

Research report

Access to work-related training

by Claire Johnson, Paul Sissons, Joy Oakley and Sara Dewson

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 749

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Contents

Acknowledgements.....	vii
The Authors.....	viii
Abbreviations.....	ix
Glossary.....	xi
Summary.....	1
1 Introduction.....	7
1.1 The policy context: Integrated Employment and Skills.....	7
1.2 The evaluation of the IES trials.....	8
1.3 Aims and objectives of this study.....	9
1.4 Methodology.....	9
1.4.1 Selection of districts.....	9
1.4.2 Limitations in comparing IES trials districts and EJW districts.....	10
1.4.3 Research methods.....	10
1.4.4 Sample composition in each district.....	10
1.4.5 Interpretation of the findings.....	12
1.5 Structure of this report.....	12
2 Screening and referrals from Jobcentre Plus.....	13
2.1 Screening at Stages 1, 2 and 3 of JRFND.....	13
2.2 Referrals from Jobcentre Plus to Next Step.....	15
2.3 Referrals from Jobcentre Plus to provision.....	17
2.4 Organisational understanding of Next Step.....	18
2.5 Use of labour market information.....	19
3 Skills Health Check.....	20
3.1 Perceived appropriateness of referrals to Next Step.....	20
3.2 Failure to attend Next Step appointments.....	20
3.3 Skills Health Check interview and onward referral to provision.....	21
3.4 Action planning.....	23

3.5	Follow-up.....	24
3.5.1	<i>Follow-up by Next Step</i>	24
3.5.2	<i>Follow-up by Jobcentre Plus</i>	24
4	Skills provision	25
4.1	Appropriateness of referrals.....	25
4.1.1	<i>Assessing skills needs</i>	25
4.1.2	<i>Perceived appropriateness of referrals to provision</i>	26
4.2	Failure to attend, drop out, and mandation.....	27
4.2.1	<i>Addressing FTA and drop out</i>	27
4.2.2	<i>Awareness of mandation and dealing with mandatory referrals</i>	27
4.3	Delivery	28
4.3.1	<i>The range of provision</i>	28
4.3.2	<i>The frequency and timing of provision</i>	29
4.3.3	<i>The employment focus of provision</i>	29
4.3.4	<i>Using claimant feedback to improve provision</i>	30
4.4	Follow-up support.....	30
4.4.1	<i>Follow-up support to learners</i>	30
4.4.2	<i>Job retention support</i>	31
4.5	Working with Jobcentre Plus and Next Step.....	31
4.5.1	<i>Decisions on provision</i>	31
4.5.2	<i>Feedback on claimants to Jobcentre Plus and Next Step</i>	33
4.5.3	<i>Relationships with Jobcentre Plus and Next Step</i>	33
5	The claimant experience	36
5.1	Claimant backgrounds	36
5.1.1	<i>Attitudes to training</i>	36
5.1.2	<i>Aspirations</i>	37
5.2	Experience of screening at Jobcentre Plus and referrals to Next Step	37
5.2.1	<i>Referrals to provision</i>	38
5.2.2	<i>Referrals to Next Step</i>	39
5.3	Experience of skills assessment and referrals at Next Step	40

5.3.1	<i>Referrals to provision</i>	41
5.3.2	<i>Reasons for non-attendance at the Next Step interview</i>	41
5.4	Views on co-location	42
5.5	Views on provision	42
5.6	Follow-up	44
5.7	Overall satisfaction with support received	44
5.8	Claimant outcomes	45
6	Progress in integrating employment and skills: an overview	46
6.1	Progress made during the IES trials	46
6.1.1	<i>Implementation and set-up</i>	46
6.1.2	<i>Screening and referral</i>	47
6.1.3	<i>Skills Health Check interviews at nextstep</i>	48
6.1.4	<i>Onward referrals and follow-up</i>	48
6.2	Working together	49
6.2.1	<i>Co-location</i>	49
6.2.2	<i>Working relationships</i>	51
6.2.3	<i>Administration and paperwork</i>	51
6.3	Culture change	52
6.3.1	<i>Jobcentre Plus advisers' understanding of the role of skills in getting people back to work</i>	52
6.3.2	<i>Organisational understanding between Next Step and Jobcentre Plus</i>	52
6.4	Embedding the IES approach in Jobcentre Plus practice	53
6.5	Differences in EJW districts	53
6.5.1	<i>Skills screening in EJW areas</i>	54
6.5.2	<i>Understanding EJW</i>	54
6.5.3	<i>Referrals to nextstep</i>	54
7	Conclusions and recommendations	55
7.1	Conclusions and 'lessons learned'	55
7.2	Recommendations	57

Appendix A Components of the Integrated Employment and Skills trials..... 58

List of tables

Table 1.1 Fieldwork interviews 12

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

ASM	Advisory Services Manager
BIS	(Department for) Business, Innovation and Skills
CAT	Customer Assessment Tool
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CSCS	Construction Skills Certification Scheme
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EJW	Enhanced Joint Working
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	Further Education
FJR	Fortnightly Jobsearch Review
FND	Flexible New Deal
FTA	Failure to attend
HM	Her Majesty's
IAG	Information, advice and guidance
IES	Integrated employment and skills
IS	Income Support
IT	Information Technology
JRFND	Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LMI	Labour Market Information
LMRA	Labour Market Recruitment Adviser
MI	Management Information
NJI	New Jobseeker Interview
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification

SIA	Security Industry Association
UK	United Kingdom
WRAG	Work Related Activity Group

Glossary

Customer Assessment Tool (CAT)	Jobcentre Plus staff use the Customer Assessment Tool (CAT) during their advisory interviews to record the evidence gained from a work-targeted interview about key attributes found to give claimants the best chance of finding work. CAT is a profiling, rather than assessment tool, which records rather than generates outcomes. CAT covers a full range of attributes, including skills. It is expected that the CAT will be used at the Stage 2 interview (13 weeks) and Stage 3 interview (26 weeks).
Enhanced Joint Working (EJW)	From April 2009, a programme of Enhanced Joint Working (EJW) ¹ was introduced in the areas not operating Integrated employment and skills (IES) trials, to increase the number of referrals of Jobcentre Plus claimants to both careers advice and skills provision. EJW comprised of: skills screening; referral and signposting to skills services; and building on existing links, to strengthen joint working between employment and skills services.
Fast Track Assessment Tool	The Fast Track Assessment Tool is a paper-based basic skills assessment which is used by Jobcentre Plus advisers to identify claimants requiring referral to basic skills provision. The Fast Track Assessment Tool identifies those who have literacy below Level 1 and numeracy skills below Entry 3 of the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy.
Future Jobs Fund	The Future Jobs Fund was a fund of around £1 billion to support the creation of jobs for long-term unemployed young people and others facing significant disadvantage in the labour market. The Fund was announced in the 2009 Budget by the (then) Labour Government. The Fund aimed to create 150,000 jobs: 100,000 aimed at 18- to 24-year-olds who have been out of work for nearly a year. The Future Jobs Fund formed part of the Young Person's Guarantee.
Integrated employment and skills approach	The Integrated employment and skills (IES) approach in IES trials and EJW areas broadly seeks to bring Jobcentre Plus and Next Step's employment and skills services into closer alignment at the point at which they are delivered to jobseekers, with the aim of raising people's skills in order to move them into employment that is sustainable and offers opportunities for progression.

¹ This was sometimes referred to as 'IES-lite'.

Integrated employment and skills trials

The Integrated employment and skills (IES) trials were intended to test components of integrated employment and skills service delivery. These were: co-location; skills screening; referral; Skills Health Check interviews; Skills Action Plans; and work-focused skills provision [detailed at Appendix A]. IES trials ran in 12 Jobcentre Plus districts between September 2008 and August 2010.

Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND)

The Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) was introduced in approximately half of the country from April 2009. The Jobseekers Regime replaced the former Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) regime. The Flexible New Deal (FND) combined the New Deal 25 Plus, the New Deal for Young People, Employment Zones, New Deal 50+, the New Deal for Musicians and Self-Employment provision. JRFND is delivered in four stages, characterised by increasing support and conditionality. Stages 1, 2 and 3 – the 'Jobseekers Regime' – is delivered by Jobcentre Plus (Stage 1 refers to the first part of the claim starting with the New Jobseeker Interview (NJI), Stage 2 begins 13 weeks after the claim to JSA is made and Stage 3 starts 26 weeks after the claim has been made). Stage 4, FND, is delivered by external providers 12 months after the claim to JSA has been made.

Next Step

In August 2010, a new integrated adult careers advice service was introduced. The newly branded 'Next Step' service brought together and replaced existing separate 'nextstep' (face to face) and 'Careers Advice Service' web and helpline services. The Next Step service is underpinned by a new Customer Relationship Management (CMR) system which allows customer records to be available to any adviser.

Routes into Work

Pre-employment training and support to move into jobs in a key employment sector.

Skills

The definition of skills adopted by the research includes:

- basic skills (literacy, numeracy, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) as well as basic IT skills);
- employability skills (for example, timekeeping, confidence and motivation);
- job-search skills (effective job applications, interview techniques); and
- vocational skills (related to a specific type of occupation or sector; including up-to-date certification).

The report distinguishes between these, as well as basic IT skills and certification, where possible.

Six Month Offer	<p>The Six Month Offer (6MO) was rolled out nationally in April 2009 in response to the economic downturn and ran until March 2011. It comprised additional support for jobseekers who reach six months of their claim. There were four main strands to the 6MO, available at the discretion of a personal adviser based on an assessment of the claimant's individual needs and their barriers in returning to work. These comprised of: (1) recruitment subsidy, (2) self-employment, (3) volunteering and (4) work-focused training.</p>
Support Contract	<p>Jobcentre Plus Support Contract replaced Programme Centre provision for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants (prior to entry to the Flexible New Deal (FND)) and other claimants who received support through Programme Centres, in December 2009. Advisers can refer claimants to specific support modules from a menu of available provision.</p>
Support for the Newly Unemployed (SNU)	<p>Support for the Newly Unemployed (SNU) was rolled out nationally in April 2009 in response to the economic downturn. It offers supplementary job preparation and job search services from day one of a claim. The package of support is designed for people who have recently become unemployed and have little experience of modern job search tools. Specialist help is also available for professionals/executives. SNU ended on 31st March 2011.</p>
Young Person's Guarantee	<p>Young Person's Guarantee was a guaranteed offer of a job, work-focused training, or meaningful activity to all 18- to 24-year-olds who reached six months on JSA. The Young Person's Guarantee consisted of the following strands:</p> <ul data-bbox="630 1339 1453 1619" style="list-style-type: none">• Future Jobs Fund (subsidised jobs);• Community Task Force (work-experience placements of benefit to the community);• Routes into Work (help into key sector jobs via Pre-employment training and recruitment subsidy. Subsidy discontinued); and• Work focused training. <p>The Young Person's Guarantee was formally introduced from 25 January 2010 although some strands, including Future Jobs Fund began earlier. From 24 April 2010, all young people reaching ten months' unemployment were required to take up an offer under the guarantee. The Young Person's Guarantee was available through to March 2011.</p>

Work Trial

Work Trials are intended to overcome any remaining suitability doubts an employer and/or disadvantaged group claimant may have following a formal interview for a vacant post. It relates to a specific vacancy that an employer is actively trying to fill and is offered to a claimant on a strictly non-competitive basis. This means that for the duration of the trial, the person taking part is the only person under consideration for the vacancy in question, that is, the job is theirs if both they and the employer are satisfied following a trial period.

