An evaluation of the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) Online Digital Trailblazers Phases Two and Three

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Executive summary

This report focuses on methods to increase uptake for the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) Online service. Creating a culture where online use is the norm can reduce costs and contribute to helping people into work and tackling poverty.[1]

The JSA Online service has existed since 2009. In May 2012, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) set out an ambition to increase the proportion of JSA claims made online to 80 per cent by September 2013 and launched the first phase of Trailblazers[2]. Phase Two comprising Trailblazers Four, Five and Six was launched in August 2012 and Phase Three comprising Trailblazers Seven and Eight was launched in February 2013. These were pilots to test different approaches to help drive up the take-up of JSA Online. This report follows on from the report on Trailblazers One, Two and Three[3] and covers Trailblazers Four to Eight. The focus is on Trailblazers Six and Eight, as these designs were close to the model that was subsequently rolled out nationally, and for which the richest evidence was collected.

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[1] DWP Digital Strategy (December 2012)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/139489/dwp-digital-strategy.pdf.pdf p.2
[2] Department for Work and Pensions (31 May 2012) *Business Plan 2012 - 2015*
http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp-business-plan-may-2012.pdf
[3] An evaluation of the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) Online Digital Trailblazers (One, Two and Three), May 2013
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/199046/ihr15.pdf

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Acknowledgements

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About the authors

Steven Tulloch, Mike Suter-Tibble and Gilly Burgess are analysts at the Department for Work and Pensions.

Abbreviations

ADS	Atomic Data Store
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
IAD	Internet Access Device
IB	Incapacity Benefit
IS	Income Support
IT	Information Technology
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
JSAOL	Jobseeker's Allowance Online
MISP	Management Information Systems Programme
NJI	New Jobseeker Interview
WFI	Work Focused Interview

Glossary of terms

Digital Champions	Jobcentre staff who have taken on additional responsibilities to advocate the benefits of getting online, and encourage and inspire claimants and colleagues to use online channels
First Contact Agents	DWP operational staff working in the Contact Centre who gather a claimant's information for their claim for benefit
Independent online claimants	Online claimants who claimed online independently of the Trailblazers
JSA Online Trailblazers	Tests in local areas to understand what drives take-up of JSA Online
Non-digital channels	Collective term for channels excluding the online channel. This includes telephone and face to face channels
Nudged online claimants	Online claimants who were persuaded online by the Trailblazer

Summary

Background

The Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) Online service, enabling claimants to make their JSA claims online, has existed since August 2009[4]. Before its introduction, the standard method for claiming JSA was by telephone. The Department set out an ambition to increase the proportion of JSA claims made online to 80 per cent by September 2013.[5] As part of a programme of work to meet this ambition, the Department conducted a number of tests (referred to as the JSA Online (JSAOL) Trailblazers) in local areas to understand what drives take-up of JSA Online claims.

The aims of the JSA Online Trailblazers were to:

- Provide opportunities to learn what has the greatest impact in encouraging claimants to go online;
- Identify which actions may support a step-change in the take-up of online claims for JSA;
- Identify actions that could be embedded into the business model for Universal Credit.

In total, eight Trailblazers were tested between May 2012 and March 2013. The evaluation of Trailblazers One, Two, and Three is covered in DWP in-house Report 15 An evaluation of the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) Online Digital Trailblazers (One, Two and Three), May 2013[6]

This report focuses on Trailblazers Six and Eight, as these were considered to have the most potential, and were the template for the national model.

Findings

Impact on take-up of JSA online

Phase Two consisted of Trailblazers Four, Five, and Six, and began in August 2012.

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[4] Initially this service was for contributions based claimants only. Income based claimants could claim from November 2010 and Rapid Reclaims were included in December 2010
[5] Department for Work and Pensions (31 May 2012) *Business Plan 2012 - 2015* http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp-business-plan-may-2012.pdf
[6] available at
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/199046/ihr15.pdf

Trailblazer Four focused on encouraging Rapid Reclaim claimants to claim on-line, and had no statistically significant impact.

Trailblazer Five removed the option to make a telephony claim at first contact by providing a call back appointment three days after the initial contact. This increased take-up of JSAOL by 11.1 percentage points.

Trailblazer Six removed the option to make a telephony claim to any claimant who is eligible to use the JSA Online service. Claimants without internet access were directed to a suitable access point at a third party provider or Jobcentre Internet Access Device (IAD). Trailblazer Six had an overall effect of around 11 percentage points (based on unweighted average four pilots, see section 2.1 for more details).

Phase Three consisted of Trailblazers Seven and Eight, and began in February 2013, after the model tested in Trailblazer Six had been rolled out nationally.

Trailblazer Seven tested the combination of Trailblazers Five and Six. This resulted in an increase in online take-up of 4.9 percentage points more than Trailblazer Six.

Trailblazer Eight was a variant of Trailblazer Six where the determination of a claimant's eligibility to claim online took place during the dialogue with contact centre agents, rather than during the Interactive Voice Response part of the call. This resulted in an increase in online take-up of 6.9 percentage points more than Trailblazer Six.

Operational impacts

There were no significant negative impacts on operational staff. The nature of some roles changed, for example Jobcentre staff spent a larger proportion of their time supporting claimants to use IT.

'First contact' call durations significantly decreased in Trailblazers Six and Eight.

Impact on claimants

Directing claimants who were eligible and capable of using the JSA online service, and providing support for those with limited access to the internet and/or poor IT skills meant the increase in take-up of JSAOL was achieved without a significant increase in complaints from claimants. Some claimants were more resistant, and Contact Centre staff needed to use a variety of techniques to persuade them to claim online.

In some cases there appeared to be a lack of consistent understanding between the Contact Centre staff and Jobcentre staff about the level of support available in Jobcentres. While this may have been a 'teething issue' the Department should monitor this to minimise occasions where claimants are directed back to the phone to claim.

Conclusions and recommendations

Trailblazers Six and Eight have shown that it is possible to strongly direct claimants to the online service, as long as this is combined with support for those without access to the internet and/or the skills to use it.

It is also important to ensure web-based services are as usable as possible. Not only because this improves the service for the claimant, but because unclear questions lead to missing information that requires additional contact with the claimants during the processing stage, which increases costs.

DWP should monitor the support it provides claimants with poor IT skills, as increasingly they will need to transact with the Department online. Investing time to upskill these claimants should pay dividends throughout their claim.

Introduction and methods

1.1 Context

The government aims to provide 'digital services that are so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use them will choose to do so whilst those who can't are not excluded.'[7] The Government Digital Strategy states that 'developing transactional services offers the greatest scope to improve efficiency and the claimant experience'. The Strategy recognises that supporting more people to get online can contribute to the Department's objectives around supporting people into work and tackling poverty, and that driving up the take up of digital services can generate cost savings and free up staff time to give more intensive support to those who need it.

The Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) Online service, enabling claimants to make their JSA claims online, has existed since August 2009[8]. Before its introduction, the standard method for claiming JSA was by telephone. The Department set out an ambition to increase the proportion of JSA claims made online to 80 per cent by September 2013.[9] As part of a programme of work to meet this ambition, the Department conducted a number of tests (referred to as the JSA Online (JSAOL) Trailblazers) in local areas to understand what drives take-up of JSA Online claims.

The aim of the JSA Online Trailblazers was to:

- Provide opportunities to learn what has the greatest impact in encouraging claimants to go online;
- Identify which actions may support a step-change in the take-up of online claims for JSA;
- Identify actions that could be embedded into the business model for Universal Credit.

Analysis from the first phase[10] suggested that although successful, the target of 80% uptake could still not be achieved without additional and stronger intervention in the business process to direct claimants to the online service. Therefore, further

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[7] Government Digital Strategy (November 2012) http://publications.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/digital/strategy/ (Cabinet Office)

[8] Initially this service was for contributions based claimants only. Income based claimants could claim from November 2010 and Rapid Reclaims were included in December 2010

[9] Department for Work and Pensions (31 May 2012) *Business Plan 2012 - 2015* http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp-business-plan-may-2012.pdf

[10] available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/199046/ihr15.pdf

Trailblazers aimed at directing claimants to the online service were introduced in 2012.

1.2 Trailblazer Design

The Jobcentre Plus network is divided geographically into 37 districts. Apart from Trailblazer Six, each Trailblazer was run in a single Jobcentre Plus district, and involved a modification to the normal process by which telephone claims for JSA are handled. Trailblazer Six was initially trialled in only seven sites in the South East Wales district, but was eventually trialled more widely across the whole of South East Wales, Birmingham and Solihull and Merseyside.

Normally calls to make JSA claims are handled by a single national virtual network, with calls being routed to any available First Contact Agent. In a modification to this process claimants calling from the Trailblazer districts were identified by their postcodes and routed to dedicated teams of First Contact Agents supporting each Trailblazer. Splitting the calls in this way made it possible to record call statistics for each Trailblazer (call length, call abandonment rates).

