

Self Service equality impact assessment

DWP Change Programme Self Service Project

July 2012

Equality impact assessment for all phases of Self Service

Introduction

The Department for Work and Pensions has carried out an equality impact assessment on Self Service. This is to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

The equality impact assessment process allows us to make sure that:

- The department's strategies, policies and services are free from discrimination.
- Due regard is given to equality (specifically disability, gender and race) in decision making and subsequent processes.
- Opportunities for promoting equality are identified.

Purpose and aim(s) of Self Service

The Department for Work and Pensions is committed to delivering on-line services. The aim is to improve the quality of customer service, while improving the efficiency of our delivery, ensuring we meet our targets.

We are committed to make the Department for Work and Pensions a model of effective service delivery to individuals and employers.

The aim of the on-line services is to give customers another way to get in touch with the Department. It does not remove any communication methods or take away any of the contact channels that our customers now use (e.g. telephone, face to face, postal etc).

The Department for Work and Pensions will work closely with customers to engage them in the design and delivery of the services ensuring we continuously refine our product based on user experience intelligence and therefore always starting with, and continuing to involve, the customer.

On-Line Services

Benefits Adviser Service

In April 2008 the Benefits Adviser Service was launched on the Directgov website.

By providing information about their circumstances customers could:

- find out which benefits they might be entitled to from a list of 28 benefits;

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- input potential circumstances to see how this could affect their benefit. e.g. – if they would be better off in work;
- display the best financial result for the customer, and
- enable customers to see how much benefit they could be entitled to,
- find out who to contact to help them make a claim, and access other facilities like jobsearch and state pension forecasts.

Jobseekers Allowance On-Line

The first release of Jobseeker's Allowance On-Line in August 2009 allowed those customers eligible to claim Jobseeker's Allowance (contributory) to claim their Jobseeker's Allowance on-line and then be notified of the time of their New Jobseeker Interview appointment by phone. Previously customers were able to apply for Jobseeker's Allowance by phone, in writing, by visiting their local Jobcentre Office or by using Tactical e-Services. The Tactical e Service is an on-line service accessed via Directgov and the Government Gateway. It allows customers or their representatives to initiate claims to a range of benefits via the Internet and reduces the length of the call back due to the information the customer has already provided online.

In August 2010 Jobseeker's Allowance On-Line was enhanced to include claims to income based Jobseeker's Allowance. In December 2010 Jobseeker's Allowance on-Line included the ability for customers to Rapid Reclaim Jobseeker's Allowance. This makes the online service available to the vast majority of Jobseeker's Allowance customers whilst not removing the element of choice to use other channels.

Identity Verification

Identity Verification will give a secure and trusted electronic identity management service that will help customers establish and protect their identity whilst dealing with the Department, using the on-line channel.

To achieve this, a user friendly solution has been designed and developed which checks and confirms the identity of customers trying to access the secure on-line services.

State Pension On-Line

State Pension on-Line is an on-line claims service for UK customers living in the UK approaching State Pension age, entitled to a UK State Pension.

State Pension on-Line:

- gives customers a user friendly, secure on-line claims service, and
- Presents information already held, back to the customer for them to use in their State Pension claim.

State Pension on-Line will not provide an on-line enquiry service.

The State Pension on-Line solution is flexible to reflect any changes in Pension Service policy e.g. Pension Reform.

Benefits Enquiry Service

Benefits Enquiry Service will focus on answering customer's most common claim and payment enquiries and will go-live in 2012.

Benefit Enquiry Service will: allow customers to go on-line to find answers to common enquiries for Job Seekers Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance allow customers to both trace and track their claim and payments securely on-line, and enable customers to access the services via a secure and trusted identity verification service that will enable individuals to establish, verify and authenticate their identity.

Customers will also be expected to register and enrol via Government Gateway (i.e. Government Gateway passwords and user identities) in order to use the service.

The BESOL data is sourced via the Departments OpStrat legacy systems which are updated nightly via a batch process and then processed into BESOL. The exception to this is the Carers Allowance Computer System (CACS) which use a different technology (Masterfile) and as a result the data can take up to three days to be visible in BESOL. Due to the different technology Carers Allowance Unit is no longer in scope for BESOL.

Consultation and involvement

Self Service has, and will continue to, consult with Department for Work and Pensions Customer Insight, Department for Work and Pensions Accessibility Services and Digital Media to make sure the proposals for the new on-line services meet the requirements of the general public and that equality of opportunity is promoted for all.

