

Research report

# The Jobcentre Plus Offer: Findings from the first year of the evaluation

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Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 814

# **The Jobcentre Plus Offer**

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Alice Coulter, Naomi Day, Nicholas Howat, Eleni Romanou and Nick Coleman

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# Glossary of terms

Assistant Advisers (AA)	Supports claimants in finding work through jobsearch reviews and taking forward the decisions agreed between the participants and their Personal Adviser.
Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF)	Funding of up to £300 provided by Jobcentre Plus to help claimants overcome small obstacles which prevent them from taking up an offer of employment. This has now been abolished and replaced with the Flexible Support Fund.
Advisory Services manager (ASM)	Jobcentre manager responsible for overseeing the work of all Personal Advisers and Customer Engagement Team Leaders.
Adviser Team Manager (ATM)	Jobcentre manager with responsibility over the advisory team within individual Jobcentre Plus offices.
AWRT	Access to Work-Related Training
Customer Assessment Tool (CAT)	A profiling tool used during advisory interviews to record the evidence about key attributes (such as skills) found to give customers the best chance of finding work.
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
CSCS	Construction Skills Certification Scheme
Customer Service Office Manager (CSOM)	Jobcentre manager responsible for monitoring multiple Jobcentre Plus offices within a Jobcentre Plus district.
Contract Package Area (CPA)	Geographical territory within which a provider delivers contracted employment provision.
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DAS	Developing our Advisory Services
Disability Employment Adviser (DEA)	Specialist advisers responsible for providing support to customers who may need additional help in finding and retaining work and supporting development due to their disability or health condition.
DM	District Manager
District Provision Tool (DPT)	Menu of local information on providers and the sorts of provision available in the area. The information is tailored by each Jobcentre Plus district in order to meet local needs and is available to all Jobcentre Plus offices to help advisers refer claimants directly to the most appropriate provider.
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions

Enhanced Joint Working (EJW)	Scheme introduced in 2009 to areas not operating Integrated Employment and Skills trials to facilitate the number of Jobcentre Plus customers being referred to careers advice and skills provision. EJW is comprised of skills screening; referral and signposting to skills services; and building on existing links to strengthen joint working between employment and skills services.
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
Flexible Support Fund (FSF)	Jobcentre Plus funding devolved to the district level, and used to work with partner organisations to support customers in moving closer to the jobs market or directly into jobs.
GBW	Get Britain Working measures
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
Incapacity Benefit (IB)	Benefit paid to people under State Pension age who cannot work because of an illness or disability. IB was replaced by ESA in January 2011, and since then no new claims for IB have been accepted.
IES	Integrated Employment and Skills
Income Support (IS)	Means-tested benefit paid to defined client groups, such as lone parents, carers and certain sick or disabled people. Since October 2008, ESA has replaced IS paid on the grounds of incapacity for new claimants.
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
Jobsearch Review	Jobsearch Review meetings must take place face to face at least once every two weeks for the duration of a Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claim.
Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg)	Document signed by new JSA claimants in their New Jobseeker's Interview which records the steps they have agreed to take to search for work and the types of work they will look for.
LLSI	Limiting, longstanding illness, disability or infirmity that limits activities.
LSI	Physical or mental health conditions or illnesses expected to last for 12 months or more.
Low Value Provision (LVP)	One-off training requirements up to a value of £50k. Requirements can vary from as little as a single day's training to a number of weeks' activity (often leading to a relevant qualification) with a value ranging from £100 to several thousand pounds.

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<b>More Frequent Attendance (MFA)</b>	Interviews introduced when the customer's PA feels that either the jobseeker is not making sufficient effort to find employment or there are suspicions that the JSA claimant could be committing benefit fraud. MFA requires the customer to be interviewed more frequently than the standard fortnight, and interviews can be called at short notice.
<b>Mandatory Work Activity (MWA)</b>	Scheme launched in May 2011 to support JSA claimants who need extra help to develop the disciplines and behaviours associated with employment. This involves a mandatory four-week work placement and 30 hours of unpaid work per week with a not-for-profit organisation.
<b>MI</b>	Management Information
<b>New Jobseeker Interview (NJI)</b>	Interview undertaken by new JSA claimants with an adviser to discuss and agree realistic and achievable job goals and jobsearch activities that will offer the best chance of finding work.
<b>New Joiner's Work Focused Interview (NJWFI)</b>	Interview undertaken by new ESA claimants to help the adviser determine the claimant's ability to find work and discuss the support they need to move closer to work.
<b>Personal Adviser (PA)</b>	Personal Advisers are based in Jobcentre Plus offices and offer advice and support to jobseekers. They are the primary point of contact for jobseekers and assess the individual customer's needs and requirements.
<b>Performance Management Framework (PMF)</b>	Framework launched in April 2011 in Jobcentre Plus to assess performance by outcome. This replaces the previous targets structure used by Jobcentre Plus.
<b>Performance Team Leader (PTL)</b>	Responsible for monitoring performance within individual jobcentres and ensuring levels meet DWP's targets.
<b>Sanctions</b>	A sanction is a penalty imposed by a Decision Maker. It is the removal of part or all of benefit paid, due to a customer's non-compliance with conditions placed on benefit receipt, even where there remains an underlying entitlement. Prior to the introduction of a new sanctions regime (to be introduced from autumn 2012), sanctions were either fixed or variable and lasted from two to 26 weeks.
<b>SDA</b>	Severe Disablement Allowance
<b>Work Capability Assessment (WCA)</b>	Questionnaire and health assessment introduced in October 2008 to assess entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance.
<b>Work Focused Interview (WFI)</b>	Regular mandatory interviews with advisers for ESA claimants (in the Work-Related Activity Group) and Income Support (IS) claimants.

Work Programme (WP)	Welfare-to-work programme for the long-term unemployed launched in June 2011 and delivered by a range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations contracted by DWP.
Work Programme Referral Interview (WPRI)	Interview conducted at Jobcentre Plus offices with the intention of assessing the potential for transferring the customer to the WP.
Work-Related Activity (WRA)	An activity that makes it more likely that the person will obtain or remain in work and targeted at ESA recipients (in the WRAG).
Work Related Activity Group (WRAG)	Category of ESA claimants who have been assessed as having a limited capacity for work and require support to prepare for work in the future.

# Summary

## Introduction

Launched in April 2011, the new Jobcentre Plus Offer was designed to change the way that Jobcentre Plus operates by placing an increased focus on outcomes rather than procedural targets. To achieve this there has been a move away from nationally mandated processes towards flexibility at the local level, with Jobcentre Plus staff being given the flexibility to provide tailored support which will best move claimants towards paid work.

The Jobcentre Plus Offer is being evaluated to find out how it is being implemented and the effect it is having on staff and claimants. The evaluation involves two main strands. The first is a longitudinal survey of new Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants, initially interviewed shortly after starting the Offer and then again as they off-flow in to employment, the Work Programme (WP) or another destination.

The second strand involves case studies in six Jobcentre Plus districts with ethnographic site visits and depth interviews with staff and claimants. These case studies will assess how far flexibility has been devolved; how delivery is working on the ground and how support is flowing for claimants including how specific elements of the Offer are working and being used – core interventions, advisers flexibility and the flexible menu of support.

The evaluation is being conducted over two years and this report covers the findings from the first year of the study.

## Implementation of the Offer from an organisational perspective

The Offer was understood in different ways by Jobcentre Plus staff, and (as might be expected given the nature of the Offer) not always as a discrete and cohesive concept. Recent changes to working practices were not necessarily associated with the Offer, but rather seen as part of a wider cultural shift towards greater flexibility and a stronger focus on outcomes; shifts that could be associated with a range of initiatives, including the Performance Management Framework (PMF), Lean continuous improvement techniques, 'Developing our Advisory Service' (DAS), and Local Autonomy pilots.

It was clear that the principle of greater flexibility had been embraced across the case study districts, in part illustrated by the various delivery models that had emerged both between and within districts. Underpinning these variations were three key factors: offices' prior experience of related initiatives; local area characteristics and resources; and the extent to which off-flow targets had been devolved within the office.

Core interventions had not changed substantially under the Offer, excluding the increased use of split New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIIs) and lighter touch Jobsearch Review meetings. Many of the case study areas had implemented these changes because they were seen as the most resource efficient way to meet conditionality deadlines and prioritise Personal Adviser (PA) time for diagnostic and ongoing support.



The principle of flexible adviser support was valued by Jobcentre Plus staff, providing greater freedom to determine how advisers' time and resources could be applied to focus on outcomes. The extent to which advisers were able to use their discretion to make these decisions differed substantially between offices, reflecting varying levels of advisers' own skill and confidence, resource limitations, and the extent to which offices had devolved flexibility down to frontline staff.

It was clear from observations and staff interviews, that diagnosis of claimant needs was fairly unstructured, with advisers using their intuition, experience and knowledge as their main diagnosis approach rather than formal diagnostic tools. Rather than complete this during the NJI/New Joiner's Work Focused Interview (NjWFI), staff felt that the diagnosis process was a continual ongoing process and reliant on the rapport and relationship between claimant and adviser.

The flexible menu of support was seen to offer a wide range of programmes which could enable more personalised provision with fewer restrictions than previous programmes on when support could be offered within a claimant's journey. Across the range of provision there were felt to be consistent barriers to use, which included: lack of availability and awareness of local provision; limited adviser confidence and knowledge of the provision available; complicated access to non-contracted funding; and challenges purchasing services from other organisations. There were also specific challenges in identifying and securing suitable support for clients with complex issues.

There was variation around how best practice was identified and shared across the case study districts. Examples included: development forums; case conferencing; one-to-one meetings for advisers with Performance Team Leaders (PTLs) or Adviser Team Managers (ATMs); weekly team meetings, and shadowing staff. Given the different delivery models across the case study districts, there is high potential for offices to learn from each other and support ongoing improvements. Offices may benefit from a more structured approach to identifying and sharing best practice (see recommendations section).

### Who is taking part in the Offer

Around one in five JSA claimants had already off-flowed into employment by the time of the first interview. In effect these were the claimants who should be receiving minimal support from Jobcentre Plus when it comes to adviser time and options from the flexible menu of support. Only a very small proportion of ESA claimants had off-flowed in to employment but a significant minority (16 per cent) said that they were currently looking for work. If the Offer is working as intended these ESA claimants should receive greater practical support with help in getting them back in to work in the early stages of their claim.

The key point to make about the attitudes of new JSA claimants is that the vast majority of them want to work so that initial motivation is present. For ESA claimants the picture is more mixed but even among those who are not currently looking for work a majority (58 per cent) said they would be happier if they had a job. However, a bigger challenge for ESA claimants is in terms of their anxiety, with over half saying the thought of being in paid works makes them nervous.

In terms of the success of different jobsearch activities older claimants were significantly more likely to say that they were not confident that employers would offer them an interview. Interestingly older claimants did not feel any less confident that they would then do well in an interview if they managed to get one. The availability of jobs was the biggest barrier cited by claimants looking for work and this was a particular concern for those who had been in work recently. Claimants who had not worked for a prolonged period of time were more likely to also mention issues relating to difficulties caused by a health condition.

The demographic profiles of new JSA and ESA claimants were significantly different in a number of key areas. New ESA claimants were, on average, ten years older than new JSA claimants and were more likely to report having no qualifications. They were also more likely to have been out of work for considerably longer than new JSA claimants. In large part this is related to the fact that a significant proportion of new ESA claimants had moved from Incapacity Benefit (IB) after a Work Capability Assessment (WCA). Over two-thirds of ESA claimants said that their health condition impacted on both their physical and mental, cognitive and intellectual, functions.

## How the Offer is experienced by claimants

### **NJI/NJWFI**

For JSA claimants the topics covered in the NJI were heavily focused around jobsearch, with most covering the type of work they were looking for as well as previous experience, how far they could travel for work and skills and qualifications. There was some evidence of tailoring as claimants with low qualifications were more likely to have discussed the possibility of retraining or changing career. However the depth interviews also indicated that for some disadvantaged claimants there were instances where their particular, more complex, barriers were not being discussed.

Older JSA claimants aged 50+ were less likely to report that their adviser had suggested possible job opportunities to them. However, when advisers were making job suggestions to older claimants they were significantly more likely to report that they were not suitable.

The experience of the NJWFI for ESA claimants was more varied. While it is true to say that the majority of ESA claimants discussed the possibility of working in the future (70 per cent) this means a substantial minority did not. Similarly, nearly half of all ESA claimants did not discuss what steps they could begin to take to find work in the future in the NJWFI. These findings were reflective of what was discovered in the site visits and depth interviews where it was felt that discussions in the NJWFI lacked depth and probing in terms of identifying claimant needs.

In addition to this, ESA claimants were significantly more likely to report that they left their initial meeting with their adviser without an appointment for their next meeting and without being clear as to how often they would meet their adviser. These factors are indicative of the general 'light-touch' approach that advisers tended to take when dealing with ESA claimants.

### **Ongoing support**

Claimants viewed the Jobsearch Review meeting as a box ticking exercise that was more about conditionality than providing in-depth jobsearch support. This reflects what was learned from the case study visits, where staff talked about reducing adviser resource used on them and delegating tasks to Assistant Advisers (AAs).

The majority of claimants felt that the time they had to spend with their adviser was sufficient, although around a fifth to a quarter disagreed with this. JSA claimants and ESA claimants looking for work were likely to feel they had too little time as opposed to too much time by a ratio of 2:1. For ESA claimants not looking for work the ratio was reversed, with twice as many thinking they had spent too much time with their adviser.

Only half of all JSA claimants said they had seen the same adviser for each meeting, but only around two-fifths who had seen multiple advisers said they would have preferred to maintain continuity. However, the depth interviews showed that getting to know their adviser personally alleviated concerns about having to explain complex situations multiple times and so these claimants appreciated continuity.

### Flexible menu of support

There was a significant difference in the provision of jobsearch support, such as help with CVs and suggestions about where to find job vacancies between JSA claimants and ESA claimants who were currently looking for work. This perhaps indicates that advisers were not always identifying that some of the ESA claimants were actually wanting to move in to employment.

Volunteering opportunities were one of the elements of the flexible menu that was significantly more likely to be offered to ESA claimants. The actual participation rates for volunteering among people who had discussed the opportunity were relatively low. However, the depth interviews indicated that this may in part be due to problems with signposting rather than reluctance on the part of claimants. There was evidence that the subject of volunteering was raised in conversations with an adviser but no clear steps were given to claimants as to how they could actually get started.

### Assessment of support

Around seven in ten claimants felt that the advice and support they received matched their personal circumstances. There is some indication that the Offer has made progress in this area when comparing results to those seen in the Jobseeker's Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) evaluation, although caution does need to be exercised due to some variation in sample profile and methodology.

It appeared that tailoring was most effective when the tailoring that was required was relatively standard, for example, a one-off offer of support to provide Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) training and card. For some claimants good tailoring came when it involved listening to the claimant's circumstances and not pushing them at inappropriate times. JSA claimants who had only seen one adviser were also significantly more likely to feel that their support had been tailored to their needs – re-emphasising the importance of adviser continuity.

The biggest problems for tailoring were for disadvantaged JSA claimants. Both the survey and the case studies indicated that advisers did not necessarily manage to identify the complex needs of these claimants and as a result support was not always being tailored appropriately.

# 1 Introduction

Launched in April 2011, the new Jobcentre Plus Offer was designed to change the way that Jobcentre Plus operates by placing an increased focus on outcomes rather than processes. To this end, Jobcentre Plus staff are allowed greater flexibility in the support that they provide to claimants which can be tailored to suit individual needs rather than following a nationally determined structure.

A more detailed summary of the Offer is provided in Chapter 2.

## 1.1 Evaluation aims and objectives

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned TNS-BMRB to evaluate how the Offer is being implemented and the impact it is having on staff and claimants. In particular, the evaluation aims to understand how:

- the programme has been implemented;
- delivery is working on the ground;
- far flexibility is devolved – whether there is real flexibility and whether advisers have the resources locally to provide support;
- advisers are managing the new system – whether they are using flexibility effectively, whether they feel they have the right skills, how they make key decisions and how it helps advisers to support claimants;
- support is flowing for claimants, including how specific elements of the Offer are working and being used – core interventions, advisers flexibility, flexible menu of support;
- claimants experience the Jobcentre Plus Offer and how this differs by claimant type and why;
- the Jobcentre Plus Offer has impacted different claimant types in terms of both claimant experience and outcomes.

## 1.2 Approach

The evaluation approach comprises a longitudinal and multimode research design.

There are three main elements:

- 1 **Developmental stage** – This involved consolidation of previous research and scoping interviews with all District Managers (DMs) across the UK. Interviews with DMs were carried out by telephone between December 2011 and January 2012, lasting approximately 15 minutes. The aim was to obtain a broad understanding of the national picture and to ascertain the varied characteristics of the districts in order to select six districts for case studies in the second stage of the research.
- 2 **Case studies** – Ethnographic site visits and depth interviews with staff and claimants were carried out across six case study districts. The research comprises of two waves, with the first conducted in early-mid 2012 and the second planned to take place in 2013. This aimed to provide in-depth understanding of the Jobcentre Plus Offer end-to-end at district level. In each of the districts, two offices were selected to take part in the research. The case study approach included three elements:

- **Ethnographic site visits** – Adviser interviews were observed, comprising interviews with claimants at different touch points along the claimant journey, as well as across a range of benefit streams (Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Income Support (IS)). Following observations, claimants were asked to take part in a short follow-up interview to discuss their views on the adviser interview and other aspects of the Jobcentre Plus Offer, where relevant. In addition, informal discussions with advisers took place throughout the site visits regarding their perspectives of observed interviews, and their experiences of the Jobcentre Plus Offer more broadly.
- **Staff interviews** – Jobcentre Plus staff at all grades were interviewed using a range of qualitative techniques including: group discussions; mini groups; paired depths; depth interviews. This varied in composition according to staff grade and how the districts were organised. A more detailed breakdown of this approach is provided in the appendices.
- **Claimant interviews** – Telephone interviews with 169 claimants were carried out across the six districts, between April and June 2012. Participants were purposively sampled to include: a range of benefit streams (JSA 18-24, 25-49, 50+; ESA Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) three, six or 12-month prognosis, ESA voluntary, and IS voluntary); different touch points along the customer journey; disadvantaged claimants<sup>1</sup>; sanctioned claimants; early entry JSA stock; and a mix of demographic characteristics.

Please note, the report outlines how findings differ across the range of benefit streams, staff grades and other variables discussed above. Where there is no reference to this, this is because no variations were noted. To ensure the anonymity of the staff and claimants observed and interviewed, the case study districts and offices are not included in this report. Staff quotes are attributed to staff grade only; and claimants’ quotes are attributed using both benefit stream and gender. Furthermore, vignettes included throughout Chapters 3 and 5 are anonymised; and, where this relates to claimants, we have changed people’s names and any potentially identifying features.

**1 Claimant survey** – Longitudinal survey design, interviewing claimants as they first start on the Jobcentre Plus Offer and then again at the end of their experience as they off-flow in to employment, the Work Programme (WP) or another destination. The initial telephone interviews took place between mid-May and late June 2012 and comprised of 1,749 interviews with JSA claimants and 1,285 interviews with ESA claimants. Over the course of 25 minutes, information was collected about the claimants’ early experiences of the Jobcentre Plus Offer, including the initial interview they attended with an adviser and the support options they had been offered and which they had taken up so far. The follow-up interviews are scheduled to begin from September 2012.

This report presents findings from the first wave of the evaluation.

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<sup>1</sup> Disadvantaged claimants were defined as: problem drug or alcohol users, ex-offenders, and homeless claimants.

## 2 Background to the research

### 2.1 Policy context

The Jobcentre Plus Offer for claimants was introduced across Great Britain from April 2011.

Through the Jobcentre Plus Offer, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) aims to create a framework in which Jobcentre Plus Advisers can focus on delivering results rather than completing set activities and processes, and have more discretion to draw down from a wide menu of support. The intention is that this framework allows a more effective and personalised system of support to be delivered to claimants. In the past the support regimes for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants have been heavily prescribed from the centre and support options have been subject to complex conditions.

Under the Offer, claimants have access to a range of support from day one of their new claim, and managers and advisers have the flexibility to help individual claimants according to need. This flexibility is underpinned by the new Performance Management Framework (PMF), which measures performance in terms of the number of claimants moving into work.

Alongside the Jobcentre Plus Offer, there have been a number of wider changes to the welfare system, including the introduction of the Work Programme (WP); the development of a number of Get Britain Working (GBW) measures; the introduction of the Youth Contract; the Welfare Reform Act and Universal Credit.

The Jobcentre Plus Offer model comprises three elements:

- 1 a core series of interventions that must occur throughout a claim;
- 2 flexible adviser support which varies depending on the benefit claimed (JSA, Income Support (IS) or ESA);
- 3 a flexible menu of support options.

#### 1 Core interventions

For JSA claimants, the individual core interventions are:

- an initial New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) which must take place at the start of a claim. The NJI can be split between an assistant adviser and an adviser, sometimes in the form of two separate interviews;
- a Work Programme Referral Interview (WPRI) which takes place at the point of referral to the WP;
- face-to-face Jobsearch Review meetings which must take place at least once a fortnight for the duration of a JSA claim.

ESA claimants in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) must undergo a New Joiner's Work Focused Interview (NJWFI). Normally, this happens shortly after the outcome of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) is known<sup>2</sup>. For lone parents in the ESA WRAG (and partners of ESA claimants with children), this will take place once their youngest child reaches the age of one.

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<sup>2</sup> ESA claimants who are placed in the three- or six-month prognosis WRAGs are usually referred directly to the WP following their NJWFI, so do not tend to experience the Jobcentre Plus Offer to the same degree as those with a longer duration prognosis.

Thereafter, ESA claimants have WFIs delivered flexibly. The timing and duration of each WFI is at the discretion of the adviser. Claimants may also be required to undertake Work Related Activity (WRA) at the discretion of the adviser. WRAG claimants who are lone parents with a youngest child under five will not be required to undertake work-related activity.

### 2 Flexible adviser support

Flexible intervention support options apply to all claimants. Advisers should determine the frequency, duration and content of flexible interventions by assessing individual claimant need through a **diagnostic interview**. They also decide what level of support the claimant needs to undertake active, effective and persistent jobseeking. This will be underpinned by the concept of the **'time-bank'** where advisers determine the frequency and duration of interventions based on claimant needs. Many claimants (JSA claimants in the main) move off benefit with very little help and will have less time-bank investment, whereas others needing more support will have greater time-bank investment.

As well as considering the time-bank, advisers also need to consider whether the claimant would benefit from opportunities available from the **flexible menu** of back-to-work support. When diagnosing a claimant's challenges to taking up employment and considering potential solutions, Advisers can use a range of tools to help them, such as the Customer Assessment Tool (CAT) and District Provision Tool (DPT).

Advisers can offer support from day one of the claim at the level and frequency they consider appropriate for the claimant, to ensure a tailored and personalised service. However, it is also the adviser's responsibility to ensure the support offered to the claimant is not just appropriate but also delivers value for money.

When deciding on support, advisers need to consider whether a claimant's needs can be met through non-contracted provision or the **Support Contract**<sup>3</sup> before considering other, more expensive solutions. Advisers also need to consider whether the support will make a difference to either move the claimant into employment sooner than would have happened without extra help, or help to move them closer to the labour market where work is not yet an option.

### 3 Flexible menu of Back to Work support

Advisers can access a range of external support options, via the 'Flexible Menu of Back to Work Support'. The level and type of support Advisers can access varies by district according to the extent of support commissioned by the District Manager (DM).

Integral to the flexible menu of support is the **Flexible Support Fund (FSF)**. It replaces a range of previous support which helped claimants enter and remain in work. To use the FSF appropriately advisers have to ensure that all other avenues of financial support have been fully explored and it is confirmed that none is available before committing to expenditure.

The fund can be used to:

- overcome barriers to claimants obtaining or moving closer to work;
- pay for certification and some types of training (classroom-based training costing no more than £150);

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<sup>3</sup> The Jobcentre Plus Support Contract delivers support for claimants using a modular format prior to entry to the Work Programme.

- improve jobsearch, job application and interview techniques and travel to interview costs;
- buy additional capacity or content from existing Jobcentre Plus Support Contract providers;
- provide support costs for those on training courses or other provision;
- meet the cost of medical evidence to support a job goal for a disabled person;
- for lone parents to overcome financial emergencies in the first 26 weeks of employment, to help them remain in work.

Another element of flexible support is the range of **GBW measures** which are voluntary in take-up. The measures comprise:

- **Work Clubs**, which provide claimants with a place to meet, exchange and develop skills, share experiences, source employment opportunities, make contacts and get support to help them in their return to work;
- **Work Together**, in which Jobcentre Plus encourages claimants and people on inactive benefits to undertake volunteering as a way of improving their employment prospects while they are looking for work;
- **Enterprise Clubs**, which provide unemployed people interested in self-employment with a place to meet and exchange and develop skills, make contacts, share experiences, receive support and encourage each other to work through their business ideas;
- **New Enterprise Allowance**, which provides access to business mentoring and offers financial support to unemployed people who want to start and grow their own business;
- **Work Experience**, which provides young unemployed people (from 18 to 24 years of age) with the opportunity to be placed with local businesses to gain work experience;
- **sector-based work academies**, which comprise sector-based training with a college/training provider; a work experience placement with an employer in that sector; and a guaranteed job interview (unless exceptionally, the guaranteed job interview is not available).

Other elements from the package of flexible support are:

- **Work Choice**, available for claimants who experience complex employment support needs arising from their disability; who have barriers to work that cannot be overcome using workplace adjustments; will need support in work as well as help with finding work; cannot be helped through other DWP programmes; and who expect to be able to work for a minimum of 16 hours or more per week;
- **skills development**, which provides claimants with the opportunity to develop skills which are relevant to the localised employer base;
- **European Social Fund (ESF) provision**, offering support focused on moving customers closer to the labour market;
- **Mandatory Work Activity (MWA)** which targets those claimants who fail to demonstrate the focus and discipline necessary to seek out, secure and retain employment opportunities. It consists of a four-week, thirty hours per week, community benefit work placement.



### 2.2 Research context

The Jobcentre Plus Offer builds on previous models of flexible delivery of welfare-to-work provision in the UK. This section summarises the evidence base on flexible delivery, and so provides a context for the findings from this evaluation.

The idea that flexible provision is a good thing in delivering welfare-to-work policies goes back a long way. A common theme running through the original New Deal programmes was flexibility – ‘to provide a menu from which claimants and NDPAs could construct a set of activities that matched the needs of the individual claimant (Hasluck, 2000).

Since the original New Deals the importance attached to flexibility has continued to grow. DWP has introduced many programmes and policies, which have given more flexibility to advisers and providers with the aim of improving outcomes. Examples include Employment Zones (EZs), Private Sector Led (PSL) New Deals, Action Team and the Working Neighbourhood Pilots. The drive for greater flexibility and devolving decision-making to front-line delivery has been given more impetus with the introduction of the Jobcentre Plus Offer and the Work Programme.

The rationale for flexibility reflects the need to move away from a ‘one size fits all’ approach to tailored provision, as a reflection of the diverse characteristics and circumstances of benefit claimants.

#### 2.2.1 Defining flexibility

It is important to note that the term ‘flexibility’ can be used to cover a wide range of practices. In some cases, flexibility can be applied within a structured process – e.g. in mandatory interventions such as the Jobsearch Review meeting, where the adviser has some flexibility to tailor the content of this intervention and resulting actions.

In other cases, advisers have greater flexibility or ‘discretion’ to not only tailor prescribed interventions, but to decide what provision is appropriate, as well as when and how it should happen.

In addition, flexibility can take place on a number of dimensions, for example in relation to funding (amount of funding allocated to customers and sources of funding), timing, content, and source (location and nature of provider).

The various models referenced in this section have used different types of flexibility, and all had distinctive characteristics in terms of timing, context, client groups and aims. However, the purpose of this review is to identify common or transferable lessons that can inform the Jobcentre Plus Offer and future models of flexible delivery.

#### 2.2.2 Impact of flexible delivery on client outcomes

Previous research has indicated that flexible delivery can have a positive **impact on customer outcomes**. Studies indicate that the more advisers are able to tailor provision, the more likely they are to help people move towards employment (Hasluck and Green, 2007; Hoggart *et al.*, 2006).

Griffiths *et al.* (2003) concluded that across a number of pilot programmes that introduced more flexibility there were small but significant improvements in the volume and pace of job outcomes. The jobs secured were also found to be more sustainable.

There is also evidence for an increase in **‘softer’ outcomes**. A review of Jobseeker’s Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) support found that some customer groups, such as lone parents, were more likely to report an improvement in their jobsearch skills, were more motivated to find work and in some cases were more confident, when comparing the regime to support they had previously received (Knight *et al.*, 2010).

However, quantitative impact analyses have been unable to isolate the impact of more flexible delivery from other differences between pilot programmes and more traditional approaches. For example, there is evidence that EZs (and to a lesser extent PSLs) cost more than other models, and as a result impact analyses cannot say whether their better job outcomes are because they have more flexibility or more money. Other differences may also contribute towards EZs’ better performance, such as their organisational structure, the sector of the lead provider and the type of provision delivered (Griffiths and Davies, 2003).

### 2.2.3 Client experience and attitudes towards flexible support

Research undertaken with different claimant groups reveals a **higher level of satisfaction** with information that has been tailored to individuals’ needs. For example, lone parents responded enthusiastically when information presented fits with their work aspirations or childcare needs. Similarly, when advising customer groups such as 18-24 and 25+, a more effective approach was found to be to construct advice and information around what the customer had already done to look for work (Drew *et al.*, 2010).

Previous models have succeeded in tailoring support to individuals’ needs, but only up to a point. For example, over half of claimants who received JRFND support felt that it was suited to their personal needs. However, differences in satisfaction were reported for different customer groups (Knight *et al.*, 2010). Separate research on JRFND found that some customers felt that personalised support was on offer while others felt they were being ‘processed’ (Adams *et al.*, 2011).

We now look at the different elements of flexible delivery: Firstly, feedback from the JRFND evaluation on the NJI found that *‘most customers recalled little detail about their NJI and those who did described the meeting as largely an administrative process. Few remembered having been offered any jobsearch advice or additional services. Overall reactions to the NJI were neutral and most respondents said that they had encountered more supportive staff later in their claim’* (Vergeris *et al.*, 2010).

In relation to **support options**, recent research amongst lone parents has examined attitudes to the support included in the Jobcentre Plus Offer. This found that claimants were unaware of the range of support that could be provided under the Jobcentre Plus Offer, and this was because lone parents were not routinely told about the support they could receive; they often had to ask for help in order to receive support. In particular, *‘short sign-on appointments for those not seeing staff trained in lone parent issues were felt to be too quick for them to be able to ask for help’* (Lane *et al.*, 2011).

In the research on JRFND Stage 3, *‘some customers criticised the haphazard or inconsistent way in which services were offered and suggested they would have preferred a menu of options at the outset. Customers were generally satisfied with the services they received, but some – particularly those from a professional background – felt that the range of services on offer was inadequate for their needs’* (Adams *et al.*, 2011).

In JRFND, *‘help with CV writing, job applications and interview skills stood out as the most useful forms of help.’* In addition, *‘the services which customers in the qualitative sample valued most were*

referrals to training, support from an employment engagement officer and the MWRA<sup>4</sup> (Vergeris et al., 2011). Research among Jobcentre Plus customers has also shown that, for customers actively looking for work, advisers suggesting different types of work other than the ones customers were interested in was a key driver of satisfaction.

*'This suggests that respondents appreciate advisers being proactive in helping with their jobsearch. However, on the other hand, advisers suggesting jobs that respondents felt were unsuitable for them was a key driver of dissatisfaction, meaning it is vital for advisers to have a clear understanding of what is appropriate for individual customers.'*

(Howat and Pickering, 2011)

In the Six Month Offer, there were positive attitudes towards self-employment support, while views on volunteering and work-focused training were mixed:

- self-employment support was regarded by customers, providers and Jobcentre Plus staff as a beneficial support during the transition from JSA to self-employment, particularly given that it can take some time to establish a business and become profitable;
- the volunteering experiences of customers in the study varied greatly, with some indicating gains in self-confidence and skills, while others reported few tangible benefits from the experience. Some customers reported feeling pressured or compelled into volunteering under the threat of losing their benefits, counter to policy;
- work-focused training customers reported mixed reviews. Those who found the training to be helpful intended to put it to use: noting it on a CV, applying for related jobs or using the training to pursue self-employment. Negative feedback related to course start delays and the perception that course content was too basic for higher skilled individuals (Vergeris et al., 2010b).

The JRFND evaluation also found some customer resistance to MWRA.

*'Providers were mostly enthusiastic about the benefits of a work placement for customers, but they found some customers resistant to the concept and believed that it was not always appropriate – for instance, for customers with alcohol or drug problems, or for highly skilled jobseekers.'*

(Vergeris et al., 2011)

### 2.2.4 Is flexible delivery more/less successful for different groups of customers?

Hasluck and Green (2007) suggested that flexibility helps most groups. For example, they concluded that the ability to combine different elements of provision is beneficial for long-term unemployed young people and adults, lone parents and Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants. The flexibility to combine elements of support is important for lone parents and those with disabilities as their circumstances can often change significantly over time.