Summary

The 2006 Leitch Review of Skills recommended the creation of a new integrated employment and skills service (Her Majesty's (HM) Treasury, December 2006).² Since then, the welfare system has undergone reform to help meet this objective of which the Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) trials, introduced in 2008 and ending in August 2010, have been a key element. The main components of the IES trials were the co-location of careers services and Jobcentre Plus; skills screening and referral by Jobcentre Plus advisers; Skills Health Check interviews and Skills Action Plans delivered by nextstep³; and work-focused skills provision. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies to evaluate the IES trials. In the later stages of the IES trials, a new system of Enhanced Joint Working (EJW) was introduced in non-trial areas. Like the IES trials, EJW was intended to identify claimants' skills needs through enhanced screening processes and, where appropriate, direct them towards support from Next Step. Underpinning the specific IES trials and EJW, the broader IES approach seeks to bring employment and skills services into closer alignment, with the aim of raising people's skills in order to move them into employment that is sustainable and offers opportunities for progression. Jobcentre Plus is developing a new offer, which aims to deliver a more flexible advisory service, responsive to local needs and offering personalised support to claimants. This research will inform the design of the Jobcentre Plus offer.

Between September and November 2010, visits were made to three IES trials districts and two EJW districts. Qualitative interviews were conducted with a range of respondents, including: Jobcentre Plus and Next Step district-level managers responsible for the implementation of the IES trials or EJW; Advisory Services Managers (ASMs); Jobcentre Plus and Next Step advisers; Jobcentre Plus claimants who had been referred to Next Step; and skills providers working with Jobcentre Plus and/or Next Step. This report builds on four previous rounds of qualitative evaluation work⁴ and has a particular focus on whether and how claimants get access to appropriate work-related skills training via a Jobcentre Plus or Next Step referral⁵.

² HM Treasury, December 2006, 'Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills'.

³ In August 2010, the former nextstep service was restructured and re-launched as Next Step. The Careers Advice Service which provided online and telephone careers advice to adults and nextstep, who provided face-to-face advice and guidance came together under one brand. The new all-access adult careers service was rebranded as Next Step. The implications for the IES approach have been that Jobcentre Plus advisers are now able to signpost claimants to a wider careers advice service than previously. This applies across both IES trials and EJW districts.

⁴ See associated evaluation report based on the first three rounds of research: DWP Research Report 618: 'Qualitative Evaluation of Integrated Employment and Skills Trials: Implementation Report' (2009) <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2009-2010/rrep618.pdf>

⁵ The definition of skills adopted by the research is wide ranging and based on the types of referral that are made as part of the IES process. It includes basic skills (literacy, numeracy, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) as well as **basic IT skills**); **employability skills** support (for example, timekeeping, confidence and motivation); **job-search skills** (effective job applications, interview techniques); and **vocational skills** (related to a specific type of occupation or sector; including **up-to-date certification**). The report distinguishes between these, as well as basic IT and certification, where possible.

The key findings of the research are:

Screening and referrals⁶

Skills screening was reported by Jobcentre Plus advisers to be light touch and primarily conversational, focusing on identifying barriers to work, including identifying basic employability and vocational skills needs. Skills needs are identified through a discussion of the claimant's work history, CV and job goals. In addition, basic skills needs are identified through observation of the claimant's form filling and using their GCSEs or equivalent English and Maths qualifications as a proxy for having attained a basic level of proficiency in literacy and numeracy. There was little use reported of assessment tools like the Customer Assessment Tool (CAT) or the Fast Track assessment tool (for basic skills) among Jobcentre Plus advisers, with a lack of training in how to use the tools and the time available reported as particular constraints.

Jobcentre Plus advisers reported that they made use of a range of referral options to provision to meet potential skills needs identified through their skills screening activity. Advisers at Stage 1 and 2 of the Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) mentioned referrals to externally-funded short certification courses (for example, forklift and Security Industry Association (SIA) licences), IT courses, job-search support for jobseekers with professional backgrounds, and provision to address basic skills needs. At Stage 3, advisers reported they had a wider range of referral options than in the earlier stages, including provision linked to specific employment opportunities or sectors (for example, through Routes into Work and the work-focused training element of the Six Month Offer). Jobcentre Plus advisers reported that they were quite instructive about what a claimant should do and when they identified a skills need they were likely to suggest a particular provision and refer the claimant directly to the provider.

Jobcentre Plus advisers referred claimants to Next Step for a number of reasons including to advise on careers, skills and training options. Referrals to Next Step were also perceived by some Jobcentre Plus staff as a way to take some of the time pressure off Jobcentre Plus advisers as they could undertake more detailed skills diagnostic work. Next Step staff reported some improvement in the appropriateness of referrals as Jobcentre Plus advisers' understanding of what they offered developed, but they also reported that some referrals were still inappropriate. Next Step advisers thought the two key influences on the appropriateness of Jobcentre Plus referrals were the experience of Jobcentre Plus advisers (with more experienced advisers more likely to refer appropriately) and a good understanding between the two organisations at local level of what the Next Step service provided.

Jobcentre Plus staff generally reported that making a referral to Next Step was straightforward; however, some Jobcentre Plus advisers had experienced difficulties in getting through to the Next Step national booking line, which was thought to have deterred some from referring to the service.

The Skills Health Check

Next Step interviews (the Skills Health Check) were reported to last up to 45 minutes and were focused on exploring skill needs, identifying transferable skills, and (if relevant) discussing possible options for career change and/or training. Some skills screening techniques which Next Step advisers reported using bore similarity to the techniques used by Jobcentre Plus advisers (for example,

⁶ See also an associated research project: DWP Research Report 748: Identifying Claimants' Needs: Research into the Capability of Jobcentre Plus Advisers, which looks in depth at skills screening activity within Jobcentre Plus

framing the discussion around a claimant's CV or work history), although Next Step advisers reported that they spent more time exploring these issues in depth. Next Step advisers did not report making frequent use of the Skills Health Check Diagnostic Tool; but they did use a range of other tools, for example, Adult Directions, Career Health Check and Adviser Net.

Next Step advisers were less instructive about making referrals to provision than Jobcentre Plus advisers. Next Step advisers reported that they would often take claimants through a range of different options that might be suitable for them and it was usually the claimants' decision to follow these up. Such actions were normally incorporated within the claimants' Skills Action Plan.

Jobcentre Plus managers and advisers reported the quality of Skills Action Plans coming back from Next Step, such as the their level of detail and usefulness, had improved incrementally over the period the two organisations had been working together, but some Jobcentre Plus staff still felt they were not sufficiently labour-market focused. As observed in the previous rounds of research, there was a major weakness in the integration of the claimant journey after the referral to Next Step as Skills Action Plans were frequently not used at Jobcentre Plus. In particular, the absence of caseloading at Stage 1 of JRFND meant that there was no follow-up until the Stage 2 interview at 13 weeks.

The failure to attend (FTA) rate for Next Step interviews was reported at between 35 and 40 per cent and some Next Step managers and advisers attributed this to how their service was promoted by advisers at Jobcentre Plus, with Next Step advisers feeling that the potential benefits of the service were not being sufficiently highlighted to claimants. There were resource implications of the high FTA rate for Next Step, who are paid on the number of face-to-face interventions they undertake per day.

Skills provision

The majority of providers reported undertaking their own assessment and diagnosis with claimants referred to them by Jobcentre Plus or Next Step, to 'fill in' information gaps on claimants' aspirations, work history and skills needs and to ensure the claimant was on the appropriate course. Providers reported this could help to reduce subsequent drop-out rates. Providers did not get as much detailed information about claimants at the referral stage as they would like from Jobcentre Plus or Next Step; however, most providers reported that the appropriateness of the referrals they received from Next Step and Jobcentre Plus was either good or improving.

Providers interviewed for this study spanned the following main types of provision:

- basic skills, encompassing literacy, numeracy, basic IT skills and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). This was offered by specialist providers or embedded within employability or vocational provision;
- vocational (work-related) provision. This included sector-specific training, certification in short-term job-specific skills such as forklift driving, and longer-term vocational courses such as National Vocational Qualification (NVQs). Some providers also offered tailored, employer-specific training;
- job search and employability support, including structured programmes of activity such as CV writing, interview techniques, timekeeping and confidence building.

Jobcentre Plus and Next Step advisers generally reported there was sufficient provision available, although some gaps were identified including higher-level skills provision for managers and professionals. In addition, some advisers reported occasional gaps in availability, for example, if demand for a course was particularly high, or for very 'niche' courses.

Helping Jobcentre Plus claimants to move closer to finding sustainable work (described as either sustaining employment for 13 or 26 weeks) was a key aim of the providers interviewed in this study. To help achieve this, many of those offering vocational skills courses had links with local employers, often through their own dedicated employer engagement teams or officers. Some provision was specifically designed to meet the needs of a particular local employer planning to expand or move into the area. There were several examples of providers adapting their courses or putting on new provision, in association with Jobcentre Plus, in response to vacancy information supplied by Jobcentre Plus and/or intelligence-gathering done by their own employer engagement teams. Providers also offered follow-up support to claimants who had found a job while on their provision to help them sustain it during the first few months.

Several providers felt Jobcentre Plus could do more to co-ordinate their employer engagement activities with their own, in order to streamline and minimise multiple approaches to employers. That said, all the providers interviewed for this study reported good relationships with Jobcentre Plus at district level and with advisers. Providers often visited local Jobcentre Plus offices to promote their provision to advisers so that they had a better awareness and understanding of it, which they reported helped to maintain or increase referral numbers.

The claimant experience

Claimants' job histories were diverse but most had a positive attitude towards training: many had undertaken training in the past and all had engaged with Next Step to some extent. Claimants reported that training could help them to get back into work, change career, build their confidence and show employers that they had been doing something constructive with their time while they were unemployed.

Although claimants recalled a discussion of their work history with Jobcentre Plus, most did not recall explicit skills screening, which may reflect the light-touch approach taken by Jobcentre Plus advisers. Claimants had a clearer recall of the skills assessment by Next Step and most reported that this had been done in depth and identified transferable skills or skills used outside of work which could be incorporated within a CV. Overall, claimants referred to Next Step found something positive about the Next Step interviews, including information on job-search skills, goal-setting, advice on changing career after redundancy, or a greater insight into their own skills and the sort of jobs they were suited for, which improved their confidence and motivation.

Claimants reported that Jobcentre Plus advisers were more instructive in making referrals than Next Step advisers, including suggesting particular providers. Jobcentre Plus advisers would often call the provider on the claimants' behalf, whereas Next Step might signpost them or suggest it as a point they should follow up in their Skills Action Plan. Most claimants preferred the more instructive approach and being referred directly.