There are two distinct phases of handling a call. Initially Interactive Voice Response (IVR) takes the claimant through a series of automated questions which ensure the call is routed to the correct line, depending on the type of call[11]. Then the First Contact Agents in the contact centre will take claimants through a script.

1.2.1 Phase Two (Trailblazers Four, Five and Six)

This phase of trailblazer activity focused on those claimants who could claim JSA online but need to be persuaded to do so.

Trailblazer Four

Trailblazer Four targeted Rapid Reclaim (RR) claimants with increased IVR messaging and promotion of the efficiency and effectiveness of making a Rapid Reclaim via JSA Online.

Gloucestershire and West of England district were selected to test this approach supported by Torquay Contact Centre. Trailblazer Four commenced on 24 August 2012 and concluded on 31st January 2013 when Trailblazer Seven replaced it – see further details below.

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[11] In the case of JSA claims for instance, the IVR questions check that the claimant wants to make a new claim to JSA, rather than another benefit.

Trailblazer Five

Trailblazer Five introduced for those claimants who refused to go online and insisted on remaining in the telephony channel a call back appointment three days after the initial contact was provided. Their claim was only taken at that point, so claimants were not able to make a claim over the phone at first contact.

Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire districts were selected to test this approach supported by Bangor Contact Centre. Trailblazer Five commenced on 12th October 2012 and continued until 28th January 2013.

Trailblazer Six

Trailblazer Six directed all who were eligible and capable to use JSAOL to make their claim online. Claimants were also given details of places they could access the internet via third party providers. Some claimants were signposted to the Jobcentre in order to use Internet Access Devices (IADs).

South East Wales district (Eastern Valleys) were originally selected to test this approach supported by Bangor Contact Centre and went live on 31 August 2012. Following the success of encouraging claimants to use the online service it was decided to test this approach in a couple of larger, more densely populated urban districts. Merseyside and Birmingham & Solihull were selected and went live on 9 November followed by the whole of South East Wales district on 7 December.

1.2.2 Phase Three (Trailblazers Seven and Eight)

Phase Three further developed the design to introduce additional agent intervention and claimant support. Two new trailblazers were implemented into existing trailblazer districts (one per district).

Trailblazer Seven

Trailblazer Seven combined the current Trailblazer Five and Six design meaning eligible claimants were directed to use JSAOL, with support of third party internet access or IAD appointments in their local Jobcentre.

Where a claimant insisted on remaining in the Telephony channel, a call back appointment was booked with a Contact Centre agent within three days of the initial contact.

Gloucestershire and the West of England district supported by Torquay Contact Centre implemented Trailblazer Seven on 1 February 2013.

Trailblazer Eight

Trailblazer Eight followed the same design model as Trailblazer Six, offering increased direction and support to enable claimants to use the online channel.

However, seeking to address gaps identified through the Trailblazer Six model, Trailblazer Eight removed the eligibility selection within Interactive Voice Response (IVR) message and presented claimants straight to the First Contact Agent to assess eligibility and provide appropriate direction. The claimant was presented with all available options to access JSAOL, including directions to local provision, support through partners and access to the internet at their local Jobcentre.

South East Wales district supported by Bangor Contact Centre implemented Trailblazer Eight from 1 February 2013.

1.3 Aim of the evaluation of the JSA Online Trailblazers

1.3.1 Evaluation success criteria

The Trailblazers were evaluated against the following criteria:

1. A statistically significant increase in the proportion of new claims made via JSA Online in the Trailblazer districts in comparison with the national figure.
2. The Trailblazer should not introduce significant operational burdens in contact centres, benefit centres or Jobcentres.
3. The Trailblazer should have minimal impact on claimants (this was only explored for Trailblazer Six).

A mixed method approach, involving the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, was adopted in order to investigate these criteria. The quantitative data aimed to show the overall impact of the Trailblazers, i.e. *what* happened and whether the Trailblazers increased the uptake of JSA Online, whilst the qualitative data aimed to explain *why* things happened by exploring people's views in depth.

1.3.2 Evaluation aims

The aim of the quantitative strand of the evaluation was to answer the following questions:

- How effective were the Trailblazers in increasing take-up of JSA online?
- How did claimants respond to being directed to claim online?
- Were there any significant operational impacts of the Trailblazers?

The first question links to the first evaluation success factor, that there should be a measurable increase in the proportion of claimants using JSA online. The second two relate principally to the second evaluation success factor, understanding operational impacts in terms of claimant behaviour and other process impacts to ensure no additional operational burden has been introduced.

The aim of the qualitative strand was to explore the following in respect of Trailblazer Six:

- Claimants' willingness or otherwise to claim online
- The effectiveness of efforts to direct them online
- The effectiveness of the support offered to claimants with poor IT skills
- The impact of the Trailblazer on operational staff.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Quantitative evaluation

A difference-in-differences approach was used to evaluate statistical significance and effect sizes. For a detailed explanation of methodology see the phase 1 evaluation[12].

1.4.2 Qualitative evaluation

Qualitative, in–depth interviews were conducted by phone with staff delivering Trailblazer Six. 23 interviews in total were conducted with staff in a range of roles in Jobcentres, Contact Centres, and Benefit Centres.

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[12] An evaluation of the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) Online Digital Trailblazers (One, Two and Three), May 2013
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/199046/ihr15.pdf

Interviews were recorded (with the participants' consent), transcribed and analysed using a thematic framework. Examples of topic guides and the coding framework are at Annexes C and D respectively.

2   Quantitative evaluation findings

Summary

- JSA Online take-up increased significantly in all districts for Trailblazers Six and Eight.

- Trailblazer Six was originally tested in seven Jobcentres in South East Wales. It had a positive impact of 13.8 percentage points. It was then tested in Merseyside (an increase of 12.6 percentage points), Birmingham and Solihull (10.7 percentage points) and then tested in the whole of South East Wales with an impact of 7.7 percentage points.

- Trailblazer Eight was tested in South East Wales and had an impact of 6.9 percentage points in addition to the increases from Trailblazer Six.

- First Contact call durations for new claims were found to decrease in Trailblazers Six and Eight.

This chapter focuses on Trailblazers Six and Eight as they were considered to have the most potential and were the template for the national model. Findings from Trailblazers Four, Five and Seven can be found in Annex A.

2.1 Trailblazer Six

Trailblazer Six involved directing all eligible[13] claimants who could use JSAOL to the online channel. Those without access to the internet at home, but who had sufficient IT skills were directed to somewhere they could access the internet, for example a library or other third party provider. Those with insufficient skills to claim online were asked if they could access help from friends or family, and if not they were given an appointment to use an Internet Access Device (IAD) in their Jobcentre where they would have access to support to claim online. Claimants for whom claiming online was not suitable (for example claimants who could not read or write) continued to claim by phone.

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[13] See Annex B for ineligibility and vulnerability criteria

The evidence from Trailblazer One[14] showed that 36.5% of callers stated lack of access and skills as a reason to not claim online. For some claimants third party providers address the access problem, but this may not be generally suitable for those requiring a significant amount of support. Callers were also asked whether a friend or family member was able to help them to claim online. In Trailblazer Six a further option was available. Claimants could be signposted to their local Jobcentre where support would be available to allow them to make claims using Internet Access Devices (IADs).

In this Trailblazer telephone claims were made by exception only, for those claimants either ineligible to claim online, or with other circumstances that made the online route unsuitable.

Seven Jobcentres in South East Wales district (Eastern Valleys) were originally selected to test this approach supported by Bangor Contact Centre and went live on 31 August 2012.

This had a large impact on JSA online uptake, showing statistically significant improvements of 13.8 percentage points on average compared to non-Trailblazer performance between 11 June 2012 and 25 November 2012.