There is evidence that the greater flexibility available in EZs may be particularly effective in helping **older people**. For example, whilst older people have less success in moving into jobs than younger people the gap in success between 50+ and those aged 25-49 is narrower in EZs than for ND25+ (Moss et al., 2003).

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<sup>4</sup> The FND included a four-week spell of mandatory work related activity (MWRA), which could include elements such as: a trial of work; work experience; community work; voluntary work; or certain types of work-focused training.

However, in research on customers aged 50+, advisers felt that although the available, generic support contract provision (in JRFND) was a useful ‘first port of call’, there was a need for more bespoke provision focused on specific 50+ needs. In addition, those aged 50+ were felt to require an additional process of assessment and identification of needs in order to target available support effectively and in timely fashion (Thomas and Pemberton, 2011).

Griffiths *et al.* (2003) concluded that typically **claimants closer to the labour market** seem to benefit most. This reflects the fact that flexibility tends to impact most on those who are closest to the labour market and are relatively motivated; these customers are the most likely to benefit from the short and intensive provision that has tended to typify more flexible programmes. For example, the Tailored Pathways Pilots helped the more job-ready claimants most and the more flexible New Deal for Young People (NDYP) PSLs have been less effective for the more disadvantaged. Also, evidence suggests that flexibility reaches *‘the limits of its capacity and effectiveness in respect of the hardest to help’* (Griffiths *et al.*, 2003). This is because severely **disadvantaged customers** are likely to need a more specialist and sustained provision than has been available to date in mainstream programmes with flexible delivery.

However, Griffiths *et al.* (2003) also note that if used to the fullest extent flexibilities can help the most disadvantaged into work. This is confirmed by other research; for example, Griffiths *et al.* (2006) found that EZs were no better or worse than the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) in helping motivated and job-ready claimants, but were much better at supporting lone parents who faced multiple barriers to employment. Hasluck and Green (2007) note that *‘overall, there is evidence that personalised advice and support is especially effective for those claimants from ethnic minorities facing the greatest barriers to work’*.

Taken together, this evidence suggests that potentially, flexible delivery can make a difference to those with more complex needs, as they will benefit from the personalised nature of provision. However, this has not necessarily happened in the past because of practical constraints – and these constraints tend to mean that those with less complex needs are able to benefit more.

### 2.2.5 Factors affecting the success of a flexible approach

In considering the factors that contribute to success in delivering a flexible approach, it is firstly worth noting that *‘there is a considerable volume of evaluation evidence – and probably a consensus amongst all concerned – that the motivation of the individual customer is a key factor in the effectiveness of any form of provision’* (Hasluck and Green, 2007). This means that elements of delivery need to contribute towards increasing customers’ motivation.

In this context, it is not surprising that a key element determining the success of flexible provision is the **skill of advisers**. Research on Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) found ‘how’ advisers perform WFIs had a marked effect on outcomes achieved, in particular in gaining claimants’ agreement or collaboration in taking steps towards the labour market (Drew *et al.*, 2010). The JRFND evaluation highlighted the *‘importance of attracting and retaining staff with appropriate skills, ongoing training, and the sharing of best practice’* (Vegeris *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, previous research found that the variation in the quality of particular Jobcentre Plus interventions was usually between individual advisers rather than districts (Davis *et al.*, 2007). The specific elements that are important to adviser skills are discussed in Section 2.2.8.

Qualitative research with EZs and New Deal customers to inform Flexible New Deal (FND) (Adams and Carter, 2008) found that continuity (meeting with the same Personal Adviser (PA) on each visit) was important. Similarly, in the research on JRFND, *‘adviser continuity was viewed by staff as essential for developing a relationship of trust and rapport’* (Vegeris *et al.*, 2011).

Lewis *et al.* (2005) found that the **pace and intensity of support** is particularly important for claimants' longer-term progress. In particular, support has been found to be more effective for some groups when delivered at an early stage of eligibility, for example for lone parents experiencing NDLP and LPWFIs (Cebulla *et al.*, 2008). Related to this, there has been adviser feedback that, in the past, interventions were made too late to be effective, particularly for long-term unemployed adults (Hasluck and Green, 2007) and many older people (National Audit Office, 2006).

Griffiths *et al.* (2003) concluded that flexibility works best when:

- PAs have the enthusiasm, skills and aptitude to deal with claimants flexibly and as individuals (confirming the above findings);
- support is not pre-defined, pre-packaged or prescribed, i.e. there is discretion and autonomy too;
- there is a range of flexible tools to address individual barriers to work;
- there are 'flatter' organisational structures so decisions are made at the point of delivery;
- PA working practices are informally driven rather than officially communicated, prescribed or taught;
- support is delivered to claimants intensively and on a one-to-one basis;
- the culture encourages PAs to use their judgement;
- PAs have sufficient time and space to get to know their claimants and build rapport and trust;
- there are dedicated specialist staff who deal with the needs of individual claimants and employers separately;
- administrative systems minimise bureaucracy and paperwork and help PAs do their job;
- MI systems track claimants' progress and monitor performance and outcomes.

Previous research indicates that the **working practices** that support flexible approaches can be as important as the flexibilities themselves. For example, research on EZs found that success could be caused by the amount of flexibility that Jobcentre Plus/EZ areas had in their operations and organisation (e.g. how they procured provision, their ability to recruit new staff, etc.), as well as any fuller use of the flexibilities in actual services (Dewson *et al.*, 2007).

Similarly, in Tailored Pathways Pilot areas, the introduction of case conferences and increased claimant monitoring were felt by some staff to be more important to success than changes in policy and programme design (Griffiths and Davies, 2003).

### 2.2.6 Roll-out and implementation

The research evidence on the roll-out and implementation of previous programmes tends to be specific to each initiative. However, problems with the implementation of flexible delivery can provide transferable lessons. Problems have included:

- in JRFND, restrictions in the flexibility to adapt services to customers' needs, caused by the structure of the programme and the pressure on advisers' time (Vergeris *et al.*, 2010);
- also in JRFND, a lack of innovation in the design and content of services, despite limited prescription on what providers should deliver (Vergeris *et al.*, 2011);
- in Skills Conditionality Pilots, a lack of training and effective communication for advisers (Dorsett *et al.*, 2011).

### 2.2.7 Impact of flexibility on staff/office culture

Dewson *et al.* (2007) noted that giving advisers flexibility can itself boost their motivation and sense of empowerment (Dewson *et al.*, 2007). However, this does depend on the skills, experience and personality of individual advisers. Previous research suggests that advisers vary in the degree to which they feel comfortable in using flexibilities. Nice *et al.* (2008) found that whilst some advisers welcomed the discretion available with the Job Preparation Premium, others would have preferred more ‘framework’ or ‘structure’ within the guidance.

Knight *et al.* (2010) found that advisers delivering JRFND viewed it as a **significant culture change**, with a greater reliance on advisers’ interpersonal skills, knowledge of third-party services and of the local labour market. However, later research on JRFND found that over time, *‘managers indicated that many advisers had embraced the idea of tailoring the interview and services they offered to the needs of the customer and, where appropriate, following up with additional support’* (Vergeris *et al.*, 2010).

Drew *et al.* (2010) noted the difficulty advisers sometimes have in **balancing matters of the conditionality** associated with benefit entitlement, with offering personalised advice and support, for instance when explaining what is mandatory and what is voluntary. The same issue was reported by Knight *et al.*, in relation to JRFND, where advisers sometimes felt unease at discussing more negative aspects of claiming benefits such as conditionality.

There is mixed evidence as to the effect of flexibility on **bureaucracy**. Some advisers thought the flexibilities under Tailored Pathways increased bureaucracy and paperwork to the extent that some were deterred from using them (Griffiths and Davies, 2003). Research into the Job Preparation Premium found that some Jobcentre Plus staff were mindful of how extra flexibility would bring a greater administrative burden (Nice *et al.*, 2008). On the other hand, the greater autonomy and discretion of PAs in EZs and PSLs has enabled them to spend less time on completing forms and bureaucracy (Griffiths *et al.* 2003).

However, in considering the impact of flexibility on staff and office culture, it is important to recognise that other factors can have a major impact. In particular, research has noted that **Jobcentre Plus performance targets** have had an impact on adviser behaviour and morale. Hasluck and Green (2007) conclude that *‘... there is also a substantial body of evidence that their [PAs] behaviour, decisions and morale is often driven by considerations of Jobcentre Plus performance targets, in some cases to the detriment of the individual customer.’*

### 2.2.8 Adviser flexibility

Previous evidence has indicated the ways in which advisers have used flexibility when dealing with customers. For example, there is evidence of advisers using different styles for different claimants. Also, when dealing with older claimants, jobsearch requirements were more minimal when compared to younger claimants and advisers expressed more optimism when advising older JSA claimants. Additionally, when explaining the purpose of WFIs, advisers placed a stronger emphasis on returning to work when talking to younger claimants than older claimants (Sainsbury *et al.*, 2010).

The increased use of adviser discretion in flexible delivery places a greater emphasis on diagnosis and assessment. According to Nunn *et al.* (2009), Jobcentre Plus staff are reasonably confident in identifying additional needs, but *‘this is less so in relation to ‘hidden’ disabilities and needs related to mental health and behavioural issues’* (Nunn *et al.*, 2009).

Research feedback on the use of the CAT (in 2009) by advisers emphasises that **assessment tools** can be used in different ways by advisers, and with varying degrees of effectiveness. For example,

some advisers used it routinely, while others did so only on a discretionary basis. The research also observed some advisers adopting a 'tick-box' approach, which was seen as *'missing a valuable opportunity to work with customers to identify real barriers to employment and ways in which they might be overcome'* (Bellis et al., 2009).

There is also some evidence that advisers are less effective without systematic support instruments, as instruments give a systematic means of assessing need and can avoid the inconsistency that may arise with adviser discretion (Lechner and Smith, 2005). Also, there is evidence that, even without support instruments, advisers may introduce their own typologies as a way of distinguishing customers, and these may be less robust than those developed as part of a more structured assessment model. This type of informal categorisation tends to be more prevalent where caseload numbers are high and/or time spent with customers is limited (Rosenthal and Peccei, 2006).

There is considerable evidence on the **key factors** that affect the success of adviser flexibility.

As noted above, customer motivation is key to the success of intervention, and advisers who have used flexibility most successfully have managed to build a **trusting and productive relationship** with claimants. *'Tailoring provision then reinforces the good relationship because claimants do not feel compelled into participating but rather feel engaged in deciding what is best for them.'* (Griffiths et al., 2003).

In tailoring provision, it is important for advisers to be guided by what the customer has said about their circumstances, so that customers can see that the support relates to, or is fitted to, their work aspirations, childcare needs, etc. (Drew et al., 2008). During interviews, advisers should try to *'invite the customer's story'*, for example using open questions to elicit claimants' preferences, goals and history. This approach can be contrasted with advisers who provide information about programmes and schemes in a relatively 'formulaic' manner (i.e. not tailored to an individual's circumstances).

Drew et al. (2010) identified positive aspects of advisers' approach:

- **collaborative** in their approach to the interview, treating the relationship with the claimant as a partnership;
- **directive** – guiding the interview agenda, and providing explicit instruction to claimants on a range of practical matters, such as CV construction, what to wear to an interview, how to answer interview questions, and how to find suitable childcare;
- **proactive** – pursuing employment and training opportunities there and then during the interview, or proactively calling a customer if a job vacancy becomes available, rather than adopting a 'wait and see' attitude.
- **positive** about the claimant, for example highlighting marketable skills;
- **challenging** – requiring claimants to engage actively in job seeking, and encouraging them to think differently about their situation.

In the research on skills screening, best practice in relation to advisory skills, as observed by researchers during the WFIs, included: probing into claimants' work experience and skills to identify gaps; exploring claimants' transferable skills; challenging unrealistic job goals, and ensuring claimants' commitment to particular courses of action. More negatively, some advisers failed to question claimants adequately and missed key pieces of information, or made judgements about claimants' skills or job goals with little evidence to substantiate their reasons for doing so (Bellis et al., 2011).

The **language** used in any assessment is also very important. It needs to be clear and comprehensible to customers, and 'in their own language' rather than the language of administration and process (Levesley et al., 2009)

In addition to positive interview skills, research has highlighted the importance of advisers having a strong **knowledge of available provision**. For example, in the Six Month Offer, the introduction of the options to customers was influenced by the degree of experience an adviser had with the advisory process, their familiarity with providers and knowledge of provision (Vergeris *et al.*, 2010b). Research on EZs (Adams and Carter, 2008) and JRFND (Adams *et al.*, 2011) also refer to the importance of advisers being informed, e.g. about sector-specific requirements and available training.

### 2.2.9 Flexible support measures

There is a body of evidence that it is the **overall package** of support that is important to flexible delivery. For example, advisers delivering NDLP felt that the overall package received by participants was more important in achieving success than the individual elements of provision (Hasluck and Green, 2007). Similarly, evidence on long-term unemployed adults suggests that it is bundles of provision that work for this group (*ibid*).

Previous programmes have varied in their ability to provide a full **range of different support measures**. In WORKSTEP it was an important, positive aspect of the programme that flexibility in the range and types of support was available; this allowed support provided through the programme to be tailored to the specific needs of individual customers, reflecting the wide-ranging needs of disabled people.

In contrast, in JRFND there was *'evidence to suggest that the choice of services on offer was narrow and did not address the full range of customer needs, contrary to what might be expected from a 'black box' approach'* (Vergeris *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, in some Tailored Pathways areas and New Deal re-engineered 25+ areas, some advisers were disappointed by the poor choice and quality of local contracted provision which they felt restricted their ability to tailor support to individual needs (Griffiths *et al.*, 2003).

In particular, previous programmes have struggled to provide sufficient **training options**. In the research on Skills Conditionality Pilots, *'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'* (Dorsett *et al.*, 2011). Research on NDLP noted a shortage of training opportunities with enough flexibility to meet the manifold needs of lone parents (Thomas 2007).

The provision of a wide range of support options depends on maintaining close working relationships with providers, *'to ensure that referrals are appropriate and meet the skills needs of individuals and employers'* (Bellis *et al.*, 2011). In JRFND, Jobcentre Plus managers and advisers reiterated the need to build relationships with providers, and suggested that this had become more difficult because of the move towards regional and national service contracts (Vergeris *et al.*, 2010).

The ability to offer wide-ranging and flexible support can also be held back by **Jobcentre Plus contracting arrangements**. The evaluation of Fair Cities found that there was not enough flexibility to restructure contracts in the light of experience gained (Atkinson *et al.*, 2007), while the lack of innovative approaches in the Working Neighbourhood Pilots was partially due to the rigidity of Jobcentre Plus procedures. Rigid contracting arrangements also meant that some pilots were less able to respond to customer needs (due to lengthy contracting procedures) which limited flexibility and innovation (Dewson *et al.*, 2007).



### 2.2.10 Summary

The evidence to date indicates that flexible delivery can have a positive impact on customer outcomes and can result in higher levels of satisfaction. Previous research suggests that flexibility tends to help those closest to the labour market the most, although there are also potential advantages for more disadvantaged customers.

Evidence suggests that the main factors affecting the success of a flexible approach are the skill of advisers, continuity, and the pace and intensity of support. The development of a trusting and productive relationship with customers is particularly important. However, the introduction of flexible delivery can be a significant culture change for staff.

This evaluation builds on the existing evidence, by examining the extent to which the Jobcentre Plus Offer successfully uses flexible delivery, and assessing which customers it helps the most. The evaluation also adds to the evidence base on the factors that help or hinder the success of a flexible approach.

# 3 How the Offer is being implemented from an organisational perspective

This chapter explores how the Jobcentre Plus Offer is being implemented from an organisational perspective and aims to pull out differences in implementation between, and within, Jobcentre Plus districts. The chapter is based on the case study findings from in-depth interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff across 12 offices (comprising two offices in each of the six case study districts). This will then provide context for subsequent findings (explored in more detail in Chapter 5) as to how the Offer has been experienced by claimants.

## 3.1 How the Offer is understood by Jobcentre Plus staff

The Offer was understood in different ways by different Jobcentre Plus staff, and (as might be expected given the nature of the Offer) not always as a discrete and cohesive concept. Staff at all levels typically understood that there had been a move towards greater flexibility, with recent changes removing many constraints on contact with claimants and access to support. However, this was not always attributed to specific developments. Rather, these changes were commonly seen as being part of a wider cultural shift towards greater flexibility and a stronger focus on outcomes; shifts that could be associated with a range of initiatives, including the Performance Management Framework (PMF), Lean continuous improvement techniques, 'Developing our Advisory Service' (DAS), and Local Autonomy pilots. This meant that it was difficult for staff to separate out their views about the Offer from other initiatives.

Variations in how the Offer was understood were noted across staff levels:

- **senior staff** (for example, District Managers (DMs) and Customer Service Office Managers (CSOMs)) generally understood the term 'Jobcentre Plus Offer' and recognised how it worked alongside other initiatives aimed at increasing flexibility;
- **middle managers** (for example, Adviser Team Managers (ATMs) and Performance Team Leaders (PTLs)) were aware of the term 'Jobcentre Plus Offer' but had a more fragmented view about what it entailed, associating it with specific elements and practices; for example, they might instantly associate the term with Get Britain Working (GBW) measures or a specific office-level approach aimed at improving off-flow targets;
- **frontline staff** (for example, Personal Advisers (PAs) and Assistant Advisers (AAs)) had the weakest understanding of the Offer as a cohesive concept, or indeed it being part of a cultural shift towards greater flexibility. However, they were aware of recent changes to working practices affecting how they manage and prioritise their workload.

As noted above, the nature of the Offer means that staff may not be expected to have a clear sense of what it means as a distinct concept. However, the vagueness of frontline staff about the principles underpinning the Offer is potentially important as an indicator of how staff understand and engage with the changes (this area is explored later in Sections 3.2 and 3.3).

### 3.2 How the Offer was rolled out across districts

There were a range of approaches to rolling out the Offer which varied between districts and also within offices in relation to both the implementation and communication of the Offer.

In terms of the implementation of the Offer, there was variation in how staff were involved in changes resulting from the Offer, both initially and ongoing. In some districts a predominantly centralised approach was employed under the direction of the senior management team through district frameworks. In other districts the freedom of greater responsibility for planning, priority-setting and budgeting was given to individual offices or clusters of offices to tailor the Offer to meet claimant needs – in this sense they took responsibility for taking forward and communicating any changes. For example, in one district, offices were tasked with making changes locally and given a three-month period to migrate from the old system to the new Offer.

*'It was down to each office to take forward.'*

(DM)

A more localised approach to roll out can be seen to be linked to the challenges facing districts where there were high levels of diversity across offices in relation to the local labour market (for example, varying levels of affluence and skill base), claimant need and existing staff resource structures.

The way in which staff were made aware of the Offer also varied according to staff levels. Districts typically adopted a predominantly top-down approach to communicating the Offer to staff under the direction of the senior management teams. This involved senior (and to some extent middle) managers taking part in workshops and training exercises to both receive information about the Offer and discuss and develop changes to service provision. This approach was felt to ensure that messages were provided consistently across the district, at least at senior management level.

*'Everyone's receiving the same message at the same time.'*

(DM)

In contrast, frontline staff (PAs, AAs) were told about changes associated with the Offer in a less structured way using multiple approaches. This resulted in some confusion between the Offer and other initiatives, which may account for the Offer not being seen as a coherent concept (see Section 3.1). Communication was via a range of methods, including workshops and presentations at site level; guidance and updates on the intranet and via email; alignment events; direct demonstrations and training on systems (for example, the Customer Assessment Tool (CAT) and District Provision Tool (DPT)).

In part this less structured approach to frontline staff communication reflects logistical difficulties getting staff together, but may also indicate that frontline staff were predominantly informed about the changes, rather than engaged in the implementation process. This is highlighted by examples of some offices/districts who adopted more structured approaches to engaging and involving frontline staff in developing services (see Office 1). For example, holding workshops at cluster/office level to discuss whether to implement a split New Jobseeker Interview (NJI). In one district where advisers were engaged in shaping service practice, the ATMs introduced a 'count-down clock' to help prepare staff. This provided a time frame for staff to be advised and trained on how best to work within the Offer.

It was also apparent that some offices were adopting more engaged processes going forward, in terms of staff at all levels reviewing progress and best practice. For example, one office established development forums for sharing best practice and case conferencing used to identify adviser training needs (this is explored in more detail in Section 3.4). It will be useful to see how these variations develop over time.

**Office 1****What are they doing?**

- Adviser ‘practitioner groups’ to consult on new practices.
- Split NJIs to free up adviser time for diagnostic meetings and ongoing support.
- One-to-one adviser caseloading from the diagnostic meeting.
- Use of case conferences and staff presentations to share best practice.
- Provider presentations and on-site visits for advisers to learn about support.

**What is underpinning this?**

- High levels of staff consultation resulting from the district’s Local Autonomy bid.
- A culture of reviewing practices due to their experience of the Lean initiative.
- High awareness of support options due to ongoing communications.

### 3.3 How the Offer is delivered

Overall, it was clear that the principle of greater flexibility had been embraced across the case study districts, with changes put into practice within the individual offices. This has resulted in a range of delivery models (and ongoing change) both between and within the districts. Notwithstanding this, it is hard to distinguish what the driving force behind changes to working practices has been and it is possible that the increase in flexibility is the result of other factors. For example, a strong emphasis on off-flows was noted in many offices (see Section 3.3.1) which perhaps indicates the influence of PMF. This section explores these issues, outlining the different delivery models observed within the case study districts and exploring what appears to underpin these variations.

#### 3.3.1 Overview

As you would expect, given the shift away from process-driven working, there was wide variation in how the Offer was being delivered across the case study sites. Variations in how support was delivered were noted both between and within the districts, and in some cases even within individual offices. For example, in one office different teams had adopted different approaches to diagnosing support needs and delivering support for particular claimant groups.

Key variations between the offices centred around the use of caseloading, how the office was structured, and the flexible use of adviser support. Before considering what underpins these variations between offices, each of these areas is outlined in more detail:

- **Use of caseloading** – Offices had varying approaches towards caseloading claimants with specific advisers (or adviser teams). This ranged from offices with little or no caseloading, to offices where claimants were caseloaded to a single adviser for the entire claimant journey. Alternatively, claimants could be assigned to adviser teams for different stages of the journey, corresponding to specific off-flow targets (see Office 2).

### Office 2

#### What are they doing?

- Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) adviser teams are organised according to stages of customer journey (1-12/13-25/26+ weeks) and separate teams for JSA 18-24, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Income Support (IS) claimants.
- Structured approach towards support provision and mandate for each stage of the customer journey.
- Stage 1: Support limited to CV writing and basic skills training (where relevant).
- Stage 2: Access to wider provision and increased attendance at Jobcentre Plus.
- Stage 3: Mandatory Work Activity (MWA) and daily contact with claimants.
- Cohort approach to prioritising customers, whereby advisers focus on claimants approaching specific off-flow targets (weeks 13, 26, and 52 of the claim).
- Case conferencing and ATM oversight used to manage adviser interactions.

#### What is underpinning this?

- Large size of customer base driving need for journey split.
- Staged approach allows effective off-flow monitoring.
- Focus on effective office systems and practices through experience of the Lean Offices pilot.

- **Office structure** – Typically offices were split into teams of advisers (led by ATMs and PTLs) focusing on specific groups of claimants. The way in which these claimant groups were defined varied considerably between the offices; for example, claimants could be divided between teams alphabetically or according to stages of the claimant journey. Similarly, offices could have specific adviser teams dedicated to new claims and 18-24 year-olds, or generic staff covering all claimants at all stages (see Office 3).

### Office 3

#### What are they doing?

- JSA adviser teams organised by alphabet (one team covering A-K, and one team covering L-Z), covering all JSA claimants (including JSA 18-24).
- Team approach to caseloading, with individual PAs teamed up with two AAs to share information and provide continuity for claimants.
- Split NJIs to free up adviser time for diagnostic meetings and ongoing support.
- CSOM oversight of case conferences to monitor progress and identify best practice.
- Publicised monthly and yearly off-flow stats by adviser to promote competition, identify and share best practice.

#### What is underpinning this?

- Focus on providing a named adviser is driving office structure and team approach to caseloading.
- Emphasis on off-flows driving inter-office competition.

- **Adviser support** – The extent to which advisers were using more flexible approaches to contact and support claimants varied between the offices. This ranged from offices where advisers were continuing to see claimants at regular face-to-face appointments, to more innovative approaches, such as ad hoc meetings, telephone contact and group sessions for new claims. The format of adviser support offered to claimants was dependent on advisers' diagnosis of claimant needs and/or decisions made at office level; for example, several offices had implemented structured group sessions to maximise adviser resource (see Office 4).

### Office 4

#### What are they doing?

- Team approach to caseloading, with individual PAs teamed up with two AAs to share information and provide continuity for claimants.
- Running group diagnostic sessions for 18-24 claimants.
- Early IT training sessions for claimants to aid jobsearch.
- Group sessions to discuss Work Programme referrals with claimants.

#### What is underpinning this?

- Group sessions are being implemented to drive efficiency and speed up the new claims process.
- Open to exploring new practices resulting from participation in the Local Autonomy pilot.

As noted above, it was difficult for staff to pinpoint what was driving these changes to working practices. However, it was clear that a number of factors influenced how offices had developed their own delivery models. This included:

- offices' prior experience of initiatives that promoted flexibility;
- local area characteristics (relating to local labour market conditions, as well as local Jobcentre Plus staff skills and capabilities);
- the extent to which off-flow targets had been devolved within the office.

It was clear that certain offices were further ahead with applying flexibility to their working practices. This was underpinned by the fact that they had **recent experience of initiatives** with similar goals to the Offer; for example, the Lean continuous improvement techniques and Local Autonomy pilot. This experience meant that offices had already started adapting and moving away from process-driven working practices and therefore, seemed better able to take advantage of increasing flexibility under the Offer. This suggests that the mindset of embracing flexibility may take time to establish itself within offices.

Staff felt that **local area characteristics** were fundamental in terms of how the Offer was delivered, both in terms of the local claimant base, and their own Jobcentre Plus staff.

- It was important for offices to be able to respond to the size and nature of the local claimant base, meaning they could focus resources where this would produce the best outcomes. For example, in one very large office claimants were divided into separate adviser teams according to stages of the claimant journey (see Office 2). This was felt to be the best way for frontline staff to develop expertise in specific support options, and for senior staff to be able to monitor performance and target off-flows.
- Service delivery also varied according to local staffing resources. For example, several offices had developed separate teams dealing with new claims. This was predominantly so that this more process-heavy part of the claimant journey could be dealt with by AAs, relieving PAs to focus on providing more complex support for claimants. Similarly, one office allowed frontline staff to adopt different approaches to how they managed their workload based on an assessment of how they worked best. This allowed staff who got better results using a more structured approach to continue working in this way, while others benefited from more flexible approaches to handling their workload.

It was clear across all districts that **off-flow targets were paramount**. This predominantly applied to JSA claimants, although ESA off-flow targets were also in place and monitored. The degree to which these targets were devolved within offices varied, and appeared to affect the extent to which advisers were encouraged to use their discretion. For example, in cases where off-flow targets were monitored at adviser level, either through adviser league tables or off-flow competitions, advisers felt encouraged to use more innovative approaches to contacting and supporting claimants as long as this resulted in outcomes.

*'They [advisers] have to understand that there is a still a bottom line. The bottom line here is off-flow.'*

(ATM)

Overall, the spectrum of delivery models observed across the six case study districts implies that flexibility has indeed been embraced. This is particularly true at senior staff level, with more variable degrees of discretion and autonomy for frontline staff. There is still a strong emphasis on processes, but this appears to be more closely aligned to local office needs and more focused on outcomes. It will be important for the next wave of the evaluation to focus on how these delivery models develop over time.

### 3.3.2 How core interventions are delivered

The introduction of the Offer was not intended to modify the delivery of the existing core interventions. However, it is necessary to assess if there were any consequences of the implementation. This section will explore what, if any, changes have been introduced as a result of the new Offer on the following core interventions:

- NJI for JSA claimants;
- Jobsearch Review meetings for JSA claimants;
- New Joiner Work Focused Interviews (NJWFIs) (ESA claimants) and ongoing Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) (ESA and IS claimants).

#### *New Jobseeker Interviews – JSA claimants only*

The main change identified in relation to the core interventions was the introduction of split NJIs. Splitting the NJI meant that advisers could separate the conditionality and diagnostic elements, so that diagnostic interviews could be completed up to four weeks after the initial conditionality interview to finalise a claim. This was implemented in all but one of the six case study districts. The length of time between the conditionality and diagnostic elements of the NJI varied from two to six weeks. A maximum of four weeks between the two interviews was seen as ideal, but was not always achieved due to diary constraints; for example, due to limited adviser time available to book diagnostic interviews. Additionally, advisers discussed not always having enough time to do as much as they would have liked in the diagnostic interview, and in those cases would try to schedule a further interview as soon as possible afterwards. Advisers felt any delays in carrying out the diagnostic element had potential implications for claimants not getting the support they needed early on, and therefore, also on advisers' ability to meet their week 13 off-flow targets.

*'I think for the customer if a diagnostic could be done at day one that's the best time [because] we've got a 13 week off-flow target to meet, the ticking time bomb of that ticking away ... it could be two weeks later before they're seeing an adviser to [do the diagnostic element] and that interview in itself is quite a lengthy interview. If diaries are choc-a-block then it could be another two weeks or another time ahead that advisers are actually working with that customer to try and get them back into work, so I just can't see the efficiency of [delaying the diagnostic element].'*

(ATM)

Splitting the NJI was regarded by many managers as the only way to achieve the conditionality deadline. Faced with limited staff resources, splitting the NJI meant that AAs could be used to quickly establish the conditionality of the claimant's benefit, freeing up PA time for more complex diagnostic interviews later on. In addition, Jobcentre Plus managers felt that fairly high natural off-flows in the early weeks justified focusing resources on those claimants who were not likely to find work themselves early on during their claim. However, this was not universal, and indeed one office reverted to combined NJIs when they found that off-flow rates in the first four weeks were not sufficiently high to justify continuing with split NJIs.



*'Because resources are limited, you don't want to be having that [diagnostic] conversation with people who are going to sign off in week six anyway, so because it's a 40-minute interview ... you try to avoid it where you can. So if you have it too early, you are interviewing some people you needn't have interviewed. If you leave it too late, you are starting a bit late with those people.'*

(CSOM)

The introduction of split NJIs could also be related to other factors, such as increased footfall due to high unemployment levels. In one office, the conditionality meeting had been allocated to a neighbouring office to ease pressure on staff time.

Split NJIs were not in operation in one district because advisers had been consulted and felt the process would be too complicated and would not work within their current resources (see Office 5). There were similar issues in the delivery of combined NJIs, with advisers unable to cover a full diagnosis in those meetings. This was not just due to time restrictions, but also claimants' own capacity to discuss their needs fully within the first meeting. Advisers felt it took a couple of weeks for claimants to think about their needs and skills in relation to the current labour market. Staff generally accepted that because of these issues, the diagnosis element of the meeting would often roll on to the next adviser appointment.

### Office 5

#### What are they doing?

- Team approach to caseloading, with individual PAs teamed up with two AAs to share information and provide continuity for claimants
- Frontline staff 'working groups' to advise on changes to practice (for example, recommending that combined NJIs continue)
- District-led caseload management sessions for advisers

#### What is underpinning this?

- DAS had been key in influencing the structure of the adviser teams

### *Jobsearch Review meetings – JSA claimants only*

Following the NJI, the next core intervention for JSA claimants was to attend Jobsearch Review meetings. In general, Jobsearch Review meetings were carried out by AAs which again freed up PA time for adviser meetings. Where more complex support needs were apparent, AAs had flexibility to refer claimants to advisers for further support. Communication between AAs and PAs regarding claimants was assisted by updates and notes in an ongoing record (referred to in several offices as an 'action plan'<sup>5</sup>). Some staff felt the information channels did not work well when there were time pressures on the length of Jobsearch Review meetings which could lead to AAs not picking up or passing on relevant diagnostic information to PAs.

In some offices a caseloading approach had been employed (discussed earlier in Section 3.3.1) which provided continuity of contact between a team of AAs and PAs. This approach was felt to result in more effective information flow regarding the individual needs of claimants. It was also difficult to ensure joined-up working where AAs and PAs were no longer located in the same team or floor (see Section 3.3.1) which could lead to a mismatch in advice and support discussed with claimants.

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<sup>5</sup> Please note, this is different to the formalised Action Plan used for ESA claimants.

There was evidence that the Offer had introduced greater flexibility to alter the Jobsearch Review meeting appointment length. In general, this was used to reduce the length of Jobsearch Review meetings to maximise (and therefore, release) AA resource. One office was planning to introduce a 'district speed signing pilot' (as part of a national pilot) where the Jobsearch Review meeting would be reduced to a two-minute process with no jobsearch and conditionality check. The idea of reducing the length of Jobsearch Review meetings was welcomed, in particular where claimants were seen as job-ready, with a good CV and capable of carrying out good jobsearches independently; for example, by registering with relevant employment agencies. However, this was also seen to reflect increased pressure of rising claimant registrations which then led to more of a 'sign and go' process in which the focus was on conditionality rather than back to work support.