Claimants reported that following a range of provision, for example, some had received employability skills training and others vocational or sector-specific training, possibly linked to a local recruitment drive. There appeared to be variations in the type of provision to which claimants could be referred, depending on the stage of their claim and local availability. Some claimants reported they knew people referred to certain courses which they were told they could not access: they did not understand the eligibility rules for particular courses and these cases generated a degree of frustration and feelings of unfairness. Many claimants wanted to access training earlier in their claim rather than having to wait to become eligible (for example, on reaching six months of unemployment).

Integrating employment and skills

A part of the IES approach was the co-location of Next Step advisers within Jobcentre Plus local offices. Over the course of the qualitative evaluation of IES, the research identified two models of co-location in operation. The most prevalent was the same Next Step adviser being assigned to the same Jobcentre Plus office, for set days of the week. Less common was a peripatetic model in which different Next Step advisers would rotate between different Jobcentre Plus offices.

Managers and advisers in both Jobcentre Plus and Next Step felt that co-location helped to build mutual understanding between the two organisations, build effective long-term relationships between advisers and improve communication about referrals. It also helped to maintain the profile of the Next Step service within Jobcentre Plus, which advisers and managers from Jobcentre Plus and Next Step felt supported referral rates.

Organisational understanding between Jobcentre Plus and Next Step was reported to have improved over the period the organisations had been working together. This was mainly a result of the improved communication and informal working relationships fostered by co-location and other elements of joint working, such as Next Step attendance at Jobcentre Plus team meetings. However it was also the case that Jobcentre Plus adviser understanding of Next Step continued to vary both across individual advisers and between local offices. In some offices, this lack of understanding, coupled with a lack of quantitative information on the impact of Next Step referrals on claimants, led to some Jobcentre Plus advisers questioning the added value of the service that Next Step offered to claimants.

There was a general feeling among Jobcentre Plus and Next Step staff that the IES approach had raised the profile of skills among Jobcentre Plus advisers and that their understanding of Next Step had improved over the course of the IES trials, or since EJW was introduced. However this was variable across offices and between individual advisers.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research concludes that the IES approach is becoming embedded in adviser practice and co-location is central to an integrated service. However, although there has been progress since Jobcentre Plus and Next Step began working together towards shared systems and processes and building organisational understanding, a fully integrated, seamless service is still an unrealised goal:

- The process of skills screening and referral to Next Step appears broadly effective, Jobcentre Plus advisers' understanding of the Next Step service was reported to have improved incrementally over the IES trials although it continues to vary both across individual advisers and between local offices. Allowing Jobcentre Plus advisers to shadow Next Step interviews (with permission from the claimant) was recognised as being useful to build better understanding about the Skills Health Check process. Advisers should be encouraged to do this and allocate time for it.
- Jobcentre Plus staff consider the quality of Next Step Skills Action Plans to have improved, but the claimant journey still breaks down after Next Step with poor understanding among Jobcentre Plus advisers of what happens to claimants after referral to Next Step. The difficulty in providing co-location and turnover of staff at Next Step and Jobcentre Plus has had a negative impact on understanding the IES approach, although co-location should be considered the ideal setting for the integration of employment and skills services. In addition to ongoing staff development and induction for new staff, Jobcentre Plus advisers would benefit from hearing success stories to encourage referrals to, and promote understanding of, the Next Step service and what claimants can get out of it.

- Administration has improved but still presents a barrier: data sharing and tracking remains problematic as does the lack of shared Management Information. A thorough review of the paperwork and the development of simpler and shared information systems would improve the integration of the employment and skills systems for Jobcentre Plus, Next Step and providers. A comparison of outcome measures from the IES trials districts – including referral rates, attendance rates, referrals to training, claimant satisfaction and claimant outcomes – against those from EJW districts, would help to determine whether the significant investment in time and resources made in IES trials districts paid dividends in terms of claimant outcomes.

1 Introduction

1.1 The policy context: Integrated Employment and Skills

The 2006 Leitch Review of Skills recommended the creation of a new IES service (HM Treasury, December 2006).⁷ Since the Leitch Review, the welfare system has undergone reform to help meet this objective. Employment and skills services have been brought into closer alignment, with the aim of raising people's skills in order to move them into employment that is sustainable and offers opportunities for progression. The IES trials have been at the forefront of this reform alongside other important changes.⁸ Following the launch of the IES trials, which officially ended in August 2010, a new system of EJW was introduced in non-trial areas. Like the IES trials, EJW helps to identify claimants' skills needs through enhanced screening processes and, where appropriate, direct them towards support from Next Step.⁹

Through this period of welfare reform, the United Kingdom (UK) has experienced a period of deep economic recession. As a result of the recession the previous government introduced additional support for jobseekers with a strong emphasis on providing extra help to young people, such as the Future Jobs Fund and the Young Person's Guarantee. The skills offer was also widened, through the introduction of programmes such as the Six Month Offer¹⁰ in April 2009, meaning that more people could receive training and support. The new programmes were, like pre-existing skills programmes, based on giving people training to support them to gain employment, but were targeted at specific groups such as those claiming benefit for six months.

The coalition government has announced their commitment to reform the welfare system and introduce the new Work Programme, which aims to create a system that treats people as individuals and allows providers greater freedom to tailor the right support to the individual needs of each claimant. Alongside the Work Programme, the DWP plans to deliver, through the Jobcentre Plus offer, a more flexible advisory service, giving local offices more control, and allowing them to deliver services that are responsive to local needs and offers personalised support to claimants. From April 2011, Jobcentre Plus managers and advisers will have the flexibility to judge which interventions will help individual claimants most cost effectively. This research seeks to inform the new flexible framework.

⁷ HM Treasury, December 2006, 'Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills'.

⁸ These changes included the implementation of the revised JRFND, the New Deal for Lone Parents, Pathways to Work and Local Employment Partnerships, that together aim to create a 'joined up' system to help people into sustainable work (DWP, December 2009, 'Building Britain's recovery: achieving full employment').

⁹ See Appendix A for a description of the components of the IES trials and the roles of Jobcentre Plus and Next Step within the trials. The key difference between the IES trials and EJW related to implementation activity: there was a staggered roll-out period for the IES trials, including staff training, which did not happen with EJW and also much greater co-location of Next Step advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices in IES trials areas, which was not the case in EJW areas.

¹⁰ This initiative has been separately evaluated in Adams, L. *et al.* (2010), DWP Research Report 699: Evaluation of the Six Month Offer: A report on quantitative research findings; available at <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2009-2010/rrep699.pdf>, and Vegeris, S. *et al.* (2010), DWP Research Report 691: Support for Newly Unemployed and Six Month Offer evaluations: A report on qualitative research findings; available at <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2009-2010/rrep691.pdf>.

BIS is giving Further Education (FE) colleges and training providers greater freedom and flexibility to decide how best to meet the skills needs of employers and individuals, including jobseekers.¹¹ There will be a move away from discrete, ring-fenced training programmes for the unemployed. Instead, Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants and those in the work-related activity group (WRAG) of the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) will be eligible through the mainstream skills budget for fully-funded, accredited units, awards and full qualifications to help them into work. Colleges and other training providers will be incentivised to offer appropriate provision to help jobseekers upskill in order to be more effective competitors in the jobs market. Active benefit claimants may access this provision at any stage of their claim, whether or not they are on the Work Programme.

1.2 The evaluation of the IES trials

The DWP and BIS commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies to evaluate the IES trials, from their launch in September 2008 through to their end in August 2010.

The Institute for Employment Studies has conducted a qualitative evaluation of the IES trials to appraise how effectively the trials have worked, the extent to which they have achieved the integration of employment and skills, and how staff and claimants have responded to the trials.

Over the course of the evaluation there have been five rounds of research, the first three of which fed into an implementation report which was published in December 2009.¹² The 2009 report was designed to identify and disseminate the early lessons and good practice from the implementation of the IES trials. Subsequently a fourth round of research was conducted between December 2009 and February 2010 which included fieldwork in five districts where EJW had been adopted, in addition to re-visiting five IES trials districts. The most recent round of research, which was titled Access to Work-Related Training and on which this report is primarily based, was conducted between September and November 2010. The fieldwork for this fifth round of research comprised visits to three IES trials districts and two EJW districts.

This report builds on the earlier rounds of research and has a particular focus on whether and how claimants get access to appropriate work-related skills training via a Jobcentre Plus or Next Step referral. The definition of skills adopted by the research is wide ranging and based on the types of referral that are made as part of the IES process. It includes: basic skills (literacy, numeracy, ESOL as well as basic IT skills); employability skills support (for example, timekeeping, confidence and motivation); job-search skills (effective job applications, interview techniques); and vocational skills (related to a specific type of occupation or sector; including up-to-date certification). The report distinguishes between these, as well as basic IT and certification, where possible.

¹¹ BIS, November 2010, 'Skills for Sustainable Growth'.

¹² The evaluation report is published as Levesley, T. *et al.* (2009), DWP Research Report 618: 'Qualitative Evaluation of Integrated Employment and Skills Trials: Implementation Report' (2009) <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2009-2010/rrep618.pdf>.

1.3 Aims and objectives of this study

This report draws mainly on qualitative fieldwork conducted in IES trials and EJW districts between September and November 2010, building on evidence from previous rounds of fieldwork where appropriate. It looks at the maturation of the IES trials and provides more detailed evidence on the later stages of the claimant journey particularly on referrals to work-related training. The aims of this research were:

- to build on previous qualitative work by examining:
 - pertinent delivery issues, such as the range of training provision available to advisers for referral, co-location and the later stages of the claimant journey;
 - best practice and lessons learned; and
 - the development of integrating employment and skills and the legacy of the IES trials.
- to support concurrent research¹³ examining the identification of claimants' skills needs, by investigating:
 - adviser understanding of the role of skills in helping move claimants into work and best practice on how to develop adviser capability;
 - the appropriateness of skills referrals to careers advice and/or training; and
 - claimant motivations to improve their skills, their career aspirations and reasons for dropping out of training or careers advice.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Selection of districts

Between September and November 2010, fieldwork visits were made to three IES trials districts and two EJW districts which had also been visited in earlier rounds of the research.¹⁴ The districts were selected according to a range of characteristics:

¹³ See also an associated research project: DWP Research Report 748: Identifying Claimants' Needs: Research into the Capability of Jobcentre Plus Advisers, which looks in depth at skills screening activity within Jobcentre Plus

¹⁴ In the first three rounds of research, an intensive rolling programme of qualitative fieldwork was undertaken involving visits to ten IES trials districts (out of a possible 12), between December 2008 and July 2009. These three rounds of research were aligned with the staggered roll-out of IES. For more information on the method of approach see the published evaluation report: Levesley, T. *et al.* (2009), DWP Research Report 618: 'Qualitative Evaluation of Integrated Employment and Skills Trials: Implementation Report' (2009) <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2009-2010/rrep618.pdf>. The fourth round of research involved fieldwork visits to five out of the ten IES trials districts studied in the early implementation phase, and five EJW districts. The IES trials districts for Round 4 were selected to explore the research aims across a range of district characteristics: start date in the district; range of geographical type (urban/rural); spread of geographical location/government office region; spread of Skills Health Check referral rates. The five EJW districts were broadly matched to five IES trial districts, taking into account population density and operational factors including employment rate/claimant count, off-flow rate and other initiatives in place.