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[14] An evaluation of the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) Online Digital Trailblazers (One, Two and Three), May 2013
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/199046/ihr15.pdf

Figure 2.1 Trailblazer Six - original seven Jobcentre trial
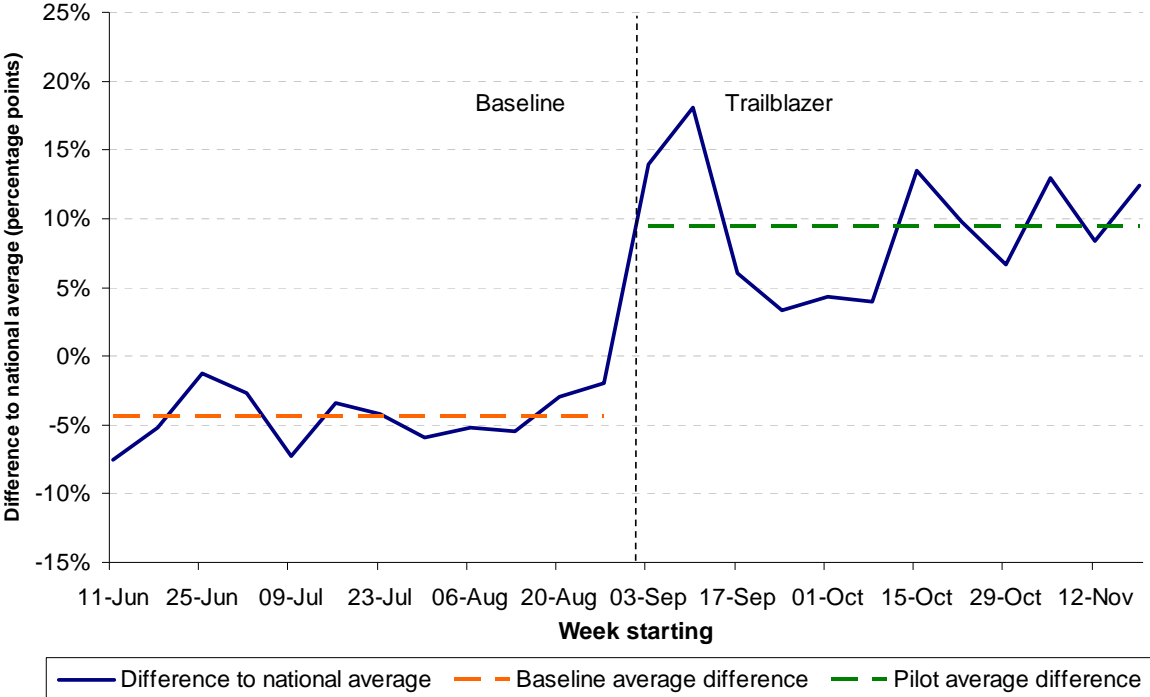
Following the success of encouraging claimants to use the online service it was decided to test this approach in a couple of larger, more densely populated urban districts. Merseyside and Birmingham & Solihull were selected and went live on 9 November 2012 followed by the whole of South East Wales district on 7 December 2012.

Figure 2.2 Trailblazer Six - Merseyside
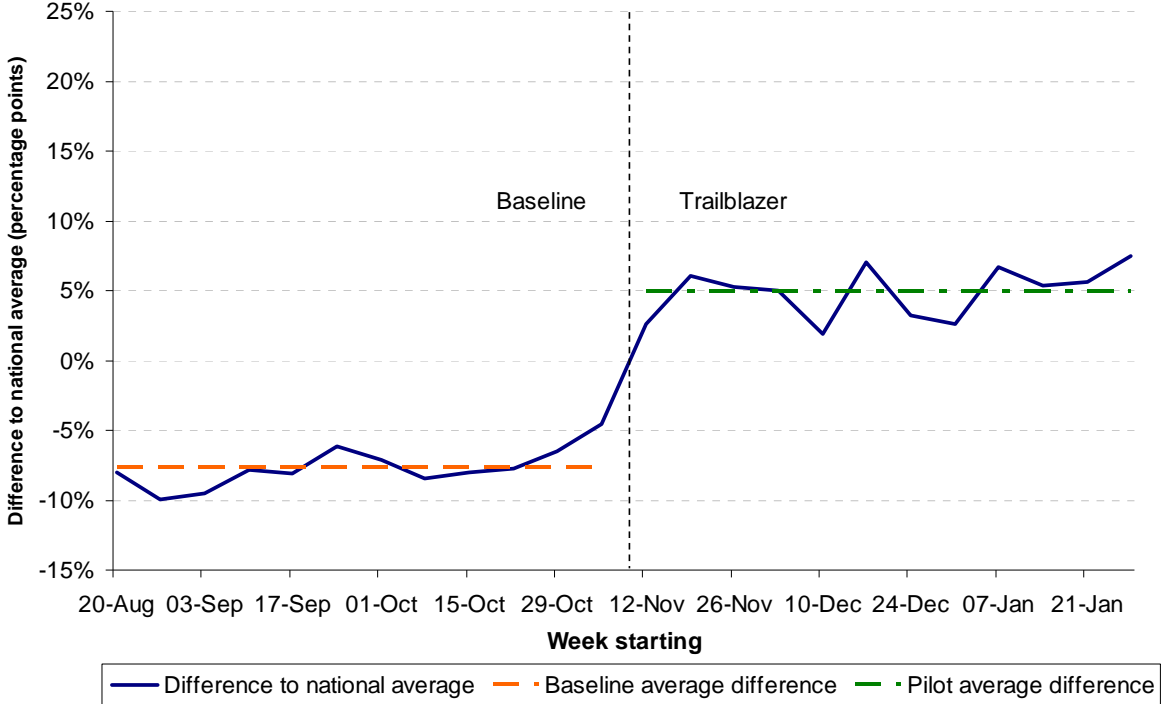
Merseyside increased JSAOL take-up by a statistically significant average of 12.6 percentage points compared to non-Trailblazer performance between 20 August 2012 and February 3 2013.

Figure 2.3 Trailblazer Six - Birmingham and Solihull
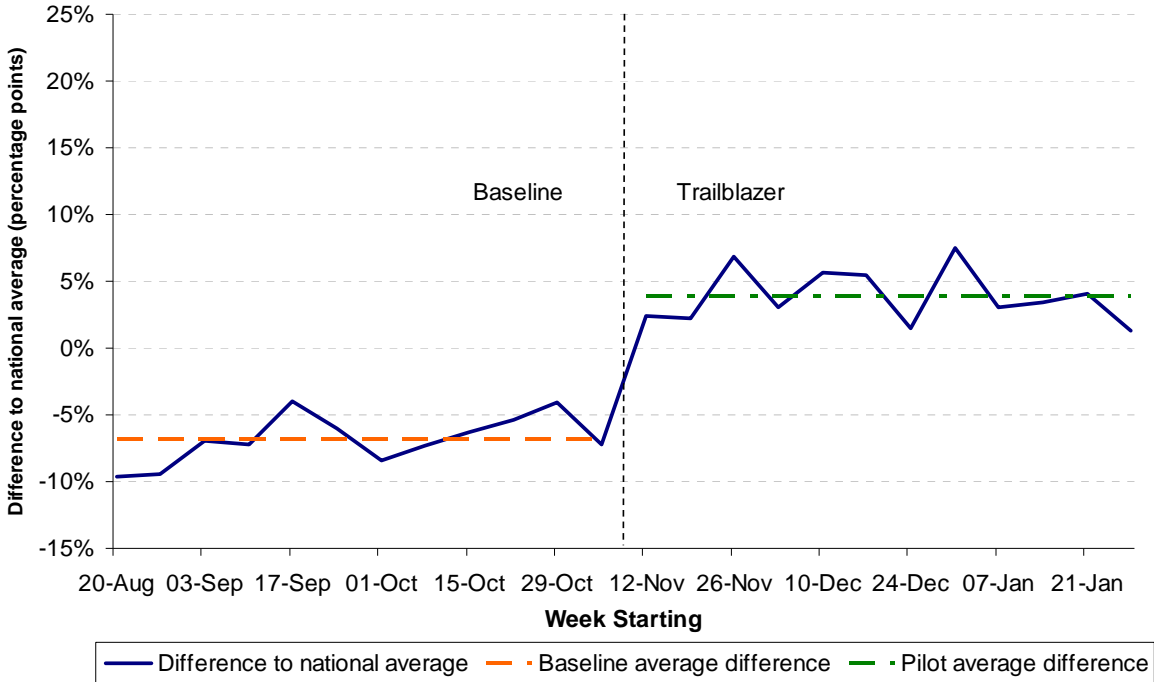
Birmingham and Solihull increased JSAOL take-up by a statistically significant average of 10.7 percentage points compared to non-Trailblazer performance between 20 August 2012 and February 3 2013.