The requirement for Self Service proposals has been investigated through customer research. The Department for Work and Pensions Customer Insight Team commissioned work in which face to face in-depth interviews were carried out with Department for Work and Pensions customers in Spring 2008. The research included identifying services that would be suitable for delivery by self service channels, testing specific self service proposals, and finding out if there would be anything that would prevent access to the services and understand how these might be prevented.

HM Revenue & Customs Customer Understand Team carried out telephone interviews with 1000 UK adults in August 2008. They looked at using the self-service tools online and whether Self Service delivery plans are what customers want. The results suggest that approximately a third of customers would be likely to use Self Service online services. (This is assuming that the sample is representative of the UK adult population)

It will be easier for some disabled people who already have access to computers and specialist assistive technologies to access our services via the internet.

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Findings from research of Jobseeker's Allowance customers (December 2008 and January 2009) support our understanding that there is an increasing customer demand for online services. For unemployed people as a whole, 45% say they prefer to access help and support face to face and 21% say they would prefer to get it online. The picture is different among people who have been unemployed for less than a month: 45% of them prefer to use online services and 38% prefer face to face.

An established independent customer research and usability testing company has been engaged to test each new Self Service release at varying stages of development. Focusing on customer behaviour and understanding, their reports contains observations and recommendations for improvements to the designs of the services which are taken forward before the services are launched.

Impact of Self Service

The change will apply to all customers nationally and does not favour a particular group or intentionally restrict opportunities to another. To measure the satisfaction of customers with regards to their customer experience the findings from the 2008 Customer Satisfaction survey have been used. These highlighted four key drivers of customer service, which are:

- Ease of Access;
- Right Outcome;
- Timeliness, and
- Treatment,

Impact of introducing an on-line service

Many of our customers are satisfied with how well we deliver against these drivers – this is particularly true among older customers and disabled customers.

Where there is no access to the Internet at home customers can get access via either Libraries, Internet cafes, or by using a third party facility, for example those provided by UK Online and Citizens Advice Bureau.

In the case of Job Seekers Allowance on-Line, the customer will still need to sign a declaration/statement after the New Jobseekers Interview, at the jobcentre before the claim is valid.

The on-line services provide an extra channel for customers to make an enquiry or claim at a time and place that suits them. We are not removing the established routes that customers already use to interact with us such as by telephone, face to face or by post for example.

Disability

The Department for Work and Pensions consults with a Specialist Information Technology team to make sure that the on-Line services they deliver are accessible to Department for Work and Pensions colleagues and customers who use assistive

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technology. As a result the Department for Work and Pensions have assurance that the needs of users have been taken into account when developing the computer software and forms that will be presented to customers using the services. The services are compatible with specialist technologies often used by disabled people such as JAWS, Dragon, Supernova and Zoomtext. Testing was carried out with users of specialist equipment, and their feedback has been taken into account when making changes.

Channels such as telephone claims and visiting local offices and jobcentres will remain available. In addition there are specialist helpdesks set up to assist customers who may have difficulties accessing or using the on-line services.

Accessing the Department's services via the on-line channel will reduce the time it takes individuals to get information for, or to complete the transaction they want to make.

Gender

The Department for Work and Pensions is committed to ensuring equality of access to its services for all its customers regardless of gender.

The Oxford Internet Survey, 2009 showed slightly lower internet usage levels among females than males (3 percentage points). However, this difference is not statistically significant. The difference is also decreasing; the same survey found a gap of 9 percentage points in 2003.

Similarly, although 27% of female Jobcentre Plus customers did not use the internet as compared to 24% of male customers, this is not a statistically significant difference.

Transgender

All gender recognition cases are marked as a Special Customer Record. This is to ensure that the case is managed securely and sensitively and there is restricted access to protect the privacy of the individual. As a result a higher level of authentication is required for added security,

There is risk that we may not be able to meet the necessary security criterion using on-line services and consequently transgender customers alongside any other customers whose records are similarly protected, will not be able to access on-line services.

However, these cases will be monitored by business managers within the Department for Work and Pensions in order to make sure that we meet the expected levels of service. Our principle is to create self service channels that as many customers as possible can access and use in addition to existing channels. There are no plans at the moment to enable a higher level of authentication, but all customers, including Special Customer Records cases, can use some of the more generic services; these include the Benefit Adviser Service, Job Seekers Allowance on-Line and Jobsearch.