### *New Joiner's Work Focused Interviews (ESA claimants) and ongoing Work Focused Interviews (ESA and IS claimants)*

Overall, it was clear that the Offer had made a limited impact on the operation and delivery of NJWFIs and WFIs.

#### **ESA claimants**

It was apparent that senior managers were less able to discuss the role of the NJWFIs and ongoing WFIs in managing ESA claimants. This may be due to uncertainty about what the intended approach should be or because districts were taking a lighter touch approach which was harder to pinpoint and describe. However, the main focus of these interviews appeared to be to discuss achievable steps to enable clients to be more work-ready; for example, introducing structured activities back into their lives, such as, going for walks in park:

*'[ESA advisers] look at more bite size things rather than for a JSA customer, so they would look at what can they do in terms of you know, if a customer had problems going out, for example, so they would look at things like okay, let's look at you going to the park today.'*

(CSOM)

In practice the meeting could also involve advisers providing reassurance to claimants after allocation to the WRAG, especially where ESA claimants were unhappy about the WCA outcome and did not feel ready to think about going back into work.

*'I think it's hard for the ESA adviser and the Assistant Advisers to try and explain that to the ESA customers, because they don't think, a lot of them don't think they should be coming in because they are not well enough to come in and that's the problem, and then when we get them they can spend half the interview telling us what's wrong with them and telling us why they cannot work, not what they can do, you know, so I think the adviser finds it hard trying to get the customers more motivated and think about working in the future.'*

(ATM)

Some districts had acknowledged adviser uncertainty around the role of NJWFIs and WFIs and had put in place more structured frameworks (for example, ESA claimant journeys) to provide guidance on how to diagnosis and prioritise the support needs of ESA claimants:

*'Well I know for a fact that since the introduction of the [District C] ESA customer journey [tool] ... I think it would be fair to say we are seeing more use of provision and generally all round more customer engagement, customers coming back for interviews with their personal advisers, certainly more use of the Flexible Support Fund [FSF].'*

(CSOM)

Advisers acknowledged that they were able to use their discretion in deciding the frequency and method of ongoing contact and WFIs depending on the need of the claimant. For example, they might use telephone contact or shorter/longer meetings than the previously standard 40 minutes.

### IS volunteers

Jobcentre Plus staff found it difficult to identify any direct influence of the Offer on the operation of WFIs for IS claimants. It was generally felt that the operation of WFIs was largely unchanged under the Offer, with any changes to WFIs being due to the increase in their frequency as lone parents approach the ending of their IS eligibility because of Lone Parent Obligations (LPO). There were some offices who felt that WFIs were now too 'light touch' and had therefore introduced proactive phone contact between meetings to discuss support needs. It was felt that this contact could help claimants prepare for the potential transition to JSA. Staff discussed difficulties in introducing the flexibilities and support of the new Offer because claimants were not required to have contact with Jobcentre Plus beyond the standard requirements for WFI

### 3.3.3 How flexible adviser support is delivered

In contrast to the core interventions, flexible adviser support was an integral element of the Offer. As discussed (see Chapter 2), the Offer had introduced greater flexibility for advisers to determine the nature of meetings (frequency, duration and content) to support claimants according to diagnosed need.

Overall, staff felt they understood what flexible adviser support entailed, claiming that guidance and communication about this area had been clear. Therefore, staff felt confident in describing changes to working practices that enabled advisers to manage their caseloads in different ways, underpinned by the principle that support should be tailored according to claimant need. This would be achieved through two methods:

- **claimant prioritisation** – determining frequency, duration and format of contact;
- **claimant diagnosis** – deciding what support to signpost and refer claimants to, and when; and additionally, whether to apply conditionality.

Staff at all levels had welcomed and embraced the principle of flexibility around how claimant caseloads could be managed. DMs felt that this acceptance and understanding of flexibility led to improved job satisfaction and motivation, with advisers empowered to provide more tailored support to claimants. However, in practice it was evident that there was variation in how this worked on the ground. In particular, variations were noted in the extent to which advisers were able to use their discretion to manage their own caseloads and make decisions about prioritising and diagnosing claimants. These variations were underpinned by how far flexibility had been devolved, and the experience and skills of the individual advisers:

**How far flexibility had been devolved:** Office structures and processes impacted advisers' discretion about how to support claimants. While management processes were evident in all case study districts, there were variations in the extent to which these prescribed adviser behaviour and decision making. For example, some offices had introduced fairly structured approaches to managing adviser caseloads, such as a staged approach towards claimant contact, support referrals/signposting and mandation depending on length of claim (see Office 2). In contrast, other offices allowed greater flexibility for advisers to make decisions about how to support claimants, using case conferencing and reviews to monitor activity and identify best practice (see Office 5).

At both ends of the spectrum it is clear that offices are making use of flexibility. The difference between them relates to the extent to which flexibility is devolved within these offices. Adviser discretion may or may not be a result of the Offer, but irrespective of that, it is clear that offices are using flexibility at some level to work according to their priorities. It is also clear that these priorities are predominantly about meeting off-flow targets, with staff at all levels acknowledging increased pressure at district level to meet off-flow targets. Therefore, offices may be using prescribed adviser support (or 'structured flexibility') to manage caseloads in a way that best achieves this.

*'We're a big office and our on-flow is great ... when you've got figures like that and you've got the same number of staff you do have to define a minimum basic standard ... so I can never have true flexibility.'*

(ATM)

**Advisers' experience and skill:** Adviser skill and experience impacted on the extent to which they were able to incorporate greater flexibility into their role, for example, by moving away from more process-driven approaches (which had in the past underpinned the way that they worked) and by offering more tailored support. In particular, certain advisers did not feel confident making decisions about altering contact approaches with claimants or referring claimants to new support options without first seeking managerial reassurance. There was variation identified in approach both within and between offices as a result of the following factors:

- **Length of time in role:** Moving away from process-driven approaches was not always easy for advisers, particularly those who had worked within Jobcentre Plus for a long time and for whom certain ways of working were engrained; for example, automatically booking 40-minute adviser appointments when these may not be necessary.

*'That has been the hard part of it, to get [advisers] to, I suppose, relinquish all those years of processes that they have known.'*

(CSOM)

*'There's very few staff that have been here less than about 20 years. And I've got one adviser who is quite new to the role, she's only been doing it about 18 months and she's found it easier to sort of cut the apron strings a little bit and use flexibilities more. We are getting there.'*

(ATM)

- **Background in working under similar initiatives:** It was felt that advisers who had worked with IS or IB claimants in the past were accustomed to more flexible ways of working within their roles as there was less structured contact required for inactive benefit claimants. Similarly, advisers who had worked under previous flexible initiatives (for example, New Deal advisers) were more familiar with the principles of greater flexibility and how to use this effectively to better support claimants.

**Resources available to advisers** were an additional factor influencing how well advisers were able to make use of flexibility. Whilst training, support and available tools could help advisers to identify claimant needs and to provide support in a flexible way, full diaries and caseloads could limit how this was put into practice. For example, diaries booked two weeks in advance limited the ability to book in a following adviser appointment at a time which was most appropriate for a claimant.

Overall, advisers felt that they now had greater flexibility to tailor support to the individual. However, this was dependent on how far flexibility had been devolved within individual offices, as well as advisers' confidence and awareness of all the support options available for claimants.

In relation to off-flows, staff felt it was too early to tell the impact of greater flexibility and felt that more work was needed at office level to understand what impact the Offer had on off-flow performance. Additionally, Jobcentre Plus staff described a tension between their ability to make use of increased flexibility and continued target-driven behaviour or processes to achieve off-flow targets.

*'As I said to my District Manager last week, we get mixed messages. We've got all this, that you do what's best for the customer and you do a, b and c because that's what the customer needs, and yet there's a target there. Now we are driven by customer service anyway and doing a, b and c should be the best thing but it isn't always, it doesn't always get that target quick enough.'*

(CSOM)

This section will now explore in detail how flexibility was used in relation to two specific areas: diagnosing claimant needs and prioritising claimant contact and support. Each are discussed in turn

### *Diagnosing claimant needs*

Claimant diagnosis was seen to work in the following ways:

- an initial assessment of needs at the beginning of the claim as part of the NJI or NJWFI meeting;
- ongoing assessments of how these needs develop as part of the adviser caseload meetings.

As outlined in Chapter 2, initial needs assessments should take place during the NJI, with advisers using the CAT to identify claimant support needs. The CAT comprises ten statements to be answered by the adviser at the end of the interview to record claimant key attributes that could give the best chance of finding work. It is intended that this then enables advisers to consider whether claimants would benefit from opportunities available from the flexible menu of back-to-work support. In practice, variations were observed in how offices (and indeed individual advisers) approached claimant diagnosis.

Offices generally used formalised approaches to categorise claimants in terms of the amount of support they would require to get into work. Typically, claimants were classified as falling into one of three groups (in many offices, this followed a colour classification of red, amber, green; referred to as the 'RAG' rating):

- claimants with complex needs requiring wide-ranging support;
- claimants with relatively straightforward barriers to working, requiring specific advice and support;
- claimants who are relatively work-ready requiring only light-touch support.

These assessments were purportedly based on use of the CAT and/or office specific classification tools. In one office, the team charged with working with 18-24 year-old JSA claimants had developed their own classification tool, which allowed claimants to rate themselves according to a list of 12 jobsearch skills. This allowed advisers to then categorise the claimant as falling into either red, green or amber groups.

Despite the claim that the CAT was routinely implemented within each district, it was acknowledged that often it was only used in principle as a tick box exercise rather than as a primary tool for decision-making around support needs. Many advisers completed the CAT after the interview as they felt uncomfortable rating claimants while they were still present.

*'I do it yes, but not in front of the customer. My understanding is it is your perception of where the customer sits and I don't see why you would do that with the customer sitting there.'*

(Adviser)

*'The staff I know have not totally bought into the [CAT] tool, and it is the whole scoring mechanism of it and then sharing that with the customer that I think they find quite difficult, so what they will be comfortable doing is asking questions, finding out what the customer needs and progressing the customer through the information. They are not comfortable with telling the customer the score.'*

(ATM)

Others felt the tool was too blunt and subjective, which in itself created inconsistencies in how PAs categorised claimant need. For example, there were variations in whether advisers based their diagnosis on what was openly discussed with claimants or whether they included their perceptions of needs that may not have been openly acknowledged, such as assumed problems with alcohol or drug use.

Managers suggested that many advisers were using their intuition, experience and knowledge as their main diagnosis tool rather than the CAT. This echoes findings from Bellis *et al.* (2011) that formal tools were often not used and a 'light-touch' eyes and ears approach was used instead to screen skills. Advisers further suggested that there were clear advantages of staff using good claimant rapport and listening skills developed through experience to support claimants because that in turn could provide a more holistic assessment. However, there were concerns about advisers who did not have these honed skills, or the relevant experience, and relied solely on their own interpretation of need. Managers discussed less experienced PAs feeling apprehensive about asking pertinent diagnostic questions to claimants with potentially sensitive issues or needs.

*'I actually observed an interview today where somebody was not comfortable discussing illness but they had read before the individual came in that she suffered with depression and when asked the question she did not respond and he didn't push it further.'*

(ATM)

Staff also felt that diagnosis was an ongoing process which was reliant on the rapport and relationship between claimant and adviser. Claimants needed time to discuss and share their needs with advisers, especially where these were complex and sensitive; for example, health issues, such as mental health problems.<sup>6</sup>

*'What you are trying to do is build up a bit of rapport, get them to trust you a little bit, because there can be issues that maybe aren't apparent at day one and they don't trust you enough to tell you at day one either, so until they get to know you a bit and that's where sometimes things like health problems come out that they are maybe embarrassed to tell you about, maybe home issues, maybe even drug abuse, alcohol abuse, things that maybe aren't quite apparent when they are coming into the office.'*

(Adviser)

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<sup>6</sup> This finding is reflected in other studies; see Donaldson, D. (2012). *Working Age Claimants with Complex Needs: Qualitative study*. Department for Work and Pensions. In-House Research Report No.12.

An informal approach to diagnosis based on advisers listening and responding to need was particularly apparent for IS and ESA, with limited use of the CAT for these claimant groups. From a managers' perspective, ESA advisers were not always equipped with the specialist skills and knowledge required to diagnose and identify needs for this claimant group. The potential implication is that discussions are predominately reliant on claimants' views of their own work readiness, with those who felt less work-ready being less likely to discuss their needs and therefore be offered support by advisers.

*'My decisions and my discretion to [decide] when I see them again ... I usually base that upon the information that they tell me, the treatment that they're getting at the moment, whether or not they're actively keeping an eye on the local labour market and it is, I suppose, it's gut instinct.'*

(Adviser)

Diagnosis decisions were further supported by case conferencing, sharing best practice, dedicated diagnostic training and ATM and PTL observations and one-to-one discussions. For example, one office had employed a work psychologist to deliver training on solution-focused interviewing, which had helped to shift advisers' mindset.

*'[Diagnostic training was used] to help really with the change of cultures ... what does a diagnostic interview look like and I think probably over the years our advisers have followed a set pattern ... and there's a lot of box ticking that has taken place and really you know it's about enhancing the advisory skills now and I felt that that's been needed, going back and revisiting those adviser skills.'*

(CSOM)

### *Prioritising claimant contact*

As outlined in Section 3.3.1, increased flexibility appeared to result in increased use of caseloading across the case study districts; albeit in different ways, such as a single adviser (or team of PA and AAs) for the entire claimant journey or separate advisers for specific stages of the journey. It was also evident that flexibility had impacted on how contact with claimants is structured in three main ways:

- intensity of contact;
- format of contact;
- duration.

**Intensity of contact:** Advisers felt that they now had the flexibility to vary contact depending on claimants' needs. Time-banking was not discussed explicitly, however it was clear that the concept was in operation through the use of claimant classification tools and advisers' decision making about contact. The freedom to determine the frequency of contact was most apparent for JSA claimants. Advisers discussed periods of daily contact to less frequent contact of every 13 weeks. However, as outlined above, limited staff time meant that it was not always possible for PAs to tailor meetings to claimant needs.

The Offer appeared to have had less influence on the intensity of contact for ESA and IS claimants. In part, this was because advisers had always had greater flexibility for these claimant groups. Advisers were very much reliant on claimants' own feelings about their work-readiness and whether they wanted additional support to help them prepare towards future employment.

**Duration of contact:** This was no longer set as the standard 40-minute interview, with advisers in many offices being encouraged to book appointments for the time required for that individual claimant. However, advisers were limited in applying flexibility over the duration of contact because they were constrained by pre-booked diary commitments and the slots that were available.

**Format:** Advisers could vary the format of meetings, with the use of telephone calls and home visits, as well as standard face-to-face office meetings. This use of flexibility was applied, in particular, to appointment arrangements for ESA and IS claimants who were less able to attend Jobcentre Plus meetings because of health conditions and childcare arrangements.

### *Use of conditionality*

In principle, advisers had also increased flexibility around the use of conditionality. Advisers felt that discussions around conditionality were aided by one-to-one caseloading because any support or actions made mandatory would then be followed up by their regular adviser and claimants would be more likely to abide by the conditions.

There were variations in the different offices around how mandation was applied to claimants' support referrals/signposting and to jobsearch and work-related activity. In some offices adviser discretion was mainly used to decide whether support referrals/signposting identified using the DPT should be mandatory or not. Allowing claimants to access support on a voluntary basis was seen as a good first approach, especially where the advisers had built up a good relationship with the claimant who was keen to attend, whereas mandatory support was seen as more appropriate for those who were not perceived as actively looking for working.

*'It's that percentage that are either unemployable or don't want to be employable that the mandatory supports and I don't think that's any different really.'*

(CSOM)

In other cases a more structured office-level approach was used – where certain types of support were made mandatory within a claimant's JSAG. For example, one office used a claimant stage approach that required advisers to take mandatory actions for each stage – such as requiring claimants to have an updated electronic CV by week 13 of the claim (see Office 2).

Beyond this, the use of sanctions was broadly unchanged under the Offer and was in the main only applied to JSA claimants. The introduction of the Offer was seen to have had limited impact on the Decision Making and Appeals (DMA) referral process, and sanctions continued to be used predominantly for JSA claimants who had FTAs, jobsearch failures and those who were actively not taking up employment. Additionally, the hardship payments were not seen by advisers to have impacted on the effectiveness of sanctions. In fact most claimants who had been sanctioned could not recall any discussion of hardship payments (see Chapter 5 for further discussion of sanctions from the claimant perspective).

### **3.3.4 How the flexible menu of support is delivered**

This section will explore the flexible menu of support, which was the third core element of the Offer.

The flexible menu of support was broadly welcomed by all staff and was valued as providing some new elements of support. However, in practice the delivery of support was restricted by a number of challenges. There was also an overall sense, by staff, that the menu of support was working well for JSA claimants, but less so for ESA and IS claimants. These points are discussed in the following section.



The flexible menu of support was seen to offer a wide range of programmes which could support more personalised provision. At DM level, it was thought to provide an opportunity for greater use of local providers to deliver tailored support for claimants – ‘local solutions for local people’. The main change for offices since the introduction of the Offer was in fewer restrictions on what stage in a claimant’s journey different types of support could be accessed. Advisers appreciated that claimants could now be offered appropriate support at the right time, including from day one.

*‘Definitely, [Jobcentre Plus support] was very structured before. It was very process driven and I am not sure that they were necessarily intervening with customers at the most appropriate time to progress them.’*

(CSOM)

Across the different elements of the flexible support menu there were consistent barriers to how advisers were able to refer claimants and how the support was provided; specifically:

- limited adviser knowledge of, and confidence in, the provision available;
- access to funding for non-contracted training was highly regulated, complicated and slow;
- challenges in purchasing services from other organisations;
- lack of availability and awareness of local provision, including long waiting lists.

How these relate to specific support options are considered in the sub-sections below.

In addition to these challenges, advisers felt that they required more feedback about what types of support were successful in order to feel confident referring people. This was particularly important given off-flow pressures which meant that advisers need to know support would have an impact, particularly for longer-term support which could be seen to be delaying off-flow.

*‘I think it [the lengthy procurement process for non-contracted training] puts advisers off because really with the way these off-flow targets work you want to get that person in as quickly as possible. If you have got to then procure training and then they go on the training, you have already missed your target before you have even started talking to that customer.’*

(CSOM)

There was also a perception that specialist support for more vulnerable claimants and those not actively seeking work had decreased; and that there was a lack of appropriate provision related to both health support (particularly mental health) and local lone parent services (this will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5). However, there was also evidence of ESA advisers referring to DEAs in order to access specialist support.

*‘The difficulty is the people who have been sick and still consider themselves sick and the doctor still consider sick, we can refer to the Disability Employment Adviser.’*

(Adviser)

It was also evident that there were challenges identifying complex needs for ESA claimants, making it more difficult for advisers to discuss what support options may or may not be suitable.

*‘The customer comes along and doesn’t know what they are capable of doing and the ESA advisers are not, you know, trained in understanding their conditions. So in determining what they can and what they can’t do can make that very difficult in trying to gain agreement with the customer.’*

(CSOM)

This variation for ESA claimants reflected a general view that the Offer was more tailored towards JSA claimants who are actively looking for work.

*‘To be honest a lot of it, it’s the Jobseekers Offer, it’s more around those that are looking for, available for and actively seeking work.’*

(ATM)

### *The process of referral to support*

There was a range of methods for raising staff awareness of provision which were often used in combination. These were:

- **DPT and eBoards<sup>7</sup>:** These tools were commonly used and were seen as relatively easy to access, but some advisers preferred to navigate the system after a claimant interview as they felt uncomfortable doing this in front of claimants due to the length of time required and that claimants may find it difficult to take in the full range of options at one time;
- **provider presentations:** For advisers, hearing directly from providers was useful to understand what specific support programmes involve and the potential impacts and outcomes so they could assess how appropriate they might be for particular claimant groups. One office had given advisers time to visit providers’ premises and view support in action, which was felt to have boosted advisers’ confidence in referring claimants;
- **weekly newsletters and desktop drops:** It was usual for offices to update advisers about local provision through newsletter and desk drops. However, some managers felt this was a timely process and the quantity of information could be overwhelming for advisers.

Some advisers also discussed having a good knowledge of what was available through experience built up working with providers over the years. Conversely, managers were aware that this could lead to complacency, with advisers not exploring other support options which would be more tailored to their claimants’ needs. One DM discussed how it took time to educate advisers so that they could refer to multiple providers if clients had needs which were best served by different types of support and providers. Advisers’ knowledge of provision could be raised through simple practices, for example, an ATM had run a DPT quiz which allowed advisers to think about the different provision available for different types of claimants.

The following section will explore, in more detail, staff views about the implementation and delivery of the specific elements of the flexible menu of support. However, this aims to provide an overview of the implementation of the flexible menu of support rather than a comprehensive evaluation of the delivery of each support measure.

### *Get Britain Working measures*

As discussed in Chapter 2, GBW covers a range of flexible support measures. Yet staff felt GBW lacked clarity as a package of support measures at adviser level; meaning that some elements were hard to distinguish from other provision. Positively, there was a sense that GBW had introduced additional (rather than rebranded) provision, particularly with the implementation of sector-based work academies and Work Together. Another benefit was that in general these measures could be accessed more readily than other provision, with fewer time restrictions.

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<sup>7</sup> eBoards were observed in several offices; essentially, these are local intranets providing advisers with information about the latest job opportunities, upcoming events, and new support options.

*'I think we have more available and customers can access some in a more flexible way, previously if we had, you know we had job clubs that customers could access if they'd been unemployed for six months, but now we have Work Clubs and customers can access them from day one of unemployment so that makes a big difference.'*

(DM)

Measures falling under the GBW banner include:

- **Work clubs:** These were valued by advisers due to their accessibility for claimants, as they were more likely to be located locally. They were largely used as intended by advisers to improve claimants' employability skills; for example, providing support with CV writing and interview techniques.
- **Work experience:** Work experience was often signposted early within JSA 18-24 claims. However, there were initial implementation challenges, with providers not always being set up in time which resulted in delays for claimants starting. Advisers had also experienced difficulty explaining the benefits of the provision following recent negative media attention.
- **Work Together:** It was felt that unlike some of the other GBW measures, volunteering was not a new option for advisers, and was one that they continued to use in a similar way.
- **New Enterprise Allowance (NEA)/Enterprise Clubs:** Both were said to have suffered slow take-up, although it was felt to be too early to judge whether this was due to need or availability as NEA and Enterprise Clubs were not available until six months into a claim. Claimants themselves felt frustrated with delays which they discussed with advisers (explored in more detail in Chapter 5).
- **Sector-based work academies:** Again there had been gradual take up so far. Staff understood this was due to difficulties securing and establishing relationships with employers. In some cases training had been arranged with no work placement and no guaranteed job interview. The reality of long waiting lists meant that it was a challenge for advisers to encourage claimants to use the provision. Despite this, sector-based work academies were valued by ATMs and Advisers because of the potential high rates of off-flows linked to the guarantee of an employer interview.

There were several factors impacting on the use of GBW as a whole. In particular, staff perceptions of the variable quality of providers and provision meant they were not always convinced that provision would meet the needs of their claimants. Furthermore, advisers struggled to persuade claimants to take part in volunteering or work experience, due to claimant perceptions that this involved 'work for free', which was felt to be unfair.

### *Flexible Support Fund*

FSF was seen as the most effective support for claimants who needed help with a single barrier (for example, clothing for interviews, transport costs, vocational certification) and therefore, was typically used as a final push into employment. In this sense, it was not viewed by advisers as necessarily offering something new, but rather a repackaging of the former Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF). Although FSF gave greater flexibility to advisers to use a budget to spend on claimants, managers discussed current widespread underuse of FSF.

According to senior managers, FSF also provided the ability to 'plug gaps' in terms of procuring support which was not offered as a standard part of the flexible menu of support. Despite national evidence of high and increasing use of Low Value Provision (LVP) to purchase one-off training provision, staff in the case study areas described fairly limited but growing use of the FSF for this purpose. Training had been purchased for a variety of group support needs including: lone parent support days; job application training; and, training for people with mental health issues. Where unique or one-off training was required to meet a specific support need, advisers requested that claimants made a business case for this; for example, evidence that the training was required for a specific job offer.

*'I've got somebody at the moment, he's an ex-offender, he's got a job but has been in prison for the last 20 years and if he can get a driving licence they will take him on. We've got a letter from the employer, we'd never ever have thought about driving lessons before but we will with him.'*

(Adviser)

There were three main factors impacting on its use:

- **Level of adviser flexibility:** There was variation in how much advisers were able to spend. This would be expected since it was intended that DMs would have the flexibility to set local guidelines on limits for types of payment and the amount an adviser can award. Generally, staff discussed a budget of £100 to spend at the advisers' discretion. However, this was not always the case, with some advisers being required to get ATM approval for any sum.
- **Advisers' lacking confidence:** It was felt that advisers lack confidence in making decisions about spending money and this was underpinning the underuse. Managers felt that prior to the Offer there had been a culture of quite limited spending on outside training and support. Advisers did not explicitly discuss feeling unconfident to spend FSF. However, this was reflected in advisers' accounts, who described only feeling able to use FSF for small expenses such as travel and clothes.

*'They are not used to being told you've got this money to spend ... because they've never had that freedom. Working for Jobcentre Plus has been so process driven – this is what you do, this is when you do it, this is what you've got, don't spend more than that. If you want to spend more than that you have to ask your manager, if you don't spend it that's great because you're saving us money.'*

(ATM)

The slow take-up was also put down to the pressure of off-flow targets and the fear that any longer-term or new support would not lead to successful job applications and interviews. This risk aversion around spend of FSF was being tackled in some offices through caseload conferencing and sharing best practice.

- **Central procurement process:** There had been limited use of FSF for the procurement of training. The process could take up to six to eight weeks and involved sign off at district level for approval and tendering<sup>8</sup>. This was regarded by advisers as a slow and onerous process which led to advisers and managers feeling that FSF-funded training was less effective in providing support which would meet off-flow targets.

*'I think it puts advisers off because really with the way these off-flows work you want to get that person in as quickly as possible. If you have got to then procure training and then they go on that training, you have already missed your target before you have even started talking to that customer.'*

(CSOM)

Examples were given by managers where job offers were dependent on a short course being taken and had disappeared by the time approval had come back. In one office, an adviser tried to access vocational training for a JSA claimant, but was told they would not approve the training as similar provision was available in a location about 100 miles away. This was not feasible for the claimant who was a lone parent, which frustrated the adviser and their team.

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<sup>8</sup> In recognition that the delay in procurement was causing claimants to lose out on jobs, a new process was introduced to ensure that where the customer had a job outcome with a start date, the training was procured within eight days.

*'You're telling us to have flexibility with our customers, where's the flexibility with our provision?'*

(ATM)

### *Mandatory Work Activity*<sup>9</sup>

MWA was regarded by advisers as a good test of a JSA claimant's commitment to finding work and was generally used as intended for claimants who failed to demonstrate that they were actively seeking, securing and retaining employment opportunities (see Chapter 2 for more detail). This also included non-compliance of mandatory requirements and suspected working. However, there was some variation across the districts in how MWA was applied in practice. In some offices there was additional use for claimants who had a lack of experience and were not ready or eligible for the GBW work experience measures. In another office, MWA was used as part of a consistently applied staged approach for long-term unemployed who were in weeks 26+ of their claim (see Section 3.3).

The key barrier to the use of MWA related to a lack of provision. Across the districts there had been problems with insufficient places for the number of referrals. This was backed up by the experiences of claimants who had been referred to MWA but had not yet started (see Chapter 5 for more detail). This then led to waiting lists and competition for places with referrals in many cases being subject to a first come, first served system.

### *Work Programme*<sup>10</sup>

Views of the Work Programme were only lightly touched upon during staff interviews. In the main, Work Programme referrals were mandatory at the end of claimants' required journey and were discussed with claimants prior to this as a threat or last resort; for example, telling JSA claimants that if they did not make efforts to find employment they would be sent to the Work Programme in 12 months' time. There was evidence of some offices deferring referrals; for example, where claimants had just started NEA and Enterprise Club support. One office deferred Work Programme referrals for 18-24 year-olds as part of a standard approach, in order to have a final push to achieve off-flow targets.

There was limited evidence of consistent use of voluntary early referral but where this appeared to be working more successfully this was based on advisers selling the benefits of more specialist provision for disadvantaged and hard to help groups under the Work Programme.

*'With people who have got really severe learning difficulties, [WP providers] have got partners that they will pull in from other districts ... they wouldn't work with Jobcentre Plus outside of that because we don't have the contracts with them.'*

(ATM)

One office discussed having high numbers of voluntary referrals for JSA 9-12 months where advisers had identified complex or multiple barriers for claimants moving towards employment. Another office was specifically looking at ways to increase voluntary ESA Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) group referrals by encouraging ESA advisers to signpost claimants to initial information sessions with Work Programme providers.

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<sup>9</sup> A separate evaluation of MWA is currently underway, and is due to be published in December 2012.

<sup>10</sup> A separate evaluation of the Work Programme is currently underway, and the first report is due to be published in November 2012.

The main factor impacting on Work Programme referrals was the lack of adviser understanding. There was a general acknowledgement that the Work Programme provided flexible and wide-ranging support. However, it was clear that typically advisers and middle managers had a limited understanding of the Work Programme which had contributed to a ‘them and us’ attitude. In most districts there had been little contact between Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme staff which could have potentially led to less informed discussions with claimants about the programme (see Chapter 5 for the effect on claimants). There were also frustrations felt by both managers and advisers that the Work Programme financially benefited from Jobcentre Plus preparatory work with claimants and/or did not contribute to Jobcentre Plus off-flow target figures.

*‘Well I mean when [claimants] have done 12 months signing on, they go to the Work Programme but when they go to the Work Programme they are effectively written off so we don’t get any results and we don’t get any feedback from the Work Programme.’*

(Adviser)

Where relationships between Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme staff seemed to be working better, this was facilitated by the use of ‘warm handovers’ (advisers making an initial call to the provider and then handing the phone to the claimant to discuss their referral), monthly meetings and presentations by Work Programme providers.

### *Support contract*

There was a lack of understanding of the term ‘support contract’ at all levels, despite good awareness of the individual provision it provided. It was used in practice extensively for JSA claimants because of its emphasis on jobsearch support provision. It was also often offered using adviser discretion rather than as a mandatory form of support. However, from anecdotal discussion it can be seen that staff were least positive about the impact of Support Contract provision and reported high levels of FTA.

The factors impacting on its use were:

- **Inflexibility of the modular format:** It was viewed as being fairly inflexible due to its fixed module approach which made it hard to book spaces at the time needed for claimants. One district was working with Support Contract providers to increase the number and frequency of the most popular modules, such as jobsearch skills.

*‘Essentially we have recognised the barrier that the customer needs addressing, but by the time the providers are going to run the next course is three months down the line and we can’t move the customer forward because there is not another way of accessing provision, so we have to wait so long for all the providers to provide the provision that by the time we have put them on there they have lost interest.’*

(ATM)

- **Perceived variation in quality of the provision:** There were concerns about the quality of provision, with some advisers feeling that it could be outdated. Typically, advisers would more often refer claimants to Work Clubs offering the same type of support. It was also felt that there was a lack of feedback on the outcomes of the training. It was suggested by some managers that quality checks or reviews of providers would help to provide transparency and raise adviser confidence in the provision. Additional measures for monitoring and providing feedback on the quality of support were generally regarded as beneficial for all types of support offered as part of the flexible menu.

### *European Social Fund*

Advisers were able to access ESF support to help claimants move towards employment. However, there was overall limited awareness of ESF which can partly be explained by its non-contracted support status. Awareness was reliant on advisers' knowledge of the funding of local provision via ESF. In one district, ESF had been used to purchase services, although the funding had now ended.

The main factors impacting on the use of ESF, included:

- **awareness of ESF providers:** Advisers had limited time to research local provision funded by ESF;
- **location:** Access to ESF is dependent on the level of deprivation within a local area. It was also felt that there was variation in the availability of providers and partners both across, and within, districts.

## 3.4 Sharing best practice

Approaches to sharing best practice varied across the case study districts, with offices adopting more or less structured approaches to identifying and then disseminating best practices; for example, the use of regular forums and channels to share learning and ideas. In some of the case study areas this was organised at district level, which encouraged shared learning between different offices. This meant, for example, the introduction of adviser development forums and district case conferencing. One district had implemented a 'Flexibilities Group' where staff from different offices shared and discussed good practice. Where there was good practice at district level this seemed also to filter down to office level, with innovative initiatives and channels being developed. In other districts, shared practice was limited to office practices, with the ATM, therefore, playing an important role in identifying and facilitating best practice.

Sharing best practice was demonstrated in variety of ways within offices. This included:

- development forums;
- use of case conferencing;
- one-to-ones with PTL or ATMs;
- weekly team meetings; and
- shadowing staff with recognised best practice skills.

One office had put in place practitioner groups of advisers to ensure frontline input into the changes and continual operation of the Offer. This included team conferences where individual cases would be discussed and the sharing of thoughts on approaches taken by advisers. Management information was also utilised in sharing best practice. For example, an ATM used skills analysis via the management information (including the ADAPT system) to observe and identify those who needed more support – as well as encouraging staff to come forward with any questions or problems.