Figure 2.4 Trailblazer Six - South East Wales
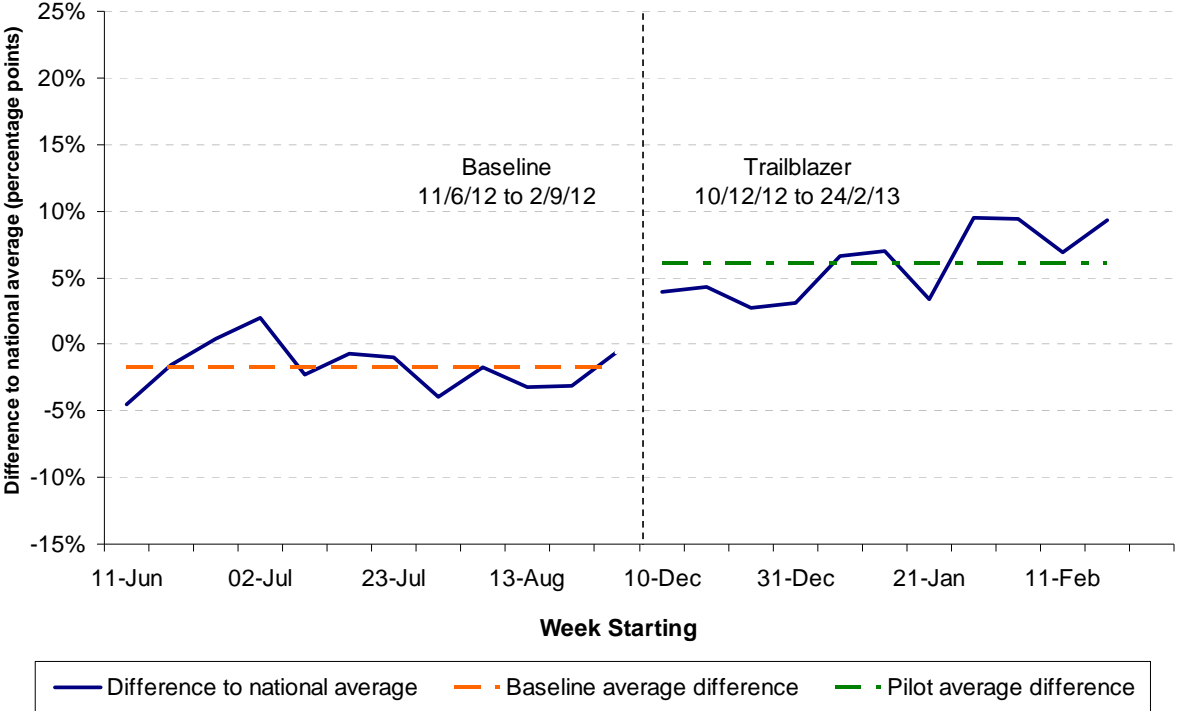
There was a statistically significant increase in JSAOL take-up of an average 7.7 percentage points compared to non-Trailblazer performance between 11 June 2012 and 25 November 2012. Note that the seven Jobcentre trial has been excluded from the baseline and Trailblazer periods for the evaluation of the district Trailblazer so there is a break in the time series.

2.1.1 Trailblazer Six Call Outcomes

A new option was provided that wasn't available in Trailblazer One. It was possible to book appointments in Jobcentres to claim online using Internet Access Devices (IAD). This option is to cater for those claimants who needed internet access, together with a degree of support to complete an online claim. The appointment booking system ensured that there would be an IAD available at the appropriate time.

Outcomes of these conversations were logged by First Contact Agents. The categories recorded are shown in the table below.

Table 2.1 Volumes Persuaded Online in Trailblazer Six[15]

Description	Number of calls reaching agent	% of calls reaching agent
Claimed Online - Own Access	6,908	36%
Claimed Online – Family/Friends Access	2,664	14%
Claimed Online – Third Party Provider Access	3,969	21%
Online Internet Access Device at Jobcentre	2,214	11%
Telephony – Vulnerable Claimant	1,340	7%
Not Eligible for JSA Online	2,259	12%
Online Total	**15,755**	**81%**
Telephony Total	**3,599**	**19%**

When would-be telephone claimants reached a Contact Centre agent, over 80% were persuaded to desist with their telephone claim, and to attempt to claim online instead.

Table 2.2 Trailblazer Six call duration

Area	Average call duration (minutes)
Trailblazer Six	9
Non-Trailblazer	14

As expected, call lengths were much lower for the Trailblazer Six contact centres than non-Trailblazer areas because many claimants were persuaded to end the call and claim online.

During Trailblazer Six, it took on average around 36 minutes to complete a claim online[16].

2.2 Trailblazer Eight

Trailblazer Eight was a slight modification of the design of Trailblazer Six.

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[15] Proportions may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
[16] Internal Management Information, using GB monthly data from September 2012 to February 2013.

In the Trailblazer Six design claimants were asked questions during the Interactive Voice Recognition stage, which determined their eligibility for claiming online[17]. However, gaps in Trailblazer Six design allowed a number of claimants to remain in, or return to, the telephony channel:

- Dropping out of the Trailblazer at the post-code identification stage.
- Answering negatively to one of the IVR eligibility questions – around 30% of callers dropped out at this stage.
- After the initial call, failing to complete an online claim, and instead phoning again.

To address these gaps, Trailblazer Eight removed the eligibility selection within IVR messaging and presented claimants directly to the First Contact Agent to assess eligibility and provide appropriate direction.

South East Wales district supported by Bangor Contact Centre implemented Trailblazer Eight from 1 February 2013. Trailblazer Eight followed the same design model as Trailblazer Six, offering increased direction and support to enable claimants to use the online channel.

Claimants were presented with all available options to access JSAOL, including directions to local provision, support through partners and access to the internet at their local Jobcentre.

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[17] See Annex B for ineligibility criteria

Figure 2.5 Trailblazer Eight compared to non-Trailblazer districts
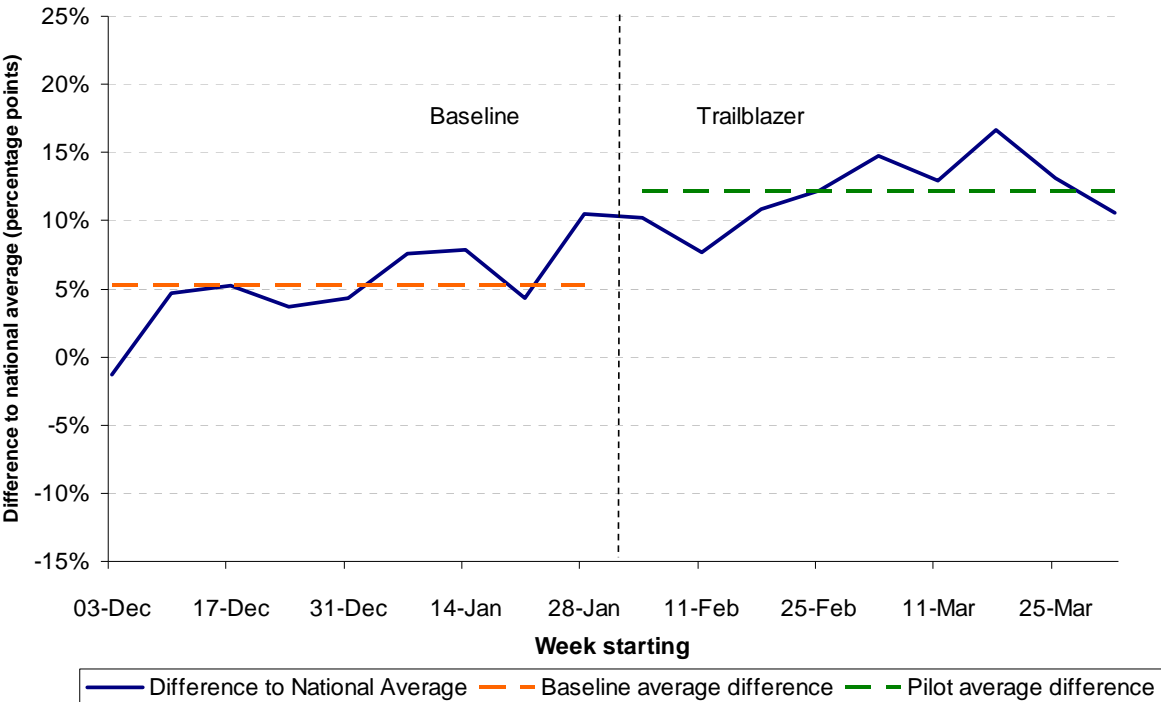
Trailblazer Eight increased JSAOL take-up by an average 6.9 percentage points compared to non-Trailblazer performance between 12 November 2012 and 7 April 2013. This increase is additional to that already achieved in Trailblazer Six.

2.2.1 Trailblazer Eight Call Outcomes

Trailblazer Eight was modelled on Trailblazer Six with the key difference that it was not possible for claimants to declare themselves ineligible in the pre-call IVR stage.

Table 2.3 Trailblazer Eight Call Logger

Description	Number of calls reaching agent	% of calls reaching agent
Claimed Online - Own Access	906	27%
Claimed Online – Family/Friends Access	399	12%
Claimed Online – Third Party Provider Access	439	13%
Online Internet Access Device at Jobcentre	284	9%
Telephony – Vulnerable Claimant	241	7%
Not Eligible for JSA Online	1,031	31%
Online Total	2,028	61%
Telephony Total	1,272	39%

Around 61% of claimants were directed online. As expected, this represents a drop of around twenty percentage points from Trailblazer Six. This is because ineligible and vulnerable[18] claimants could drop out in the pre-call IVR stage in Trailblazer Six but not in Trailblazer Eight.

