioned more than 1 or 2 times?                      What happened?</p>	<p>Get details of any such cases</p>



## A.8 Views on the scheme

Key questions	Notes and prompts
<p>Do you think the pilot is having a positive impact on the employment prospects of the target group?</p> <p>How/why not?</p>	<p>Emphasise that this is about their personal views on the pilot programme, its design and effectiveness</p>
<p>What are the positive aspects of the pilot? And the negative aspects?</p>	
<p>What is your view on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the random assignment aspect of the programme?</li> <li>• the mandatory aspect of the programme?</li> </ul>	<p>Probe for how these features affect them as JSA advisers as well as how they affect customers</p>
<p>Do you think the programme could be improved in any way? How?</p>	

# Appendix B

## Topic guide for interviews with Jobcentre Plus customers

### B.1 Evaluation of the Jobseeker's Allowance JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot

#### Introduction:

- Hello, my name is [researcher name] from National Institute of Economic & Social Research
- We wrote recently about research we are doing for the Department for Work and Pensions
- Research is about the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot
- Would like to ask about your experiences and views of the scheme
- Will take about 30 minutes and everything say will be confidential. Jobcentre/DWP do not know who we are talking to
- To thank for taking part, will send you a £20 voucher
- Permission to record the interview

### B.2 Are they eligible for interview

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<b>Key questions</b>	<b>Notes and prompts</b>
To take part in the research you need to have been on training recently. Can I just check that you have been sent on training by the Jobcentre in the last six months (since May 2010)?	To establish whether they've been sent on training or are waiting for it and are therefore correctly recorded by the Jobcentre as part of the pilot
If yes, proceed with interview	
If yes, but did not go on course, proceed with interview	
If no or don't remember:	
Are you waiting to go on a training course?	
If yes proceed	
If no or don't remember:	
Explain they are not eligible to take part in the research and apologise.	

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## B.3 Referral to skills programme

Key questions	Notes and prompts
Do you know whether the training you have been sent on is called the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot?	This section is about when they were first told about the pilot and their initial reactions. <b>Make sure they are talking about the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot</b>
When did the Jobcentre first tell you about the training pilot (or the training, if they don't know it's part of the pilot)?	
Was this at your first Stage 3 interview (26 weeks unemployed)?	
What month was this?	
At that time, were you completely unemployed, working part time or on a training course?	
If on a training course, did you have to leave the course to take part in the pilot programme?	
What did you think of this?	
What did they tell you about the JSA Skills Conditionality Pilot/the training?	
Did they say it was to help you overcome barriers to employment that you had?	
What were these barriers?	
Do you agree that you had these barriers to employment?	
Do you have any health problems that might affect the work that you could do?	
Have you been unemployed before this?	
If yes, have you reached Stage 3 before?	
Once or more?	
Did you have an interview to assess your skill needs?	<b>Find out if this was done by Next Step, adult careers service</b>
Who did the assessment (adviser or someone else)?	
Where did this take place?	
What did you think of the assessment?	
What training course did they arrange for you to go on?	
What was it called?	
What did it cover?	
When did it start and when did it/will it finish?	
Was it full time or part time?	

### B.3 Continued

Key questions	Notes and prompts
Were you given a choice in the course you were sent on? What were the options? Why did you choose the course?	
Were you given any help to attend the course? Childcare Travel costs Training premium Did these payments cover your expenses?	
If you are waiting to go on a training course: How long have you been waiting? Do you know why you are having to wait? How do you feel about having to wait?	

### B.4 Views on mandatory aspect and sanctions

Key questions	Notes and prompts
What was your initial reaction when the adviser suggested the training to you?	Probe throughout this section about any harm resulting from mandatory aspect and threat of sanctions
Did you think it was a good idea? Why/why not?	
Did you have any concerns? What were these?	
Did you talk about your concerns to your adviser? What did they say/how did they respond?	
Did you talk to anyone else about having to go on the training? Who? What did they say?	Find out if spoke to anyone other than PA  E.g. family, friends, CAB
Were you told your benefit might be stopped if you did not go on the course or if you didn't turn up? What did you think about this?	
Did you go on the training? If not, are you waiting? Did you turn it down?	If didn't attend at all, ask for details of what they were offered, why they turned it down and then go to Section 6.
Did you attend all the sessions?	If are waiting for training go to Section 7 If went on the course but were sanctioned, say will ask them about this later and carry on with topic guide
If not, why was this? Did you have your benefit stopped for not taking part or for not attending?	