- geographical type (urban/rural);
- spread of geographical location/government office region;
- spread of Skills Health Check referral rates; and
- the start date of the IES trials in the district.

An additional factor which had to be considered was the need to avoid visiting districts that were already being visited by other evaluation teams or involved in the introduction of various new pilots, so as not to over-burden Jobcentre Plus staff. This meant that, in practice, there were limitations on which districts could be included in this research.

1.4.2 Limitations in comparing IES trials districts and EJW districts

Limited differences between the former IES trials districts and those operating EJW were observed in this round of the research. The sample of EJW districts in this round was small, comprising two districts, and therefore may not represent the diversity of practice outside the former trial areas. There were particular local circumstances in the two EJW districts visited by this research. One was managed by the same Next Step contractor as a neighbouring IES trials district and had adopted many of the same processes, while partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and Next Step was already established in the other. As no clear distinctions have been observed between IES trials districts and EJW districts in the fifth round of research, the key findings relating specifically to EJW areas, drawing on the fourth round of the research, are reported in Section 6.5.

1.4.3 Research methods

The research team used a mixture of qualitative research techniques to conduct this research. These included:

- face-to-face in-depth interviews with individual staff respondents;
- a handful of in-depth telephone interviews with individual staff respondents, which were necessary where particular staff were not available at the time of the visit;
- in-depth telephone interviews with a range of providers delivering skills provision that was commonly used by Jobcentre Plus or Next Step; and
- in-depth interviews with claimants who had been referred to Next Step. The majority of these interviews took place face-to-face in respondents' homes but a few were conducted by telephone. This was usually because the respondent had agreed to be interviewed in person but was then unavailable and a replacement interview had to be arranged.

1.4.4 Sample composition in each district

The Institute for Employment Studies conducted interviews at district level with:

- the IES/EJW project implementation manager (or equivalent) – this was generally the district's External Relations Manager; and
- the Next Step manager/prime contractor lead for IES/EJW.

The research team also visited one Jobcentre Plus office in each of the five districts. In each office the research team aimed to interview:

- the local Jobcentre Plus Manager or person responsible for leading the delivery of IES or EJW at that Jobcentre Plus office (usually an ASM), to ascertain how the model was operating locally; and

- up to five Jobcentre Plus and Next Step advisers operating the new system who were involved in conducting skills screening and making onward referrals to skills provision. At Jobcentre Plus, this included a spread of advisers involved in Stages 1, 2 and 3 of the JRFND.¹⁵

In addition, the research team conducted interviews with four or five skills providers per Jobcentre Plus district, and with six or seven claimants who had been referred to Next Step.

The provider sample was sourced from Jobcentre Plus and Next Step managers, who identified the main skills providers to which their advisers made referrals. The type of providers included a spread of FE colleges, specialist basic skills providers, providers of sector-specific training, and welfare-to-work providers. Some providers (for example, FE colleges and large welfare to work providers) offered a mix of these types of provision.

The claimant sample was sourced via a postal opt-out conducted by Next Step on behalf of the Institute for Employment Studies, as this was the optimum method of sourcing a claimant sample in the available timeframe for the fieldwork. A sample of approximately 130 claimants was sought from Next Step in each of the five districts and included claimants who were:

- referred from Jobcentre Plus to undertake a face-to-face session, who had advice/information only (no training referral made); and
- referred from Jobcentre Plus to undertake a face-to-face session and as a result were referred to training (who either did or did not attend).

The Institute for Employment Studies prepared an opt-out letter for mail merging with claimant details and printing at Next Step. Once the opt-out period had finished, Next Step removed the details of claimants who opted out of being contacted about the research, before sending the Institute for Employment Studies the remaining contact details. Researchers then made contact and interviews were generally held in claimants' homes or in a suitable local place such as a community centre. The sample did not include any claimants who failed to attend a Next Step interview. Within the claimant sample there were sub-groups of claimants referred to skills provision (including employability and job-search support) by Next Step and/or by Jobcentre Plus: claimants referred to skills provision by Jobcentre Plus were only included if they had also been referred to Next Step.

Table 1.1 lists the respondents interviewed throughout the fieldwork period.

¹⁵ Stage 1 refers to the first part of the claim starting with the New Jobseeker's Interview, Stage 2 begins 13 weeks after the claim to JSA is made and Stage 3 starts 26 weeks after the claim has been made.

Table 1.1 Fieldwork interviews

Respondent type	Number of interviews
Jobcentre Plus district-level IES lead (generally the External Relations Manager)	6
Jobcentre Plus Local Office Manager or ASM	5
Jobcentre Plus advisers	15
Next Step district-level IES implementation leads ¹	4
Next Step advisers	8
Skills providers	21
Claimants referred to Next Step	35
Total	94

¹ One Next Step IES lead covered two of the districts that were part of this study.

1.4.5 Interpretation of the findings

The use of qualitative methods allowed researchers to explore respondents' views in great depth and produces rich, detailed evidence. While it does not produce robust estimates of the prevalence of findings within the wider population in the same way as a quantitative survey, it offers greater insight into how and why respondents think and act in the way they do. In particular, qualitative research is ideal for exploring intra-organisational relationships and developments in organisational cultures. Structured large-scale qualitative research samples like the ones adopted by this evaluation ensure that a robust spread of qualitative evidence has been collected across a range of respondent types and viewpoints.

1.5 Structure of this report

This report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 focuses on skills screening and the referral processes at Jobcentre Plus, including the understanding of mutual roles among Jobcentre Plus and Next Step advisers.
- Chapter 3 focuses on referrals to Next Step, the content of the Skills Health Check interview process, action planning and follow-up of the Next Step interview.
- Chapter 4 draws on interviews with providers and focuses on the appropriateness of referrals to them, the range of skills provision available, follow-up and how providers liaise with Jobcentre Plus and Next Step.
- Chapter 5 focuses on the claimant experience, from skills screening at Jobcentre Plus through to referral to Next Step and/or skills provision, follow-up and outcomes.
- Chapter 6 summarises the key findings of the previous rounds of research and the 2009 evaluation report on early implementation, and outlines where changes have been made both in implementation processes and in the Next Step service. The chapter then moves on to explore how the IES trials relate to the vision for integrating employment and skills and considers issues that cut across the different stages of the IES claimant journey, including co-location and the relationships between Next Step and Jobcentre Plus staff. It also discusses the key findings from EJW areas.
- Chapter 7 draws together conclusions and recommendations from the research as a whole.

Appendix A describes the key components of the IES trials.

2 Screening and referrals from Jobcentre Plus

This chapter focuses on skills screening and referrals at Jobcentre Plus. It outlines the skills screening methods used by advisers during their claimant interviews at Stages 1, 2 and 3¹⁶ of the JRFND, including the use of screening tools. Referrals to Next Step and to other skills provision are explored to see how advisers identify claimants appropriate for these routes and how these routes are presented to them. Finally this chapter considers Jobcentre Plus advisers' views on the range of skills provision they have available for claimants.

2.1 Screening at Stages 1, 2 and 3 of JRFND¹⁷

Jobcentre Plus advisers delivering Stages 1, 2 and 3 of JRFND widely reported that skills screening formed part of their interviews with claimants, and that this was part of the advisers' broader focus on identifying and addressing barriers to work. Across Stages 1 to 3, advisers reported that skills screening tended to be conversational and focused on the specific and immediate job goal listed in the claimant's Jobseeker's Agreement.

The amount of time which advisers reported spending on skills screening varied across claim stages and also between individual advisers. Advisers also reported that skills tended to be covered less extensively in their interviews with professionals (regardless of the stage of JRFND), as these claimants are more likely to identify their own transferable skills, as well as any skills needs they might have.

The overall approach to delivering initial interviews at the different stages of JRFND was described by Jobcentre Plus advisers as:

- Stage 1 New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs) are scheduled for 40 minutes. A good deal of that time is taken up with explaining the procedures and processes associated with JSA and completing the Jobseeker's Agreement. The adviser will begin to discuss skills as part of the process of formulating the Jobseeker's Agreement. In the interview the adviser will also record the claimant's qualifications and discuss their work history, which informs the discussion of skills. If a skills need is identified the adviser may look at referring to suitable provision.
- Stage 2 initial interviews are scheduled for 30 minutes. The adviser will review the Jobseeker's Agreement with the claimant and may widen their job search. In particular they will look at whether the job goals are relevant and realistic, and whether there are skills gaps which might prevent the claimant from meeting these job goals. They may also request a CV for job matching, and may again look at referring to suitable training or provision.

¹⁶ All claimants are intended to be screened at initial Stage 1 and Stage 2 interviews, using a light-touch approach to identify any potential skills need. At Stage 3 initial interviews basic skills screening using the Fast Track Assessment tool (in England and Wales) is expected to take place.

¹⁷ See also an associated research project: DWP Research Report 748: Identifying Claimants' Needs: Research into the Capability of Jobcentre Plus Advisers, which looks in depth at skills screening activity within Jobcentre Plus

14 Screening and referrals from Jobcentre Plus

- Stage 3 initial interviews are scheduled for 40 to 50 minutes. Advisers inform claimants of the support that is available to them at that stage. They will then review the Jobseeker's Agreement (to assess that the job goals it contains are still appropriate), and create an action plan. Skills are discussed in relation to the stated job goals with a view to identifying any further skills gaps not previously identified, which might prevent the claimant from achieving those job goals. Advisers will then look at suitable referral options for the claimant.

Jobcentre Plus advisers reported that the discussion of skills generally followed on quite naturally from the agreement, or reviewing, of job goals on the Jobseeker's Agreement. So for example, when reviewing the job goals with claimants they would make an assessment of whether there were any skills needs which made a job goal unrealistic. In particular, advisers reported that they checked that the claimants' qualifications and past employment history made their job goals realistic. Advisers used their own knowledge of the labour market and the job goals listed to make this assessment. They reported that they were less likely to discuss skills as an enabler for claimants to retain employment, and to progress once in work. Advisers were also less likely to report discussing with claimants how their skills might be transferable into other types of work. Advisers also said that they rarely discussed opportunities for in-work training with claimants.

'In a lot of ways, the Jobseeker's Agreement is an analysis of their skills really. You can't do one without finding out what they can do.'

(Claimant Engagement Team Leader, Jobcentre Plus).

Jobcentre Plus advisers reported using a number of methods to assess skills within interviews. This could include a discussion of a claimant's CV, with reference to their work experience and qualifications. Advisers also used questioning techniques aimed at getting claimants to identify their own skills barriers and needs. These types of techniques were felt by advisers to be more effective at Stage 2 and Stage 3 interviews when they could be framed in the context of the time it has taken to find work, for example, 'you have been out of work for three/six months now, why do you think that is?'