Ineligible and Vulnerable Claimants

Around 31% of callers who came through to the contact centre were classified as ineligible. There were an average of 459 calls per week, of which an average of 119 were ineligible and 27 were vulnerable. However, many claims originate online without any call so of an average of 1267 claims per week during the Trailblazers, an estimated 9% of all claims were ineligible and 2% were vulnerable.

Calls where the claimant is directed online tend to be much shorter than calls where the claim is taken on the telephone, so directing the claimant online saves staff resources at First Contact stage. No statistically significant difference was found in levels of re-work needed.[19]

Table 2.4 Trailblazer Eight Call Durations

District	Average call duration (minutes)
Trailblazer Eight	10
Non-Trailblazer	14

As expected, call durations were much lower for the Trailblazer Eight calls than in the rest of the country, because more claimants were persuaded to end the call and

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[18] Annex B contains criteria for identifying ineligible and vulnerable claimants

[19] A sample of 450 online and 105 telephony claims, taken between 18 February and 1 March 2013, was provided to test the hypothesis that online claims put an extra burden on staff because more claims require follow-up. No statistically significant difference was found.

claim online. The gap is narrower than for Trailblazer Six because of the time spent by First Contact Agents determining eligibility to claim online.

3   Trailblazer Six Qualitative Findings

Summary

- Directing claimants who were eligible and capable of using the JSA online service, and providing support for those with limited access to the internet and/or poor IT skills meant the increase in take-up of JSAOL was achieved without a significant increase in complaints from claimants. Most claimants were happy to claim online when told this was how they needed to make their claim.

- Some claimants were more resistant, and Contact Centre staff needed to use a variety of techniques to persuade them to claim online. In some cases, staff felt claimants exaggerated difficulties in accessing the internet or IT skills in an attempt to claim by phone.

- In some cases there appeared to be a lack of consistent understanding between the Contact Centre staff and Jobcentre staff about the level of support available in Jobcentres. While this may have been a 'teething issue' the Department should monitor this to minimise occasions where claimants are directed back to the phone to claim.

- There were no significant negative impacts on operational staff. The nature of some roles changed, for example Jobcentre staff spent a larger proportion of their time supporting claimants to use IT.

Trailblazer Six involved directing claimants to the online channel. Those without access to the internet at home, but who had sufficient IT skills were directed to somewhere they could access the internet, for example a library or other third party provider. Those with insufficient skills to claim online were asked if they could access help from friends or family, and if not they were given an appointment to use an Internet Access Device (IAD) in their Jobcentre where they would have access to support to claim online. Claimants for whom claiming online was not suitable (for example claimants who could not read or write) continued to claim by phone.

This qualitative study aimed to gather the views of staff from Contact Centres, Benefit Centres and Jobcentres on:

- Claimants' willingness or otherwise to claim online
- The effectiveness of efforts to direct them online
- The effectiveness of the support offered to claimants with poor IT skills
- The impact of the Trailblazer on operational staff.

Claimants were not interviewed for this research, so the effectiveness of support, and claimants' reactions were explored through staff's experience, and feedback they had received from claimants.

3.1 Claimants' willingness to claim online

Staff felt the majority of claimants were happy to claim online when told this was how they needed to claim. The level of resistance to using online channels was also lower than some had expected.

"Those that do [have access to the internet at home, and good IT skills] are happy to tell you that, and are happy to go online straight away" (Contact Centre).

"The training has definitely prepared call agents for the calls with customers but the expected level of resistance from customers has not happened at all in reality." (Contact Centre).

Some respondents felt claimants expected DWP to be moving to online channels, due to the general trend for organisations to increasingly interact with people online *"there seems to be an expectation from customers that they need to go online" (Jobcentre).*

Similarly, several respondents felt fewer claimants than expected did not have access to the internet at home or elsewhere.

"A lot of our fear about the impact of the Trailblazer was based on assumptions around internet access, but customers do have access to the internet and many use our providers' facilities" (Contact Centre).

Before the Trailblazer started, staff also anticipated directing claimants online would lead to an increase in complaints. However, this did not occur.

"I have been amazed at how smoothly it has all gone and I'm still stunned that we haven't had more complaints." (Jobcentre)[20]

Generally, there were very few complaints reported, formal complaints in particular. Respondents said there were a few 'grumbles' or 'gripes' that were dealt with there and then, but generally, if staff mentioned formal complaints it was specific single cases, demonstrating the low number of these cases.

Although before the Trailblazer started there was some concern about claimants with language barriers, claimants who were not fluent in English generally tended not to call in person, but ask their support worker or a family member to call on their behalf. In the vast majority of cases, respondents said the person calling on the claimant's behalf was happy to help them to claim online.

3.2 Effectiveness of efforts to direct claimants online

Although the majority of claimants were happy to claim online, contact centre staff did have to handle callers who were either resistant to claiming online, had no access to the internet at home, or had low levels of IT skills. In a very small number of cases, the claimant was extremely resistant to claiming online, and staff took the claim by phone to avoid causing more stress to the claimant. Contact centre staff used a variety of techniques to persuade claimants to go online.

3.3 "Selling" the benefits of claiming online

For those who were reluctant and/or had poor IT skills, staff outlined the benefits of claiming online, such as being able to work at their own pace, or save the form part way through and complete it later:

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[20] In this evaluation, a distinction is made between formal written complaints and verbal complaints or comments. A formal written complaint is regarded as one which had to be escalated beyond Team Leader Level. Verbal complaints are regarded as issues being reported to and dealt with by frontline staff.

"Customers like the fact they can save the form and return to it later (Contact Centre)."

Other staff promoted the online channel to claimants by informing them that Universal Credit would be coming soon and explaining how that will be an online system;

"This is a better way for us to sell online to customers and makes the customer feel like we are helping them to prepare for the future" (Contact Centre).

3.4   Offering or directing the claimant to support

Staff also reassured claimants that the online application process was straightforward, and told them the helpline would be able to offer support if they got stuck. This helped to persuade claimants with poor IT skills, who were concerned they would have to call the claim line again if they struggled with the form. It also helped overcome what some respondents felt was a common reason claimants were reluctant to claim online – the fear of making a mistake on their application.

Another way of persuading claimants with poor IT skills to claim online was to ask them if a friend or family member could help them with their application, and if there was no-one suitable, to book them an appointment in their local Jobcentre to use an IAD to make their claim. This was felt to overcome a lot of claimants' concerns;

"Customers are fine as long as they know there is someone on hand to support them through the online application." (Contact Centre)

3.5   Assessing and dealing with problems or support needs

During a call, contact centre staff had to assess whether a claimant had a genuine need to claim by phone, or was capable of making an online application with support in a Jobcentre or elsewhere. This task was sometimes complicated by claimants

appearing to exaggerate their support needs, in order to have their claim taken by phone.

Staff felt that sometimes people claimed to have problems when they didn't, such as claiming they did not have sufficient IT skills, in order to claim by phone. Staff checked these to some extent, for example, by checking the claimants' record and any previous JobSeeker's Agreement, for any mention of job searching online or previous online contact.

Some respondents felt claimants had learnt that saying they could not read or write would mean they could claim by phone. Contact Centre staff do not feel able to strongly challenge people who say they are unable to read or write, or are dyslexic.

"You cannot question if someone tells you they cannot read or write…There is a fine line between what you can ask and what you can't ask so it's better to be on the safe side".(Contact Centre)

On the other hand, one respondent felt more use should be made of previous claimant details to check whether someone saying they can't read or write or use a computer has previously agreed to search for jobs online.

"*They play on that fact and we don't know for sure that they have literacy issues unless we look into their LMS record to see if they have had previous dealings with us and to see if they have basic skills needs. The information on LMS is the best information on offer to us. We should be using LMS more to check out what the customer is telling us"* (Contact Centre).

Staff mentioned that a lack of access to the internet was sometimes given as a reason why the claimant couldn't claim online when this was not the case;

"The script helps us to identify whether and how much access a claimant has to the internet. If they say no then we will say that we will find them access and they usually say 'oh, I do have access.". (Contact Centre)

3.6 Effectiveness of support for claimants to use JSA Online in Jobcentres

Jobcentre staff reported relatively low numbers of claims being made on IADs, varying from around one a day to around three a day (likely reflecting the different size of offices). This was fewer than expected, and Jobcentre staff reported frequent 'no-shows'. One Jobcentre had tracked claimants who had not attended their appointment to use an IAD (they estimated that around 40% of those booked to use an IAD did not attend), to see whether and how they had made their claim, and found that most had made a claim online with a friend or family member helping them.

The IADs were resourced differently in different Jobcentres; some had a member of staff dedicated to supporting claimants using IADs for claiming benefits, searching for work, and applying for jobs, while in others all staff supported claimants as and when support was needed.

It appeared that in some cases there was not a shared understanding between the contact centre and Jobcentre staff of who should be able to claim over the phone, and who should be supported to claim in a JCP office. Some staff in Jobcentres mentioned claimants who had very low computer skills, in some cases having never used a mouse previously, who they referred back to the contact centre to claim by phone as they needed more support than JCP was able to provide.