## 3.5 Summary

The Offer was understood in different ways by Jobcentre Plus staff, and (as might be expected given the nature of the Offer) not always as a discrete and cohesive concept. Recent changes to working practices were not necessarily associated with the Offer, but rather seen as part of a wider cultural shift towards greater flexibility and a stronger focus on outcomes; shifts that could be associated with a range of initiatives, including the PMF, Lean continuous improvement techniques, DAS and Local Autonomy pilots.

It was clear that the principle of greater flexibility had been embraced across the case study districts, in part illustrated by the various delivery models that had emerged both between and within districts. Underpinning these variations were three key factors: offices' prior experience of related initiatives; local area characteristics and resources; and the extent to which off-flow targets had been devolved within the office.

Core interventions had not changed substantially under the Offer, excluding the increased use of split NJIs and lighter touch Jobsearch Review meetings. Many of the case study areas had implemented these changes because they were seen as the most resource efficient way to meet conditionality deadlines and prioritise PA time for diagnostic and ongoing support.

The principle of flexible adviser support was valued by Jobcentre Plus staff, providing greater freedom to determine how advisers' time and resources should be applied to focus on outcomes. The extent to which advisers were able to use their discretion to make these decisions differed substantially between offices, reflecting varying levels of advisers' own skill and confidence, resource limitations, and the extent to which offices had devolved flexibility down to frontline staff.

It was clear from observations and staff interviews, that diagnosis of claimant needs was fairly unstructured, with advisers using their intuition, experience and knowledge as their main diagnosis approach rather than formal diagnostic tools. Rather than complete this during the NJI/NJWFI, staff felt that the diagnosis process was a continual ongoing process and reliant on the rapport and relationship between claimant and adviser.

The flexible menu of support was seen to offer a wide range of programmes which could enable more personalised provision with fewer restrictions on when support could be offered within a claimant's journey. Across the range of provision there were felt to be consistent barriers to use, which included: lack of availability and awareness of local provision; limited adviser confidence and knowledge of the provision available; complicated access to non-contracted funding; and, challenges purchasing services from other organisations. There were also specific challenges sourcing suitable support for clients with complex issues, especially for ESA claimants.

There was variation around how best practice was identified and shared across the case study districts. Examples included: development forums; case conferencing; one-to-one meetings for advisers with PTLs or ATMs; weekly team meetings, and shadowing staff. Given the different delivery models across the case study districts, there is high potential for offices to learn from each other and support ongoing improvements. Offices may benefit from a more structured approach to identifying and sharing best practice (see Section 6.1).

This section considered staff perspectives on how the Offer has been implemented and delivered across six case study districts. These findings provide context to Chapter 5, which outlines how claimants are experiencing the Offer; prior to this, the following section provides an overview of who the claimants are.



# 4 Who is taking part in the Offer

This section provides an overview of claimant attitudes at the start of a claim as well as highlighting key demographic characteristics and differences between new Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants. The findings in this section are based on the results of the claimant survey where respondents were new JSA and ESA claimants interviewed shortly after they had their New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) or New Joiner Work Focused Interview (NJWFI). This means that the findings can begin to provide a 'pre-measure' of claimants' attitudes prior to their experience of the full offer.

The section begins by looking at how many claimants had already moved in to work and the extent to which ESA claimants said they were currently looking for work. It then moves on to examine the attitudes of claimants as they start their claim in terms of their motivation to find work and any anxiety they feel about the prospect of working. Finally the section highlights the key demographic differences between JSA and ESA claimants which should be borne in mind when assessing the evaluation findings.

## 4.1 Moving towards work

By the time of the initial survey interview around one in five JSA claimants (21 per cent) had already managed to find work. Those claimants who had found work relatively quickly after applying for JSA tended to be more likely to have higher qualifications, their own motor vehicle and to own their own home.

Around one in ten new claimants who had already moved in to work by the time of the initial interview<sup>11</sup> (ten per cent) said that they had found their job through Jobcentre Plus. Claimants who had moved in to jobs in the managerial, professional and technical occupations were less likely to have said they found their job through Jobcentre Plus than those who had moved in to other occupations (three per cent compared to 11 per cent).

While 21 per cent of JSA claimants had found work since claiming their benefit and being interviewed, only one per cent of ESA claimants had found employment. To a large extent this is to be expected as ESA claimants are further away from the job market. Indeed, the group of ESA claimants interviewed for the survey were in the 12-month prognosis Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) and would be expected to be moving towards work rather than necessarily moving in to employment immediately.

However, within this group there are claimants who do want to be working and who are searching for employment from the start of their claim. Just over one in six new ESA claimants interviewed (16 per cent) said that they were currently looking for work.

As might be expected, the length of time since the ESA claimant had last worked was strongly associated with whether or not they were currently looking for work. Only around one in eight claimants who had not worked for over five years were looking for work (13 per cent), compared to around three in ten of those who last worked one to three years ago (31 per cent).

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<sup>11</sup> Interviews were conducted five to 12 weeks after the NJI. If claimants off-flowed before having their NJI they were not included in the survey.

As well as the length of time since last working, the level of qualification a claimant had was also associated with whether or not they were looking for work. ESA claimants with a degree were twice as likely to be looking for work as those without any formal qualifications (24 per cent compared to 12 per cent).

However, while the length of time since working and highest qualification were associated with whether or not claimants were looking for work there was no significant difference by age. The average age of an ESA claimant looking for work was 44.2 years while for those not looking for work it was 46.5 years.

The type of health barriers the claimant faced did not seem to be strongly associated with whether or not ESA claimants were looking for work. Just under one in five claimants with a mental health barrier said they were currently looking for work (19 per cent) and this was matched by the proportion of those with a physical health barrier (17 per cent).

## 4.2 Attitudes

All claimants were asked a series of statements about their attitudes towards both being in work and their jobsearch prospects.

### 4.2.1 Motivation to find work

The first thing to note about new JSA claimants is that they want to work. Nearly all respondents agreed that they would be happier if they were in work (95 per cent), and more than four out of five agreed that having almost any type of paid work is better than not working (83 per cent).

These results indicate that although previous research has shown that the motivation of claimants is a key factor in the success of provision (see Section 2.2.5), the role that the Jobcentre Plus Offer can play in increasing new JSA claimants' motivation is limited as most already say that they want to work. In some senses perhaps the main challenge the Offer faces will be in maintaining motivation as claims extend.

ESA claimants were less positive about the prospect of being in work. Whereas 95 per cent of JSA claimants said they would be happier if they were in work, only 63 per cent of ESA claimants agreed with this statement. Of course, while this is a smaller proportion, it should be pointed out that this is still a majority of all ESA claimants. Even among those ESA claimants who say they are not currently looking for work, nearly three-fifths (58 per cent) say that they would be happier if they were in work. This indicates that there is a significant proportion of the ESA population where the desire to find work is not the main challenge.

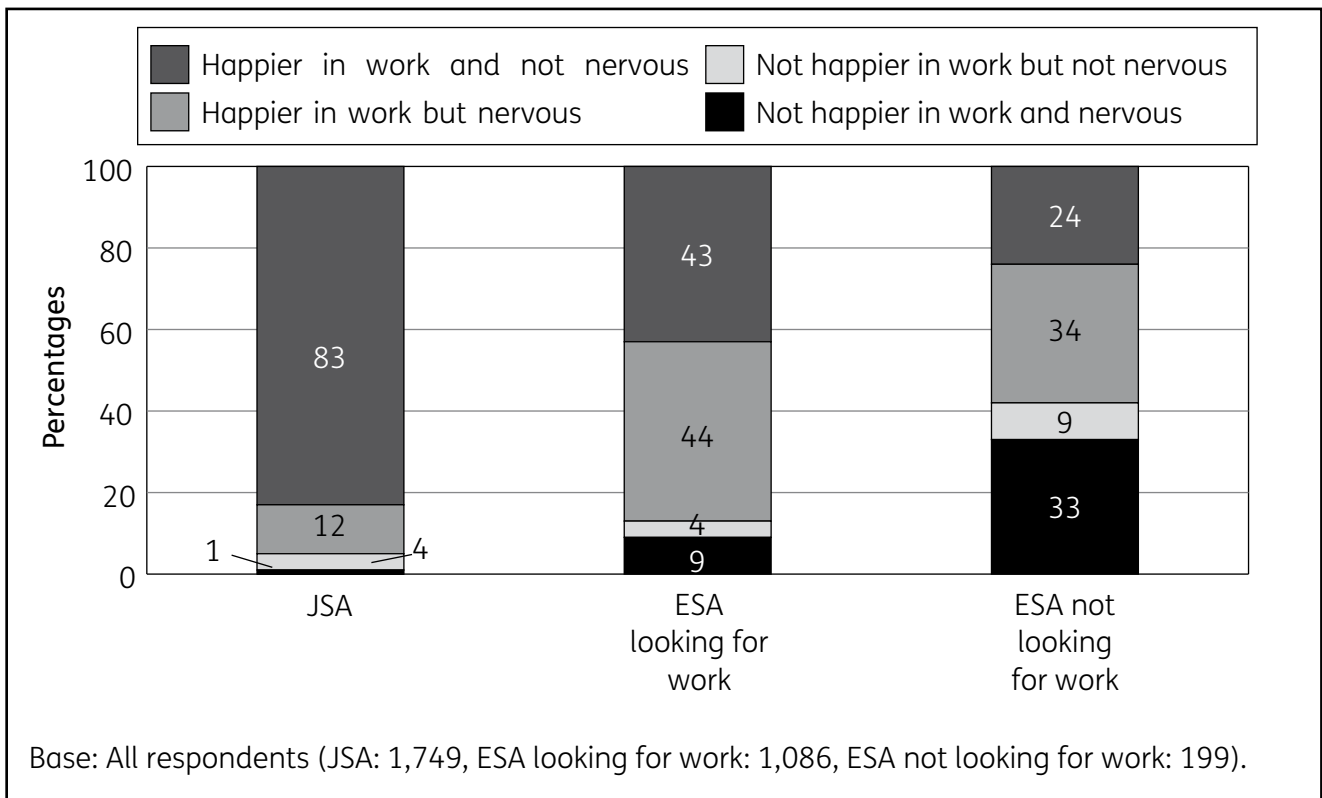
### 4.2.2 Anxiety about work

While it is encouraging to note that most claimants want to work, one potential demotivating factor for jobseekers can be a sense of anxiety about the prospect of being in work. All respondents who had not yet found a job were asked whether they agreed with the statement 'The thought of being in paid work makes me nervous'.

Anxiety about the thought of being in work was much more of an issue for ESA claimants than JSA claimants. Only around one in seven JSA claimants (14 per cent) said that the thought of being in paid work made them nervous, compared to over half of all ESA claimants (53 per cent). Even among ESA claimants who said they were currently looking for work, levels of anxiety were relatively high with more than four in ten agreeing with the statement (43 per cent). Figure 4.1 shows a breakdown of anxiety about the prospect of working and whether or not claimants believe they would be happier if working.

Reducing anxiety levels among the ESA claimant group is something that parts of the Offer may be able to address. In particular those elements of the flexible menu of support that provide work experience could be useful for claimants who are anxious about the prospect of being in paid work.

**Figure 4.1 Attitudes towards employment, by claimant type**

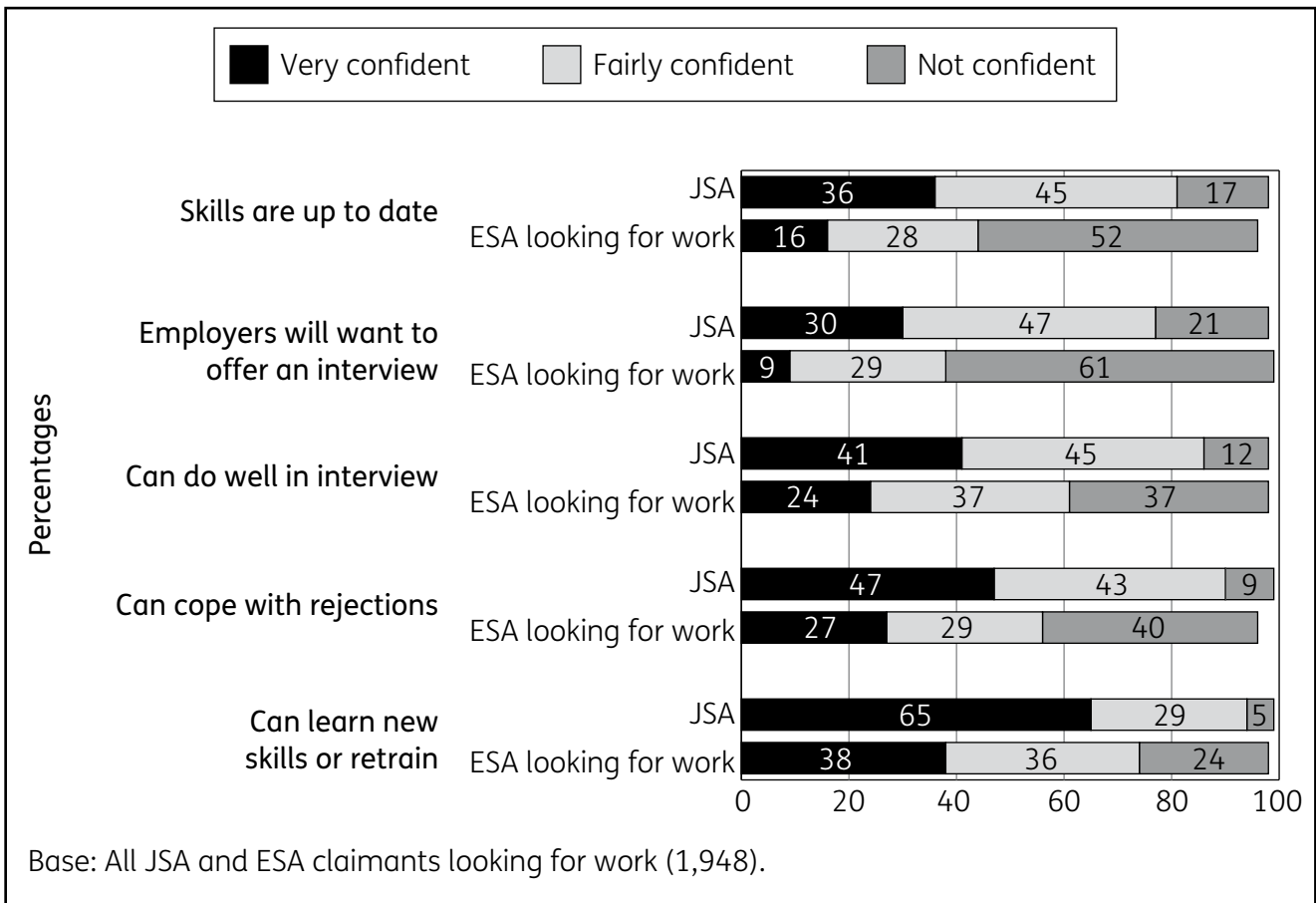


As Figure 4.1 shows, over a third of ESA claimants (35 per cent) believe that they would be happier in work but remain nervous about the prospect of actually being in work. Looking at those claimants who say they are currently looking for work this proportion rises to 44 per cent. Among those ESA claimants with a long-term health problem or condition that affected just their mental, cognitive and intellectual functions the figure was higher again at 52 per cent.

### 4.2.3 Confidence in jobsearch

All JSA claimants and ESA claimants who said they were currently looking for work were asked how confident they were in different elements of their jobsearch activities – the results are shown in Figure 4.2.

**Figure 4.2 Confidence in jobsearch**



The jobsearch area with the highest proportion of claimants expressing a lack of confidence was employers wanting to offer them an interview, with a quarter saying they were not confident this was the case. Within this there was dramatic variation by age. Only 16 per cent of 18-24 year-olds said they were not confident employers would offer them an interview compared to 25 per cent of 25-49 year-olds and 41 per cent of those claimants aged 50 or over. It should be noted that while older claimants were not confident they would be offered interviews they did not lack confidence that they would do well in them. Just 15 per cent said they were not confident they would do well in interviews compared to 16 per cent of 25-49 year-olds and 12 per cent of 18-24 year-olds.

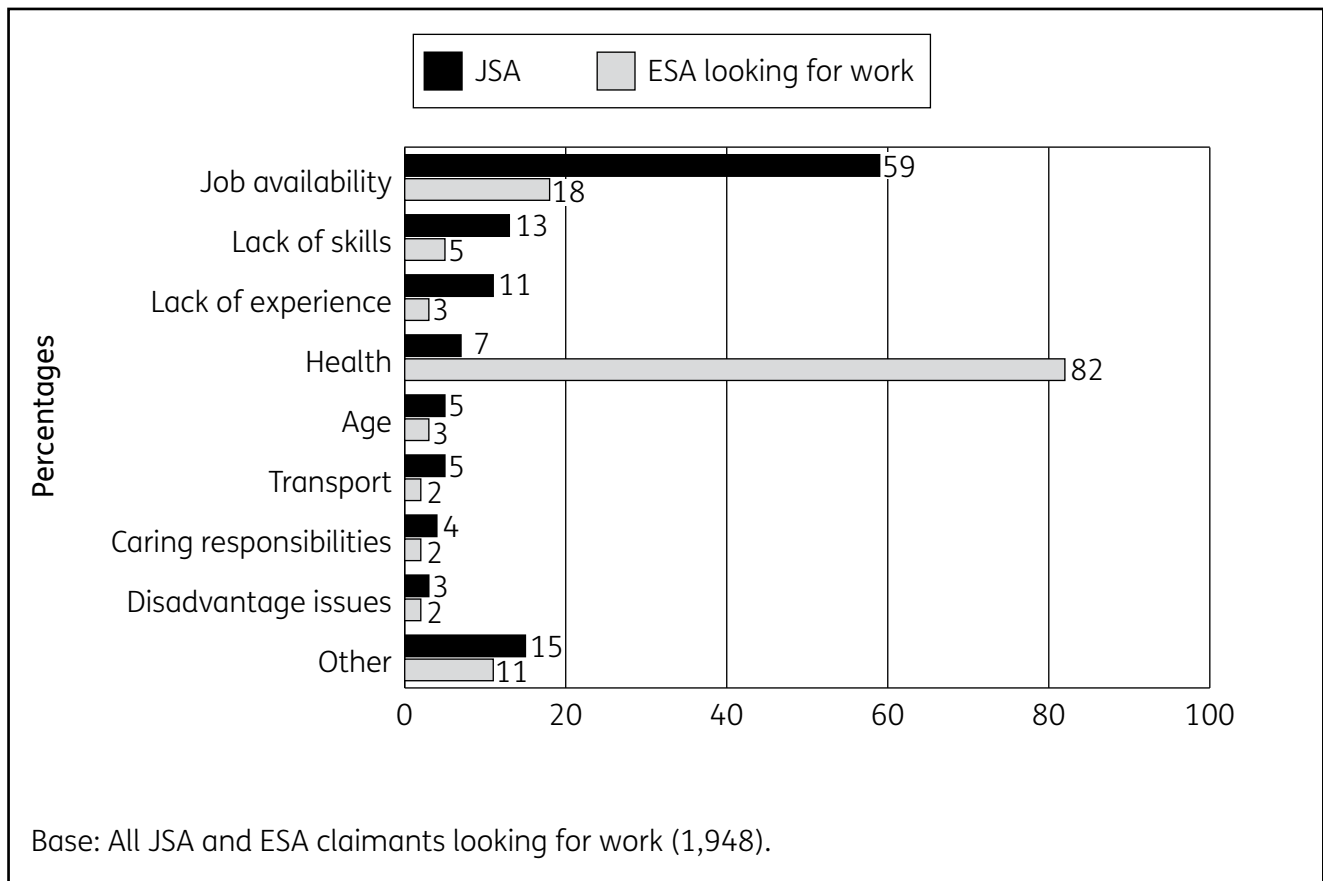
This lack of confidence among older claimants in being offered interviews may be based on first hand experience, or it may be an assumption that their age makes it less likely employers will want to give them a chance. If it is the latter there may be some scope for advisers to try to instil confidence in older claimants that employers will be looking for employees of all ages.

The second jobsearch area with a high proportion of claimants expressing a lack of confidence was in having skills which are up to date for the current job market with around one in five saying they were not confident this was the case (21 per cent). Again, older claimants were more likely to say that this was a problem with 29 per cent of 50+ claimants saying they were not confident their skills were up to date compared to just 14 per cent of 18-24 year-olds. Beyond this other groups who were not confident their skills were up to date for the current job market were those whose previous employment was as Process, Plant and Machine Operatives (31 per cent) or who were in Elementary Occupations (27 per cent).

### 4.2.4 Perceived barriers to employment

All claimants who were looking for work were asked what they thought was preventing them from finding a job. This question was answered spontaneously by respondents and the results are shown in Figure 4.3.

**Figure 4.3 Barriers to finding work**



As far as claimants were concerned the biggest challenge they faced was job availability with over half citing this issue (53 per cent). The more recently a respondent had been in paid work the more likely they were to mention job availability. Claimants who had been in paid work in the last 12 months were twice as likely to mention a lack of available jobs as those who had not been in paid work for three years or longer (61 per cent compared to 28 per cent). Those claimants who had not been in work for such a prolonged period of time were instead more likely to identify issues relating to their health limiting the kind of work they can do (59 per cent compared to nine per cent).

## 4.3 Demographic profile

The nature of the two benefits means that it is only to be expected that there are significant differences in the demographic composition of new ESA and JSA claimants. Illness and disability become more common with age and this can then in turn lead to differences on other measures such as tenure, qualifications and presence of children.

This section provides an overview of the demographic profile of new claimants for both benefits highlighting the key differences between the two groups which need to be borne in mind when looking at the experience of the Offer for the two groups.

### 4.3.1 Length of time since last worked

Although both JSA and ESA respondents in the survey were ‘new’ claimants there were significant differences between the two groups in the length of time since they last worked.

#### JSA

New JSA claimants do not necessarily start claiming the benefit because a previous job has ended. A significant proportion move on to the benefit because they are no longer eligible for a benefit they had previously been receiving. This would include lone parent Income Support (IS) recipients affected by Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) and Incapacity Benefit (IB) recipients who have been found fit for work following a Work Capability Assessment (WCA)<sup>12</sup>.

As a result of this the length of time since a ‘new’ JSA claimant last worked varies considerably as can be seen in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1 Length of time since last worked**

	%
Less than 3 months	34
3-6 months	26
6-12 months	14
1-2 years	9
Over 2 years/never worked	17

Base: All JSA claimants.

#### ESA

New ESA claimants are comprised of those who have moved on to the benefit from IB following a WCA and those who are making a new claim as result of an emergent condition. The national roll-out of IB reassessments began in the spring of 2011 and is due to be completed in the spring of 2014. As a result of this the sampling period of December 2011 was a time when a significant number of new ESA claims were actually from people who had previously been receiving IB. More than four out of five new ESA claimants in the survey were ex-IB recipients who had been through the reassessment (82 per cent).

As a result of this the length of time since a new ESA claimant last worked was considerable, with two-thirds having not worked for over five years (67 per cent). Details are shown in Table 4.2 split between claimants who have moved from IB and those who have not.

<sup>12</sup> LPO meant that from May 2012 lone parents with a youngest child aged five and over would have lost eligibility to IS, based solely on being a lone parent, with many of them being transferred to JSA. The age of the youngest child has reduced in phases since November 2008. IB reassessments would also have seen claimants move to JSA.

**Table 4.2 Length of time since last worked**

	ESA ex-IB %	ESA new %
Less than 12 months	1	33
1-3 years	4	27
3-5 years	12	15
Over 5 years/never worked	81	23

Base: ESA ex-IB (1,008); ESA new (277).

### 4.3.2 Age and sex

New JSA claimants were, on average, over ten years younger than new ESA claimants. The average age of a new JSA claimant was 33.1 years while for a new ESA claimant the average age was 13 years older at 46.1 years. In part, this reflects the fact that a number of new ESA claimants have moved on to the benefit from IB after undergoing a WCA and so their ‘new’ claim may in reality have started many years previously.

There was also a significant difference in the gender composition of new claimants. Two-thirds of new JSA claimants were men (66 per cent) while in comparison the gender split for ESA claimants was more balanced (48 per cent male and 52 per cent female).

### 4.3.3 Health

As would be expected, nearly all new ESA claimants reported having a long-term health problem or disability (96 per cent), but so did around one in six new JSA claimants (16 per cent).

#### ESA

A large proportion of ESA claimants with a long-term health problem or disability said that their condition affected both physical and mental, cognitive and intellectual functions (69 per cent). A full breakdown of the areas affected by health conditions for ESA claimants is included in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3 Areas affected by health conditions for ESA claimants**

	%
Vision – for example blindness or partial sight	19
Hearing – for example deafness or partial hearing	12
Mobility – for example walking short distances or climbing stairs	73
Dexterity – for example lifting and carrying objects, using a keyboard	67
Stamina or breathing or fatigue	65
<b>Any physical functions</b>	<b>84</b>
Learning or understanding or concentrating	60
Memory	53
Mental health	62
Socially or behaviourally – for example associated with autism, attention deficit disorder or Asperger’s syndrome	19
<b>Any mental, cognitive and intellectual functions</b>	<b>77</b>

Base: All ESA claimants with a long-term health problem (1,235).

## JSA

Only around three in ten JSA claimants with a long-term health problem or disability said that their condition affected both physical and mental, cognitive and intellectual functions (28 per cent). In addition to this, JSA claimants with a long term health problem were less likely than ESA claimants to mention any of the potential areas their condition could affect them in. Details are shown in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4 Areas affected by health conditions for JSA claimants**

	%
Vision – for example blindness or partial sight	9
Hearing – for example deafness or partial hearing	6
Mobility – for example walking short distances or climbing stairs	33
Dexterity – for example lifting and carrying objects, using a keyboard	28
Stamina or breathing or fatigue	40
<b>Any physical functions</b>	<b>66</b>
Learning or understanding or concentrating	30
Memory	19
Mental health	34
Socially or behaviourally – for example associated with autism, attention deficit disorder or Asperger’s syndrome	10
<b>Any mental, cognitive and intellectual functions</b>	<b>49</b>

Base: All JSA claimants with long-term health problem (312).

### 4.3.4 Disadvantage

The survey found that just over a quarter of new JSA claimants (27 per cent) were in at least one of a number of groups that could be classified as disadvantaged. These included:

- those with a long-term health problem or disability (16 per cent);
- carers (six per cent);
- offenders and prison leavers (6 per cent).

In addition to this two per cent revealed a drug or alcohol problem, one per cent were ex-armed forces and one per cent were homeless.

### 4.3.5 Highest qualification

ESA claimants were significantly more likely than JSA to report that they had either entry level qualifications (11 per cent compared to five per cent) or no qualifications at all (18 per cent compared to eight per cent). They were also significantly less likely to have a first degree or higher qualification (nine per cent compared to 16 per cent). The fact that in general ESA claimants’ qualifications were lower is another potential hurdle that they face in moving towards employment. Full details of respondents’ highest qualifications are included in Table 4.5.



**Table 4.5 Highest qualification**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
No qualifications	8	18
Entry Level qualifications	5	11
GCSEs D-G, Vocational Level 1 qualifications and equivalent	11	14
GCSEs A*-C, Vocational Level 2 qualifications and equivalent	30	24
A-levels, Vocational Level 3 qualifications and equivalent	18	10
Certificates of Higher Education or equivalent	5	4
Higher National Certificates (HNC), Diplomas (HND) or equivalent	4	4
First degree or higher	16	9
Don't know	4	7

Base: All JSA (1,749); all ESA (1,285).

## 4.4 Summary

Around one in five JSA claimants had already off-flowed in to employment by the time of the first interview. In effect these were the claimants who should be receiving minimal support from Jobcentre Plus when it comes to adviser time and options from the flexible menu of support. Only a very small proportion of ESA claimants had off-flowed in to employment but a significant minority (16 per cent) said that they were currently looking for work. If the Offer is working as intended these ESA claimants would be the ones we would expect to see receiving the most practical support from Jobcentre Plus as they will be more motivated to work and potentially closer to the labour market.

The key points to make about the attitudes of new JSA claimants is that the vast majority of them want to work so that initial motivation is present. For ESA claimants the picture is more mixed but even among those who are not currently looking for work a majority (58 per cent) said they would be happier if they had a job. A larger challenge for ESA claimants than the motivation to find work is anxiety, with over half saying the thought of being in paid work makes them nervous.

In terms of the success of different jobsearch activities older claimants were significantly more likely to say that they were not confident that employers would offer them an interview. Interestingly, older claimants did not feel any less confident that they would then do well in an interview if they managed to get one. The availability of jobs was the biggest barrier cited by claimants looking for work and this was a particular concern for those who had been in work recently. Claimants who had not worked for a prolonged period of time were also more likely to mention issues relating to difficulties caused by a health condition.

The demographic profiles of new JSA and ESA claimants were significantly different in a number of key areas. New ESA claimants were, on average, more than ten years older than new JSA claimants and were more likely to report having no qualifications. They were also more likely to have been out of work for considerably longer than new JSA claimants. In large part this is related to the fact that a significant proportion of new ESA claimants had moved from IB after a WCA. Over two-thirds of ESA claimants said that their health condition impacted on both their physical and mental, cognitive and intellectual functions.

The above summarises the profile of new JSA and ESA claimants as they begin the Offer and it is important that these points are borne in mind when reading the next section which examines claimants' experience of the Offer.

# 5 How the Offer is experienced

This chapter focuses on claimants' perspective of the Jobcentre Plus Offer and the various elements of support they are presented with to assist them in moving closer to work. It highlights the diagnosis process claimants experience at the start of their claim when their work-readiness is evaluated by their adviser; their understanding of the responsibilities associated with receipt of their benefit; the proportions who are offered and who take up each type of support; and claimants' views of the assistance they have received so far.

The picture that emerges is highly divergent. The Offer appears to be working as intended for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants without significant barriers but for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants and JSA claimants facing disadvantages there are indications that needs are not being identified consistently and support not tailored appropriately. Of particular concern is the group of ESA claimants who are currently looking for work. As Section 4.1 illustrated, 16 per cent of the ESA claimants surveyed were currently looking for work, yet Adviser support is not consistent and can leave claimants unsure of next steps to access support following their initial meetings. This is reflective of a general 'lighter-touch' approach which seems to be being applied to ESA claimants.

It should be noted that this picture is largely derived from the national survey of new claimants carried out in the summer of 2012, and is therefore representative of people who began their claim for JSA or ESA at a particular point in time. As such, the findings reflect the experience of claimants who are at an early stage of a (potentially) much longer journey through the Offer, many of whom are likely to receive additional support in the months to come. Findings from qualitative research supplement this picture by providing detail of the experience of claimants at various stages of their journey through the Offer, particularly those facing significant disadvantage.

## 5.1 New Jobseeker and New Joiner's Work Focused Interviews

All new claimants begin their journey through the Jobcentre Plus Offer by attending an interview with an adviser. The New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) and New Joiner's Work Focused Interview (NJWFI) provide advisers with the opportunity to identify the specific barriers claimants face, and to design steps to help claimants move closer to work. During the NJI, JSA claimants are also given information about the conditions associated with Jobseeker's Allowance and the repercussions for non-compliance.

While the objectives of NJIs and NJWFIs are broadly similar they are not always organised in the same way. In some Jobcentre Plus offices NJIs are split into two stages, comprising a separate diagnostic and conditionality interview. Three in ten JSA claimants (30 per cent) said they experienced this two-stage arrangement, with disadvantaged claimants and claimants over the age of 50 more likely to go through a two-stage process (34 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively). Since the decision to split NJIs is often made at a district or office level the disproportionate experience of split NJIs by these two groups may be accidental, resulting from regional variation in the demographic characteristics of claimants rather than discretionary application of the two-stage approach to particular claimant types. It is also the case that respondents recall as to the nature of their initial interviews may, on some occasions, be inconsistent and that some may have received a split NJI but identified just one interview in the survey.

This section covers the content of the interviews and considers the extent to which they initiate the process of helping claimants move closer to work. Claimants' understanding of conditionality and the way this affects their behaviour are explored separately in Section 5.2.

### 5.1.1 Topics discussed

Most interviews covered the claimants' work history and skills and qualifications, though coverage of these topics was somewhat less common amongst ESA claimants looking for work, and markedly less common amongst ESA claimants with no imminent plans to enter the labour market (Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1 Topics discussed in NJI/NJWFI**

	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	ESA not looking for work %
Type of work looking for and its availability	95	74	n/a
Previous jobs and work experience	88	82	70
How far willing to travel for work	88	57	n/a
Skills and qualifications	85	80	60
Changing career or retraining to do something else	57	66	41
Caring responsibilities	51	43	31
Possibility of working in the future	n/a	n/a	70
Steps or support needed to prepare for work	n/a	n/a	54

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants looking for work (199); all ESA not looking for work (1,086).

The vast majority of JSA claimants covered issues relating directly to job attainment during their interviews, discussing the type of employment they were looking for and its availability (95 per cent) as well as the distance they were willing to travel to find work (88 per cent). Such immediate practical concerns formed a lower priority for claimants who were looking for work whilst on ESA, who were instead more likely to discuss the possibility of career change (mentioned by 66 per cent). Meanwhile, one of the most frequent topics of discussion for claimants who were not looking for work was the possibility of working in the future (mentioned by 70 per cent).