Advisers stated that they often assessed basic skills using GCSE or equivalent level Maths and English qualifications as a proxy: if claimants possessed GCSE qualifications or equivalent, they were deemed to have no literacy and numeracy needs. Some advisers also reported they would observe claimants filling out forms to assess literacy needs. Some district-level staff questioned whether all Jobcentre Plus advisers had sufficient confidence to tackle basic skills needs with claimants.

'I don't think [Jobcentre Plus advisers] are directive or confident enough in their selling skills, to be able to talk to claimants and explain to claimants why they need to do something about their basic skills.'

(Jobcentre Plus Manager)

The quality and consistency of the skills screening by Jobcentre Plus advisers were felt to be variable by both Jobcentre Plus managers and advisory staff themselves. The advisers interviewed also differed quite markedly in how confident they felt in their own abilities to accurately diagnose skills needs, with some much more confident in their own techniques than others. District-level staff highlighted that the quality was variable across all the stages, with the ability and confidence of advisers to do effective skills screening differing widely.

Overall the main enablers to effective skills screening were felt by Jobcentre Plus managers and advisers alike to be the communication skills, and particularly the experience, of the adviser (which may have been gained outside of Jobcentre Plus). District-level staff felt the skills screening was often done more effectively by experienced advisers than by newer members of staff. For one

district manager this meant that the screening at the Stage 1 NJI was often the weakest, as newer advisers tended to work on earlier claim stages.

Jobcentre Plus managers and advisers identified that, in addition to a lack of experience, another major constraint to effective skills screening was time pressure on advisers, caused by the amount that they had to fit into their interviews. Managers and advisers alike noted there are many other tasks to complete in an interview, which constrain the amount of time available for skills screening. This applies particularly at the Stage 1 NJI where advisers must draw up the Jobseeker's Agreement and collect lots of demographic information from the claimant to set up the JSA claim.

Advisers reported relatively little use of the CAT or the Fast Track assessment tool for basic skills. In general, Stage 2 and Stage 3 advisers were somewhat more likely to use these tools, partly because they had more time available and partly because skills issues were more prevalent at these stages, but even among these advisers their use was far from universal. The reasons given by advisers for not using these tools included not yet trained in their use and the amount of time they took in an interview. For example, one adviser working at Stage 3 reported they did not use the Fast Track assessment tool because basic skills could be assessed more quickly using qualifications as a proxy, combined with observation of the claimant during the interview.

2.2 Referrals from Jobcentre Plus to Next Step

There were quite different views held by Jobcentre Plus management staff across the areas visited about when it was most beneficial for claimants to be referred to Next Step. Jobcentre Plus district-level strategies and planning assumptions around the proportions of claimants who would be referred to Next Step at different claim stages diverged. In one district, the manager reported their planning assumptions were made on the basis of referring to Next Step around ten per cent of claimants at Stage 1, ten per cent at Stage 2, and 50 per cent at Stage 3. The district's rationale was that by six months' unemployment it is clear claimants are having difficulty finding work and that 'something needs changing', and the Stage 3 appointment provides a good 'sounding board' for this. In another district the planning assumptions for referrals followed a similar pattern: five per cent at Stage 1, ten per cent at Stage 2, and 30 per cent at Stage 3. By contrast, in the other districts the focus was very much on referring at Stages 1 and 2, and much less on Stage 3. The reason given for this different approach was that if the claimant could potentially benefit from a Next Step referral this would be apparent at Stage 1 and Stage 2, and the only cases referred at Stage 3 were those missed for referral previously.

There was no standard approach reported by Jobcentre Plus advisers to 'sell' the Next Step appointment and some advisers admitted to being unsure about how they should be describing the appointment to claimants. This issue related largely to uncertainty among some Jobcentre Plus advisers about what the Next Step service offered, as well as the fact they were referring people with somewhat different needs. Next Step advisers also reported feeling that some Jobcentre Plus advisers were unclear on what the service offered.

'I think that's where the lack of understanding is with some of the [Jobcentre Plus] advisers, what Next Step does and how to sell it. We're not this CV service; it's looking at skills and career options and linking them into the labour market. And I think some of the advisers still don't feel too comfortable with the selling of the Next Step service.'

(Next Step adviser)

Jobcentre Plus advisers stated that they referred claimants to Next Step for a number of needs, including advice on careers, skills and training options. Some advisers said that they still referred

claimants to Next Step for CV support. One Jobcentre Plus district-level manager pointed out the Next Step appointment could also help to take some of the time pressure off the Stage 1 NJI, as advisers could refer to Next Step for more detailed skills diagnostic work.

'I'm not a careers adviser, I'm here to get people signed up to Jobseeker's [Allowance] with the rules and regulations, and let them know that we are here to support them; but Next Step, they are the people that know about careers. If they have got a CV, they will look over it; if you've got any questions about training.'

(Jobcentre Plus Stage 1 adviser)

The research found that some offices had a better understanding of referrals to Next Step than others. This understanding was largely the result of local learning, as feedback from claimants about the appointment, and the formal and informal contact with Next Step advisers facilitated by co-location, increased the understanding among Jobcentre Plus advisers of what the service could offer. It was particularly felt by Jobcentre Plus managers that advisers had a reasonable understanding about who to refer to Next Step in areas where the two organisations had been working together for longer, and that this understanding had improved over the course of the IES trials.

In several districts it was reported by Jobcentre Plus and Next Step managers that the number of referrals from Jobcentre Plus to Next Step had dropped off recently. Jobcentre Plus and Next Step managers suggested that there were two reasons for this. Firstly, the difficulties with the new national booking line for Jobcentre Plus advisers (detailed below), and the rebranding of the former nextstep service to the new Next Step service, which had caused some confusion among Jobcentre Plus staff.¹⁸ Secondly, there was some evidence that in the IES trials areas, the end of the trials had somewhat reduced the profile and perceived importance of the Next Step referral in advisers' minds, compared with other types of provision. In these districts, district-level managers directly linked the end of the trials to reduced numbers of Next Step referrals. They observed that IES was previously badged as a trial had 'helped raise awareness' and the profile of the trials, but that the end of the trials now meant there was less encouragement by local Jobcentre Plus managers for advisers to make referrals.

Problems were reported by Jobcentre Plus staff across all districts regarding the roll-out of the new national booking number for Next Step appointments. The particular issue was the amount of time it was taking for Jobcentre Plus advisers to get through and to book appointments. Several of the Jobcentre Plus advisers interviewed were highly critical of this. One Jobcentre Plus district manager suggested that the delays were so bad that they deterred Jobcentre Plus advisers from referring to the service. In this district they had started using a local booking number again. More generally, most staff in Jobcentre Plus offices which had local booking systems and co-location favoured the use of local diaries, rather than telephone booking, which they felt were more time efficient because they were immediately accessible in the local office. Jobcentre Plus advisers in several of the areas visited reported that there were also opportunities for immediate referrals to the Next Step adviser in some local offices, but this was largely dependent on filling interview slots vacated by those who had failed to attend. Again this was something Jobcentre Plus and Next Step advisers welcomed.

¹⁸ In August 2010, the former nextstep service was restructured and re-launched as Next Step. The Careers Advice Service which provided online and telephone careers advice to adults and nextstep, who provided face-to-face advice and guidance came together under one brand. The new all-access adult careers service was rebranded as Next Step. The implications for the IES approach have been that Jobcentre Plus advisers are now able to signpost claimants to a wider careers advice service than previously. This applies across both IES trial and EJW districts.

The amount of form-filling associated with making the referral from Jobcentre Plus to Next Step reduced in the IES trials districts over the course of the trials, and this was welcomed by Jobcentre Plus advisers (see Section 6.2.3).

2.3 Referrals from Jobcentre Plus to provision

Jobcentre Plus advisers outlined a wide range of training provision where they referred claimants when a skills need was identified. Jobcentre Plus advisers regarded referrals to training provision to be appropriate:

- if they were directly linked to getting a job or building on the claimant's skills, including to meet a certification need linked to getting a job (such as a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card);
- if addressed a basic skills need; or
- to access more intensive job-search support or the development of improved employability skills.

Referral options mentioned by Stage 1 and 2 advisers included referrals to externally-funded short certification courses (for example, forklift and SIA licences), IT courses, provision for jobseekers with professional backgrounds, and provision to address basic skills needs. At Stage 3, advisers reported they had a wider range of referral options than in the earlier stages, including training provision directly linked to either specific employment opportunities or specific sectors (for example, through Routes into Work and the work-focused training element of the Six Month Offer). However, several Jobcentre Plus advisers and managers noted that in the last 18 months there had been so many referral options introduced for claimants that advisers could get 'lost' in what was available and find it difficult to keep up to date. These options included national offers, such as the Six Month Offer options; European Social Fund (ESF) provision; as well as the development of new DWP- and Skills Funding Agency -contracted and non-contracted provision at a local level.

Suitable provision to meet claimants' needs was identified by Jobcentre Plus advisers by matching both claimant eligibility and need to the available provision. Other factors that Jobcentre Plus advisers took into consideration when selecting suitable provision to refer claimants to were: locality (distance to travel); feedback from other claimants who had attended that provision (both positive and negative); and custom and practice, whereby advisers had some provision that they felt was tried and trusted. For example, if an adviser had referred several claimants to a particular provider previously and received good feedback from claimants, they would continue to use that provider. In some cases, where the claimant was being referred to provision in a specific sector or area, there was only one relevant provider on offer.

Advisers reported using mandation to provision relatively infrequently. However, they did tend to be quite instructive about what a claimant should do, and when they identified a skills need they were likely to suggest a particular provision to a claimant, and refer them to a specific provider.

There were differing views among Jobcentre Plus staff on the use of provision tools and directories. District-level staff in particular felt that district provision directories offered an effective way of making consistent information available to advisers about provision, including around eligibility, availability and content. In one district, advisers were very positive about the comprehensiveness and currency of their online provision directory. However, in other districts, advisers reported using such tools less frequently, and several advisers commented that such directories did not always contain up-to-date information on availability, for example, advisers could ring and find a course was fully booked.

Jobcentre Plus advisers said that providers communicated with them in a number of ways. This included emailing information and updates about their provision, and in several districts Jobcentre Plus managers and advisers reported that providers regularly visited local offices to explain their services (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4). In one district a Jobcentre Plus manager cited an example where a provider visited the Jobcentre Plus office, and the number of referrals to them rose noticeably, as the visit had raised the profile of that provision with advisers.

2.4 Organisational understanding of Next Step

As a whole, Jobcentre Plus advisers' understanding of Next Step continued to improve in all districts visited over the period during which the organisations have been working together. Jobcentre Plus advisers felt this was the result of claimant feedback on their discussions and activities with Next Step, the informal working relationship fostered by co-location, and other elements of joint working such as joint meetings between the two organisations; and, in some districts, Jobcentre Plus staff shadowing Next Step interviews. However adviser understanding of Next Step continued to vary both across individual advisers and between local offices.

