

Insight to support Universal Credit user-centred design

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Jigsaw Research was commissioned to conduct a programme of ongoing user testing to generate insights to support the user centred design of Universal Credit. User centred design enables the needs and behaviours of potential users and administrators to be considered throughout the development of Universal Credit. This report is of the findings of the user testing work, which involved 160 users (potential claimants of Universal Credit) and approximately 30 staff (DWP, HMRC and Manchester City Council), engaged at mainly fortnightly intervals in and around Manchester between March and October 2011.

Most of the aspects of Universal Credit design that were tested succeeded in driving the desired user behaviours (namely encouraging and facilitating claimants to seek and increase work; use the online channel easily and correctly; and manage their money and budgets), or would require only relatively minor modifications to do so. A number of residual issues were also identified for further consideration.

The Universal Credit design appeared to be most effective at encouraging claimants to seek and increase work when the following aspects were personalised:

- online job search support;
- the Claimant Commitment; and
- sanctions for non-compliance.

A key challenge in this area will be communicating in-work conditionality as those in work tend not to regard the job seeking elements within the Universal Credit design or the Claimant Commitment as being aimed at them.

In terms of encouraging claimants to use the online channel easily and correctly, the ease of use, layout and navigation, and language and terminology received generally positive feedback, although couples' applications were felt to be potentially over-complex and long-winded. Great importance was attached to:

- data security;
- checks to prevent fraud and error; and
- help for online users.

In terms of managing money, existing budgeting tools and devices which could be incorporated into the online interface were viewed positively. Presenting a calculation of Universal Credit payments was felt to exceed people's expectations as their interest was mainly in the total amount paid. Similarly, an explanation of how the Universal Credit payment was calculated in relation to household income was felt to be difficult to understand. Effectively communicating the tapering aspect of Universal Credit is necessary to avoid undermining or failing to convey the 'work pays' message.

Overall, this would suggest that the main challenges going forward are communicating that work pays and claimants are better off in work, and also the issue of in-work conditionality.

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The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 908523 66 2. Research Report 799. June 2012).

You can download the full report free from: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

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