It is worth bearing in mind that the results presented here do not comprise the full content of the interviews. Respondents were asked to select the topics covered during the NJIs and NJWFIs from a pre-defined list.

#### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

JSA claimants were asked about six possible topics potentially covered in the NJI. The four subjects that were most commonly cited concerned the types of jobs they were interested in and their availability, as well as the qualifications and skills, work experience, and flexibility (with regards to location) that the claimant was able to offer employers. Over seven in ten claimants (72 per cent) had discussed all of these topics, and only two per cent had discussed none, suggesting that job attainment was placed centre-stage during the NJIs.

Advisers may have made an effort to discuss these jobsearching issues systematically with most claimants, as indicated by the absence of variation by age or highest qualification in the proportions citing each topic. Moreover, the likelihood of discussing skills or work experience was no higher for claimants who felt that these were factors preventing them from finding work. For example, claimants who cited concerns during the survey about the suitability of their skills for the jobs they were interested in, or who worried about lacking suitable qualifications, were no more likely

to discuss skills and qualifications during the NJI (84 per cent and 89 per cent respectively) than those who did not share their concerns (85 per cent). Similarly, claimants who felt that lacking work experience might hinder their ability to move into work were just as likely to discuss previous jobs or work experience (87 per cent) as those who did not feel this way (89 per cent). Clearly these topics formed a central part of the NJI regardless of the claimant's circumstances or personal concerns.

That said, there is evidence of differences in the discussions taking place within NJIs in a limited number of cases. Those who were unemployed for three years or more were less likely than the average JSA claimant to review their skills and qualifications with the adviser (78 per cent, compared with 85 per cent overall). In addition, somewhat fewer claimants with mental or physical health conditions discussed the types of work they were interested in and their availability (91 per cent each, compared with 95 per cent across all JSA claimants), while discussion of skills and qualifications was less common amongst those with mental health conditions (77 per cent compared with 85 per cent overall).

Further differences are evident in the coverage of issues raised within the NJI around the possibility of changing careers or re-training. As shown in Table 5.2, career change was more likely to be the subject of discussion in NJIs attended by claimants with low qualifications. Having said that, for claimants who lacked all formal qualifications, only 58 per cent of claimants discussed moving into another line of work, significantly fewer than the 71 per cent of claimants with GCSEs below grade C who did the same.

**Table 5.2 Discussion of career change by highest qualification amongst JSA claimants**

	All %	None %	GCSE below grade C %	GCSE grades A-C %	A levels and other post-16 %	Degree %
Changing career or re-training to do something else	57	58	71	62	50	45

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); with no qualifications (160); with only basic qualifications (284); with highest qualification at GCSE grades A-C (498); with highest qualification at A level of post-16 (469); with a degree or above (2,656).

It is not known to what extent personal barriers to working were discussed specifically during the NJIs, though there is some evidence that discussion of caring responsibilities was more frequent in cases where this was felt to be a concern. Three-quarters of JSA claimants (74 per cent) who cited family and caring commitments as a barrier during the survey covered this topic during their NJI, compared with half of those who did not feel family commitments hindered their ability to find work (51 per cent). It is worth pointing out that claimants aged 50 or over were less likely than average to discuss caring responsibilities (41 per cent compared with 51 per cent overall), in spite of the fact that this was the age group with the highest probability of having a caring commitment (11 per cent, compared with eight per cent of younger claimants) and despite being just as likely as younger claimants to cite commitments of this kind as a barrier to work. This suggests that claimants may not always have been forthcoming in their discussion with the adviser about the areas which they felt could be hindering them from working.

From the depth interviews it was clear that JSA claimants felt their wider support needs were not always discussed during initial meetings with their adviser. In part this may reflect that many JSA claimants did not feel they had significant support needs, and therefore, a focus on job history and jobsearch skills during the NJI was sufficient.

*'I assume [the adviser hasn't covered barriers to work] because they think I'm quite focused. I'm trying to get a job and I'm applying for jobs etc and I've got quite a reasonable CV. They don't need to offer me anything, I think. That's what I assumed.'*

(Male, JSA 50+)

However, for more disadvantaged JSA claimants there was a sense that the initial adviser meeting did not sufficiently identify the barriers they faced to working. This is explored in more depth in relation to flexible adviser support and the flexible menu of support (see Sections 5.3 and 5.4).

### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

The content of the NJWFI is largely shaped by the claimant's intentions regarding job attainment in the medium and short term. The analysis below therefore separates out the results for ESA claimants who said they were looking for work and those who were not.

Around eight in ten ESA claimants who were looking for work discussed their previous jobs and work experience with the adviser (82 per cent), and a similar proportion discussed their skills and qualifications (80 per cent). The focus of the interview was not, however, on immediate job attainment or the practicalities of finding work: discussion of the types of work sought and the distance claimants were willing to travel was far less prevalent than in the NJI (see Table 5.1). Only half (49 per cent) discussed a combination of their experience and skills as well as the types of jobs they were interested in and the locations they were willing to work in, compared with 73 per cent of JSA claimants who did the same. Thus, the NJWFI was somewhat less likely to set the jobsearching process in motion than the NJI.

In summary, NJWFIs do not appear to be used in a systematic way to support the jobsearching process amongst ESA claimants looking for work. In this respect they differ from NJIs whose focus is firmly fixed on job attainment.

There is very limited scope for sub-group analysis amongst ESA claimants looking for work due to small base sizes. The likelihood of discussing each topic did not appear to vary by the characteristics of the claimants, except for a slightly higher occurrence of career change discussions amongst those with a physical disability (71 per cent, compared with 48 per cent of those with no such disability). Claimants who perceived the state of their health as a barrier to work and mentioned this in the survey were no more likely to have discussed any of the topics than those who did not feel this way. It remains unclear whether other perceived barriers to working were included in the conversations.

The survey asked ESA claimants who did not have imminent plans to enter the labour market whether they discussed the possibility of working in the future and the support or steps they may need to take to prepare for work. These issues were discussed by 70 per cent and 54 per cent of claimants, respectively. The fact that almost half (46 per cent) did not talk about their support needs or what they would need to do to prepare for work means that the NJWFI does not cover these topics automatically and that advisers are using discretion as to which claimants they feel it is appropriate to discuss these with.

The content of the NJWFI varied for different categories of claimant, with advisers evidently using their discretion to decide which subjects to discuss. Coverage of all work-related topics was sporadic for claimants who were not looking for work and had been outside the labour market for five years or more or never been employed; the same applied to those who had only basic or no qualifications (Table 5.3). These sub-groups were less likely to discuss the possibility of working, the steps required to move closer to work, attributes (such as skills, qualifications and work experience) that might help them find work, or the option of re-training for a new career.

**Table 5.3 Discussion topics by highest qualification and length of unemployment amongst ESA claimants not looking for work**

	All	Highest qualification			Length of unemployment	
	All %	None %	Basic %	Higher %	5 years or more (or never worked) %	Less than 5 years %
Previous jobs and work experience	70	61	67	75	69	74
Possibility of working in the future	70	62	68	75	68	77
Skills and qualifications	60	46	58	68	58	68
Steps or support needed to prepare for work	54	48	54	58	52	61
Changing career or retraining to do something else	41	34	41	46	39	50
Caring responsibilities	31	28	29	35	31	32

Base: All ESA claimants not looking for work (1,086); with no qualifications (215); with only basic qualifications (265); with higher qualifications (522); unemployed for five years or more (777); unemployed for less than five years (292)

Advisers appear less inclined to bring up several of the work-related subjects with claimants who were not looking for work and were either a long way from re-entering the labour market, or close enough to retirement age to find such issues irrelevant. Conversations with claimants who had physical conditions expected to last 12 months or more were less likely to include the possibility of working in the future (69 per cent, compared with 77 per cent of those without such a condition). Presumably this was because a return to work would still be seen as a distant prospect for claimants in those circumstances. Other instances of variation involved claimants in their 50s or 60s. Advisers discussed the possibility of working and the steps they could take to move closer to work, with 63 per cent and 47 per cent of these claimants, compared with 75 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively, of claimants under the age of 50. Career change was covered in less than two-fifths of cases (37 per cent, compared with 45 per cent of claimants under 50). In addition, discussion of support options and potential re-training was fairly infrequent for claimants who had recently transferred from IB to ESA and were not yet looking for work (53 per cent and 40 per cent respectively, compared with 61 per cent and 48 per cent of those who had not been transferred).

Such variations may partly have been driven by claimants themselves. Though there is no hard evidence for this, a possible indicator is the fact that claimants who felt they would be 'a happier person if I was in paid work' had higher levels of discussion on a range of work-related topics, including their work experience (73 per cent, compared with 65 per cent amongst everyone else), their skills and qualifications (64 per cent, compared with 54 per cent) and the possibility of career change (46 per cent, compared with 35 per cent).

Taken together, the above suggests the NJWFI is a more loosely structured interview than the NJI, especially for claimants who are not intending to look for work in the short term. Advisers use their discretion to decide whether to broach certain job-related subjects with those not looking for work,

possibly taking the lead from claimants themselves. As a consequence the NJWFI may not directly address the subject of Work Related Activity (WRA) for some claimants as they may not yet be in a position to consider it in a meaningful way.

These findings are supported by the case study research, which highlighted that some ESA claimants felt initial discussions with advisers had limited focus on work or a WRA in which they could participate while also recognising that this may have been appropriate at that moment.

*‘Well [the support discussed during the NJWFI] wasn’t really very clear though, it was quite vague information. Nothing is stuck in my mind at all. To be fair though I don’t know whether that was purely because it was all vague information or whether it is just because I was incredibly stressed.[...] It was just a case of going through everything, circumstances wise, and what possibly I would want to do in the future, but there was nothing really set in stone.’*

(Female, ESA WRAG 12 months prognosis)

### 5.1.2 Job suggestions

Four in five JSA claimants (80 per cent) and almost three in five ESA claimants who were looking for work (58 per cent) received suggestions from an adviser about jobs that might be suitable for them. The disparity between these two categories of claimant underlines the earlier finding that different emphasis was placed on job attainment during the NJI and NJWFI.

From the claimants’ perspective not all of the jobs that were recommended to them suited their circumstances or requirements. This was particularly true for claimants on ESA, with more than a quarter of those who received suggestions dismissing every recommended job as unsuitable (Table 5.4).

**Table 5.4 Suitability of job suggestions**

	JSA	ESA looking for work
	%	%
All suitable	69	47
Some suitable	13	14
None suitable	15	28
Don’t know	2	12

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); JSA claimants who received job suggestions (1,367); all ESA claimants looking for work (199); ESA claimants looking for work who received job suggestions (114).

There were various reasons why jobs were considered unsuitable, but the most common reason given by JSA claimants was that the positions were not of interest to them or did not match what they had done in the past (51 per cent), whereas the most common explanation given by ESA claimants was that there was no realistic chance of getting the proposed job (81 per cent). This last finding should be treated with some caution, however, as only a small number of ESA claimants received job suggestions and, therefore, the base for this question is relatively small.

The analysis that follows focuses only on JSA claimants, as the number of ESA claimants who received job suggestions (n=114) is too small to allow sub-group analysis.

### Analysis of JSA claimants

The likelihood of receiving job suggestions varied considerably amongst JSA claimants. A number of factors may have contributed to this, including the disproportionate difficulty advisers face in identifying jobs for certain categories of claimant, such as those aged 50 or above and those with degrees.

Most notable is the variation by claimants' age, with claimants aged 50 or over not only the least likely to receive suggestions, but also the least likely to find them suitable (Table 5.5).

**Table 5.5 Job suggestions and suitability amongst JSA claimants, by age**

	All %	Under 25 %	25–49 %	50 or above %
Received suggestions	80	86	78	70
All suggestions suitable	55	65	53	39

Base: All JSA claimants (1749); all JSA claimants aged below 25 (550); all JSA claimants aged 25-49 (627); all JSA claimants aged 50 or above (572).

Advisers apparently struggled to make appropriate recommendations to claimants aged 50 or above: one in five of those who received suggestions found none of them suitable (20 per cent) and a further one in five thought only some of the recommendations they received were aligned to their requirements (19 per cent). The reasons given for the lack of suitability were not substantially different to those given by younger claimants, with the exception of insufficient IT skills (mentioned by three per cent of the over-50s who found all recommendations unsuitable, but no one under that age). Indeed, these claimants were less exacting than their younger counterparts: they were the least likely to say the recommended vacancies were not of interest or not what they had asked for (12 per cent, compared with 32 per cent of 16-24 year-olds and 28 per cent of 25-49 year-olds who found recommendations unsuitable) and no more likely to object to the advertised pay than anyone else over the age of 25 (12 per cent).

Advisers were also slightly less likely to recommend jobs to claimants qualified to degree level or above: three quarters of these claimants (74 per cent) received suggestions, compared with over four in five of those educated to GCSE level or below (81 per cent). However, the recommendations made to claimants who held a degree were just as likely to be suitable as recommendations made to anyone else, suggesting that any selectivity on the part of advisers in proposing jobs to highly qualified claimants may be well founded. Instead, suitability was lowest for claimants who lacked qualifications altogether. More than four in five claimants without formal qualifications (82 per cent) received suggestions about jobs from their adviser, but only 57 per cent of those claimants felt the proposed vacancies took account of their circumstances and requirements (compared with 68 per cent across everyone else who received suggestions). It is worth mentioning that, amongst these claimants, one in five (19 per cent) noted that the jobs suggested to them in fact called for formal qualifications.

While advisers may have had difficulty finding appropriate jobs to propose to older and more qualified claimants, other factors may also have impacted on advisers' propensity to suggest jobs. One factor may be circumstantial: claimants who experienced a two-stage NJI were more likely to receive suggestions (84 per cent) than those who had a single interview (79 per cent). A potential reason for this is that advisers who had two sessions with a claimant spent more time with them overall, and had more opportunity to find and discuss vacancies. There was no difference in the suitability of the jobs proposed to those who attended a single interview and those who attended a two-stage NJI.



A further factor may have been the extent to which the claimant needed suggestions from their adviser. This could explain why those who off-flowed from JSA after only a few weeks were amongst the least likely to report that their adviser offered them job suggestions (76 per cent of those who succeeded in finding employment by the time of the survey, compared with 82 per cent of those who were still receiving benefit).

There were concerns raised about advisers' job suggestions by two categories of JSA claimant. Those with physical health conditions or an unspent criminal record were no less likely to receive recommendations, but more likely than average to find the recommendations they received unsuitable. Sixty per cent of the former and 69 per cent of the latter felt that all recommended jobs fitted their requirements and circumstances (compared with 71 per cent of claimants who lacked a physical health condition and 81 per cent of those who lacked a criminal record).

The reasons given by all JSA claimants for the unsuitability of jobs are shown in Table 5.6.

**Table 5.6 Reasons why jobs were unsuitable for JSA claimants**

	%
<b>Not of interest or unsuited to previous experience</b>	<b>51</b>
Not of interest/not suited/not what I asked for (no specifics provided)	26
Not in the area already specialise in	19
Not enough pay	9
Over-qualified or too much experience for level offered	4
<b>No realistic chance of getting the job</b>	<b>29</b>
No relevant qualifications	12
No relevant skills	7
No relevant experience	7
Not suited to claimant's physical/mental condition	4
Required more IT skills than claimant has	*
<b>Unsuitable for practical reasons</b>	<b>17</b>
Difficulties travelling to job (cost, lack of time or vehicle)	12
Hours not suitable	3
Does not fit around caring commitments	3
Too many hours	2
Not enough hours	2
No specific vacancies suggested	10
Jobs suggested no longer available	7
Other reasons	10
Don't know	1

Base: All JSA claimants who received unsuitable job suggestions (226).

The most common shortcoming of the recommended jobs, mentioned by 51 per cent of claimants who deemed all proposals unsuitable, was that they were not of interest to the claimant in subject matter, level, or pay, or simply too different to the types of jobs they were familiar with or had specialised in previously. This was a particular issue amongst people educated to degree level or above (76 per cent).

Three in ten (29 per cent) implied that the suggested jobs were not realistic prospects for them, as they lacked the qualifications, skills, experience or health needed for them. Claimants with basic or

no qualifications were the most likely to say this (42 per cent, compared with 24 per cent of those with higher qualifications). Not having experience that was relevant to the suggested vacancy was cited as a problem by 14 per cent of disadvantaged JSA claimants (compared with five per cent of those without a disadvantage), and particularly those with mental health conditions (22 per cent, compared with six per cent of those with no such condition).

Practical considerations were cited less commonly, though one in eight claimants (12 per cent) mentioned travel complications. Seven per cent of claimants said that the recommended vacancies were already gone by the time they tried to apply for them but this reflects the fact that some vacancies will fill quickly and that information can become out of date while claimants are in the process of applying.

### 5.1.3 Next steps

At the end of the NJI and NJWFI, claimants sign either a Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg) or an Action Plan outlining the steps they will be taking to prepare themselves for work while receiving their benefit. Claimants are expected to leave the interview with this document and an understanding of how often they will meet with an adviser and what the adviser expects them to accomplish before each meeting.

The analysis below explores claimants' perceptions of all three dimensions of the JSAg and Action Plan. It should be noted that around one in eight ESA claimants who were looking for work were unable to provide views on the Action Plan. Substantial numbers of ESA claimants with no imminent plans to look for work also felt the questions regarding the Action Plan were not applicable to them. Amongst the latter group, this was slightly more common if the claimant had a physical condition (29 per cent compared with 21 per cent of those with no such conditions), but there was no clear bias in the type of claimant who said the questions were not applicable. For example, claimants who were previously on IB were no more likely to say this than claimants who had not been transferred from another benefit (32 per cent compared to 25 per cent). It is, therefore, possible that advisers did not use an Action Plan consistently with all ESA claimants but decided when to do so on an ad hoc basis.

Table 5.7 summarises the views of those who were able to offer an opinion regarding the document they completed during their NJI or NJWFI.

**Table 5.7 Perceptions of the JSAg/Action Plan**

Whether felt that all things agreed...?	JSA	ESA looking for work	ESA not looking for work
	%	%	%
Took account of your personal circumstances	75	74	75
Were achievable	88	62	58
Would genuinely increase chances of finding work (if not looking for work: in the future)	71	58	43

Base: All JSA claimants with an opinion (1,735/1,740/1,733)/all ESA claimants looking for work with an opinion (174/172/172); all ESA not looking for work with an opinion (877/805/772)

Three-quarters of each of the categories of claimant agreed that the actions they agreed to undertake took account of their personal circumstances. However JSA claimants were more likely to find the items listed in the document achievable (88 per cent), with fewer ESA claimants believing this to be true of their Action Plan. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the much higher tendency to discuss job attainment from a practical perspective during the NJI compared to the NJWFI. This can also be seen in how effective claimants believed the measures would be in finding them work. Seven

in ten JSA claimants believed the JSAg could genuinely lead to employment (71 per cent) compared to six in ten ESA claimants who felt the same about their Action Plan (58 per cent). ESA claimants who were not looking for work were evenly split between those who believed the items would help them find work in the future and those who believed the opposite (43 per cent each).

At the end of their interview, the majority of JSA claimants (85 per cent) left with an appointment for another meeting and a clear understanding of how often they would need to see an adviser (77 per cent). However, only around half of all ESA claimants left the NJWFI with a sense of clarity regarding next steps, although this was slightly higher among those looking for work (Table 5.8).

**Table 5.8 Preparation for next steps after NJI/NJWFI**

	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	ESA not looking for work %
Given appointment for next meeting with personal adviser	86	53	44
Clear on how often would need to meet an adviser	77	56	56

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants looking for work (199); all ESA not looking for work (1,086).

The lack of clarity regarding next steps for ESA claimants may be reflective of a lack of clarity in ESA advisers as to how best to support the WRAG group. As discussed in Chapter 3, this may be indicative of a general lack of adviser confidence on how to respond to claimants with more complex needs. This in turn may result in a more ‘light touch’ approach being adopted and experienced by ESA claimants and explain the much lower proportion of new ESA claimants who are told when their next meeting would be and how frequent such meetings would be.

### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

The JSAg constitutes a record of the objectives the adviser and claimant have agreed to progress over the coming weeks. As such, the steps ought to reflect the claimant’s circumstances and capacity to undertake various types of task or support options.

The majority of claimants felt that the steps took account of personal circumstances (75 per cent); were achievable (88 per cent) and would genuinely increase their chances of finding work (71 per cent) (Table 5.9). However, older claimants aged 50 or above were less likely to feel that the JSAg achieved each of these tasks. In particular they were less likely to feel that they were achievable (78 per cent compared to 89 per cent of those aged under 50) or that they took account of personal circumstances (66 per cent compared to 76 per cent).

**Table 5.9 Perceptions of the JSAg**

Whether felt that all things agreed...?	Took account of your personal circumstances	Were achievable	Would genuinely increase chances of finding work
	%	%	%
	Yes	75	88
Some of them	2	3	4
No	20	7	23
Don't know	2	1	2
Not applicable	1	1	1

Base: All JSA claimants with an opinion (1,749).

As indicated above, views of the JSAg varied substantially by age. While claimants aged 50 or above had the most reservations over the content and usefulness of the JSAg, the under-25s had the least. Most notable was the almost universal acknowledgement amongst claimants of this age that the items agreed with the adviser were achievable (93 per cent, compared with 88 per cent overall). Though one in six (17 per cent) doubted that the items would actually help them find work, they were more likely than older claimants both to recognise this potential (76 per cent, compared with 69 per cent of 25-49 year-olds and 63 per cent of claimants in their 50s), and to view the items as compatible with their personal circumstances (81 per cent, compared with 73 per cent of 25-49 year-olds and 66 per cent of claimants in their 50s).

Beyond this, the depth interviews indicated that while claimants recognised the JSAg as a tool to facilitate the jobsearch, in practice their use had a limited impact. Some JSA claimants felt that the JSAg did not enable a sufficient discussion with the adviser about their support needs or the barriers they faced and that the content and actions agreed were fairly 'basic' (i.e. actions that they would have intuitively taken themselves).

*'Well your basic things like, I was to check the paper twice a week, I was to phone up at least two companies a fortnight, I was to at least have something on the record for every day, and I would be applying for three main things. I think the three main things were labourer, handy man and engineer's mate. I had to sign to say that I was going to continue to keep doing those things'.*

(Male, JSA 25-49, ex-offender)

Several categories of claimant were more likely to say that their JSAg had not been appropriate for them. This was either because the steps outlined in the document failed to take account of their personal circumstances or because they were felt to be unrealistic. Claimants with physical health conditions were disproportionately more likely to feel this in both respects: 67 per cent felt their circumstances were acknowledged and 81 per cent believed the tasks assigned to them were achievable (compared with 76 per cent and 88 per cent, respectively, of those without such conditions). Moreover, lone parents were less likely than other claimants to think that their circumstances had been taken into consideration (62 per cent, compared with an average of 75 per cent). Meanwhile, claimants who had not worked for two years or more (or ever), who lacked qualifications, or who had mental health conditions were less likely than average to view the items in their JSAg as achievable (78 per cent, 80 per cent and 81 per cent respectively, compared with 88 per cent overall).

Upon completion of the NJI, 86 per cent of JSA claimants left with an appointment to see an adviser again, and 77 per cent were confident that they understood how frequently meetings should occur. However, within this there was significant variation between different claimant groups.

Claimants under the age of 25 were the most likely to leave the NJI with a further appointment (89 per cent) and a firm grasp of how often they were expected to see an adviser (83 per cent), whereas claimants aged 50 or over were the least likely to leave with either (80 per cent and 70 per cent, respectively). It is hard to understand why this variation should occur as arranging appointments and discussing their frequency should be consistent for claimants of all ages. It may be that claimants in the 18-24 group are targeted for more frequent meetings but information provision about what the specific arrangements should at least be uniform.

In addition to differences by age there was also variation in the experiences of claimants in the 'disadvantaged' category. For example, homeless claimants had a lower than average likelihood of departing from their NJI with a set date for a follow-up (61 per cent, compared with an average of 86 per cent), and a higher than average likelihood of feeling uncertain about the expected frequency of meetings (56 per cent, compared with an average of 77 per cent). By contrast, those who revealed a drug or alcohol dependency were more likely than average to say they understood how often they needed to meet with an adviser (95 per cent).

### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

There were differences in the views of those looking for work, compared to those not looking for work, when considering the feasibility of the actions they agreed to undertake, and their potential to lead to work in the future (Table 5.10).

**Table 5.10 Perceptions of the Action Plan**

Whether felt that all things agreed...	Took account of your personal circumstances		Were achievable		Would genuinely increase chances of finding work	
	Looking for work	Not looking for work	Looking for work	Not looking for work	Looking for work	Not looking for work
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	66	61	54	43	51	31
Some of them	3	2	5	4	3	1
No	11	13	17	19	25	31
Don't know	9	6	10	9	9	9
Not applicable	11	19	13	25	12	28

Base: All ESA claimants looking for work(199); all ESA claimants not looking for work (1,086).

The number of ESA claimants in the survey who were looking for work is small, so there is limited scope to explore how the views of sub-groups within this category may have differed. However, there is evidence to indicate that those with basic qualifications were more likely than other claimants to feel that the items in their Action Plan could genuinely increase their chances of finding work (70 per cent, compared with 45 per cent of those with higher or no qualifications).

There was variation in the views of the remaining ESA claimants, suggesting that Action Plans were of greater benefit to some categories of claimant and less to others. In part, views varied according to the amount of time that had passed since the claimant was last in work and whether or not they

had a physical health condition. Claimants who had worked within the last year were more likely to consider the steps in their plan achievable (62 per cent, compared with 43 per cent overall) and believe that the actions could help them find employment in the long term (49 per cent, falling to 36 per cent amongst those who had left their last job between one and five years earlier, and 29 per cent amongst claimants who had never worked or been out of work for five years or more). Claimants with physical health conditions often felt the reverse: 58 per cent believed the actions in their plan were achievable and 29 per cent that they could lead to a job in the future (compared with 41 per cent and 46 per cent, respectively, of claimants with no such conditions).

Age, too, played a role, with claimants in their 50s and 60s evidently less optimistic about the prospect of finding work. This group was less inclined to view the items in their Action Plan as either achievable (41 per cent) or liable to lead to employment in the long term (26 per cent) when compared to claimants under the age of 50 (48 per cent and 41 per cent, respectively).

Less than half of all ESA claimants (45 per cent) said they were given a date for their next meeting with an adviser following their NJWFI. Proportions were higher for those in search of work (53 per cent) but even among this key group nearly half of all claimants left the NJWFI not knowing when their next contact with Jobcentre Plus would be.

Echoing this, only around three in five ESA claimants (56 per cent) understood how often they would need to meet with their adviser. This applied across the board, regardless of the claimants' health, most other demographic characteristics, or whether or not they were looking for work.

#### **5.1.4 Summary**

For JSA claimants the topics covered in the NJI were heavily focused around jobsearch with most covering the type of work they were looking for as well as previous experience, how far they could travel for work and skills and qualifications. There was some evidence of tailoring as claimants with low qualifications were more likely to have discussed the possibility of retraining or changing career. However, the depth interviews also indicated that for some disadvantaged claimants there were instances where their particular, more complex, barriers were not being discussed.

Older JSA claimants aged 50+ were less likely to report that their adviser had suggested possible job opportunities to them. However, when advisers were making job suggestions to older claimants they were significantly more likely to report that they were not suitable.

The experience of the NJWFI for ESA claimants was more varied. While it is true to say that the majority of ESA claimants discussed the possibility of working in the future (70 per cent) this means a substantial minority did not. Similarly, nearly half of all ESA claimants did not discuss what steps they could begin to take to find work in the future in the NJWFI. These findings were reflective of what was discovered in the sites visits and depth interviews where it was felt that discussions in the NJWFI lacked depth and probing in terms of identifying claimant needs.

In addition to this, ESA claimants were significantly more likely to report that they left their initial meeting with their adviser without an appointment for their next meeting and without being clear as to how often they would meet their adviser. These factors are indicative of the general 'light-touch' approach that advisers tended to take when dealing with ESA claimants.

## **5.2 Conditionality**

The initial interview between claimant and adviser presents an opportunity to inform claimants of the conditions associated with receipt of their benefit. For JSA claimants this includes the need to be available for and actively seeking work, having a signed and up-to-date JSAG, as well as attending

regular jobsearch review meetings and participating in other activities, as required. For ESA claimants in the WRAG, this includes attending WFIs, as well as undertaking WRA, as required. Advisers are expected to give an explanation of the conditions that might lead to claimants having their benefit stopped or reduced. This section explores how well these issues were explained during the NJI and NJWFI and claimants' understanding of the conditions that may lead to the reduction or withdrawal of their benefit payments<sup>13</sup>.

### **5.2.1 Explanation of conditionality**

All JSA claimants ought to receive an explanation from an adviser of what they need to do in order to keep claiming JSA, as well as the reasons for attending regular jobsearch review meetings. In reality, one in ten (ten per cent) said they were not given an adequate explanation of the conditions associated with JSA and seven per cent did not recall receiving any explanation as to the purpose of their regular reviews. Over one in eight JSA claimants (13 per cent) and one in three ESA claimants (34 per cent) said they were never told by an adviser that their benefit would be affected if they did not agree to certain conditions.

#### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

Half of JSA claimants (51 per cent) felt that the conditions associated with receipt of their benefit were explained 'very well'. Where the NJI had been split into two separate meetings, claimants were slightly more likely to say that conditions were explained very well (61 per cent compared to 56 per cent). However, they were no more likely to say they had been told about the repercussions of failing to agree to the conditions, or of being given an explanation of the purpose of the regular jobsearch review meetings.

Claimants with mental, cognitive or intellectual health conditions or an unspent criminal conviction were more likely to say they were not given an adequate explanation of JSA conditionality (14 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively, compared with 10 per cent of claimants overall). Moreover, claimants with mental health conditions who were told the purpose of the regular jobsearch review meetings were more likely to find the explanation provided unclear (17 per cent, compared with eight per cent of other claimants who received an explanation).

#### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

Three in five ESA claimants (58 per cent) reported being told that their benefit could be stopped or reduced if they did not agree to certain conditions. This is substantially lower than the proportion of JSA claimants who were given this information (85 per cent).

It is possible that a particular effort was made to avoid conveying this information to ESA claimants with a mental health condition. Almost half of claimants who only had a condition of this sort (45 per cent) had either not been told about the possibility of their benefit being affected or could not recall being told this. This compares with 31 per cent of claimants who only had a physical health condition and 33 per cent of those with a combination of physical and mental health conditions.

### **5.2.2 Understanding of conditionality**

There was a relatively low level of awareness surrounding the conditions associated with ESA. When asked to name the conditions that might lead to the reduction or withdrawal of benefit, one in ten JSA claimants (11 per cent) were unable to answer, but this rose to almost half of ESA claimants

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<sup>13</sup> For further information see: <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/index.htm>

(49 per cent). The conditions cited by claimants on JSA and ESA are shown in Table 5.11. ESA claimants who were not looking for work were clearly less knowledgeable than those who were about the conditions that might affect their payments.

**Table 5.11 Conditions that may lead to benefit being stopped or reduced**

	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	ESA not looking for work %
Inadequate attendance or participation	64	39	34
Inadequate efforts to find work	55	19*	8*
Fraud	9	3	4
No longer eligible	3	4	4
Failure to produce written evidence	1	5	3
Other conditions	3	4	3
Don't know	11	40	50
Refused	*	2	2

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants looking for work (199); all ESA not looking for work (1,086).

At the top of most claimants' minds were examples of inadequate attendance or participation in the support options offered by Jobcentre Plus, including failing to sign on (for JSA claimants only) or failing to attend a meeting with an adviser. Over half of JSA claimants (55 per cent) indicated that inadequate efforts to find a job could lead to sanctions. Interestingly, one in ten ESA claimants (10 per cent) said that inadequate efforts to find work could lead to a sanction even though this is not the case – this was even higher among ESA claimants who were looking for work (19 per cent).

### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

A key determinant of the number of conditions JSA claimants put forward was whether or not an adviser had explicitly told them their benefit could be stopped or reduced. Claimants who were not given this information were five times more likely than other claimants to fail to name any conditions (38 per cent compared to seven per cent). They were also half as likely to be able to name more than one condition (28 per cent compared to 59 per cent).

Older claimants seemed less aware of the need to attend the meetings and support options organised by Jobcentre Plus. While 72 per cent of the under-25s said that failure to do this could lead to the withdrawal or reduction of their benefit, only 50 per cent of claimants aged 50 or above did the same. Compared to people aged 25-49, and especially those under that age, claimants in their 50s and 60s were more likely to not give an answer (15 per cent) and less likely to mention the necessity of signing on (27 per cent), attending meetings with Jobcentre Plus advisers (18 per cent) and attending meetings with external organisations (six per cent).

By contrast, disadvantaged JSA claimants seemed to have particularly high levels of awareness of some conditions: they were more likely to spontaneously mention signing on (43 per cent) and being available to work (six per cent) as requirements for claiming JSA (compared with 36 per cent and three per cent, respectively, of other JSA claimants).



### Analysis of ESA claimants

ESA claimants who were warned by their adviser that their benefit could be stopped or reduced if they failed to agree to certain conditions were far more likely (68 per cent) than those who were not given this information (22 per cent) to be able to name at least one condition.