One reason for the continued lack of clarity about what Next Step do reported by some Jobcentre Plus advisers, was the volume of provision made available, particularly the range of provision introduced in response to the recession, and the ensuing difficulty recalling what different provision offers and how it fits together. Sometimes Jobcentre Plus advisers did not differentiate between Next Step and other provision.

'Our advisers in the last nine months have been bombarded with all sorts...a huge number of programmes and provisions, but I just feel if you were to ask that question of any provision, the answer would be that they are confused. I know there's just been too much chucked at them.'

(District-level Third Party Provision Manager/ IES Lead, Jobcentre Plus)

Another reason for the limited understanding of the Next Step service among some Jobcentre Plus advisers was a more general lack of understanding of what careers advice involved, and how it fitted with what Jobcentre Plus were trying to do with claimants in relation to integrating employment and skills services (see Section 6.3).

'I think Jobcentre Plus advisers need to be very clear on how Next Step is supporting the Jobcentre Plus agenda and building on that agenda.'

(District-level Manager, Jobcentre Plus)

Some Next Step advisers and Jobcentre Plus staff reported some Jobcentre Plus advisers did not understand the concept of careers advice and/or did not see the added value the Next Step service offered.

In terms of understanding the Skills Health Check, the biggest lack of knowledge among Jobcentre Plus advisers was around the Skills Diagnostic Tool.¹⁹ Few of the Jobcentre Plus advisers interviewed

¹⁹ The Skills Diagnostic Tool is a computer programme to identify and evaluate a claimant's skills strengths and weaknesses to help Next Step make their assessment of the claimant's needs. A revised version of the Skills Diagnostic Tool was introduced in April 2009, with further releases available through skills accounts from October 2009.

for this study and in earlier research into the IES trials²⁰ had any detailed knowledge about what this tool entailed, nor had they seen it used. Advisers tended to have relatively little information on the tool's format or output, and what the tool was designed to achieve. This lack of understanding was less likely to be addressed because the tool was used infrequently by Next Step advisers in some districts (see Section 3.3). Jobcentre Plus advisers were therefore not likely to receive feedback about the tool from claimants.

There was a variable understanding of Jobcentre Plus among Next Step advisers, although it was notable that a number of Next Step advisers who were interviewed had previously worked for Jobcentre Plus. What Next Step advisers primarily perceived about Jobcentre Plus was the strong focus on 'work first'; the focus on moving claimants into work quickly, rather than providing more 'client-centred guidance' around longer-term career development.

2.5 Use of labour market information

Earlier qualitative research examining the IES trials²¹ found that effective channels for the dissemination of labour market information (LMI) existed within the Jobcentre Plus districts visited. At the district level, it was reported that Employer Engagement Managers and District Account Managers work in employer-facing roles and maintain up-to-date knowledge on the needs of the local labour market. More specifically they work with local employers to develop and identify opportunities for Jobcentre Plus claimants, including pre-employment training opportunities. The information they collate is often disseminated at the local office level by Labour Market Recruitment Advisers (LMRAs). LMRAs support the work of Jobcentre Plus advisers at the local office level in a number of ways, including collating and disseminating local LMI, for example, by alerting advisers to new developments such as upcoming local recruitment drives linked to new store openings, and providing information about new vacancies which have been received.

Jobcentre Plus advisory staff interviewed in this round of the evaluation reported they had a good knowledge of the local labour markets. It was also reported by district-level Jobcentre Plus staff that advisory staff in some districts received information by email about the highest volume of local vacancies to help inform their work, although the use of this information varied across advisers. This LMI informed advisory interviews in two main ways. Firstly, Jobcentre Plus advisers said knowledge around the type of work available locally informed their assessment of the realism of claimants' job goals, listed on the Jobseeker's Agreement. Secondly, some Jobcentre Plus advisers reported their knowledge around occupational requirements fed directly into skills screening, for example, in an assessment of whether a claimant has all the licences to practise to secure employment in a specified job, such as security or construction.

²⁰ DWP Research Report 618: 'Qualitative Evaluation of Integrated Employment and Skills Trials: Implementation Report' (2009) <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2009-2010/rrep618.pdf>.

²¹ op. cit.

3 Skills Health Check

This chapter explores the appropriateness of Jobcentre Plus referrals to Next Step, responses to address FTA rates, and the content of the Next Step Skills Health Check interview process, including skills assessment, action planning, referrals and follow-up.

3.1 Perceived appropriateness of referrals to Next Step

Across the districts visited, Next Step managers and advisory staff reported the referrals which they were receiving from Jobcentre Plus were, for the most part, broadly appropriate. There was also a feeling among Jobcentre Plus and Next Step managers that the quality of referrals had improved during the period the organisations had been working together for the IES trials. District-level Next Step staff in particular emphasised the important role that co-location had played in improving the quality of referrals, as Next Step advisers could feed back any concerns directly, and in person, to Jobcentre Plus advisers who were making the referrals. Next Step advisers almost universally reported being satisfied with the quality of referrals they received. In part, however, this reflected their perception that almost all claimants could derive some benefit from the service.

However, even when Next Step advisers were reportedly satisfied with the quality of referrals it was clear that a small proportion remained inappropriate. For example, there were still some Next Step advisers who reported receiving referrals from Jobcentre Plus for claimants who had basic skills needs and they needed to refer to basic skills provision, even though Jobcentre Plus advisers should have made these referrals before claimants reached Next Step. Some Next Step advisers also reported they were still receiving referrals purely for CV preparation although under the IES contract, Next Step advisers were not intended to provide CV support.

Next Step advisers reported that two important influences on the appropriateness of referrals were:

- the Jobcentre Plus advisers' experience of making referrals, with those more experienced being more likely to refer appropriately; and
- a good understanding between the two organisations at the local office level, so that Jobcentre Plus advisers understood more about what Next Step could provide.

3.2 Failure to attend Next Step appointments

The FTA rate for Next Step referrals had been reported to be broadly stable for some time and to be between 35 and 40 per cent across the districts visited. District-level Next Step staff expressed some frustration that it had proved very difficult to reduce this rate, despite them following good practice such as sending claimants a reminder text message prior to appointments.

From a Next Step perspective, the relatively-high FTA rate was primarily attributed to the way the service was 'sold' by advisers at Jobcentre Plus, with Next Step advisers feeling the potential benefits of the service were not being sufficiently highlighted to claimants:

'I don't think they are pressing the point that we are a very good service and you are going to get free careers advice.'

(Next Step adviser)

'It goes back to that, it's about the claimant knowing what they're being referred to, because if they're not...I suppose the term is sold, sold it, it's difficult for them to see, why should they?'

(Next Step manager)

In the main, Next Step staff were not in favour of Jobcentre Plus advisers mandating claimants to attend Next Step appointments. While they acknowledged the positive effect mandating claimants would have on resourcing (by reducing the FTA rate), there was a worry that mandation would make claimants less likely to engage with the service. This was a particular concern as Next Step advisers viewed part of the service's benefit to be its motivational value and they felt this would be diminished if claimants had been mandated to attend.

To mitigate the resource implications of FTA, overbooking of appointments was a widespread practice reported among Next Step advisers. Overbooking refers to the practice of booking more appointments in a day than the optimum number an adviser would typically want to fill, on the assumption not all the scheduled appointments would attend. Overbooking was preferable to double-booking, so advisers could cope even if all their scheduled appointments attended. An example of this, which a Next Step manager felt worked effectively in one district, was booking nine appointments per day: even if all the appointments attended, the adviser could work through without a break and provide nine 45-minute appointments. In practice, the reality of all claimants attending was relatively infrequent, so Next Step advisers in this district felt the workload remained manageable.

3.3 Skills Health Check interview and onward referral to provision

Next Step appointments for a Skills Health Check interview are scheduled to last for 45 minutes in the districts visited. As Next Step advisers had other appointments booked in, they had to stick fairly rigidly to this timing. Next Step advisers reported that the time is typically spent exploring skills needs, identifying transferable skills and looking at career change and training. They would often start by identifying whether there were any basic skills needs and this would be done largely through questioning.

A central focus of the Next Step appointment was reported by Next Step advisers to be on identifying claimants' transferable skills, gained from previous employment, voluntary work and personal experiences. In Next Step appointments, skills are viewed as an enabler to alternative career paths and to career progression once in employment. The analysis of transferable skills, which Next Step advisers felt could potentially open up different job goals and career paths, was felt to be an important motivational tool.

'They go away thinking, I've actually got some skills I can sell to an employer.'

(Next Step adviser)

Next Step advisers felt the service provided a more in-depth exploration of claimants' skills than the skills screening at Jobcentre Plus because of the time they could devote to this. For example, they felt they could go into greater detail of claimants' previous employment, around specific tasks and responsibilities. Some Next Step advisers also used job adverts as a tool to generate discussion about skills.

The Next Step interview was felt by Next Step advisers to focus on medium and longer-term career and job goals, as well as short-term employment needs. Next Step advisers therefore identified their role as being focused on sustainable employment outcomes, which they contrasted to the Jobcentre Plus focus of moving people off the 'register'.

'The Jobcentre will generally be looking for a quick fix. They want rid of that person from the register one way or another. From the client's point of view, we're looking at both, I would say, the other being the longer term, perhaps medium-to-longer term job goals as well, the aspirational stuff, which of course, if you're doing any sort of client-centred guidance, that's going to be what you cover. But as part of that, we talked earlier about realistic choices within the local labour market, and you could never make the assumption that someone's happy sitting on Jobseeker's Allowance until they achieve their dream job.'

(Next Step adviser)

Next Step advisers reported that they were funded to see claimants up to three times, and they had different approaches to help them to decide which claimants might need subsequent appointments. One Next Step adviser reported they would tend to see claimants again if they had given them specific action points which they could meet again to review. On the other hand in one largely rural district, the Next Step adviser expressed a reluctance to make follow-up appointments if it could be helped because of the travel costs incurred by claimants to attend the appointments.

There was relatively little use of the Skills Diagnostic Tool reported by Next Step advisers and there were a number of criticisms of the tool. One Next Step manager at district level felt the tool was 'too wordy' for many client groups, and the interpretation of the findings required a good level of English, and 'good analytical skills'. Also, because of the time taken up by the tool, little time is left for the Next Step adviser to interpret the findings for a claimant. The length of time the tool takes was also a concern for other Next Step staff, who tended to feel that its use was not an effective use of time. One adviser did provide claimants with the website details for them to look at the tool themselves if they wanted to.

There were also several practical difficulties reported by Next Step advisers in administering the Skills Diagnostic Tool where Next Step were co-located with Jobcentre Plus. In one of the districts visited, Next Step advisers reported weak mobile internet signals in the Jobcentre Plus office created difficulties with using the tool. In another district a Next Step adviser reported that the local Jobcentre Plus offices did not want them to bring their own laptops in for security reasons, but that they could not access the diagnostic tool on the Jobcentre Plus computers.

While Next Step advisers did not make widespread use of the Skills Diagnostic Tool, they did use a range of other tools, for example, Adult Directions, Career Health Check and Adviser Net, which they felt were more effective in generating ideas for jobs and which could suggest new career possibilities to claimants.