"We can get the computer set up, give them a short guideline, but we can't literally sit there with them and fill in an application form with them. Some people are struggling with using the mouse." (Jobcentre)."

It should be noted that these cases were reported to be rare. It was expected that such cases will become rarer still as contact centre and Jobcentre staff gain a better shared understanding of which claimants should have their claims taken by phone, and the kinds of support Jobcentres should provide.

In contrast to these cases, staff mentioned claimants who had never used a computer before completing their claim form online and saying they would be happy to do so again.

"You have people who wouldn't have dreamed of going online and the Trailblazer has shown them not to be frightened of computers and how easy it is to make a claim'(Jobcentre)".

3.7 Technical issues with the JSA online application

Some technical issues were identified by respondents, which were addressed before Trailblazer Eight was rolled out nationally.

Staff in Benefit Centres reported that a high proportion (up to half) of claims had unanswered questions and/or missing information. For example, one respondent estimated, approximately 30% of claims have no address or the address is incomplete meaning staff had to contact the claimants for the information making the claim process take longer than expected;

"……if they don't know what to answer, they leave it unanswered and then they just move on to the next block of questions, and if they haven't answered the previous question correctly it doesn't throw up the information then that we need. So you get lots of claims with unanswered bits on them, and then we've got to ring them up or we've got to send them a letter in the post asking for information" (Benefit Centre).

Two questions in particular appeared to be commonly unanswered (whether the claimant received income from a forces compensation scheme, and whether they received income from a private pension). These fields were not mandatory on the JSA online application, and staff felt they were either thought not to be relevant to the claimant, or not understood, and left unanswered. These questions were made mandatory in November 2012. A subsequent sample found no statistically significant difference in levels of re-work needed.[21]

Staff also reported that the JSA online application itself frequently ran slowly on IADs, leading to the application 'timing out', and claimants having to log in again to

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[21] A sample of 450 online and 105 telephony claims, taken between 18 February and 1 March 2013, was provided to test the hypothesis that online claims put an extra burden on staff because more claims require follow-up. No statistically significant difference was found.

complete their claim. This was caused by the structure of the application's firewall, which has subsequently been changed.

3.8 Impact of the Trailblazer on staff

As might be expected, the Trailblazer had different impacts on staff in different parts of the organisation.

Jobcentre staff:

Jobcentre staff generally felt their job roles had not changed significantly, other than the proportion of their time spent assisting claimants to use the IT;

They did not feel the Trailblazer had led to an increase in 'footfall' in Jobcentres; generally seeing small numbers of claimants making their claim in the Jobcentre.

Contact Centre staff:

Staff in contact centres felt their roles had changed from being based around scripts to involving more influencing and negotiating skills[22]. They also felt they hadn't had as many calls from the trailblazer area they'd expected; some speculated this was because the messaging that directed claimants to go online before they got through to an agent was working. While estimates of how much shorter calls from the Trailblazer area were varied, the consensus was that durations had decreased. This was verified through analysis of calls data. Some respondents also said call lengths were more variable during the Trailblazer;

 "we go through the options and this is where a call length will vary greatly. If a customer has their own internet and is happy to use it then the call will be shorter. If they need more support and you need to book an appointment for the IAD the call is much longer." (Contact Centre)

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[22] The evaluation of Trailblazers one, two, and three also found this. See section 3.2.1 in DWP In-House Report 15, available at www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/199046/ihr15.pdf

Benefit Centre staff:

In general, the Trailblazer had least impact on staff in Benefit Centres. Some felt the quality of claims had deteriorated, as claimants did not know how to answer some questions on the online form, and left them unanswered (referred to above), whereas a call centre agent would have explained the question. However, analysis of Departmental data found the proportion of claims made online that required further contact was very similar to the proportion of claims made by phone that required further contact.

4 Conclusions

4.1 Evaluation success factor one – Increasing JSA Online take-up

In Phase Two JSA Online take-up increased in all Trailblazer districts apart from Trailblazer Four (by between 7.7 and 13.8 percentage points more than the average increase in take up in non-Trailblazer districts over a 12 week period). Therefore, this success factor was met in Trailblazers Five and Six.

Phase Three built on this with *additional* increases in JSA Online take-up in both districts (Trailblazer Seven increased JSAOL take-up by an additional 4.9 percentage points in Gloucestershire and the West of England compared to the National Average. Trailblazer Eight increased JSAOL take-up by about 6.9 percentage points in South East Wales compared to national average.). Therefore, the success factor was met in both Trailblazer Seven and Eight.

Trailblazer Eight was considered to be the method most likely to meet the Department's JSA Online take-up aspiration of 80 per cent by September 2013, and was adopted as the national model in April 2013.

4.2 Evaluation success factor two – No significant operational burdens

Trailblazer Six did not create significant operational burdens, therefore this success factor was met. It had more impact on staff in some roles than those in others.

Contact centre staff noted that the changes required a shift in emphasis away from scripted conversations towards greater use of influencing and persuading skills. These skills may take time for staff to acquire, particularly identifying where callers are misrepresenting their levels of skills or access in an attempt to claim by phone. In contrast, although some callers were resistant to claiming online and took time to convince, contact centre staff felt the majority of callers were happy to be directed

online, and consequently average call times were shorter. This was verified through call data.

Staff in Jobcentres similarly noted a shift in emphasis to supporting claimants to use IT, as they now needed to support claimants who previously would have claimed by phone, and who had low levels of IT literacy. During the Trailblazer period, different offices resourced the IADs in different ways; in some cases this meant claimants booked to use the IADs to make a claim did not get the level of support they required, and in some cases were referred back to the phone to claim. Although most Jobcentre staff interviewed mentioned such cases, they were reported as being rare, rather than frequent occurrences. Jobcentre staff also reported problems with the IADs running slowly, on occasion leading to the online application form 'timing out', and claimants having to log in again. This problem was caused by the servers hosting the JSA online application, and has since been addressed.

Benefit Centre staff generally felt there had been little impact on their work (other than in some cases where they covered Trailblazer and non-Trailblazer areas, and prioritised cases differently for each area). Views were mixed on whether increasing the proportion of claims made online was impacting the quality of data on claims, with some feeling online claims were more likely to contain unanswered questions, due to some fields in the online claim form not being mandatory. The most commonly unanswered questions have since been made mandatory.

4.3 Evaluation success factor three – Positive claimant experience

The level of complaints received (both formally and informally) during Trailblazer Six was lower than anticipated, given it essentially removed the choice to claim by phone. Contact Centre and Jobcentre staff generally felt that there were some low level complaints or 'grumbles', but that the level of complaints remained broadly the same as before. Some felt that many of the complaints were simply down to some people being resistant to change, rather than a particular dislike of claiming online.

It should be noted, however, that the offer of support for those who need it is crucial in achieving a high level of online claiming. Staff felt that without the offer of support, claimants would be more likely to complain and refuse to claim online. It is therefore important that the Department ensures signposting and support is accessible for those who need it. The Department also needs to ensure there is a shared understanding of the support that will be available in Jobcentres, and when claimants

should have their claim taken by phone. This will reduce cases where claimants are booked to use an IAD in a Jobcentre, then directed back to the phone.

# Annex A Findings from Trailblazers Four, Five and Seven

Trailblazer Four

Trailblazer Four focussed on those claimants making rapid reclaims to JSA because those making rapid reclaims are known to be less likely to claim online and to be more likely to claim again so there is an opportunity to influence future claiming patterns. It targeted current claimants who had also made a recent claim in the past with increased Interactive Voice Response (IVR) messaging and promotion of the efficiency and effectiveness of making a rapid reclaim via JSA Online. It began in Gloucestershire and West of England on 24 August 2012.

It did not show significant effects either for those re-claiming or for all claimants. Compared to the other Trailblazers in Phase Two and Three, it was much easier for claimants to select to make telephone claims.

In summary, this focus on rapid reclaims was more complex and less effective than strategies that encompass all claimants.