## For all who have been on training

### B.5 The training programme: practicalities and standard

<b>Key questions</b>	<b>Notes and prompts</b>
<p>You've given me the name of the course and how long it was for. I'd like to ask you now for a bit more detail about the training course which the Jobcentre arranged for you.</p>	<p>Make sure you get as much detail as possible. Again, probe for any harmful effects.</p>
<p>What level would you say the course was? For beginners or more advanced? Was it the right level for you?</p>	
<p>How many others were on the course? Would you say the course was the right level for them?</p>	
<p>What did you think of the teaching on the course? Was it good or not so good?</p>	
<p>How much individual help did you get? Was this enough or too little?</p>	
<p>Did you have any difficulties getting to the college/training provider?</p>	<p>Check if transport is a problem where they live, including if it is rural area</p>
<p>Did going on the course affect the amount of time you could spend on looking for work? How?</p>	<p>Remember: those on part-time courses are still required to look for work</p>
<p>Did it affect your availability for interviews?</p>	<p>Ask for any examples of missed interviews</p>
<p>For those with health problems: Did going on the course affect your health condition in any way?</p>	

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## B.6 Outcomes of the training

Key questions	Notes and prompts
I want to ask you about how you feel you may have benefited from going on the course.	
What kinds of things did you learn on the course (that you didn't know already)?	
Did you gain a qualification or certificate from the course? What was the qualification/certificate?	
Do you feel you benefited from going on the course? How/why not?	
Did you enjoy the course? Why/why not?	
Do you think the training has helped/will help you to get a job? In what ways? If not, why?	
What do you think would improve your chances of finding work?	This is a completely open question, could include economic recovery, skills, childcare etc.
Has the training changed the kinds of jobs you are looking for/applying for? How?	
What kind of job are you looking for/applying for?	
Has it made you think about going on another training course or in gaining a new qualification? What kind of course/qualification?	
Has it made you less interested in taking another training course? Why?	
Has it changed your attitude or confidence about finding work? In a positive or negative way?	
Has it affected your confidence more generally? In a positive or negative way?	
How confident are you of finding work in the near future?	
What do you think would improve your chances of finding work?	
Looking back to before you went on the training, would you say your attitude towards training is different now to what it was then?	Probe fully on responses to these final questions
Do you think that unemployed people should be required to go on training courses and lose their benefits if they don't? Has taking part in training changed your views on this?	

## B.7 Customers who were sanctioned

Key questions	Notes and prompts
<p>You say you had your benefit stopped for not taking part in the training or for not attending.</p>	<p>Try to get as much detail on what happened and the effects of being sanctioned on the interviewee and their family</p>
<p>Can you tell me what happened? Why was your benefit stopped?</p>	
<p>Did you get written notice that it could be stopped or reduced?</p>	
<p>For how long was your benefit stopped? Was it stopped more than once? How many times?</p>	
<p>What did you feel about your benefit being stopped?</p>	
<p>Did you appeal against your benefit being stopped? What happened?</p>	
<p>Did you have any income while your benefit was stopped? Did you have a hardship payment? How much was this? Did you take out a loan? Where/who from? • Have you paid off the loan? How did you manage financially while your benefit was stopped?</p>	
<p>How did having your benefit stopped affect you?</p>	<p>If refer to health problems for self or family, e.g. stress, mental health, probe for details</p>
<p>How did it affect your family? Did it lead to any stress or strains or health problems for you or the family? Did you speak to anyone about these (e.g. JSA adviser, GP) What did they say?</p>	
<p>Have you had your benefit stopped before you entered Stage 3 of your current claim? Why, for how long etc? Did it affect you differently this time to before?</p>	
<p>Do you feel the Jobcentre was wrong to stop your benefit? Why?</p>	
<p>Do you feel you were right to turn down the course/to not attend/stop attending? Why? Would you do the same again?</p>	

## B.8 For customers who turned down training or are waiting for training

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<b>Key questions</b>	<b>Notes and prompts</b>
What kind of job are you looking for?	These are questions which have been asked of others along with questions about the training
How confident are you of finding work in the near future?	
What do you think would improve your chances of finding work?	
Do you think that unemployed people should be required to go on training courses and lose their benefits if they don't?	
Has your experience within Stage 3 changed your views on this?	