Next Step advisers referred claimants to a range of provision, including Learn Direct, Adult Education providers such as colleges, basic skills provision, local FE providers, and vocational (work-related) training, as well as more specialist support (for example, support for those with mental health problems). Next Step advisers were less likely to suggest and refer claimants to a particular course than Jobcentre Plus advisers, and some Next Step advisers would talk claimants through different provision options that might be suitable for them (including around location and learning environment).

'They've got a choice of online learning, further education colleges or local community courses. We discuss each one with them and where they feel they would be happiest learning.'

(Next Step adviser)

Several Next Step staff believed that the Next Step role was changing and that onward referrals were likely to become more important. As such, one Next Step district manager was of the opinion that onward referrals to other provision were something their advisers were going to have to become

better at. They felt that because of funding constraints, advisers would need to play much more of a gateway role, and where in the past advisers may have undertaken an intervention themselves with the claimant (for example, working on interview techniques), they would now need to refer on more quickly.

Next Step advisers were largely reliant on their own local knowledge of what provision was available to make referrals as they had no central repository for this information. However, one district manager reported they were waiting for a new Next Step directory, onto which all Skills Funding Agency funded provision would be uploaded, which they felt should be a useful tool for advisers in the future. Next Step staff widely reported receiving regular LMI and in the main this either came from:

- the Jobcentre Plus district;
- local offices; or
- from the regional Next Step lead contractor.

3.4 Action planning

Next Step advisers described the Skills Action Plan²² as essentially a summary document of the main points of discussion which they had with a claimant in terms of their skills, future aspirations and barriers to work. Skills Action Plans might also contain suggested agreed action points, as well as contacts for organisations or websites which the adviser had suggested the claimant look at.

There were differing opinions expressed over the perceived quality of action plans and their suitability for use. Some district-level Jobcentre Plus managers noted the quality of the Skills Action Plans had improved incrementally over the period they had been working with Next Step as any concerns Jobcentre Plus advisers or district staff might have had were fed back to Next Step. However in one area, a district-level Jobcentre Plus manager felt too many Skills Action Plans were still coming back where the information was too minimal to be useful. The manager reported this had left Jobcentre Plus advisers questioning the 'added value' of the Next Step service; this view was confirmed by advisory staff in the same district. There was also a feeling among both Jobcentre Plus and Next Step management in this district that the Skills Action Plans were not always sufficiently labour-market focused, so they did not relate to the types of work available locally.

Some of the issues around the perceived quality of Skills Action Plans relate to the lack of shared understanding about what constitutes a good Skills Action Plan. Jobcentre Plus staff reported some Skills Action Plans were not specific enough, while others, which provided specific steps, were criticised by Jobcentre Plus advisers for identifying referral routes that they could have referred to directly.

There were minimal problems reported by Jobcentre Plus advisers in the physical transfer of (paper-based) Skills Action Plans from Next Step to Jobcentre Plus. Different practices were adopted by area: in some, Skills Action Plans went to Jobcentre Plus via a centralised district contact, while in others they were transferred direct to Jobcentre Plus local offices. There had also been an increase in the use of electronic action plans, which Jobcentre Plus advisers found more useful because they were easier to read. It was reported that a new electronic Skills Action Plan format was being rolled out on a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system for Next Step.

²² See Appendix A for a description of the Skills Action Plan.

3.5 Follow-up

3.5.1 Follow-up by Next Step

Next Step advisers did not report any follow-up after their appointments with claimants, other than the longer-term follow-up linked to assessing outcomes. As part of their contractual and funding obligations, Next Step follows up with claimants at one, three and six months to check on claimant outcomes and satisfaction with the service. It was reported by a Next Step district manager that this would be supported by the new CRM system which would alert advisers when to check on claimants' progress.

3.5.2 Follow-up by Jobcentre Plus

There is a weakness in the integration of the claimant journey when they return to Jobcentre Plus after the referral to Next Step, which was also observed in the previous rounds of research.²³ There was relatively little evidence the Next Step Skills Action Plans were being used by Jobcentre Plus advisers to inform subsequent interviews, or that they were reviewed consistently by Jobcentre Plus advisers. There was a strong perception among Jobcentre Plus district-level staff that the process around the integration of Skills Action Plans was a weak link in the process.

Follow-up of a referral to Next Step was reported by Jobcentre Plus advisers to be weakest when a claimant had been referred to Next Step from the Stage 1 NJI, because Jobcentre Plus advisers did not caseload claimants at this stage, and they did not have the time to follow up and track individual referrals. As such when a claimant was referred to Next Step at Stage 1 it was typically not until the 13-week point of the claim (the Stage 2 initial interview) that the appointment was followed up by an adviser (although the official policy is that referrals to Next Step should be followed up at the next Jobcentre Plus intervention including Fortnightly Jobsearch Reviews (FJR)). Where claimants were caseloaded at Stages 2 and 3, advisers reported that they were more likely to follow up and ask about the Next Step referral in subsequent appointments. Overall, as well as differing by Stage, the presence and level of follow-up by Jobcentre Plus tended to vary between advisers and across offices.

There was also a concern among Jobcentre Plus district managers that there was too much paperwork and that it was not sufficiently integrated. Several district-level Jobcentre Plus managers felt that the Next Step Skills Action Plans, and the action plans that Jobcentre Plus advisers produced with claimants at Stage 3, constituted too many documents.

'...if the claimant goes to Next Step they're getting up to three Action Plans from that. In the Jobcentre they're getting a Jobseeker's Agreement and an action plan...and we seem to be ending up with quite a bit of duplication and lots of bits of paper flying around rather than actually having a genuinely seamless service.'

(District-level IES Lead, Jobcentre Plus)

²³ DWP Research Report 618: 'Qualitative Evaluation of Integrated Employment and Skills Trials: Implementation Report' available at <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2009-2010/rrep618.pdf>.

4 Skills provision

This chapter covers providers' views on the appropriateness of referrals from Jobcentre Plus and Next Step, and how providers address FTAs or drop out. It then discusses the range of provision available and how it is delivered, and the extent and type of follow-up support offered to learners. Finally it examines how providers liaise with Jobcentre Plus, Next Step and other local partners and what impact this has on the types of provision offered. The chapter draws primarily on evidence from in-depth interviews with a broad range of providers offering basic skills, vocational skills training (including certification), job-search skills support and/or employability support. Providers' views are cross-referenced with the views of Jobcentre Plus and Next Step staff where appropriate.

4.1 Appropriateness of referrals

4.1.1 Assessing skills needs

The vast majority of the providers interviewed for this study reported conducting their own assessment and diagnostic with claimants referred either from Jobcentre Plus or Next Step. This was for a number of reasons. Providers reported they did not always receive as much detailed information as they would like from Jobcentre Plus or Next Step about the claimant, in terms of their aspirations and job goals, existing qualification levels and work history, and how these related to skill needs. Undertaking their own assessment enabled them to fill in the gaps.

'You might get a couple of bits of factual stuff, went for an interview here, did this, did that, but [Jobcentre Plus] have been working with that claimant for months, there's got to be other stuff in there that would help us to pick up that claimant more quickly...have they had a basic skills assessment? When did they do it? What were the levels? What is the claimant thinking? Are they turning up on time, engaging with them? So it's a lot of the soft stuff.'

(Welfare-to-work training provider)

Providers who received referrals from Jobcentre Plus said the information they received tended to be more in-depth with claimants referred at Stage 3, than at earlier stages, in particular because at this point they would have access to the claimant's Jobcentre Plus Action Plan. Providers who dealt with referrals from Next Step reported they had access to the Next Step Skills Action Plan. Even when providers had access to the claimant's existing action plans and other background information relating to the referral, many also reported that they preferred to do their own diagnostic assessment to gauge the claimants' basic skills needs and identify whether they had been referred to the most appropriate provision. The most common way of doing this was via a basic skills assessment (using, for example, a paper or online diagnostic tool) together with an interview prior to the start of the course, focusing on the clients' reasons for doing it, what they hoped to achieve, and how this was related to their previous work history and future job goals.

'When [claimants] come here they've already got an idea about what they want to do because they've had the interview at Jobcentre Plus. They have an interview with us where we look at the options...it's looking at their existing skills, their aspirations, what they can realistically achieve or work towards. It's talking about the career but it isn't a careers interview as such. We are advising on and listening to them about the best way they can upskill.'

(FE college)

4.1.2 Perceived appropriateness of referrals to provision

Most providers reported the majority of referrals they received both from Jobcentre Plus and Next Step were appropriate for the course they were referred to. Some reported this had always been consistently good, while others described this as having improved over the course of their involvement with Jobcentre Plus or Next Step. For example, one welfare-to-work provider reported that initially only around 40 per cent of referrals from Jobcentre Plus had been appropriate, but as the relationship developed and they did more promotional work with Jobcentre Plus advisers to improve their understanding of the provision, this had improved to around 80-85 per cent of referrals.

Where providers identified a referral as inappropriate it would generally be for one of three reasons:

- Firstly, the claimant did not have the appropriate level of basic skills to do the course, which generally meant that they had a previously unidentified literacy, numeracy or ESOL need. Many providers offered basic skills provision embedded within their employability or vocational offer. However, if the need was very severe, for example, below NVQ Entry Level 1, providers reported that the claimant would generally be referred back to Jobcentre Plus or Next Step for a more specialised basic skills referral.
- Secondly, that the claimant wanted to do a different type of course to the one they had been referred to do. Providers reported that claimants tended to feel more open with them than Jobcentre Plus and this could mean that claimants' real preferences emerged in their initial pre-course assessment interview or induction period. Providers tended not to report this issue with referrals from Next Step.
- Thirdly, a few providers reported that occasionally claimants were referred, and wanted, to do courses which did not take account of their previous work experience or would not meet demand in the labour market. For example, they might be referred to do a forklift truck licence (for which local vacancies were available), but if they had no prior forklift experience, there was little chance of them finding a job as employers tended to specify having the licence plus at least one years' work experience. In these cases, the provider would work with the client to identify something that was more appropriate, but still linked to their job goals.

In these circumstances, and where the provider offered a range of provision, claimants might be transferred on to something more appropriate. Some providers reported problems with this, however, as they were told by their local Jobcentre Plus office claimants could only be offered the type of provision they were originally referred to, or had to be referred back to Jobcentre Plus. This could be a long-winded process which risked reducing the claimant's enthusiasm for doing the course:

'We have to work with [claimants] under the [course] they were referred to. We're supposed to send them back, fill in the SL2 form, say not suitable, send it back to the Jobcentre. The Jobcentre will say "do you want to go back to that college and do this one, which is more what you want to do according to the college". Give them a new SL2. That could be two weeks before you see them again, because it would be the next signing on date...and by then they've lost interest. Work arounds happen I'm sure.'

(FE college)

4.2 Failure to attend, drop out, and mandation

4.2.1 Addressing FTA and drop out

Many of the providers interviewed for this study reported that even though claimants attended their provision on a voluntary basis, FTA rates (for the initial interview) and drop-out from the courses were minimal. Pre-course screening interviews and inductions were part of their strategies to minimise drop-out, by trying to ensure that the claimant was on the appropriate course. They also tried to make claimants feel welcome during the initial interview or visit, for example, by showing them around the facilities and letting them speak with other learners. Many providers also rang the claimant immediately prior to the start of the course, as a reminder and to make sure they were still attending.