Figure A1 Trailblazer Four
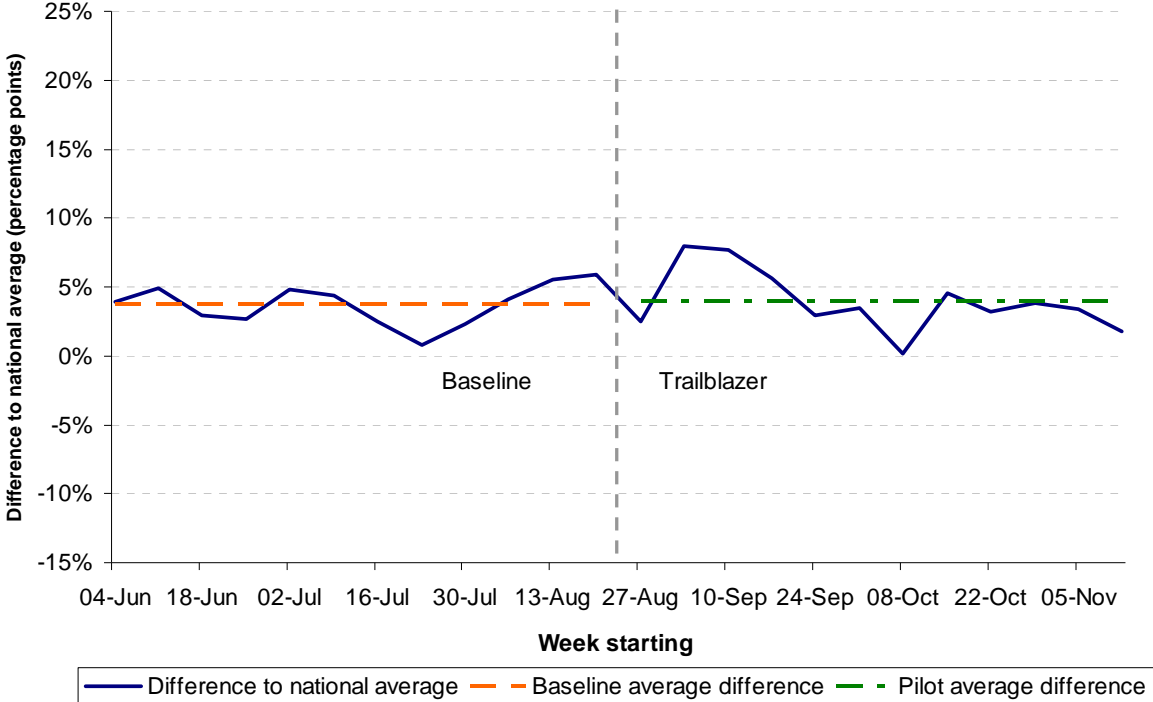
Trailblazer Five

The principle of Trailblazer Five was that claimants would not be able to make a claim over the phone at first contact . It began on 12 October 2012 in the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire district. As per Trailblazer One, First Contact Agents would have a conversation with claimants to ascertain their willingness and ability to claim online. For those claimants who opted to make a telephone claim, this was done via a call back appointment three days after the initial contact was made. Claim start dates were set as date of first contact so no benefit would be lost. The intent was to see if the disincentive of waiting for this call was enough to drive additional online take-up.

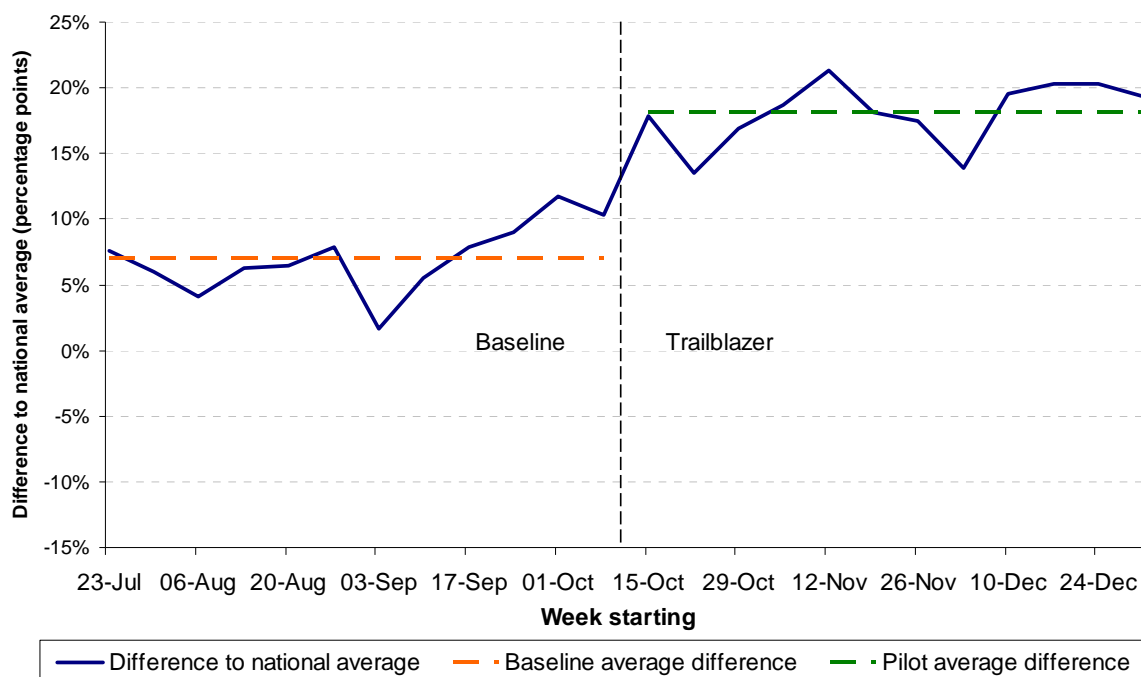Trailblazer Five increased JSAOL take-up by a statistically significant average of 11.1 percentage points compared to national performance between 23 July 2012 and 6 Jan 13.

Over 70% of eligible claimants opted to claim online rather than await a three day call back. This was far more than the proportion opting to claim online in Trailblazers One and Four, but less than that in Trailblazer Six.

Fewer claimants were found to be ineligible through IVR compared to Trailblazer Six, partly due to demographics (for example, there are more ex-ESA claimants in South East Wales).

Figure A2 Trailblazer Five

Trailblazer Seven

Trailblazer Seven combined the Trailblazer Five and Six designs, meaning eligible claimants were directed to use JSAOL, with support of third party internet access or Internet Access Device appointments in their local Jobcentre. It was implemented in Gloucestershire and the West of England district on 1 February 2013. If a claimant insisted on remaining in the Telephony channel, a call back appointment was booked with a First Contact Agent within three days after the initial contact.

Trailblazer Seven increased JSAOL take-up by a statistically significant average 4.9 percentage points compared to national performance between 12 November 2012 and 7 April 2013. This is less than the 6.9 percentage points achieved in Trailblazer Eight, so the results showed less potential than that model.

Figure A3 Trailblazer Seven
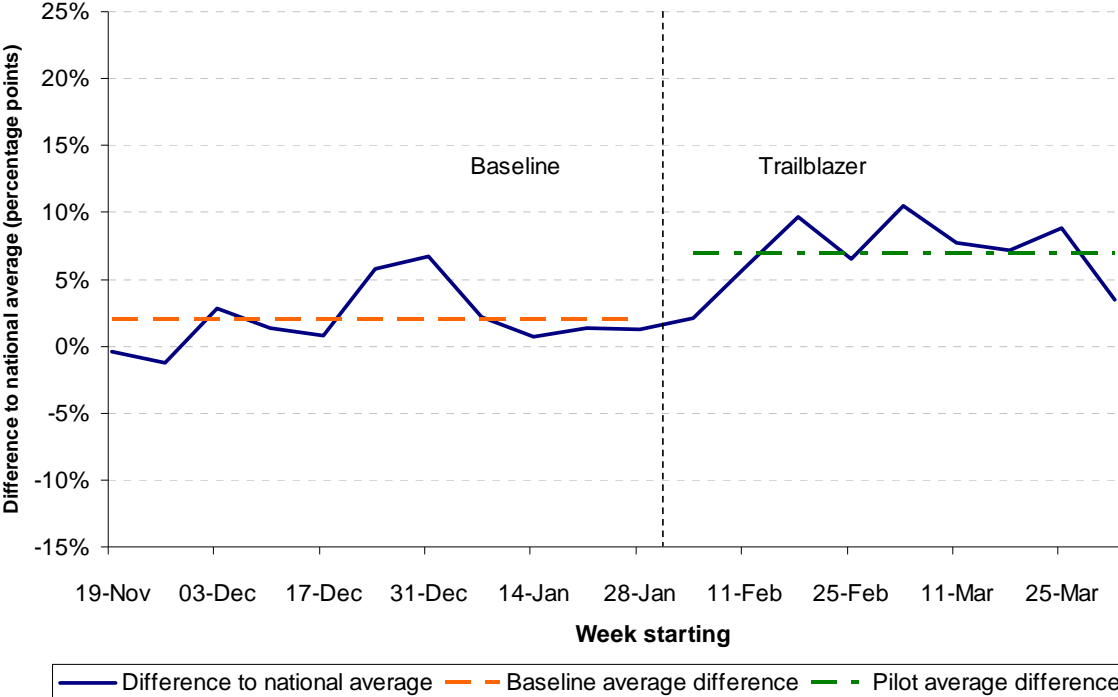
Annex B Ineligible and Vulnerable Categories

Table B1 Ineligible to claim JSA online

Ineligible Claimant Categories
Moved from ESA to JSA
No National Insurance Number
Potentially violent / on the staff protection list / on a tag
Prison leaver
Advance claim
Referred by Jobcentre Plus
Referred by helpdesk
No contact number
Appointee
Income Support claimant
Not in the Trailblazer area
Resumed online claim

Table B2 Vulnerable claimant exempt from JSA online categories

Vulnerable Claimant Categories
Literacy / numeracy difficulties
No computer skills
Visually impaired
Homeless (no access to phone or internet)
Other medical condition (e.g. epilepsy)
MAPPA (restriction imposed on access)
Emotionally distressed
Support worker availability
Domestic violence
Under 18 / Over State Pension age
Language barrier (no support available)
Other vulnerable claimant

Annex C Example topic guide

Background and introduction

Hello my name is _____ and I'm a researcher working in the Cross Cutting Delivery Analysis Division in Strategy Group. I'm doing some staff interviews as part of the evaluation of the JSA Online Trailblazers.