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The on-line service is providing an extra channel for customers to make an enquiry or claim. We recognise that there may be some disproportionate impacts on certain groups within society, however, access to all established routes are available to all customers for them to access the same standard of service across all aspects of the business, for example by telephone, face to face or by post.

Race

The instructions and guidance to use the on-line services are written in plain English to meet the Department for Work and Pensions writing standards, which meet the legal standards in terms of equality. The services are also available in Welsh, including a Welsh version of guidance and feedback forms.

Job Seekers Allowance on-Line and State Pension On-line, allow customers to indicate their language requirement for any call-back that we may need to make to progress the claim the customer is trying to make.

Customers will still have access to phone services and face to face in order to provide translation service support.

Impact on our staff

The provision of a new on-Line channel is being provided for customers. As part of any release of an on-line service a full People Impact Assessment is carried out to ensure that staff impacts are identified and arrangements are put in place to ensure that our staff are fully prepared for the change and not disadvantaged in any way.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The proposal will be monitored in terms of equality and we will look to answer questions such as –

- Do the new on-line services meet the needs of different customers?
- Do they unintentionally disadvantage one group over another?

This will be linked to the overall strategy, which is to build a performance management framework around the customer experience, linked to the four drivers of customer satisfaction outlined above. By using Web analysis to play an increasingly important part in monitoring and evaluating our service, Self Service is able to measure customer experience and service delivery against the following indicators:

- Aligning customer surveys around customers and the four key drivers – we are improving our existing customer surveys by asking common questions across the organisation, related to the identified drivers of customer satisfaction. We are increasing survey frequency to get regular, up-to-date feedback about our customers' experiences. (Timescales not currently available).
- Capturing reason for contact as part of the standard telephone process – Self Service is working closely with Transforming Customer Contact Project to better understand why customers contact us, which will allow us to assess which contacts

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are of value to the customer and to develop our strategy to avoid unnecessary contacts.

- Systematically analysing customer compliments and complaints – enabling common themes to be identified and responded to, locally and nationally.
- Using mystery shopping better– looking at developing ‘mystery shopping’ scenarios that reflect what happens when a customer’s needs require more than one part of the Department to work together.
- Department for Work and Pensions Survey – including questions in the internal Department for Work and Pensions Survey to give us insight into staff perception of customer service offered by Department for Work and Pensions and also of staffs’ own levels of knowledge and ability to deliver the required customer experience.
- Feedback – Directgov are responsible for providing customers with accurate, relevant information about public services. The on-line services will include customer feedback links that are monitored to ensure any feedback relating to Diversity and Equality would be acted on as a priority.

Ongoing consultation

Self Service has, and will continue to, consult with Department for Work and Pensions Customer Insight, Department for Work and Pensions Accessibility Solutions Team, Digital Media and other Government Departments such as HM Revenue & Customs to make sure the proposals for the new on-line services meet the requirements of the general public and that equality of opportunity is not neglected.

Moving Forward

Self Service is now in its later stages and has delivered the majority of its services.

The on-line services team is using the feed back received from our customers to build on and improve the on-line service.

Examples of recent improvements as a result of feedback received are;

- E-mail confirmation that their claim has been submitted.
- Text added to clarify the number of character spaces they are allowed when leaving their own comments.
- Text added to clarify how foreign addresses can be input into the address fields.

Digital Future

Jobcentre Plus and Pensions, Disability and Carers Service have signed up as partners of Race Online 2012.

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Race Online 2012 is an organisation led by Martha Lane-Fox, bringing together both private and public sector partners to help as many UK citizens as possible, to get on-line and use the internet.

Jobcentre Plus pledge to Race Online has been the introduction of Digital Champions across Jobcentres. Their role is to build confidence and capacity of both staff and customers in using the internet and accessing Department for Work and Pensions On-line services that will support them in finding work.

Jobcentre Plus has also teamed up with UK Online Centres to provide training and internet access facilities.

Conclusion

The aim of the on-line services is to improve availability and accessibility to Departmental services for all. Having considered the nature of the Self Service initiatives, it is concluded that there is no specific negative impact identified for customers or staff other than those identified above.

The equality impact assessment will continue to be considered as more on-line Self Service initiatives are developed and implemented.

For more information please contact the Self Service Team using the e-mail address below.

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