Levels of awareness were particularly low amongst claimants who had transferred over from IB, with 51 per cent unable to name a single condition (compared with 39 per cent of other claimants).

As was the case with JSA, claimants in their 50s and 60s in receipt of ESA seemed less aware that their benefit could be affected if they failed to attend meetings or participate in certain activities: only 31 per cent mentioned this, compared with 39 per cent of younger ESA claimants. More specifically, this group was less likely to spontaneously mention that keeping meetings with an adviser was one of the conditions of claiming benefit (25 per cent, compared with 32 per cent of younger claimants).

### 5.2.3 Attitudes regarding conditionality

Claimants who were aware their benefit could be reduced or stopped if they did not comply with certain conditions were asked during the survey whether this made them more likely to follow the rules associated with their benefit. Seven in ten JSA claimants and six in ten ESA claimants replied that it would. However, fewer JSA and ESA claimants felt this information made them more liable to look for work or take steps that would move them closer to work (Table 5.12).

**Table 5.12 Attitudes regarding conditionality**

Whether knowing benefit could be reduced or stopped if certain rules are not followed makes you...	JSA	ESA looking for work	ESA not looking for work
	%	%	%
More likely to follow rules	71	62	63
Makes no difference	27	28	31
Don't know	2	10	5
Refused	*	*	*
More likely to look for work/take steps to prepare for work	62	53	31
Makes no difference	37	40	57
Don't know	1	7	12
Refused	*	0	*

Base: All JSA claimants told their benefit could be stopped or reduced (1,493); all ESA claimants looking for work told their benefit could be stopped or reduced (123); all ESA not looking for work told their benefit could be stopped or reduced (626).

### Analysis of JSA claimants

Knowing the impact that conditions can have on JSA payments had a varying effect on different types of claimant. The impact on older claimants was relatively minimal: a third (34 per cent) felt this knowledge did not alter their inclination to follow the rules (compared with 29 per cent of 25-49 year-olds and 22 per cent of under-25s), while 45 per cent said it did not affect their inclination to look for work (compared with 41 per cent of 25-49 year-olds and 27 per cent of under-25s). It is not clear whether this means that claimants in their 50s and 60s had less regard for the rules associated

with claiming JSA, or simply that they were prepared to follow the rules and take steps towards work irrespective of the risk of losing their benefit.

Knowing that non-compliance could endanger their benefit was particularly effective in motivating lone parents to abide by the rules (89 per cent, compared with 71 per cent overall). The same group, together with claimants who had been out of the labour market for three years or more, had a higher than average likelihood of treating the risk to their benefits as motivation to look for work or take steps to prepare for work (73 per cent each, compared with 62 per cent overall). By contrast, relatively few claimants who had been out of work for one to two years (67 per cent) and even fewer of those who had been in employment more recently (59 per cent) translated this risk into increased motivation to search, or prepare themselves, for work. The risk of benefit reduction or loss evidently serves as a motivating factor for some claimants more than others, and perhaps especially so for claimants who had been transferred onto JSA from another benefit.

### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

Around three in five ESA claimants who were told that their benefit could be cut or reduced if they failed to meet certain conditions said that this made them more likely to follow the rules associated with claiming ESA (63 per cent). There was no perceptible difference between the opinions of those who were looking for work and those who were not, though opinions did vary by age: claimants over the age of 50 were less likely (56 per cent) than younger claimants (69 per cent) to say that this knowledge made them more liable to follow the rules.

Only in 35 per cent of cases did this knowledge impact on claimants' inclination to search for jobs or prepare themselves for work. The claimants most likely to be motivated by this knowledge were those who had been in employment within the last year (55 per cent) and those who lacked any physical health conditions (51 per cent). Claimants who started claiming ESA without previously having been on IB also had a higher than average likelihood of feeling this way (48 per cent). ESA claimants aged 50 or older were the least likely to say that conditionality motivated them to find work (27 per cent).

#### **5.2.4 Experience of sanctions**

The depth interviews included a number of cases of claimants who had been sanctioned. In general, this was accepted as being a consequence of failing to meet their responsibilities. However, in some cases sanctions were felt to be 'unfair' and Jobcentre Plus perceived to be inflexible in how sanctions had been applied. JSA claimants discussed cases where they believed they had given credible explanations to their advisers for missed appointments yet were still sanctioned. In one case, a claimant had been sanctioned following a timetabling conflict between an adviser interview and referred support. Another claimant had a job interview on the same day as signing on but was sanctioned for missing their appointment.

*'I had an interview on the same day I had to sign on, so I had called up the Jobcentre and told them, "look, I have got an interview today, I was meant to come in", so they said "okay rearrange another time for you to come in". So I went in a few days later ... and they said "okay well we have to send it to a Decision Maker to see whether your claim will be affected by it in anyway" ... and for some reason they just closed my claim down and they said that I will be not paid for the next two or three weeks and for me that's a hindrance.'*

(Male, JSA 18-24)

Some claimants did appeal against their sanctions but said the appeal process was long. Furthermore, it was felt to be difficult to find someone in Jobcentre Plus to speak to in order to begin the process.

## 5.3 Ongoing support

Following the NJI and NJWFI, claimants' experiences of the Jobcentre Plus Offer begin to diverge as they start taking up elements of support according to their needs. The initial section below looks at claimant views of the Jobsearch Review meeting before moving on to examine how much contact there has been so far between claimants and advisers in other meetings. Following this there is a review of the types of support claimants said they were offered and which ones they received (Section 5.4). Claimants' opinions on the degree to which the support actually matched their needs and circumstances, the perceived helpfulness of the support, and the effect that the support received so far has had on their confidence, motivation and job prospects are explored in Section 5.5. The final section briefly looks at any additional support received by claimants who had already moved off benefits and into work by the time of the survey.

### 5.3.1 Jobsearch Review meetings

The depth interviews explored JSA claimants' experience of Jobsearch Review meetings.

JSA claimants' general perception of Jobsearch Review meetings was of a routine meeting which was fairly standardised and focused around meeting conditionality and providing basic jobsearch with an adviser.

It was perceived by some claimants (who had previous JSA claims) that the Jobsearch Review meetings were now less focused on an in-depth jobsearch and offered limited back-to-work support. This attitude was underpinned by a sense that there was less discussion and reflection around their jobsearch diaries and jobsearch activities.

*'A few years ago they used to talk to you longer when you signed in, maybe 15 minutes, and now you just go and sign in. They don't really tell you what they have on offer and the courses they do tell you about are too long winded or there's some sort of problem with them, e.g. too far away.'*

(Male, JSA 18-24)

*'I think sometimes you feel that they're rushing ... they don't go through all my six jobs and they don't look at the job or the company and try to ring them. They don't say you know, "what's going on here?", "how long [have you been waiting for an] application" or anything. They don't do things like that, like chasing the job.'*

(Female, JSA 50+)

This reflects observations from the case study visits that some offices had decreased the amount of time allocated to Jobsearch Review meetings, which was then experienced in some cases as a relatively rushed process (see Section 3.3.2 for further discussion).

Claimants described experiences of conflicting support and advice from AAs in their Jobsearch Review meetings and then PAs in their ongoing meetings. This lack of co-ordination could lead to limited follow through regarding support or barriers as discussed with the claimant.

*'It's weird because they don't know what the other adviser's talked to me about [...] then they start asking you same questions and of course it's like, I've already been asked this last week and you know, they look at jobs and like "have you done this?" "Have you applied for that?" and you know - I mean fair enough, end of the day it's what they do but there's ways, you know, there's like nicer ways.'*

(Male, JSA 18-24)

This reflected the views of staff who discussed the challenges of continuity between Jobsearch Review meetings and adviser meetings (see Section 3.4.2. for more detail). In some areas a team approach was used to ensure greater continuity of support, with shared case loading between Assistant Advisers (AAs) and Personal Advisers (PAs). For some claimants, seeing the same AA fortnightly provided a more effective information flow and continuity of support.

*'It creates a personal relationship between the claimant and the [assistant] adviser, you open up a lot more and you feel comfortable talking to them and it's not just this drone behind the desk that you've never met before, so it's, yes it's a lot better.'*

(Male, JSA 18-24)

Yet on-site observations and follow-up interviews with claimants suggested that this joined-up case loading approach did not always translate into positive experiences of the Jobsearch Review meetings. For many, Jobsearch Review meetings were still regarded as a quick box-ticking process that were wholly unconnected to their adviser meetings and did not help them find work when the expectation was that they would.

### 5.3.2 Jobsearch advice

Respondents were asked whether they had been offered certain types of jobsearch advice by an adviser during their claim: advice about how to write a CV or job application, or how to prepare and carry out a job interview; and suggestions about where they should look for job vacancies.

Most JSA claimants (84 per cent) said they had discussed at least one of these issues. However, the proportion was lower for ESA claimants who were looking for work (56 per cent). In particular, these ESA claimants were less likely to have been offered suggestions about where they should look for job vacancies (49 per cent, compared with 78 per cent of JSA claimants). Table 5.13 provides further details. Overall, these findings indicate that there is a stronger focus on practical jobsearch advice for JSA claimants than ESA claimants, even where ESA claimants are looking for work.

**Table 5.13 Discussion of jobsearch activities**

	JSA %	ESA looking for work %
Offered:		
Advice about how to write a CV or job application, or how to prepare and carry out a job interview	55	35
Suggestions about where you should look for job vacancies	78	49
Any of the above	84	56

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants looking for work (199).

#### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

Younger JSA claimants were more likely to have been offered jobsearch advice: 90 per cent of 16-24 year-olds were offered at least one of the types of advice, compared with 83 per cent of those aged 25 or over. A similar pattern was found in the evaluation of Jobseeker's Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) (Knight *et al.*, 2010). Respondents who had been out of work for a longer period of time were also more likely to have had this type of advice, as were those who described themselves as being nervous at the thought of being in work. By contrast, those who had already moved off JSA and into work by the time of the interview were less likely to have been offered jobsearch advice (perhaps reflecting the fact that they often did not need this type of advice).

As with a number of topics covered in this chapter, respondents were more likely to have jobsearch advice if they had seen the same adviser over two or more meetings – rather than seeing a different adviser. Although claimants' own views were mixed as to the importance of seeing the same adviser (see Section 5.3.2), these findings suggest that continuity with the same adviser can lead to greater discussion of options than is possible when claimants are seeing different advisers. This confirms previous evidence from Employment Zones (EZs) and JRFND, as described in Section 2.2. It should be noted that the impact of adviser continuity is not apparent for new JSA claimants who have been out of employment for over a year. These claimants are equally likely to be directed to jobsearch support whether they speak to one or multiple advisers, perhaps reflecting the fact that this support need is more apparent in these cases.

In general, there were no differences in the proportions receiving jobsearch advice, in relation to various barriers to work, such as health conditions or aspects of 'disadvantage'. The only exceptions were that ex-offenders were less likely than other respondents to say they had been offered jobsearch advice (76 per cent), while those revealing drug or alcohol problems were more likely to say they had been offered this advice<sup>14</sup>.

Of particular note, those with barriers relating to finding work, such as those saying a lack of local job vacancies was a barrier, were no more likely than other respondents to have been offered the various types of jobsearch advice. This suggests that, while advisers were differentiating between claimants up to a point (as indicated by the variations by age, recent work experience and nervousness about work), they were not always responding to those claimants who most needed this type of advice.

### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

There is very limited scope for sub-group analysis of ESA claimants, as these questions were only asked of those looking for work (199 respondents). However, analysis indicates that (as was the case with JSA claimants), discussion of jobsearch activities was higher for those who had been out of work longer. For those on ESA, the division is between those who had worked in the last five years, compared with those who had not worked for over five years or at all.

### **5.3.3 Ongoing adviser contact**

The survey included a series of questions designed to measure whether the extent and nature of the contact which claimants maintained with advisers matched their needs. Claimants were asked about the number of meetings attended so far; their views on the degree of contact they had experienced; whether they had seen more than one adviser and, if so, how they felt about this; and how well the advisers they had come into contact with understood their circumstances.

JSA claimants and ESA claimants who were looking for work maintained similar levels of contact with advisers (2.6 and 2.7 meetings on average, respectively, up until the point of the survey interview). Claimants on JSA, however, were more likely to have attended either no meetings at all, or to have attended over five meetings. This variation may indicate that advisers are targeting support at those who are further away from work. In contrast ESA claimants who were looking for work were more likely to have attended just one (Table 5.14).

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<sup>14</sup> The findings for those revealing drug or alcohol problems should be treated with caution, due to the small number of respondents.

**Table 5.14 Number of meetings with adviser (excluding regular jobsearch review meetings)**

	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	ESA not looking for work %
None	13	1	2
1	24	40	51
2	23	22	22
3	14	14	13
4-5	11	12	6
6-10	6	4	3
11 or more	2	2	1
Don't know	8	6	4

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants looking for work (199); all ESA not looking for work (1,086).

ESA claimants with no imminent plans to enter the labour market had the least contact with advisers (2.0 meetings on average), and around half had only attended a single meeting so far (51 per cent). However, most claimants (74 per cent) judged this limited amount of contact to be about right for their needs, though a significant minority felt that some of this contact was unnecessary (12 per cent).

Table 5.15 shows claimants' views on the amount of time they spent with advisers. Although the majority of claimants in each category felt that they had spent about the right amount of time with advisers, satisfaction was highest amongst ESA claimants who were looking for work (80 per cent). One in six JSA claimants (17 per cent) felt that the time available to spend with advisers was insufficient for their needs; they were more likely to voice this criticism than either ESA claimants looking for work (12 per cent) or ESA claimants who were not looking for work (seven per cent).

**Table 5.15 Views regarding amount of contact**

	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	ESA not looking for work %
Too much time	8	6	12
About right	73	80	74
Not enough time	17	12	7
Don't know	2	2	7
Refused	*	1	0

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants looking for work (199); all ESA not looking for work (1,086).

Around three-quarters of ESA claimants who had attended more than one meeting saw the same adviser every time. JSA claimants experienced much lower levels of continuity – with only 49 per cent seeing the same adviser on every occasion – but those who experienced a change of adviser were less likely to mind this than their ESA counterparts (Table 5.16).

**Table 5.16 Views on seeing multiple advisers**

	JSA %	ESA %
Prefer to see the same adviser	37	52
Prefer to see one of your usual advisers	4	4
No preference on which adviser you see	55	39
Spontaneous: Don't mind as long as they know a bit about your circumstances	3	4
Don't know	1	2

Base: All JSA claimants who spoke to more than one adviser (515); all ESA claimants who spoke to more than one adviser (142).

While JSA claimants were less likely to say they preferred to see the same adviser or group of advisers than ESA claimants (41 per cent compared to 56 per cent) there was still a substantial minority who did prefer this. This reflected the findings from the depth interviews where claimants described the importance of seeing the same adviser because it ensured both continuity and familiarity. Developing a relationship with one adviser was seen as positive because claimants could rely on their advisers' understanding and awareness of their situation and needs, which in turn prevented them having to repeat the same information again.

*'[My adviser] has got to know me personally as an individual and I feel that she does have our interests at heart rather than just processing paper and ticking boxes and throwing people through a door.'*

(Male, JSA 50+)

Continuity in adviser support was valued by those claimants with complex or multiple needs because their advisers were able to understand the sensitivity of their situation. This was particularly important for those claimants with health conditions (related to both physical and mental health) who did not want to have to explain their situation multiple times.

*'I found it helpful just because I didn't feel like I was like getting asked, like I said I only went over my anxiety and my panic attacks in the first time, so I didn't have to keep sort of going over it with everyone, because I do find it hard to talk about to people sometimes because I find it quite embarrassing.'*

(Male, ESA WRAG six month prognosis)

Additionally, claimants who had anxiety or stress disorders could feel uncomfortable attending meetings in the environment of a Jobcentre Plus office but knowing they were able to see the same adviser facilitated this contact. One example of this was an ESA claimant with mental health problems who only felt able to come into the Jobcentre Plus office because of the relationship she had developed with her adviser:

*'I'd rather see the same person so I know who I am going to see, whereas if it's different people that would make me a bit more nervous and a bit more anxious but if I am seeing the same person I like routine and I know who I would then be going to see.'*

(Female, ESA WRAG 12 month prognosis)

However, the depth interviews also found that there were those who felt they had received a less personalised and tailored service and were, therefore, less concerned about seeing the same adviser again. Some in this group perceived an advantage in seeing different advisers because this might bring a diversity of approaches or, where they were critical of the first adviser, wanted more engaged and tailored support and help.

*'Yes, no I don't mind [which advisers I see] because I mean there's not much substance to the actual interview or meeting when you go so it doesn't really matter who you see.'*

(Female, JSA 18-24)

*'The guy has let me down on a couple of occasions ... I'm not going to antagonise him because then that will cause me problems later on. But I think it would be best if you see different people because then you're able to ask well, why did that not happen for you last time or why did that? Somebody along the way would be a conscientious member of staff and pick things up, and it would be flagged up and then hopefully whoever had done it would get picked up at their appraisal.'*

(Female, JSA 50+)

### 5.3.4 Understanding and responding to personal circumstances

Between seven and eight in ten claimants felt that the advisers they saw understood their particular circumstances (Table 5.17). The opinions of the three claimant groups were broadly similar, though JSA claimants were slightly more inclined than ESA claimants to indicate that advisers had failed to appreciate their circumstances.

**Table 5.17 Views regarding advisers' understanding of personal circumstances**

Jobcentre Plus advisers understood your particular circumstances	JSA	ESA looking for work	ESA not looking for work
	%	%	%
Agree	70	74	78
Agree strongly	42	57	62
Agree slightly	28	18	16
Disagree	21	17	14
Disagree slightly	7	7	3
Disagree strongly	14	11	12
Neither agree nor disagree	8	6	4
Don't know	2	2	4

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants looking for work (199); all ESA not looking for work (1,086).

#### Analysis of JSA claimants

While a range of factors may have helped shape the relationship between JSA claimants and advisers, one of the most notable is the delivery during the NJI of information regarding 'next steps'. Claimants who were given a follow-up appointment at the end of their NJI attended more meetings than those without an appointment (an average of 2.7 compared to 1.8) and were less likely to mention that the time they had spent with an adviser was inadequate for their needs (15 per cent compared to 27 per cent). Over two-fifths of this group (44 per cent) strongly agreed that advisers understood them, well above the equivalent for claimants who had not received an appointment (31 per cent).



Similarly, claimants' initial understanding of the frequency of meetings they needed to attend had a bearing on the degree and nature of their ongoing contact. Claimants who failed to establish a clear understanding of this during the NJI not only had fewer meetings overall (an average of 2.2, compared with 2.7 amongst those who felt they understood this) but a greater likelihood of seeing multiple advisers (63 per cent compared to 48 per cent), feeling the time spent with advisers did not meet their needs (29 per cent compared to 14 per cent) and believing that advisers did not understand their circumstances (37 per cent compared to 16 per cent).

Adviser contact varied by age, though this may be linked to the delivery and understanding of 'next steps' information. It was relatively common for claimants under the age of 25 to receive an appointment during the NJI and understand how often they should see an adviser; and it is this group who had the most meetings (3.2 on average) and the highest tendency to see the same adviser (53 per cent, compared with 48 per cent of 25-49 year-olds and 43 per cent of claimants aged 50 or above). Perhaps this, in turn, may explain why three-quarters of under-25s (74 per cent) felt that advisers understood their circumstances, whereas claimants over the age of 25 were less likely to feel this way (67 per cent).

Opinions on the amount of time spent with advisers did not vary substantially, though claimants who said the thought of being in paid work made them nervous were more likely to feel they had insufficient time with the adviser (18 per cent, compared with 12 per cent who did not feel this way). Claimants who were homeless or had an unspent criminal conviction also thought that they had insufficient time with advisers: only 62 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively, felt this was right for their needs (compared with 74 per cent across all JSA claimants).

Several categories of disadvantaged claimant were more likely than average to say that advisers did not understand their circumstances: three in ten with physical health conditions (29 per cent) or mental health conditions (31 per cent), and six in ten claimants who were homeless (60 per cent) felt this way (compared with 21 per cent across all JSA claimants). It is unclear what was driving this, but in the case of those with health conditions the belief that there may have been a lack of understanding may be based on the relatively small amount of contact experienced so far (an average of 2.0 and 2.2 meetings).

### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

Establishing 'next steps' was a major determinant of the amount of contact and continuity experienced by ESA claimants in the weeks immediately subsequent to the NJWFI. Claimants who received an appointment at the end of the NJWFI tended to have more contact with advisers than those without an appointment (an average of 2.5 meetings compared to 2.1 meetings) and were more likely to see the same adviser at every meeting (82 per cent compared to 62 per cent). As was the case with JSA claimants, those on ESA who left the initial interview feeling unclear on how often they would need to meet with an adviser ended up attending fewer meetings (an average of 1.7). In contrast to claimants who were clear in this regard, they were more likely to see multiple advisers (34 per cent compared to 21 per cent), feel that they needed to spend more time with advisers (12 per cent compared to five per cent) and believe their circumstances were not understood (82 per cent compared to 70 per cent).

While most claimants (75 per cent) said that advisers correctly assessed the amount of contact required for their needs, one in eight claimants who were transferred from IB to ESA or who had mental health conditions believed that some of this time was not necessary (12 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively, compared with six per cent overall). The opposite concern – of not spending enough time – was disproportionately mentioned by claimants who were nervous about working (ten per cent, compared with six per cent of those who disagreed that 'the thought of being in paid work makes me nervous').

As discussed in Chapter 3, advisers also had discretion to change the format of meetings and in practice this occurred mainly for ESA and IS claimants. Examples of advisers adopting this flexibility to use different contact channels for different claimants were picked up in some of the depth interviews.

Claimants valued the flexibility of adviser contact via the telephone for informal support on an ad hoc basis – particularly where they faced barriers attending meetings, such as difficulties with childcare provision or physical or mental health-related reasons. However, this flexibility was not used consistently. Some claimants identified the need for greater use of telephone or home contact. One ESA claimant with mobility problems had only found out that Jobcentre Plus offered home visits nine months into her claim:

*‘I’d rather do my talk with them over the phone or have a team doing home visits.’*

(Female, ESA WRAG 12 month prognosis)

Additionally, some ESA claimants noted that they would have preferred the option of a private room as they felt uncomfortable discussing personal issues next to other people. This may have affected how often they contacted their adviser and the issues they disclosed to them.

### **5.3.5 Summary**

Claimants viewed the Jobsearch Review meeting as a box-ticking exercise that was more about conditionality than providing in-depth jobsearch support. This reflects what was learned from the case study visits where staff talked about reducing adviser resource used on them and instead delegating tasks to AAs.

The majority of claimants felt that the time they had to spend with their adviser was about right, although a round a fifth to a quarter disagreed with this. JSA claimants and ESA claimants looking for work were likely to feel they had too little time as opposed to too much time by a ratio of 2:1. For ESA claimants not looking for work the ratio was reversed with twice as many thinking they had spent too much time with their adviser.

Only half of all JSA claimants said they had seen the same adviser for each meeting compared to around three quarters of ESA claimants. However, only around two fifths of JSA claimants who had seen multiple advisers said they would have preferred to maintain continuity. In the depth interviews the benefit of getting to know their adviser personally and concerns about having to explain their situation multiple times was something that was particularly important for disadvantaged claimants and those with health conditions.

## **5.4 Flexible menu of support**

This section looks at the flexible menu of support. It examines the proportion of claimants who discussed support options with advisers, as well as the proportion taking up different options. It also looks at the profile of claimants who discussed and took up support options, to assess the extent of tailoring.

When reading this chapter, it is important to bear in mind that interviews took place at a fairly early stage in many claims. This means that the findings only cover support options that were discussed or taken up in these early stages. The second wave of the survey will provide a more complete picture of support for the full duration of the claim.

Secondly, the survey results rely on respondents' ability to recall accurately the specific types of support they have discussed and taken up. Although experiences were still recent when the interviews were conducted, it is still likely that some respondents had difficulty in recalling the detail of what they had discussed with advisers. Some caution should therefore be taken when interpreting the findings.

### 5.4.1 Work Clubs

Respondents were asked whether they had been offered information about local Work Clubs.

Around two in five JSA claimants (44 per cent) and ESA claimants looking for work said they had been given information about Work Clubs in their local area. In total, 11 per cent of JSA claimants and six per cent of ESA claimants said they had attended a Work Club. The higher figure for those on JSA reflects both the greater proportion who received information about Work Clubs, and a higher attendance rate among those who received information: 25 per cent for JSA claimants and 15 per cent for ESA claimants.

**Table 5.18 Discussion and attendance of Work Clubs**

	JSA %	ESA looking for work %
Offered information about Work Clubs	44	38
Attended a Work Club	11	6

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants looking for work (199).

#### Case study: Work Clubs, Lisa, lone parent, IS voluntary, District F

Lisa has dyslexia, which she feels is a barrier to finding work. Lisa's adviser recommended that she go to her local Work Club, which had experience of helping people with literacy and learning needs. She has found going to the Work Club really helpful so far, and likes the fact that it is more informal than other support and training.

*'[The Work Club is good] if you have got problems and you can't go to like somewhere that is like college or anywhere like that. I went to college to do hairdressing and I wasn't comfortable with it because everyone else was all like onto the next level and I was still struggling on the first level.'*

Lisa feels that the Work Club staff understand her needs and are helping her to develop her CV. She particularly likes that she can go there whenever she wants to. She feels this is the first step towards going back to work once her daughter goes to school.

### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

The following groups of JSA claimants were more likely than average to have attended a Work Club, and this reflects both a greater proportion who discussed Work Clubs with advisers, and a high proportion who then actually attended one:

- those out of work for more than two years (18 per cent);
- those who were nervous about being in work (19 per cent);
- those who saw the same adviser rather than different ones (16 per cent compared with eight per cent).

By contrast, some sub-groups were less likely to have attended a Work Club, again reflecting both a lower level of discussion and lower attendance rates:

- those who had left JSA for a job (five per cent);
- claimants with a child and partner (five per cent). By contrast, a relatively large proportion of lone parents had attended a Work Club (16 per cent), due to the high proportion of those getting information who had then actually attended one.

Other sub-group patterns reflect high or low attendance rates (i.e. the proportion who received information and who actually attended a Work Club):

- the overall proportion who attended a Work Club was similar for those with a longstanding illness or disability (LSI) as for other respondents. However, the attendance rate was higher for those with a LSI, and was particularly high among those who said their condition affects their ability to work (47 per cent of this group who had information about a Work Club actually attended one). The attendance rate was also high among those with a mental health condition (38 per cent);
- claimants with some kind of disadvantage that was not health-related (including ex-offenders, ex-armed forces, those who had experienced homelessness or revealed drug or alcohol problems) were more likely to attend a Work Club (17 per cent);
- there was no difference by age group in overall attendance rates, despite a greater level of discussion among 16-24 year-olds.

### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

There is very limited scope for sub-group analysis of ESA claimants, as these questions were only asked of those looking for work (199 respondents).

#### **5.4.2 Skills assessment and training**

Seven per cent of JSA claimants and four per cent of ESA claimants said that they had received a skills assessment at some point during their claim.<sup>15</sup> One in five JSA claimants said they had been offered some form of training (19 per cent), much higher than the proportion of ESA claimants (six per cent).

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<sup>15</sup> It is likely that the survey under-reports the proportion of claimants having a skills assessment, as claimants may not always be aware that a skills assessment is being carried out, as this is sometimes a discreet activity carried out by Jobcentre Plus advisers. Generally though, any claimant being referred to training or being referred to another organisation will have had an initial skills assessment carried out by a Jobcentre Plus adviser.

Table 5.19 shows the type of training that respondents had been offered.

**Table 5.19 Skills assessment and offer of training**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Had skills assessment	7	4
Offered training:	19	6
• advice on or referral to an education course at a local college or other training provider	13	4
• referral to a skills assessment with a Skills Provider (not based at Jobcentre Plus)	7	2
• referral to the National Careers Service or a Careers Adviser	4	1
• being told you had to attend a course to improve your skills	6	2

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

Around half of JSA claimants attended the training they had been offered (49 per cent across the different types of training). The attendance rate for ESA clients was lower (28 per cent). This means that, in total, nine per cent of JSA clients and two per cent of ESA clients had attended some training by the time of interview.

Table 5.20 shows the attendance rates for individual types of training (figures are only shown for the JSA sample, as the number of ESA claimants is too small for analysis). The table shows that in each case, around half of JSA claimants who had been offered training had taken it up.

**Table 5.20 Attendance at training**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Any training:	49	28
• education course at a local college or other training provider	49	–
• skills assessment with a Skills Provider (not based at Jobcentre Plus)	49	–
• National Careers Service or a Careers Adviser	48	–
• course to improve your skills	60	–

Base: All JSA/ESA claimants who were offered each type of training (base varies).

Note: percentage figures are not shown where base is less than 50.

### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

In total, 23 per cent of JSA claimants had either had a skills assessment or been offered training, while nine per cent had actually attended some training. A number of groups were more likely to have been offered – and to have actually attended – training:

- those with basic qualifications only (34 per cent offered, 13 per cent attended); detailed analysis by qualification level is in Table 5.21. A similar pattern was observed in the JRFND evaluation (Knight *et al.*, 2010);
- those out of work for over two years (30 per cent offered, 13 per cent attended);

- those who said they were nervous at the thought of working (29 per cent offered, 14 per cent attended).

**Table 5.21 Offer of, and attendance at, training, by highest qualification**

	Offered %	Attended %
No qualifications	24	10
Basic qualifications only	34	13
GCSE A-C	21	9
A levels and other post-16	19	8
Degree level	16	6

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749).

The offer of training was also higher than average among ex-offenders (32 per cent) and other respondents with a disadvantage that was not related to health (e.g. ex-armed forces, those who had experienced homelessness or revealed drug or alcohol problems).

JSA claimants who had moved into work by the time of the interview were less likely to have been offered training (14 per cent).

These findings indicate that advisers were tailoring the support offered to JSA claimants to some extent. However, it is notable that those with barriers to work which might be addressed through training – those who said they lacked the right skills for the jobs they were interested in – were no more likely than other respondents to have been offered any training. These respondents did have a high attendance rate at training, however, in total, 18 per cent of these respondents had attended training. This indicates that when they were offered training, they were likely to have attended – the problem was that many said they had not been offered training in the first place.

### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

For ESA claimants, those looking for work were more likely to have had a skills assessment or to have been offered training than those not looking for work (13 per cent compared with eight per cent). Those looking for work were also more likely to have attended training (four per cent in total, compared with one per cent of those not looking for work).

### **5.4.3 Work experience**

One in seven JSA claimants (14 per cent) said they had been offered an opportunity to develop some work experience during their claim. Given that work experience initiatives are mostly targeted at those aged under-25, it makes sense to look at the findings for this age group separately<sup>16</sup>. In total, 29 per cent of 16-24 year-olds said they had been offered a work experience opportunity.

Table 5.22 shows the proportion of respondents who were offered each type of work experience advice or activity. The highest figure is for the Work Experience scheme, which was offered to nine per cent of all JSA claimants and 18 per cent of those aged 16 to 24.

<sup>16</sup> In particular the Youth Contract was launched in April 2012 and this will potentially have impacted on these claimants.

**Table 5.22 Offer of work experience**

	All JSA %	JSA aged 16-24 %
Offered an opportunity to develop some work experience	14	29
• Work Experience scheme	9	18
• being referred to a 'Work Trial'	5	11
• Mandatory Work Activity (MWA)	4	9
• advice about internships	3	7
• advice about apprenticeships and 'Access to Apprenticeship scheme'	5	14
• a placement on a sector-based work academy	1	3

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all JSA claimants aged 16-24 (550).

In total, four per cent of JSA claimants had taken up a work experience placement or activity by the time of the interview. The figure for 16-24 year-olds was nine per cent.

The attendance rates for work experience are shown in Table 5.23. Overall, 31 per cent of JSA claimants who had been offered an opportunity had actually attended one. The highest attendance rate was for MWA which obviously reflects the compulsory nature of the programme.

**Table 5.23 Attendance at work experience opportunities**

	All JSA %	JSA aged 16-24 %
Any work experience:	31	32
• Work Experience scheme	31	32
• Work Trial	34	34
• MWA	36	36
• advice about internships	49	44
• a placement on a sector-based work academy	–	–

Base: All JSA claimants/JSA claimants aged 16-24 who were offered each type of training (base varies).

Note: percentage figures are not shown where base is less than 50.

### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

More detailed analysis (restricted to JSA claimants aged 16-24 only) shows that those with lower skills were more likely to have been offered a work experience opportunity (39 per cent with basic qualifications or none at all, compared with 29 per cent qualified to GCSE level or above), as were those who had been out of work for over two years or who had never worked (41 per cent). The figure was also higher among claimants who had seen the same adviser over two or more meetings (33 per cent) rather than those who saw different advisers over two or more meetings (24 per cent).

As on other issues, respondents who had found work by the time of the interview were less likely to have been offered a work experience opportunity (21 per cent).

If respondents said that a lack of work experience was a barrier to work, they were more likely to have been offered a work experience opportunity, although the difference was small: in the 16 to 24 age group, 36 per cent of those who said this was a barrier were offered a work experience opportunity, compared with 30 per cent of other respondents. Once again, these sub-group patterns indicate that there was some tailoring of the support being offered by advisers, but this was somewhat limited.