You've been selected to take part in the research because we would like to gain your feedback on the Trailblazer in terms of its impact upon your job, workload, resources and how successful you feel it has been in encouraging customers to claim for JSA using JSA Online. You should have received an information sheet explaining the research which was sent in September 2012.

All the answers you give me will be strictly confidential and anonymous. Your views will be used to inform the research but you will not be identifiable.

The interview will last around 20-30 minutes, and you can stop the interview at any time.

Are you happy to continue with the interview? Yes / No (Make sure their answer is noted).

If possible I would like to record the interview, as it will help me to write up notes from the interview later on. Please note only the staff working on this evaluation would be able to have access to the recordings and notes, and the recording will be deleted as soon as the notes have been written up.

Are you happy to be recorded? Yes / No (Make sure their answer is noted)

Do you have any questions before we start?

1. Impacts on individual job role and workload – All

- Please could you confirm your job role? What does this usually involve?

- Since the Trailblazer started has your job role changed in any way? Have you had to do anything differently?
- *(If appropriate)* How confident do you feel about working differently in your role?

2. Impacts – e.g. footfall and complaints

I'm trying to determine whether the trailblazer has had any unintended impacts in the Jobcentre, such as an increase in footfall or an increase in complaints.

- Since the trailblazer started in late August 12', have you noticed any changes in customer footfall in the Jobcentre? If so, an increase or decrease? *If an increase, probe and explore reasons why (e.g. cannot get through on the telephone to claim JSA? Had a query regarding online application or anything else)* <u>*Here we are looking for reasons for an increase in footfall beyond use of the IADs.*</u>
- Has there been any change in the number of customers you see who have queries regarding claiming on-line? Or problems with applying using JSA Online? If so, is the Jobcentre able to handle the queries or do you refer them to another part of the business? If so where?
- Have you noticed any change in the number of complaints since the Trailblazer began? If so, an increase or decrease?
- Have there been any complaints linked to the Trailblazer, e.g. have you had any customers complain about not being able to get through to the JSA Claims line, customers being made to claim online? Or any other related complaint.
- (If experienced an increase in complaints) do you have adequate resources to respond to complaints? Who responds? JC or District level? Is there a single point of contact in the District for complaints to do with the Trailblazer?

3. Internet Access Devices (IADs) – Diary management and resource

- Since the trailblazer began in late August, how many customers approx have used the IADs in your Jobcentre?
- What is the process for booking appointments to use IADs? *Probe have there been any problems with the process? Any problems with working with the contact centre and booking appointments for IADs?*
- Is the appointment time slot sufficient for a customer to complete their online claim? *Have you experience any backlog of customers waiting to use the IADs?*
- How do you deal with customers who are late for their IAD appointments? Do you turn them away, redirect them to other service provision (library) or do you re-book their appointment for another day? *Probe – does this affect the start date of the claim?*
- How do you prioritise use of the IADs? *Probe – especially use of IADs for job searching and JSA Online claims?*
- How do you resource the IADs in your Jobcentre? *Is there a dedicated job role that oversees the IADs? Who provides support to customers during their online claim?*
- What is the role of JCP staff in manning the IADs – is it to police the use or support claimants or both?
- Does your Jobcentre have sufficient resource to man the IADs? *Probe issues around 'policing' the IADs to ensure appropriate use and content use.*
- Has your Jobcentre experienced any problems or issues with the use of the IADs?
- Have you received any customer feedback on their experience of using the IADs? *Was this positive or negative? Probe issues around privacy of using IADs at the JC.*

- Has your office experienced any technical problems with the IADs? *Probe what has been the impact of technical problems, how have they dealt with them?*
- Have staff at the JC received training on how to use JSA Online? *Do they feel confident to be able to help and support claimants in completing their claims online?*
- Do customers usually complete their claims in one sitting? *Probe – are customers able to print out documents?*

4. Attitudes towards JSA Online – All

- Was any comms provided to let you know about the JSA Online Trailblazer? (*Probe – formal guidance, communications from line manager, desk aid etc*). How did you find the comms / guidance / desk aid?
- **(FOR JCM ONLY)** Did you try to ensure that staffs within the Jobcentre are aware of the Trailblazer and the impacts it might have on their work / customer attitudes? If so how?
- What are your views on encouraging claimants to claim for JSA online rather than by telephone?
- Do you understand why DWP is trying to increase the proportion of claims made online? *(probe – are they aware of the target for 80% of claims to be online by September 2013?)*
- Has your level of understanding in terms of why we wish customers to use JSA Online changed since the JSA Online Trailblazer? (e.g. have you seen more comms in relation to JSA Online and channel shift since becoming involved in the Trailblazers?)

5. Thoughts on success, possible roll-out and lessons learnt – All

- Do you have a feeling for whether the trailblazer is making a difference in terms of increasing the proportion of claims made on-line?
- If this trailblazer is rolled out to other Districts, is there anything that needs to be borne in mind?
- What lessons does DWP need to learn from your experiences?

Thank you for your time. Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't already covered?

Annex D Coding framework for qualitative interviews

1. **Impacts on Job roles, workloads and resources**

    1.1 Changes to roles and responsibilities (including none)
    1.2 How staff persuade customers to go online
    1.3 Impacts on Contact Centres (e.g. number of FC calls, average call length, helpdesk calls, waiting times)
    1.4 Impacts on Jobcentres (e.g. footfall)
    1.5 Impacts on Benefit Centres including problems experienced (processing times and volumes)
    1.6 Whether resources can cope with changes (staffing levels, changes to work patterns / shifts? etc)
    1.7 Sustainability of changes if Trailblazer rolled out
    1.8 Problems encountered with the online claim form (including incomplete or missing information and or technical problems)
    1.9 Problems mentioned regarding the booking of the WFI for online claimants

2. **Impacts on customer attitudes and complaints**

    2.1 Whether formal complaints have been made / received
    2.2 Customer reactions to being asked to claim online
    2.3 Customer feedback in relation to the JSA Online claim form itself
    2.4 Staff views on customer ability to use online (including identifying vulnerable customers)
    2.5 Staff reaction and ability to handle customer complaints and reactions to being asked to go online (Eg. Aggressive customers)

3. **Internet Access Devices (IADs) – Diary management and resource**

    3.1 **How many customers approx have used the IADs in your Jobcentre?**
    3.2 **What is the process for booking appointments to use IADs?**
    3.3 **Is the appointment time slot sufficient for a customer to complete their online claim?**
    3.4 **How do you deal with customers who are late for their IAD appointments?**
    3.5 **How do you prioritise use of the IADs?**
    3.6 **How are resourced the IADs in your Jobcentre?**

3.7 role of JCP staff in manning the IADs – is it to police the use or support claimants or both?

3.8 Does your Jobcentre have sufficient resource to man the IADs?

3.9 Jobcentre experienced any problems or issues with the use of the IADs?

3.10 Any customer feedback on their experience of using the IADs?

3.11 Has office experienced any technical problems with the IADs?

3.12 Have staff at the JC received training on how to use JSA Online?

3.13 Do customers usually complete their claims in one sitting? *Probe – are customers able to print out documents?*

4 Staff knowledge and understanding of DWP Digital Agenda

4.1 Understanding of DWP's Digital agenda, including 80% target for JSA Claims Online, Universal Credit etc

4.2 Understanding of and training received on JSA Online

4.3 Understanding of and training / guidance received on Trailblazers

5 Staff attitudes towards encouraging customers to use JSA Online

5.1 Positive reactions

5.2 Negative reactions

6. Issues and ideas

6.1 Issues that emerged in the interview

6.2 Ideas on how the Trailblazers can be improved before rollout

6.3 Ideas on how JSA Online claim form and processing can be improved

6.4 Ideas on how to promote JSA Online and other DWP digital services

6.5 Views on whether the Trailblazer is having an impact on increasing JSA Online