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## B.9 Closing questions

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<b>Key questions</b>	<b>Notes and prompts</b>
That's everything I want to ask you about the skills programme, but is there anything you want to say about it that we haven't covered? Anything else that was good or bad about the scheme and what happened to you?	Closing the interview
Can I just ask you a few questions about yourself?	
Do you live alone or with your family or a partner? Do you have any children living with you? How old are they?	
Can I just check your postal address so that we can send you the £20 voucher?	
Thank you for taking part in the research.	

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# Appendix C

## Characteristics of claimants interviewed

Name	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Marital status	Highest qualification
Oliver	Male	22	White British	Single	Not known
Ronnie	Male	20	White British	Single	Level 1
Alfie	Male	18	White British	Single	Not known
Barbara	Female	51	White British	Single	Not known
Carl	Male	25	Black African	Single	Level 3
Tony	Male	23	Black Caribbean	Single	Not known
Ali	Male	37	Unknown ethnic minority	Single	Not known
Jonathan	Male	34	White British	Single	Level 5
Samuel	Male	44	Black Caribbean	Single	None
Paul	Male	28	Not known	Cohabiting	Entry Level
Aiden	Male	19	White British	Single	Level 2
Alfred	Male	61	White British	Divorced	None
Cheryl	Female	18	White British	Separated	None
Marcus	Male	18	White British	Single	None
Sophia	Female	30	White European	Single	Level 6
Tim	Male	36	White British	Single	Level 5
Keeley	Female	30	British	Single	Level 2
Daniel	Male	37	British	Single	None
Dai	Male	22	British	Single	None
Pedro	Male	46	Irish	Single	Entry level
Ralph	Male	21	British	Single	None
Stefan	Male	18	British	Single	Level 2
Reena	Female	19	Unknown ethnic minority	Single	Not known
Damian	Male	24	Black African	Single	Entry level
Katrina	Female	21	British	Single	Level 2
Philip	Male	18	British	Single	Level 1
Elena	Female	31	Not known	Separated	Entry level
Thomas	Male	50	British	Married	None
Nicholas	Male	40	British	Single	Entry level 3
Greg	Male	44	British	Single	Level 2
Soraya	Female	49	Not known	Single	Level 3
Jamie	Male	20	British	Single	Level 3
Nathan	Male	53	Unknown ethnic minority	Single	None
Saul	Male	54	British	Single	Level 2
Patrick	Male	43	Not known	Married	Level 2
Lara	Female	40	British	Single	Level 1
Valeria	Female	42	Black Caribbean	Single	None
Angus	Male	29	British	Single	Level 6
Ben	Male	32	British	Cohabiting	Entry level 3
Helena	Female	53	Not known	Divorced	Level 1

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The Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) Skills Conditionality Pilot was aimed at exploring the effects of mandating participation in training, through randomly allocating claimants with an identified skills need to a range of provision. A two-part evaluation was carried out by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research for the Department for Work and Pensions. The evaluation looked first at administrative data to assess the implementation of the pilot and whether it could be used to provide valid estimates of the impact of mandating. Qualitative research was then carried out with mandated customers, Jobcentre Plus advisers and training providers to explore experiences, views and behaviour of participants in the pilots.

Research themes include:

- Lessons from the implementation of the pilot.
- Low referral rates and reasons for this.
- The need for accurate training data when assessing outcomes.
- The availability of training for JSA customers.
- Customer views on training and their preferences for types of provision.
- Views of customers and advisers on mandating.
- Customer experiences of being sanctioned because of non-compliance with mandating.
- The need of some customers for additional support rather than for training.

The report includes recommendations for policy in the areas of design and implementation of pilot programmes, training for JSA customers, mandating and sanctioning.

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