Attendance rates for work experience placements were similar for older JSA claimants as for 16-24 year-olds. Detailed analysis of this group is not possible because of the small numbers of respondents concerned.

#### 5.4.4 Self-employment support

Five per cent of JSA claimants have been offered help with setting up their own business<sup>17</sup>. Table 5.24 shows the specific types of help received.

**Table 5.24 Help with setting up own business**

	All JSA %
Offered help with setting up own business:	5
• receiving information and guidance about self-employment or setting up your own business	3
• being referred to a business mentoring scheme	2
• being referred to an 'enterprise club' in your local area	1
• discussing the New Enterprise Allowance (NEA)	1

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749).

One in six (17 per cent) of those who were offered help had actually taken up some form of self-employment activity by the time of the interview (one per cent of all JSA claimants overall). Analysis of individual activities is not possible, because of the small numbers of respondents. There was evidence from the depth interviews that some claimants were frustrated that they were not able to access support for becoming self-employed until they had been claiming for at least six months.

#### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

More highly qualified claimants were more likely to have been offered help with setting up their own business (eight per cent of those qualified to degree level). The proportion offered this type of help was lower among those aged under 25 (two per cent), and was higher for men than women (five per cent compared with three per cent).

#### 5.4.5 Volunteering

In contrast to the pattern seen for other issues, ESA claimants (37 per cent) were more likely than JSA claimants (23 per cent) to have discussed volunteering with an adviser. The specific issues discussed can be seen in Table 5.25.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that some self-employment support is not available to JSA claimants until 6 months into their claim.



**Table 5.25 Advice about volunteering**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Advised about volunteering:	23	37
• local organisations that have agreed to support unemployed people	16	26
• a local volunteer centre	12	20
• on-line (e.g. a website called 'DO IT')	11	15

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

A low proportion of JSA and ESA clients overall had actually taken up a volunteering opportunity (four per cent in each case). This means that the participation rates among those who discussed it were relatively low, particularly for ESA claimants (11 per cent, compared with 17 per cent of JSA claimants).

The depth interviews provided some indication of potential problems which may lead to the relatively low take-up of volunteering options. Where volunteering had been discussed with ESA claimants, they did not necessarily take up support because of current health conditions. Others did not see the value as it was perceived as unpaid work and associated with negative media stories regarding the Work Experience offer for 18-24 year-olds.

However, perhaps most worryingly of all from an organisational standpoint was that the discussion of volunteering was not always followed up with information regarding where they could find opportunities. As a result of this some claimants found they had to look independently for contacts and organisations.

### **Case study: Volunteering, Robert, ESA mandatory 12 months, District B**

Robert suffers from psychosis and depression/anxiety problems and receives ongoing support from his local psychiatric support team. His adviser mentioned the possibility of volunteering but did not provide him with any details or signpost any suitable contact organisations. Although he initially felt reluctant about the idea of volunteering, he subsequently thought this could be a good idea. He found the discussion with his adviser unclear and did not know if this was something he had to organise himself and what next steps he needed to take.

*'You know a couple of months into it she was kind of saying, "you need to be doing something, whether it's voluntary work or whether it's getting on some kind of programme" ... and I said, "well, like what?", you know, and she said, "well the NHS do things" and so I asked my psychiatric nurse and she said that she doesn't really know what kind of programme or anything like that they're talking about anyway so it wasn't really clear exactly what I was meant to be doing.'*

### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

Amongst JSA claimants, discussion of volunteering was higher among 16-24 year-olds (31 per cent), as well as those who had either been out of work for over two years or who had never worked (32 per cent). It was lower among those in a couple with children (15 per cent), as well as those who had moved into work by the time of the interview (18 per cent).

Those who had seen the same adviser over two or more meetings were again more likely to have discussed volunteering (31 per cent) than those who had seen different advisers (21 per cent). Those who said lack of work experience was a barrier to work were no more likely than other respondents to have discussed volunteering.

Take-up of volunteering opportunities was relatively high among those with a limiting longstanding illness or disability (LLSI) (eight per cent in total), as well as those who said they were nervous about working (also eight per cent).

### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

ESA claimants who were looking for work were more likely than other ESA claimants to have discussed volunteering (46 per cent compared with 35 per cent). Those who were nervous about working were also more likely to have discussed this option (39 per cent). Respondents without any qualifications were less likely to have discussed the possibility of volunteering (29 per cent).

Among ESA clients, discussion of volunteering was (as with JSA claimants) higher where claimants saw the same adviser over two or more meetings (47 per cent), rather than different advisers (38 per cent).

Actual take-up of a volunteering opportunity was higher among those looking for work (eight per cent) and among those qualified to degree level (ten per cent).

## **5.4.6 Advice and support for health conditions or disabilities**

Around one in eight JSA claimants (12 per cent) said that they had been offered advice or support for a health condition or disability. Of these, 42 per cent had received advice on health service providers who could help with their health condition or disability; this means that five per cent of all JSA claimants had this advice. One in four ESA claimants (25 per cent) said they had received advice on health service providers.

Where respondents had been offered help or support by a Jobcentre Plus adviser about their health condition or disability, many said that they had discussed both the jobs that they would, and would not, be able to do. This was higher for JSA claimants (77 per cent) than ESA claimants (46 per cent). One in three ESA claimants (34 per cent) said they had no discussion about the jobs they could or could not do.

**Table 5.26 Discussion of jobs as part of help and support for health conditions or disabilities**

	JSA %	ESA %
Whether discussed:		
• jobs they would be able to do	11	9
• jobs they would not be able to do	0	3
• both	77	46
• neither of these	9	34
• don't know	4	6

Base: All who were offered help and support for a health condition or disability: JSA (74); ESA (226).

Of those offered help or support by a Jobcentre Plus adviser about their health condition or disability, around one in four were referred to a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA), and a similar proportion discussed Access to Work. Figures for JSA and ESA claimants are shown in Table 5.27.

**Table 5.27 Discussion and referral as part of help and support for health conditions or disabilities**

	JSA %	ESA %
Referred to DEA	29	22
Discussed Access to Work	29	28

Base: All who were offered help and support for a health condition or disability: JSA (74); ESA (226).

Only 49 ESA claimants were referred to a DEA. Of these, 25 had discussed the Work Choice Programme with the DEA, while 16 had received information from the DEA about employers who had adopted the 'two ticks' disability symbol, and seven had discussed residential training with the DEA.

### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

Among JSA claimants with a longstanding illness (LSI), 27 per cent said they had been offered advice or support with their health condition or disability, and encouragingly this was higher (39 per cent) where they said that the condition makes it difficult for them to work. The proportion offered this type of support was similar for those with physical and mental health conditions.

Eight per cent of JSA claimants with a LSI received advice on health service providers. This proportion was similar for those with a condition that limited their ability to work (ten per cent) and again was similar for those with physical and mental health conditions.

### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

The proportion of ESA claimants who had advice on health service providers (25 per cent overall) was higher for those with mental health conditions (37 per cent for those with mental health conditions only; 25 per cent for those with both a physical and mental health condition; and 19 per cent for those with a physical condition only). The figure was no different for ESA claimants who were looking for work as for other ESA claimants. There were no sub-group differences for ESA claimants who saw a DEA.

For both JSA and ESA claimants, respondents who revealed drug or alcohol problems were also more likely to say they had advice on health service providers to help them with their condition.

### 5.4.7 Information or help with childcare

Only a minority of claimants with children said they were offered information or help with childcare by a Jobcentre Plus adviser during their claim. This applied to just 14 per cent of JSA claimants and five per cent of ESA claimants who had children. The number of respondents is too small to analyse the specific types of childcare advice received.

Lone parents on JSA were more likely than parents in couples to say that they had been offered information or help with childcare (25 per cent compared with seven per cent). In terms of the age of the youngest child, parents with a youngest child aged between five and ten (22 per cent) were more likely to have had information or help with childcare than either those with a youngest child under five (seven per cent) or 11 or over (13 per cent). There were no significant sub-group differences in the ESA sample.

### 5.4.8 Other types of support

Some claimants said they had been offered advice or support on treatment options for drug or alcohol problems, information or help with caring responsibilities for adults, and advice regarding homelessness. Figures for JSA and ESA claimants can be seen in Table 5.28.

**Table 5.28 Other types of support**

	JSA %	ESA %
Treatment options for any drug or alcohol problems	4	7
Information or help with caring responsibilities for adults	5	8
Advice regarding homelessness	4	4

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

#### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

On all three issues (drug/alcohol problems, homelessness and caring responsibilities), younger JSA claimants (under 25) were more likely than older claimants to say that they had been offered advice or support (between six and seven per cent of 16-24 year-olds said they had advice on each issue). Men were also more likely than women to say they had been offered advice on treatment options for drug or alcohol problems and on homelessness (six per cent of men had advice on each issue, compared with four per cent of women). Advice on homelessness was also higher among those with a disadvantage that was not related to health (ten per cent), especially those with drug or alcohol problems.

In relation to both treatment options for drug or alcohol problems and homelessness, JSA claimants who saw the same adviser over multiple meetings were more likely to have had this advice than those who saw different advisers or who had only had one meeting. Again, this suggests that adviser continuity increases the likelihood that relevant issues are discussed with claimants.

JSA claimants who mentioned they had caring responsibilities for adults were no more likely than other JSA claimants to have been offered help or advice on caring. This finding, and the low level of discussion overall, suggests that caring responsibilities are currently very low on advisers' priorities for discussion.

### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

In the ESA sample, those with low qualifications (nine per cent qualified to no higher than GCSE level, compared with three per cent qualified to A level or above) were more likely to have received advice or support on treatment for drug or alcohol problems, as well as men (nine per cent compared with six per cent of women). ESA claimants aged 50 or over (four per cent) were less likely to have received advice or support on treatment for drug or alcohol problems.

Advice on treatment options for drug or alcohol problems was also higher among ex-offenders (18 per cent), while advice regarding homelessness was higher among those who revealed drug or alcohol problems (12 per cent). This indicates a certain degree of overlap between these types of problem, and that there is a sub-group of claimants with very severe multiple barriers.

The proportion of ESA claimants who discussed caring responsibilities for adults was slightly higher among those who had these responsibilities (14 per cent) but, as with the JSA sample, this proportion was still low.

On all three issues, figures for ESA claimants who were looking for work were similar to other ESA claimants.

### **5.4.9 Work Programme**

This evaluation is focused on the Jobcentre Plus Offer but it does also include some information on claimant interactions with the Work Programme in order to better understand the overall experience. A separate evaluation of the Work Programme is currently being conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) with the first report due to be published in November 2012.

Five per cent of JSA claimants and two per cent of ESA claimants said they had been on the Work Programme as part of their claim<sup>18</sup>. These small numbers are not surprising, given that respondents had only started their claim for JSA or ESA at most a few months before the interview. Those entering the Work Programme at this early stage will either be those who volunteered to access the Work Programme or who did so at the adviser's discretion. Early entrants to the Work Programme are generally those with particular difficulties or barriers; this is reflected in the analysis of JSA claimants below.

Of the respondents who said they had been on the Work Programme, around half said that they had volunteered to access the Work Programme (60 per cent of JSA claimants and 45 per cent of ESA claimants).

In addition, some respondents had discussed the Work Programme with an adviser (nine per cent of JSA claimants and 15 per cent of ESA claimants). Among those who discussed the Work Programme with an adviser, 33 per cent of JSA claimants and 22 per cent of ESA claimants said they discussed the option of entering the Work Programme early.

Around half of those who had been on the Work Programme or discussed it with an adviser said they had been on a Work Programme information session (59 per cent JSA, 43 per cent ESA).

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<sup>18</sup> Claimants can volunteer to enter the Work Programme early.

**Table 5.29 Work Programme**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Been on the Work Programme	5	2
Not been on but discussed with an adviser	9	15

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

As would be expected given the early entry criteria for JSA claimants, those who had not worked for at least two years (or at all) (nine per cent), and ex-offenders (12 per cent) were more likely to have been on the Work Programme.

The proportion who discussed the Work Programme was higher than average among those aged under 25 (15 per cent compared with five per cent of those aged 25-49 and four per cent aged 50+) and those with low qualifications (11 per cent qualified to GCSE level or below, compared with six per cent of those qualified to A level or above). It was also higher among those with some type of disadvantage that was not health-related (23 per cent), specifically ex-offenders (23 per cent) and those who revealed drug or alcohol problems (31 per cent).

### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

Among ESA claimants, discussion of the Work Programme was relatively high among lone parents (27 per cent), as well as those who were looking for work (23 per cent). Those looking for work were also more likely to have actually been on the Work Programme (five per cent).

The depth interviews found that ESA claimants generally felt a degree of negativity about the Work Programme because it was initially perceived as work-focused. They were concerned they would be forced back in to work too early when they were still dealing with issues related to their health. However, those who felt more ready to go back to work were positive about the Work Programme and hoped that it could provide tailored support for their needs.

There was also some confusion around the referral process to the Work Programme for ESA claimants. These claimants were typically unaware of whether the programme was voluntary or mandatory. Furthermore, some claimants had been referred to the Work Programme to later be told by the provider that they were not eligible or that it was not appropriate for them to be referred. For example, the case study below relates to an ESA claimant who was mistakenly told that referral to the Work Programme was mandatory.

**Case study: Work Programme, Rebecca, ESA WRAG, District C**

Rebecca suffers from depression and anxiety disorder. She was told by her adviser after nine months she must now be referred to the Work Programme. She knew very little about the Work Programme and was worried about what it would involve.

*'It's like a get back to work programme but I said to her "do I have to?" because I started to panic, you know, different place and stuff like that and she said, "yes, you have to go otherwise, you know, benefits can be stopped and stuff like that". So I said okay.'*

When she had her first meeting at the Work Programme she was told that her attendance was voluntary. She decided that she did not feel emotionally ready to think about going back into employment yet and opted out of the Work Programme.

*'The guy that I spoke to [at the Work Programme] was helpful and really, you know, he was ready to support me but I am just not ready to, I don't feel comfortable enough to make that step, but I want to make that step if you know what I mean.'*

**5.4.10 Flexible Support Fund**

One in eight JSA claimants (13 per cent) said they had been offered financial help by their adviser for one-off expenses (this would have been part of the Flexible Support Fund (FSF), although the FSF was not mentioned to respondents specifically, just the type of expenses it covered). The proportion was lower among ESA claimants (five per cent).

However, some of these respondents said that they did not actually receive any financial support: either support was mentioned but they didn't actually receive anything, or the claimant declined it. The proportion who actually received help was nine per cent among JSA claimants and four per cent among ESA claimants.

Where financial help was received, it was used most commonly for assisting with transport or parking costs. The types of help received by JSA claimants are shown in full in Table 5.30.

**Table 5.30 Types of financial help received<sup>19</sup>**

	<b>JSA %</b>
Transport or parking	62
Clothing or footwear	19
Work-related licence	8
Courses or training	6
Tools or equipment	3
Payment towards a CRB check	1
Other	14

Base: All JSA claimants who received financial help as part of the FSF (163).

<sup>19</sup> This question was open-ended, although respondents were provided with a list of examples for which financial help might be received through the FSF.

### Analysis of JSA and ESA claimants

The proportion who were offered support as part of the FSF was consistent across different JSA claimants. For example, 13 per cent of those who had actually moved into work had received financial help to find work, the same proportion for those on JSA as a whole. Section 5.6 provides more details on receipt of the FSF by claimants during their time in work.

In the ESA sample, those who were looking for work were more likely than other ESA claimants to have received financial help (ten per cent compared with five per cent).

#### Case study: FSF, John, JSA 18-24, District A

John was interested in taking up an apprenticeship in the construction industry but was unable to find any opportunities.

*'A lot of like plastering jobs I've been going for require like previous experience and a CSCS [Construction Skills Certification Scheme] card which is basically so you can work on sites and stuff and I haven't got it, I haven't got experience either so that's what's stopping me.'*

His adviser suggested that he might be interested in receiving money towards the training for a CSCS card. John felt that this support was essential for him to build up any work experience on a construction site and improve his job prospects.

*'Basically it's just a small college where you can learn to do health and safety for a CSCS card so you can go onto a builders site ... So they basically help people who've like left school but haven't got like a qualification if you know what I mean.'*

#### 5.4.11 Barriers to the take-up of support options

As can be seen across the range of options where claimants were aware of the support options available to them, this did not necessarily lead to take-up. There were a range of key factors impacting on claimant take-up of Jobcentre Plus support identified in the depth interviews. These included the following:

- **Timing and proximity of the support and training:** As discussed in Chapter 3 there were issues around the location of contracted providers, with many based outside the local area. Claimants, especially those with health conditions, did not want to travel to access provision.

*'I had asked them, like, "do you offer support with SIA training [Security Training] and that?" and at that time they said they did, but I mean even the course they was going to send me to at that time was a three months course, whereas SIA you can get within two days [...] So it just wasn't worth it to me, travelling every day for three months, two or three hours away from where I lived; going that hour there, coming that hour back for three months for a course I can do which would cost me a £100.00 and it will take me two days to finish [...] so I am better off not using the Jobcentre.'*

(Male, JSA 18-24)

- **Childcare responsibilities and/or availability of childcare:** This included claimants' ability to pay for the cost of childcare and their own trust and confidence in leaving a child in the care of another. There was one example of a woman with ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) needs who was unable to attend a course because she had no childcare available.

*'There was one [ESOL course], I remember, he said for me to go to [the] College, I think it was, but because I didn't have childcare I couldn't go.'*

(Female, JSA 18-24)



- **Clear signposting and referral processes:** In addition there were discussions that were not followed through by referrals or clear signposting. For example, advisers discussing relevant basic skills or work experience support but not following up this discussion in next meetings or making the necessary referrals.
- **Adviser support for external support options:** There is also evidence to suggest that advisers were not necessarily supportive of claimants who accessed support outside of Jobcentre Plus provision, especially if it was voluntary or work experience.

*'I told them I was volunteering and they were like, "oh yes, we'd rather get you a real job what pays you" and I was like, "I'm trying my best here." ... Do you know what I mean? I mean I've done something, I've got something.'*

(Male, JSA 18-24)

- **Perceived relevance of referrals:** In other cases, the referrals to support were sometimes perceived to be based on inappropriate diagnoses of the claimants' needs. This was particularly raised by ESA claimants who were offered work experience and volunteering opportunities but felt they were not ready to think about WRA.

*'Well you see, my perception – I don't need any \*\*\*\*\* help. What I need is somebody to give me some pills to get rid of this dizziness and I can get straight back to work, end of story, do you know what I mean? It doesn't matter whether they come up with this programme, that programme or we can help you with this, you need support on that. I don't need any support, what I need is a cure for the illness.'*

(Male, ESA WRAG six months prognosis)

### 5.4.12 Summary

There was a significant gap in the provision of jobsearch support such as help with CVs and suggestions about where to find job vacancies between JSA claimants and ESA claimants who were currently looking for work. This perhaps indicates that advisers were not correctly identifying some of the ESA claimants who were actually wanting to move into employment.

Volunteering opportunities were one of the elements of the flexible menu that was significantly more likely to be offered to ESA claimants. The actual participation rate for volunteering among people who had discussed the opportunity was relatively low. However the depth interviews indicated that this may, in part, be due to problems with signposting rather than reluctance on the part of claimants. There was evidence that the subject of volunteering was raised in conversations with an adviser but no clear steps were given to claimants as to how they could actually get started.

## 5.5 Assessment of support

### 5.5.1 Tailoring

The majority of respondents agreed that the advice and support they received had been matched to their personal needs and circumstances, and that they were offered the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus. Around one in five respondents disagreed with these statements (see Table 5.31 for details). Findings were very similar for JSA and ESA claimants.

JSA and ESA claimants also held similar views on whether they felt under pressure to take part in activities that were not suited to their needs and circumstances. Most respondents disagreed with this statement.

**Table 5.31 Extent to which support was tailored**

	JSA		ESA	
	Agree %	Disagree %	Agree %	Disagree %
The advice and support you were offered matched your personal needs and circumstances	70	22	70	19
You were offered the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus	70	23	69	18
You felt under pressure to take part in activities that were not suited to your needs and circumstances	23	67	24	59

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

We can analyse these questions according to the types of support that claimants had been offered or had taken up. As might be expected, where claimants had been offered various types of support – and particularly where they had taken them up – they were more likely to have a positive view of the way support had been tailored.

Overall, claimants' opinions are mainly positive towards the extent to which support matched their needs and circumstances. This is perhaps at odds with the evidence in the previous section, which showed that claimants' individual circumstances or barriers were not always being taken into account within the support offered – at least at this early stage of the claim.

The JRFND evaluation included the same questions on whether advice and support matched personal needs and circumstances, and whether respondents felt under pressure to take part in unsuitable activities. Although it is not possible to compare the findings from the two surveys directly (due to differences in design, methodology and sample profile), a comparison can indicate broad similarities or differences between the two regimes. The comparison shows that findings are very similar in terms of whether respondents felt under pressure to take part in unsuitable activities, but that respondents in the Jobcentre Plus Offer survey were more likely to say that the advice and support matched their personal needs and circumstances. This suggests that some progress has been made in tailoring support to claimants' needs, at least in so far as this is perceived by claimants<sup>20</sup>.

Respondents who said that they were not offered the right amount of support were asked why they felt this. Their answers fall into four broad categories outlined below – note the percentages are for those who said they had not received the right amount of support:

- They were not offered enough support (43 per cent of JSA claimants and 38 per cent of ESA claimants; for example, Jobcentre Plus 'offered them nothing', they didn't offer the support that the respondent wanted, they didn't offer enough information or advice, or they did not spend enough time with an adviser. In the ESA sample, this includes respondents who said they were not offered support for their disability or condition.

<sup>20</sup> Comparisons have been made with findings for respondents in Phase 1 areas (where JRFND had been introduced) in Knight *et al.* (2010).

- Not enough effort to tailor the support to the individual (36 per cent of JSA claimants and 41 per cent of ESA claimants). Specific answers include the view that Jobcentre Plus were not interested in the respondent or in finding out their requirements, qualifications or previous experience; that they did not take account of personal circumstances; that services were not tailored to the respondent; and that it felt like a conveyor belt or box-ticking exercise. ESA claimants said that they did not take their disability or condition into account.

The depth interviews reinforced this impression. In some cases the support discussed or referred to was seen by claimants as process driven rather than tailored to the appropriate needs of the claimant. For example, advisers were perceived as not taking into account past experience or skills. There were claimants who felt they were being routed through stock support (i.e. offered a standard-to-all process) such as CV writing and interview skill sessions rather than referrals based on individual need

- The support offered was unsuitable (13 per cent), because they were offered random or unsuitable vacancies, or were put under pressure to accept unsuitable support/job interviews. This was seen even more strongly in the case study research where there appeared to be a mismatch of views between how effectively staff felt they were tailoring support compared to the experience of the claimants having support discussed or offered relevant to their needs. Within our observations, it was evident that some claimants would agree to support options discussed but on reflection felt that these were not suitable. They would agree to this because they regarded it as part of the process to take up any support offered by their adviser.
- Staff were unable to help or there was inadequate staff expertise (11 per cent). This was mainly where respondents said that staff could not help or advise on jobs in their field or at their level (in the JSA sample) or where respondents said there was no familiarity or understanding of their disability or condition (in the ESA sample).

While there were some problems with providing appropriate support the case study research was also able to bring together a picture of where tailoring was most effective. In the main it tended to be where there was a simple need which could be met by a one-off offer of support; for example, CSCS training and card for those looking to work in construction. One JSA 18-24 claimant had received support gaining a CSCS card through the FSF and had been giving advice during both his Jobsearch Review meetings and PA appointments on options for apprenticeships:

*'The help for the apprenticeships, that's the main help I've had because it's something that I really want to do and they've helped me with it a lot by giving me information about it and what's available.'*

(Male, JSA 18 -24)

For ESA and IS claimants there were indications that tailoring might beneficially be more about understanding their individual needs and raising confidence at this stage rather than a focus on back-to-work skills. One lone parent had recently lost confidence after a split with her partner. She was signposted to Sure Start by her adviser which had given her more self-confidence and a belief that she can return to work.

[When asked why she had taken up the suggestion of attending Sure Start] *'At the time I felt all alone and that because I was nowhere near my family so I felt a bit alone and [my adviser] said that it might help. So I went and it did, and I still go now.'*

(Female, IS)

For ESA claimants, good tailoring of support was regarded as signposting options but not pushing the claimant too fast into a return to work. This had happened for one ESA claimant who suffers from mental health problems. She felt that she had received a good balance of information and support which took into account her current health condition. It was understood that she was not yet ready to return to work but she was signposted to a mental health charity for further support. It was also suggested that she could consider volunteering as a WRA, having first focused on getting support with her agoraphobia. She was not ready yet to take up volunteering but was happy she understood her future options.

*'I could have been apprehensive about them stereotyping me in some way but I didn't feel like that had happened. I think that it was more personal.'*

(Female, ESA WRAG 12 month prognosis)

### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

As on other issues, JSA claimants tended to give more positive views if they had seen the same adviser over two or more meetings, rather than seen a different adviser. Views were also more positive where respondents said that their adviser had tried to identify jobs that might be suitable for them, and in particular where respondents thought that these jobs were actually suitable. By contrast, those who said their adviser had not tried to identify suitable jobs – or had tried but not succeeded – were very negative towards the extent to which their support had been tailored. This confirms the analysis from the Jobcentre Plus Claimant Satisfaction Survey, where advisers suggesting jobs that respondents felt were unsuitable for them was a key driver of dissatisfaction (Howat and Pickering, 2011).

In addition, there were differences according to attitudes to work, with those who thought they would be happier in paid work much more positive towards the way their support had been tailored, compared with those who did not think they would be happier if they were in work.

Beyond this there were consistent sub-group patterns in JSA claimants' perceptions of whether support had been tailored to their needs. Respondents aged 16-24 were more likely than older respondents to feel their support had been tailored, while those with an LSI (especially those with physical barriers), those with caring responsibilities and ex-offenders were more negative than other respondents.

This was brought out even more in the depth interviews which found that there was limited evidence of tailoring support for those claimants with the most complex needs. Specifically, disadvantaged claimants (e.g. homeless, ex-offenders and problem drug users) were concerned that advisers were not sufficiently skilled or equipped to understand their needs which in turn led to the provision of limited support.

For example, within our research homeless claimants experienced limited discussion of support until referral to the Work Programme.

*'No, they don't ask you personal things or what help you need or anything like that, they show no support whatever, they don't even do training courses no more, no nothing.'*

(Male, JSA 25-49, homeless)

However, for some claimants, their less tailored experience of Jobcentre Plus was counterbalanced by other specialist support. Within Jobcentre Plus this was by the DEA to whom some claimants were referred, however, some claimants had experienced long waiting times.

*‘So they put me in touch with a guy who deals with disabilities [...] at the Jobcentre, so this was last August I was at this meeting and about six weeks ago [March the following year] I got to see this guy about disabilities, so it took me from last August to six weeks ago to get to see this guy, you know, it’s just ridiculous to wait so long isn’t it? He has been quite useful really, he has given me some good information and I’d seen him about, probably four or five times now I’ve seen him, and he has been quite good really.’*

(Female, JSA 50+)

Externally this was carried out by specialist providers such as the Probation Service (for ex-offenders), specialist drug treatment services and mental health services.

Some claimants felt that more should be done to tailor support for groups of claimants by age. They thought that there should be more understanding of the differences in needs of claimants who were 50+ with experience compared to 18-24 year-olds who lacked worked experience and skills.

*‘Again, like I say, it’s just a process when you go in. It’s like going to the dentist – you go in, you have your tooth taken out and off you go. There’s no help about that – How you keep your teeth clean? to use an analogy. There’s no looking at you as an individual to say, well, you’re 18 and you’ve no skills... What about going back to college? What about this? What about that? We’ve got family apprenticeship schemes. Or, you’re 50, you need to think about this.’*

(Female, JSA 50+)

It was evident from claimants’ experiences that advisers did not consistently take into account the wide range of barriers affecting many claimants. For example, a JSA claimant with severe dyslexia was encouraged to complete an online CSCS course in a group reading class at the Jobcentre Plus. On reflection, the claimant realised this required one-to-one support for him to make any meaningful progress.

*‘With courses I get kind of frustrated because when I do go on them kind of things I still don’t get any help. And then people kind of just laugh at you because you can’t read or you can’t fill something out. So then I get frustrated in that as well.’*

(Male, JSA 25-49)

This reflected a wider need for specialist dyslexia, literacy and ESOL support. Advisers themselves discussed limited access to providers who offered this type of support. Within the case study areas, there was discussion of withdrawals of ESOL and literacy providers and/or long waiting lists. The lack of suitable specialist provision available potentially raises questions around the expectations of what type of support Jobcentre Plus can offer, and whether resources should be concentrated on those Jobcentre Plus can potentially help.

Overall, the findings in this section suggest that JSA claimants with distinctive or specialist needs were less likely to feel that their support had been tailored by Jobcentre Plus.

### *Analysis of ESA claimants*

The outcome of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) had a large bearing on ESA claimants’ perceptions of the support they received. Respondents who were satisfied with the outcome were more likely to agree that support had been tailored to their needs, whereas views were more negative amongst those who were not satisfied but had accepted the outcome, and those who were appealing the decision.

As with JSA claimants, ESA claimants also tended to be more positive when they saw the same adviser over two or more meetings rather than a different adviser.

There was no difference between ESA claimants who were looking for work and other ESA claimants.

### 5.5.2 Was support helpful?

Respondents who took up support activities during their claim were mostly positive about the experience. Table 5.32 shows the findings for individual activities. Figures for most activities are shown for JSA claimants only, as the number of participating ESA claimants was often too small for analysis.

Views were particularly positive in relation to training courses and activities that aimed to address skills; more than 90 per cent of participating JSA claimants found these activities helpful. Although they are based on a small number of respondents and are restricted to claimants who participated in training at an early stage of their claim, these findings are encouraging, given the difficulties experienced by previous programmes in providing training (as noted earlier in Section 2.2).

However, while training to address skills was regarded positively, the case studies indicated that training courses to support jobsearch were not as helpful for claimants. For example, there were claimants who had good previous work experience and skills who highlighted the poor quality of CV and back-to-work support which was regarded as too basic for their needs.

Advice and activities related to self-employment met with the most mixed response. While nearly seven in ten said that they were helpful (69 per cent) a quarter (26 per cent) said that these activities were not. This is in contrast to the feedback from the Six Month Offer, where there were positive attitudes to self-employment support (see Section 2.2). In general, however, schemes for self-employment support have often struggled to make a positive impact (Meager *et al.*, 2011).

**Table 5.32 Helpfulness of support activities**

	JSA		ESA	
	Helpful %	Not helpful %	Helpful %	Not helpful %
Work Clubs	82	16	-	-
Education course at a local college or other training provider	92	7	-	-
Skills assessment with a Skills Provider	94	6	-	-
Course to improve your skills	97	3	-	-
Any training activity	91	6	-	-
Advice about apprenticeships and 'Access to Apprenticeship scheme'	83	17	n/a	n/a
Any work experience activity	77	16	n/a	n/a
Information and guidance about self-employment and setting up your own business	67	27	n/a	n/a
Any self-employment activity	69	26	n/a	n/a
Volunteering opportunity	90	10	83	11
Any childcare activity <sup>1</sup>	81	9	-	-

Base: JSA/ESA claimants who have taken up each activity (base varies).

Note: percentage figures are not shown where base is less than 50.

<sup>1</sup> Figure for childcare are for both JSA and ESA customers combined (because of the small numbers of respondents).

Respondents were also asked which of the support they had received had been the most helpful. Because the numbers receiving different types of support varied, it is difficult to compare the individual activities. Also, in many cases, the numbers of respondents receiving the support are too small to analyse the findings. However, it is clear that JSA claimants valued jobsearch advice and support from advisers (as also found in the JRFND evaluation), as well as education and training courses. In the ESA sample, respondents often found the volunteering opportunity that they took up the most helpful support they received.

When asked whether there was any additional support that they could receive from Jobcentre Plus that would be helpful, only 41 per cent of JSA claimants and 28 per cent of ESA claimants said that there was.

Respondents mentioned a wide range of different types of support that they would find helpful:

- advice, information and signposting (six per cent in both of the JSA and ESA samples);
- support with job seeking (nine per cent of JSA claimants and four per cent of ESA claimants);
- support with up-skilling or training (nine per cent of JSA claimants and four per cent of ESA claimants);
- financial assistance (seven per cent in the JSA sample, three per cent in the ESA sample);
- more effort to tailor support to the individual (mentioned by three per cent of JSA claimants and six per cent of ESA claimants);
- other, practical support, e.g. help with CVs or practical support with health conditions or disabilities (seven per cent of JSA claimants and five per cent of ESA claimants).

In general, this support is already available through Jobcentre Plus, but respondents are either not being told about it or being given access to it, when they feel it would be helpful.

The depth interviews also drew out a number of areas where there were unmet needs for claimants. These included the following:

- **Funding for training, certification and licences:** Claimants were frustrated by a perceived lack of financial support for one-off training or certification where this would help them to overcome vocational barriers, particularly where they were aware of this being provided to others. For example, one ESA claimant felt his requests for training courses had not been taken forward by his adviser:

*'I've asked them for training courses whether it's in forklift driving, HGV driving, certificates to work on building sites and they've always said sorry there is no funding for this and yet I've spoken to other people who have got this funding, whether it's my age...'*

(Male, ESA WRAG 12 month prognosis)

- **Retraining and career change support:** There were claimants who felt they needed retraining because their prior experience was not relevant for the current labour market. For example, one JSA claimant could no longer find work as a joiner in his local area and wanted the opportunity to go to college to retrain.

*'I was told that there wasn't any funding ... I wanted to do something different. Train for something different to try and get a job. There wasn't any in joinery. I used to work as a joiner, can't find a job so I wanted to do something else, go to college and do something else... There isn't any funding'*

(Male, JSA 25-49, ex-offender)

- **Tailored support for 50+ claimants:** There was a perception by 50+ claimants that current work experience opportunities were not relevant for their age group. One participant complained that work experience opportunities as part of Get Britain Working (GBW) are only available for those aged 18-24 – despite the fact that work experience is available for those aged 25 and over.

*‘I asked them about work experience ... [my adviser] said “we’ve got work experience going on at the moment at Iceland”, and I said “well okay then, I’d be prepared to do it” ... then a woman piped up in the background, she turned round and she said “well, she can’t do it ... it’s only for 16-24 year-olds”. A lot of the work experience is based around the younger generation.’*

(Female, JSA 50+)

One case study area had recognised this and was in discussions with providers to offer 50+ tailored modules as part of the Support Contract.

- **Specialist support for claimants with disabilities and health conditions:** Claimants also discussed a lack of specific support or job brokerage in contacting employers who offered more flexible employment opportunities for people with disabilities and health conditions. Advisers also felt that there was limited support that they could offer, especially around mental health issues, and that they often needed to refer via the DEA for more specialist support for ESA claimants.

*‘I don’t think with my illness I don’t think a lot of people understand it and I don’t think the Jobcentre are keyed up as much for the mental illness side.’*

(Female, ESA WRAG 12 month prognosis)

### 5.5.3 Outcomes

Respondents were asked whether they thought that the advice and support they had received from Jobcentre Plus had helped them in various ways.

Around half of JSA claimants felt that the advice and support had helped them to increase their motivation to find work (54 per cent), their chances of finding suitable work (also 54 per cent) and had built up their confidence about finding a job that they could do (48 per cent). The corresponding figures for ESA claimants are lower (between 22 per cent and 27 per cent), although these figures are higher for ESA claimants who were looking for work, as discussed below.

**Table 5.33 Whether advice and support had helped claimants**

Has the advice and support helped ... ?	JSA %	ESA %
To build up your confidence about finding a job that you could do	48	27
To increase your motivation to find work	54	25
To increase your chances of finding suitable work	54	22

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

#### *Analysis of JSA claimants*

JSA claimants aged 16 to 24 were consistently more likely than older JSA claimants to say that the advice and support had helped them. For example, 60 per cent of 16 to 24 year-olds said that it had helped them to build up confidence about finding a job they could do, compared with 42 per cent of 25 to 49 year-olds, and 40 per cent of those aged 50 or over.



JSA claimants who were less qualified (qualified to GCSE level or below) were also consistently more likely to say the advice and support had helped them, as were those who had been out of work for a longer period of time. Respondents who did not speak English as their first language were also more likely to say the advice and support had helped them.

The JRFND evaluation found that parents, and particularly lone parents, were more likely than other claimants to report an increase in these types of soft outcomes (e.g. in increasing confidence and motivation to find work), but there were no differences in this survey for lone parents or parents generally.

Analysis by attitudes to work shows that JSA claimants who were nervous about the thought of being in work were more likely to think the advice and support had helped them.

The above findings (on qualifications, recent work experience and respondents whose first language is not English) indicate that JSA claimants who were further from the labour market were more likely to feel the advice and support were helpful to them. However, there were no differences in relation to various barriers to work, health conditions or indicators of disadvantage, suggesting that Jobcentre Plus support does not appear to have been disproportionately helpful – or unhelpful – to those with barriers to work.

Respondents who had seen the same adviser over two or more meetings were more positive about the helpfulness of advice and support, confirming that this continuity can have a positive effect (as noted earlier in relation to different support options).

Respondents who had moved off JSA and into work by the time of the interview were somewhat less likely than other respondents to say the advice and support had helped them. For example, 39 per cent of this group said that the advice and support had helped them to build up confidence about finding a job they could do, compared with 51 per cent of those still on JSA. This finding may not be surprising, given that only 11 per cent of those in work by the time of the interview said that they got the job through Jobcentre Plus. At the same time, 27 per cent of respondents in work said that the advice and support had helped them to succeed in getting their job. One other point to make about those claimants who had found work is that they did of course spend less time on the Offer so would not have as much opportunity to receive support generally.

These findings (summarised in Table 5.34) provide a good illustration of the role of Jobcentre Plus in finding claimants work. Although only a small proportion of claimants had found their job directly through Jobcentre Plus, the advice and support they received had still made a contribution in moving them into work.

**Table 5.34 Whether Jobcentre Plus helped JSA claimants into work**

Has the advice and support helped ... ?	JSA %
To build up your confidence about finding a job that you could do	40
To increase your motivation to find work	51
To increase your chances of finding suitable work	47
You to succeed in getting the job you are in	27
Did you get this job through Jobcentre Plus	11

Base: All JSA claimants in work at the time of the interview (393).

### Analysis of ESA claimants

ESA claimants were more likely to think that the advice and support from Jobcentre Plus had helped them if they were looking for work at the time of the interview. Table 5.35 shows the findings for this group.

**Table 5.35 Whether Jobcentre Plus helped ESA claimants who were looking for work**

Has the advice and support helped ... ?	ESA looking for work	ESA not looking for work
	%	%
To build up your confidence about finding a job that you could do	41	24
To increase your motivation to find work	50	20
To increase your chances of finding suitable work	40	18

Base: All ESA claimants looking for work (199); not looking for work at the time of the interview (1,086).

As with the JSA sample, there were differences for ESA claimants by age group. Those aged 50 or over were less likely than younger respondents to say that the advice and support had helped them.

ESA claimants were also more positive if their condition or disability did not limit their daily activities. Perhaps related to this, respondents who were satisfied with the outcome of their WCA were more positive towards the help they received than those who were not satisfied. This indicates that attitudes towards the WCA may continue to influence claimants' perceptions of Jobcentre Plus into their claim, at least in the early stages of the claim.

In contrast to the JSA sample, there were no differences in relation to whether respondents saw the same adviser or different advisers during their time on ESA.

### 5.5.4 Summary

Around seven in ten claimants felt that the advice and support they received matched their personal circumstances. There is some indication that the Offer has made progress in the area when comparing results to those seen in the JRFND evaluation, although caution does need to be exercised due to some variation in sample profile and methodology.

It appeared that tailoring was most effective when the tailoring that was required was relatively standard, for example, a one-off offer of support to provide CSCS training and card. For some claimants good tailoring came when it involved listening to their circumstances and not pushing them at inappropriate times. JSA claimants who had only seen one adviser were also significantly more likely to feel that their support had been tailored to their needs – re-emphasising the importance of adviser continuity.

The biggest problems for tailoring were for disadvantaged JSA claimants. Both the survey and the case studies indicated that advisers did not necessarily manage to identify the complex needs of these claimants and as a result were not able to tailor support appropriately.

Respondents who took up elements of the support activities tended to be positive about their effect. Views were particularly positive in relation to training courses that aimed to address skills, although courses which focused on basic jobsearch skills were felt to be too basic for some respondents in the depth interviews.

### 5.6 In-work support

This section examines the support that was offered to claimants after they started work. In Work Advisory Support (IWAS) is offered and promoted to lone parents to help them with their transition into work and career progression once in work. However, some advisers may also offer to stay in contact with other claimants as they move back in to work, in a less official capacity, as well. The analysis is limited to JSA claimants, as only a very small number of ESA claimants had moved into work by the time of the interview.

In total, 21 per cent of respondents had moved off JSA and into work by the time of the interview. Of these, one in seven (14 per cent) said that Jobcentre Plus staff had offered to stay in contact with them after they started work. Only a slightly smaller proportion (11 per cent) said that they had actually been in contact with Jobcentre Plus staff since they had been working. It is difficult to assess at this point whether lone parents were more likely to have received this in-work support due to relatively small base sizes, but it appears that the proportions are in line with all of those who have moved in to work.

The contact that respondents had with Jobcentre Plus staff while they were in work was mostly to do with administrative matters, such as helping with benefits or financial arrangements, explaining procedures or sending a P45 with letters regarding commencement of work<sup>21</sup>.

Two per cent of JSA claimants who had moved off JSA and into work said that they had received financial support from Jobcentre Plus during their time in work, as part of the FSF or as an in-work emergency payment. As noted previously, 13 per cent of those in work had received financial help from Jobcentre Plus at some point. These findings suggest that financial help tends to be given while claimants are looking for work while on JSA, rather than after they have started a job.

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<sup>21</sup> Further analysis of this issue, or the extent to which in-work support helped customers, is not possible due to the very small number of respondents receiving in-work support.

## 6 Conclusions

From an organisational perspective the implementation of the Jobcentre Plus Offer has been successful. There has been a clear move away from a nationally determined structure to one where districts, and in some cases individual offices, decide how to implement support to get claimants back in to work. It is also clear that the focus of Jobcentre Plus staff is very much on helping claimants back in to work rather than focusing on process and 'box-ticking' exercises as may have been the case previously. This is not to say that individual offices do not still lay down processes for staff to follow, but that now these processes are focused on getting claimants back in to work and are determined locally rather than nationally.

It is hard to disentangle to what extent the changes have come about as a result of the Offer and its greater autonomy as opposed to the Performance Management Framework and its focus on off-flows. However, in reality the two initiatives are complementary and neither would have much chance of success without the other being deployed at the same time.

During the course of the evaluation staff highlighted aspects of the Offer that could be improved. The flexible menu of support was seen to offer a wide range of programmes which could enable more personalised provision with fewer restrictions on when support could be offered in a claimants' journey. Across the range of types of support there were consistent barriers which included: lack of availability and awareness of local provision; limited confidence and knowledge of the provision available; access to non-contracted funding; and, challenges purchasing services from other organisations. There were also specific challenges sourcing suitable support for clients with complex issues, especially for those who were Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants with health-related needs.

At this point in the evaluation it is more difficult to ascertain whether the implementation of the Offer is proceeding as intended from the claimant perspective as the research is only at the halfway stage in terms of the survey fieldwork. Follow-up interviews will be conducted in the last half of 2012 and the first half of 2013 as claimants either off-flow in to employment, or complete their 12-month cycle as part of the Offer. However, looking at the initial interviews it is clear that there have been some encouraging aspects as well as some potential areas of concerns.

One positive aspect would be that claimants who have already moved in to work were in general less likely to have received or discussed support options with Jobcentre Plus. This indicates that those claimants who are the least in need of support are receiving less support reflecting the goal of the Offer to use resources in a more targeted manner.

The biggest concern would be around how the Offer is experienced by ESA claimants. The initial results indicate that ESA claimants do not discuss potential support options with advisers to the same extent as Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants. There is also a worrying issue around the communication of next steps following the initial New Joiner's Work Focused Interview (NJWFI), with significant numbers of ESA claimants saying that they were not told when their next meeting with an adviser would be or even how often any meetings would occur. This is a particular concern as it also affects those ESA claimants who are currently looking for work (around 16 per cent of the ESA claimants surveyed). In general these claimants do not seem to receive the same level of support which could help them back in to work as early as JSA claimants do. However, one caveat to this point is that the research in this report is based on the initial weeks of a claimant's time on the Offer and such support may be introduced later in the process for ESA claimants.

### 6.1 Recommendations

At an organisational level sharing of best practice is currently unstructured and it may be that this can be formalised to some extent. However it would need to be done in such a way that these 'best practices' are not communicated such that they are then deployed in districts/offices in an unthinking manner when they are not appropriate for that situation.

There was a great deal of variation in whether or not the NJWFI covered even basic discussion points in relation to finding work such as the possibility of working in the future and the support the claimant may need to start to prepare for work. If the Jobcentre Plus Offer is intended to move ESA WRAG claimants closer to work it would seem appropriate to begin these discussions at the start of their claim during the initial interview. In addition to this, a substantial proportion of ESA claimants were leaving the NJWFI with no fixed date for any subsequent meeting and no idea of how many meetings, if any, they would have with an adviser. These findings are reflective of the 'light-touch' approach that some advisers took with ESA claimants.

In order to improve the chances of Work Related Activity (WRA) being undertaken it could be beneficial if a more structured approach could be overlaid on to the NJWFI in terms of the topics that are covered and confirming next steps.

On a related note it was clear from the observations during the site visits and subsequent claimant interviews that some staff are not identifying and assessing the support needs of ESA claimants to help them back in to work. In some cases this may reflect an assessment of a claimant's distance from work, but it may also be reflective of a lack of confidence or skills when dealing with ESA claimants. Additional support may well be required for staff who are administering NJWFIs/WFIs to enable them to better identify claimant support needs. However, there may be a need to implement specific monitoring to identify advisers who are struggling in this area as simple off-flow metrics will not work for this group.

While identifying complex needs during the NJWFI may require giving advisers additional support, it could be that an easier win can be had by simply ensuring that advisers ascertain whether or not the ESA claimant is actually currently looking for work. The survey indicated that ESA claimants who were looking for work were significantly less likely to receive jobsearch support, such as help with CVs and suggestions about where to find jobs, than JSA claimants. Given that this level of support and advice is not particularly challenging to provide, the gap is probably at the NJWFI stage, where advisers are not always identifying that the claimant is actually keen to move in to employment.

There is some indication that elements of the flexible support menu are being raised when speaking to ESA claimants but not followed through because claimants do not then know how to actually access this support. It is unclear whether this is a result of advisers not picking up on claimant interest during the interview or whether it is a result of claimants only becoming interested on later reflection. To limit the former it may be worthwhile encouraging advisers to ask claimants directly whether they are interested in the support options they are discussing rather than relying on them to state interest spontaneously when options are presented.

# Appendix A

## Claimant survey technical details

### A.1 Sample

The sample for the claimant survey covered the two claimant groups mandated to the Jobcentre Plus Offer: Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants in the 12-month prognosis Work Related Activity Group (WRAG).

#### A.1.1 JSA sample

The survey was intended to capture the views and experiences of new JSA claimants shortly after having attended an NJI. New JSA claims were identified by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) analysts during a period of a week in mid-March 2012 and were checked a few weeks later, shortly before the dataset was transferred to TNS-BMRB, to ensure that they were still a live claim (and had not already off-flowed from benefit). The sample was proportionately stratified by district, gender and age for the three age bands of interest (16-24, 25-49 and 50+).

The sample received from DWP was checked by TNS-BMRB, and any records with invalid, incomplete or missing addresses and telephone numbers were removed from the sample. The remaining records were again stratified by age group, region, district, and gender to ensure representative coverage of claimants. A total of 6,300 records were randomly selected and these claimants were sent advance letters inviting them to participate in the survey. Any claimants who contacted TNS-BMRB to opt out were removed from the sample, and 5,400 of the remaining records were issued to the telephone centre.

#### A.1.2 ESA sample

Similarly, for new ESA claimants, the survey was aimed at those who had recently attended an NJWFI, which takes place after the outcome of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) is known, roughly 13 weeks after an application is made. Ex-Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants were included in the survey, following a WCA. New ESA claimants were identified during a period of three weeks, from mid-December 2011 to early January 2012, and were again checked just before the sample was transferred to TNS-BMRB to ensure that they were still a live claim. It was not possible to just identify those in the 12-month prognosis group (as this information was not available at the time of sampling). Therefore, all cases within the sample frame were transferred and screening was undertaken by TNS-BMRB, using Work Programme referral information to screen claimants out of the survey (as once on the Work Programme claimants are no longer eligible for support through the Jobcentre Plus Offer).

TNS-BMRB cross-checked the sample received from DWP against a list of identifiers provided by DWP which identified ESA claimants currently on the Work Programme. All cases of claimants who had already volunteered to enter the Work Programme were removed, along with cases which had invalid, incomplete or missing addresses and telephone numbers. The remaining records were stratified by whether they had previously been on IB or not, age, region, district, and gender to ensure the survey coverage was representative of the population of ESA claimants. A total of 5,200 records were randomly selected and sent advance letters inviting them to participate in the survey. Any claimants who opted out were removed from the sample, and the remaining 4,918 records were issued to the telephone centre.

## A.2 Fieldwork and response

Telephone interviews were conducted with 3,034 claimants between 16 May and 1 July 2012. Sixteen interviews were conducted in a language other than English, using a fluent foreign language speaking interviewer.<sup>22</sup> In addition, 218 respondents requested a written version of the questionnaire and were sent this by post. Twenty-five completed questionnaires were returned, resulting in a total of 3,059 interviews.

**Table A.1 Response details**

Number sampled	11,800
Office opt-out or declared ineligible before fieldwork	338
Reserve sample not issued to telephone unit	2,288
Sample issued to telephone unit	10,318
Valid sample (in scope of fieldwork)	7,394
Invalid sample data	1,914
Ineligible	1,010
Telephone interviews	3,034
Postal interviews	25
<b>Total interviews</b>	<b>3,059</b>

**Table A.2 Telephone response details – JSA claimants**

Number sampled	6,300
Opt-out or declared ineligible before fieldwork	56
Reserve sample not issued to telephone unit	844
Sample issued to telephone unit	5,400
<b>Invalid sample data</b>	<b>1,039</b>
Invalid telephone number	614
Unknown at number	377
Respondent died	10
Duplicate records	38

Continued

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<sup>22</sup> Six in Urdu, three in Hindi, three in Polish, two in Gujarati and two in Arabic.

**Table A.2 Continued**

<b>Ineligible</b>	<b>218</b>
Has never had dealings with Jobcentre Plus	12
Did not make a claim for JSA	110
Has not had a NJI	86
Respondent long-term ill/incapable of interview	10
<b>Valid sample (in scope of fieldwork)</b>	<b>4,143</b>
Refusal	690
Abandoned interview	171
Unavailable during fieldwork	113
Non-contact with respondent/unresolved	1,366
Requested postal questionnaire	54
<b>Interview</b>	<b>1,749</b>

**Table A.3 Telephone response details – ESA claimants**

<b>Number sampled</b>	<b>5,200</b>
Opt-out or declared ineligible before fieldwork	282
Reserve sample not issued to telephone unit	0
<b>Sample issued to telephone unit</b>	<b>4,918</b>
<b>Invalid sample data</b>	<b>875</b>
Invalid/incomplete telephone number	572
Unknown at number	276
Respondent died	6
Duplicate records	21
<b>Ineligible</b>	<b>792</b>
Has never had dealings with Jobcentre Plus	58
Did not make a claim for ESA	150
Has not had a NJWFI	88
Has not had a WCA	371
Respondent long-term ill/incapable of interview	125
<b>Valid sample (in scope of fieldwork)</b>	<b>3,251</b>
Refusal	656
Abandoned interview	126
Unavailable during fieldwork	56
Non-contact with respondent/unresolved	954
Postal questionnaire requested	174
<b>Interview</b>	<b>1,285</b>



### A.3 Weighting

The data from the survey was weighted before analysis. Weighting is carried out for two reasons:

- to correct for differences in sampling fractions across the sample (using so-called design weights);
- to try and reduce bias arising from non-response (using non-response weights).

The sample was designed to provide sufficient numbers of interviews with JSA claimants in each age-group and equal numbers of interviews with ESA claimants who had, and had not, previously been on IB. It was, therefore, necessary to apply design weights to correct these imbalances. The profile of the survey respondents was then compared to the true profile of JSA and ESA claimants (in terms of age, gender and claimant-type), and non-response weights applied to correct for any discrepancies between the profiles.

# Appendix B

## Case study technical details

### B.1 Developmental stage

Telephone interviews were undertaken with District Managers (DMs) between December 2011 and January 2012 to ascertain the varied characteristics of the districts and to obtain a broad understanding of national activity. From the data gathered at this stage, the six case study districts were selected to ensure a balanced mix of characteristics in relation to the organisation and delivery of the Offer in their district. These characteristics primarily included: the size of district; the geographical location; the number of offices within the district; the size of their budget; the Offer characteristics (for example, types of interventions/support available, how the Offer had been implemented); the strength of the local labour market and labour market variation within the area; and whether there was other research activity occurring which would make it an unsuitable case study.

To ensure the anonymity of the staff and claimants observed and interviewed, the districts are not identified.

### B.2 Case study research

The case study approach included three elements:

- ethnographic site visits;
- staff interviews;
- claimant interviews.

#### B.2.1 Ethnographic site visits

Observational and interviewing techniques were used in each of the six districts (two offices were selected in each district). Specifically the following were undertaken in all 12 offices:

- **observations of adviser interviews:** A variety of adviser interviews were observed covering a range of touch-points (set time periods along the claimant journey), as well as interviews with different types of claimants (Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Income Support (IS));
- **follow-up interviews with claimants:** Claimants who had been observed with their advisers were asked if they would be happy to take part in a short 15-20 minute follow-up interview to discuss their views on the interview and other aspects of the Offer where relevant. These took place in the Jobcentre in a private room set aside for this purpose. Claimants were provided with clear information about the purpose and nature of the interview and gave informed written consent;
- **informal discussions with frontline staff:** in addition to the interviews with claimants, informal ongoing discussions with staff were undertaken regarding their experiences of the Offer and the interviews observed throughout the course of the site visits.

### B.2.2 Staff interviews

A broad range of staff within each district were interviewed using different qualitative techniques depending on the needs of each staff group. These were group discussions, mini groups, paired depths and individual depth interviews. This tended to vary depending on how the different districts and Jobcentres were organised on the ground.

Table B.1 demonstrates the observations and interviews undertaken at each case study.

**Table B.1 Site visit – staff interviews and observations**

	District 1	District 2	District 3	District 4	District 5	District 6
<b>Staff type</b>						
PAs, DEAs, AAs	1 group	1 group	1 group, 1 depth	2 groups, 1 depth	1 group	2 groups, 2 depths
ATMs/PTLs	1 group	3 groups	2 depths, 1 group	1 depth	2 depths	
LOMs, CSOMs, DMs**, TPPMs, External relationship managers, Partnership managers	1 depth	2 depths	1 depth	3 depths	3 depths	1 depth
<b>Staff interviews (Total)</b>	10	16	14	14	14	20
<b>Observations (Total)</b>	7	15	10	8	12	12
JSA	6	11	7	7	8	10
ESA	1	1	2	1	2	1
IS	0	3	1	0	2	1
			<b>Follow-up interviews</b>			
Staff	5	8	10	7	10	11
Claimants	6	12	10	8	12	12

### B.2.3 Claimant interviews

169 telephone interviews were undertaken between April and May 2012 with claimants across the six case study districts. Claimants were sampled at different touch-points along the claimant journey in order to capture the full range of support offered as part of the Offer; therefore, the sample was drawn at three, six and 12 months.

The primary and secondary variables were the following:

#### *Primary variables*

- Range of benefit streams: including JSA, ESA and IS and a range of specific benefit claimants within this which were: JSA 18-24; JSA 25-49; JSA 50+; ESA Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) 3-6 months prognosis; ESA WRAG 12-months prognosis; ESA voluntary; and IS voluntary.
- Geographic locations: claimants who accessed the Offer in the case study districts only.

#### *Secondary variables*

- Disadvantaged claimants: including problem drug users, homeless and ex-offenders.
- Sanctions: target of two claimants per case study who had received a sanction from Jobcentre Plus.
- Early entry JSA stock: target of two per case study area.
- A mix of demographic characteristic: including age, gender, and ethnicity.

The achieved sample quotas are listed in Table B.2.

**Table B.2 Achieved sample quotas**

	District A	District B	District C	District D	District E	District F	Total
Total	25	28	31	26	29	30	169
Primary variable:							
JSA 18-24	4	4	5	3	4	4	24
JSA 25-49	4	4	4	4	4	4	24
JSA 50+	4	4	4	3	4	5	24
ESA 3/6 months	1	4	5	4	5	5	24
ESA 12 months	5	6	7	6	6	6	36
IS voluntary	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
ESA voluntary	4	3	3	3	3	3	19
Secondary variables (NB: these are all cross-cutting variables, operating across the sample as a whole rather than area-specific):							
Disadvantaged	Problem drug users						12
	Homeless						8
	Ex-offenders						14
Sanctioned	Target of two per case study area						16
Early entry JSA stock	Target of two per case study area						5
Gender	Balanced across sample						M: 91 F: 78
Age	18-24						37
	25-49						82
	50+						50
Ethnicity	Non-white claimants per case study area						19
Sample touch-points	3 months						63
	6 months						58
	9 (or 12) months						48

# Appendix C

## Claimant profile

This appendix provides additional information on the characteristics of the new Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants included in the survey to that covered in Chapter 4.

It is important to note that the profile information presented here is for new claimants and would therefore not be representative of all benefit recipients.

### C.1 Sex and age

Table C.1 displays the sex of JSA and ESA claimants.

**Table C.1 Sex**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	67	48
Female	33	52

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

Table C.2 shows the age of JSA and ESA claimants.

**Table C.2 Age**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
16–17	1	*
18–19	12	*
20–24	23	3
25–29	12	5
30–34	10	6
35–39	9	9
40–44	10	14
45–49	9	20
50–54	7	18
55–59	5	20
60–64	2	4
65–69	*	*
Refused	–	*

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

## C.2 Caring responsibilities

Table C.3 displays the percentage of JSA and ESA claimants who have caring responsibilities.

**Table C.3 Caring responsibilities**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Caring responsibilities within household	6	11
Caring responsibilities outside of household	2	3
Both	*	*
No caring responsibilities	92	85

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

Table C.4 shows the impact which caring for someone has on the work which JSA and ESA claimants can undertake.

**Table C.4 Caring responsibilities – effect on work**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes – availability to work	29	42
Yes – types of work can do	9	25
No	66	48
Don't know	2	6

Base: JSA claimants (143); ESA claimants (190) who care for someone.

Table C.5 depicts who JSA and ESA claimants with caring responsibilities care for.

**Table C.5 Caring responsibilities – who care for**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Adult/s	35	33
Children	65	67

Base: JSA claimants (23)/ESA claimants (3) whose main activity is caring for someone.

### C.3 Occupation

Table C.6 displays the occupation of both JSA and ESA claimants who are currently in work.

**Table C.6 Current occupation**

	<b>All participants</b>
	<b>%</b>
Managers, directors and senior officials	5
Professional qualifications	6
Associate professional and technical occupations	12
Administrative and secretarial occupations	11
Skilled trades occupations	12
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	9
Process, plant and machine occupations	13
Elementary occupations	10
Sales and customer service occupations	22

Base: JSA/ESA claimants (348) currently in employment.

Table C.7 depicts the previous occupation of JSA and ESA claimants combined.

**Table C.7 Previous occupation**

	<b>All participants</b>
	<b>%</b>
Managers, directors and senior officials	5
Professional qualifications	6
Associate professional and technical occupations	8
Administrative and secretarial occupations	10
Skilled trades occupations	13
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	9
Process, plant and machine occupations	12
Elementary occupations	12
Sales and customer service occupations	26

Base: JSA/ESA claimants (2,655) currently unemployed.

Table C.8 shows the percentage of JSA and ESA claimants who are currently in work.

**Table C.8 Currently in work**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	24	3
No	76	97

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

Table C.9 illustrates the proportion of JSA and ESA claimants who are currently claiming benefits.

**Table C.9 Currently claiming benefits**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	69	95
No	31	3
Don't know	*	2

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

Table C.10 displays the current main activity of JSA and ESA claimants who are not working and not receiving JSA/ESA payments.

**Table C.10 Main activity at present**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
In training or education (including at school/college)	8	7
Not working and claiming benefits	26	43
Caring for children or adult(s)	14	10
Not working for other reason	29	23
Something else	21	13
Refused	3	3

Base: JSA claimants (165)/ESA claimants (30) not working and not receiving JSA/ESA payments.



## C.4 Highest qualification

Table C.11 shows the highest qualification attained by JSA and ESA claimants.

**Table C.11 Highest qualification**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Null	8	18
Don't know	4	7
Entry Level qualifications	5	11
GCSEs D-G, Vocational Level 1 qualifications and equivalent	11	14
GCSEs A*-C, Vocational Level 2 qualifications and equivalent	30	24
A Levels, Vocational Level 3 qualifications and equivalent	18	10
Certificates of Higher Education or equivalent	5	4
Higher National Certificates (HNC), Diplomas (HND) or equivalent	4	4
First degree or equivalent	11	7
Postgraduate degree (Masters) or equivalent	4	2
PhD (Doctoral degree) or equivalent	*	*

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

## C.5 Ethnicity

Table C.12 displays the ethnicity of JSA and ESA claimants.

**Table C.12 Ethnicity**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
White	82	94
Black	6	2
Mixed	3	*
Asian	7	3
Other	2	*

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

## C.6 Language

Table C.13 shows the proportion of JSA and ESA claimants who consider English to be their first language.

**Table C.13 Is English your first language?**

	JSA %	ESA %
Yes	93	97
No	7	3

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

## C.7 Marital status

Table C.14 shows the marital status of JSA and ESA claimants.

**Table C.14 Marital status**

	JSA %	ESA %
Single (or engaged but not living with partner as a couple)	63	36
Married	12	32
Civil Partnership	*	*
Living with Partner	4	6
Married, Civil Partnership or living with partner (NET) <sup>1</sup>	24	41
Widowed	*	2
Divorced	7	15
Separated	4	6

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

<sup>1</sup> Sum of married, civil partnership and living with partner does not equal NET as a proportion of claimants surveyed were not asked to specify their relationship status beyond ‘married, civil partnership and living with partner’.

Table C.15 displays the number of children within presence of partner.

**Table C.15 Partner status and number of children, by claimant type**

	JSA %	ESA %
No children	79	72
Single		
One child	4	6
Two children	2	2
Three children	*	1
More than three children	*	*
Partner present		
One child	6	6
Two children	4	7
Three children	2	3
More than three children	*	2

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

## C.8 Tenure

Table C.16 shows the living accommodation of JSA and ESA claimants.

**Table C.16 Tenure**

	JSA %	ESA %
Rented privately	19.7	14.9
Rented from a council or local authority	13.7	26.6
Rented from a Housing Association	7.4	16.2
Owned outright	6.6	13
Being bought on a mortgage/bank loan	15.7	17.8
Shared ownership where you pay part rent and part mortgage	.6	.5
Living with friends/relatives	33.4	8.9
Supported housing	.2	.5
Living in hostel (including foyers)	.4	.2
Homeless (squatting or other temporary accommodation)	.6	–
Living in caravan	.1	.2
Other	.6	.5

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

## C.9 Driving

Table C.17 shows the proportion of JSA and ESA claimants who either possess a driving licence and a car, just a driving licence or no driving licence at all.

**Table C.17 Driving**

	JSA %	ESA %
Driving licence and car	39	40
Driving licence without car	15	13
No driving licence	46	48

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

## C.10 Benefit receipt

Table C.18 displays the benefits collected by JSA and ESA claimants, in addition to JSA or ESA.

**Table C.18 Benefit receipt**

	JSA %	ESA %
State Pension	*	3
Winter Fuel Payment	1	21
Pension Credit	*	1
Carer's Allowance	1	12
Attendance Allowance	–	–
Disability Living Allowance	2	46
Housing Benefit	10	27
Tax Credits	12	17
Child Benefit	19	15
Council Tax Benefit	10	31
Other	7	20
Don't know	*	3
Refusal	66	19
No answer	66	19

Base: JSA claimants (540); ESA claimants (68) currently on benefits.

## C.11 Sexual identity

Table C.19 shows the sexual identity of JSA and ESA claimants.

**Table C.19 Sexual identity**

	<b>JSA %</b>	<b>ESA %</b>
Heterosexual or straight	93	94
Gay or lesbian	2	2
Bisexual	1	*
Other	*	*
Refused	2	2
Don't know	1	*

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

## C.12 Ex-armed forces

Table C.20 displays the proportion of JSA and ESA claimants who were members of the armed forces.

**Table C.20 Ex-armed forces**

	<b>JSA %</b>	<b>ESA %</b>
Yes	*	*
No	99	100

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

## C.13 Ex-offenders

Table C.21 shows the percentage of JSA and ESA claimants who are ex-offenders.

**Table C.21 Ex-offenders**

	<b>JSA %</b>	<b>ESA %</b>
Yes	5	4
No	95	96

Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285).

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Launched in April 2011, the new Jobcentre Plus Offer was designed to change the way that Jobcentre Plus operates by placing an increased focus on outcomes rather than procedural targets. To achieve this there has been a move away from nationally mandated processes towards flexibility at the local level, with Jobcentre Plus staff being given the flexibility to provide tailored support which will best move claimants towards and into paid work.

The Jobcentre Plus Offer is being evaluated to find out how it is being implemented and the effect it is having on staff and claimants. The evaluation involves two main strands: The first is a longitudinal survey of new Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance claimants, initially interviewed shortly after starting the Offer and then again as they off-flow in to employment, the Work Programme or another destination. The second strand involves case studies in six Jobcentre Plus districts with two waves of ethnographic site visits and depth interviews with staff and claimants.

The evaluation will be conducted over two years by TNS-BMRB and this report covers the findings from the first year of the study.

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