A few providers found FTA the initial interview for pre-course screening an issue (for example, one who reported this at around 45 per cent, another at around 40 per cent). They felt it would be beneficial if the referring Jobcentre Plus adviser, rather than themselves, phoned a claimant to remind them about the course and encourage them to attend. These providers felt this would have a greater influence on the claimant's attendance than if they made the call, as the provider had no prior contact with the claimant.

'When we phone them, we've got no empowerment on them...What I'm trying to get is for the Jobcentre Plus adviser who made the referral to phone them 24 hours before as well, because they may have a bit more influence than ourselves. They [the claimant] know them [the adviser] and would probably take more to that than to someone they've never met before.'

(Employability skills provider)

The level of drop-out providers reported once training was underway varied according to the type and duration of provision and while many providers reported minimal drop-out, others reported it at anything up to 30 per cent. Most providers reported the majority of drop-out happened very early in the course. Providers also reported that drop-out could vary according to the composition of different course intakes. For example, if they had a group that consisted of more claimants with multiple support needs (for example, ex-offenders, people with drug or alcohol problems), they might expect drop-out to be higher for that group than average. Providers reported the reasons for drop-out varied, but included factors like getting a job, personal reasons, and doing the wrong type of course. It could be difficult for providers to ascertain these reasons if the person just stopped attending and did not return phone calls, and providers said they did not generally get feedback on this from Jobcentre Plus.

Providers reported adopting strategies to minimise drop-out centred around the provision itself and these were geared to supporting the learner and engaging them in the course as much as possible. For example, several providers described how engaging employers from the start of the course helped minimise drop-out because it helped learners to recognise the work-relevance and feel they would have better prospects of finding work at the end of it.

4.2.2 Awareness of mandation and dealing with mandatory referrals

Some providers reported that all referrals to their provision were voluntary, while a few reported that they would not be told if a person was a mandatory referral or not. Other (mainly welfare-to-work) providers offered mandatory provision and were accustomed to dealing with Jobcentre Plus claimants who had been referred on this basis, for example, for New Deal or Flexible New Deal (FND) provision.

Where providers did deal with claimants on a Jobcentre Plus mandatory referral, they emphasised the importance of being open and upfront about what the course could offer and how it could help them find a job, in particular that the provision was not a ‘punitive’ measure but designed to support them to find work. They also tried to set out clear expectations at the course outset about attendance and timekeeping, while stressing the reciprocal relationship and making clear what claimants could expect of them. These providers also emphasised the importance of the relationship the individual course tutors or employment support workers could build with claimants, explaining this was crucial in terms of building claimants’ engagement with the course, and thereby their motivation.

‘If the customer’s been told he has to come, that’s quite a big barrier to bring down. And in terms of trying to get people on side and explain that we’re here to help them, that can be difficult for people to hear. Trying to do it all the same way [for everyone] doesn’t work...the relationship between the unemployed person and our staff, their main link person, if that builds up well then we’ve got a better chance to work through the customer’s issues.’

(Welfare-to-work training provider)

4.3 Delivery

4.3.1 The range of provision

The providers interviewed for this study spanned the following main types of provision:

- Basic skills, encompassing literacy, numeracy, basic IT skills, and ESOL. This type of provision was offered both by specialist providers, especially in ESOL, and by more general or sector-specific providers, who embedded basic skills provision into their courses.
- Vocational (work-related) provision. There were three main types:
 - sector-specific short courses, often offered as part of Routes into Work or the Six Month Offer;
 - provision of certification in short job-specific training such as Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards, forklift truck or SIA licences; and longer-term vocational courses such as NVQs.

In addition to these, certain providers developed employer-specific training on an ad-hoc basis in response to employer demand.

- Job search and employability support. This included structured programmes of activity covering skills like job seeking, CV writing, interview techniques, timekeeping, teamwork, and confidence and motivational support.

Some smaller ‘niche’ providers were specialised either in basic skills provision or a particular type of sector. Others, mainly FE colleges and large welfare-to-work providers, offered the full range of different provision types – basic skills, vocational and employability support. All providers, whether general or more specialised, incorporated employability support into their courses to a greater or lesser extent depending on the type and duration of the course.

In addition, some providers offered targeted employer-specific provision geared to the needs of a particular company having a recruitment drive. Examples of this type of provision were provided by FE colleges, specialist sector-specific training providers, and general welfare-to-work providers. The provider would liaise with the employer to find out what job roles they were recruiting for and what types of skills and aptitudes they sought. They would then design a tailored programme based around that company’s recruitment processes and needs. For example, they would incorporate

completing the company's own application form as part of their training, and would coach learners on the company's history and ethos.

Advisers from Jobcentre Plus and Next Step reported the range and volume of provision was generally adequate. Occasionally, courses would be oversubscribed which could lead to shortages, for example, provision for SIA licences was very popular, and some gaps existed in training for professional jobseekers, who often required retraining in alternative occupations. However, the provision available was generally perceived to be adequate for most jobseekers' needs.

The type of provision that claimants did was largely dependent on the eligibility criteria for the course, the JSA regime, the particular skill needs they had and the results of the providers' own assessment process prior to the start of the course (detailed in Section 4.1.1).

The duration of provision varied widely depending on the type of course. For example, Routes into Work was a programme lasting between two and eight weeks; other courses varied from a few days for short sector-specific courses such as SIA or forklift licences, to 12+ weeks for basic skills, ESOL or employability provision. The number of hours per week varied according to the type of course and the claim stage at which it was aimed. For example, some courses had to remain below 16 hours per week due to benefit eligibility rules, whereas others (aimed at Stage 3 or 4 claimants) were full-time programmes at 30 hours per week.

4.3.2 The frequency and timing of provision

Many providers (including FE colleges) reported at least some of their provision was offered on a roll-on, roll-off basis, so they could accept referrals at any point in the course. Some courses had specific start dates (for example, the eight-week Routes into Work courses), and so if someone was referred once a course had started they may need to wait several weeks for the next one to start before they could join.

Some providers reported that they needed a minimum number of referrals before a course could run. The minimum varied depending on the type of provider and how they were funded, and the subject of the course. For example, one third-sector provider reported they had occasionally run their hospitality-focused training for as few as three people, but the maximum number was 20, and it was uneconomical for them to continue running a course with consistently low number of referrals. Another provider, a large FE college, reported they could not run catering courses for just two or three learners because of the amount of resources delivering the course took up. This was a key reason why providers felt it was important to maintain their profile among Jobcentre Plus advisers.

Although FE colleges generally operate on the basis of academic terms, most of those interviewed for this study reported the provision that was specifically tailored for unemployed people was more flexible than this and operated across term times and holidays. A few reported they operated this provision up to 50 weeks of the year. It was only when claimants had been referred (or self-referred) to more 'mainstream' provision, such as NVQs, that providers reported that term-based start and end dates could mean having to wait several months for the next course intake to start.

4.3.3 The employment focus of provision

All the providers interviewed for this study recognised that the skills provision they offered for Jobcentre Plus claimants had the ultimate aim of moving people closer to finding 'sustainable' work (rather than 'any job'). Many of those offering vocational skills courses (in particular, sector-specific

training) had links with local employers, often through their own dedicated employer-engagement teams or officers. Providers saw building and maintaining links with employers as crucial to:

- identify what employers were looking for in their recruits in terms of skills, experience and attitude (and build the content of their provision around this);
- develop work-experience placements, and find out about and prepare learners for upcoming recruitment drives.

In addition, all the providers received at least some element of funding for achieving a successful job outcome, with additional funding if this outcome was sustained over a period of time (some providers reported this to be 13 weeks, others 26 weeks). All providers therefore incorporated job-search support into their skills offer, including activities such as CV updating, coaching in how to complete application forms, and interview techniques. Provision aimed at people who had been unemployed for six months or longer tended to include more intensive elements of employability support alongside this, such as confidence building, motivation, timekeeping and teamwork.

As identified in Section 4.3.1, some provision was designed with the needs of specific employers in mind. Providers reported this was generally instigated by a partnership with Jobcentre Plus and other members of the local employment and skills board (including representatives of the local authority and Chamber of Commerce) who made approaches to employers planning to expand or move into the local area. This enabled them to design and deliver tailored pre-employment training and support which could improve the calibre of job applications. There were examples of this across several different districts, primarily with a range of retail employers. Providers reported relatively high success rates (compared with courses that were not tailored to specific companies) in terms of the proportion of candidates who were invited to interviews and who subsequently were offered a job in these companies.

4.3.4 Using claimant feedback to improve provision

All providers reported they collected client feedback with regular learner satisfaction surveys or feedback sheets. Some providers also reported conducting 'exit interviews' with learners at the end of a course, to get more first-hand feedback from them on their experience and where they felt improvements could be made. There were several examples of where providers had adjusted the content or delivery of a course, in response to learner feedback, either direct or via Jobcentre Plus.

'We had one course that was two days a week and we ended up changing it to three days a week, so still under the 16-hour mark. It was running at 15 hours, just because we found out learners needed that extra time just to process the material.'

(FE provider)

Jobcentre Plus advisers reported that claimants provide informal feedback to them on provision (helping to inform their decisions about which providers to use) and providers reported they actively encouraged claimants to feed back to Jobcentre Plus.

4.4 Follow-up support

4.4.1 Follow-up support to learners

The majority of the providers interviewed for this study offered some form of follow-up support to learners once they had completed the course, most of which was provided on an ad-hoc basis. This ranged from drop-in access to use the internet or computers on providers' premises to informal chats between the claimant and their tutor or employment support worker, by phone or

face-to-face during drop-ins, asking how the claimant was getting on with their job search and whether they needed any specific additional support. In addition, where learners had only completed a part-qualification through the course (for example, with the eight-week Routes into Work provision), they could be offered the opportunity to complete the full qualification. This could be done while they were in work with support from their employer or, if they had not yet found a job, learners could benefit from fee remission to complete their courses. Fee remission was not available for every course however, and some providers reported there was little funding support available for adult learners wanting to do full-cost provision such as certain electrical or plumbing qualifications, where all costs have to be met by the learner and/or their employer:

‘Some of the courses that customers want, we’re not able to run with, such as an electrical course, which is still full-cost – we don’t get any funding to run that course so we can’t run with it, and a lot of customers do want that, but they would have to pay for it.’

(FE college)

Providers reported they also helped with the provision of information, advice and guidance (IAG) on progression to other courses and funding availability, if learners wanted to continue training. Often this IAG was provided by in-house careers advisers or Next Step.

4.4.2 Job retention support

Most providers reported they could claim an additional payment for moving people into a sustainable job (see Section 4.3.3). Many providers reported they offered an element of in-work support to claimants who had found a job, to help them sustain it during the first few months, until the sustainable employment trigger was reached. This was particularly the case for welfare-to-work providers and third-sector training organisations, but was also mentioned by some FE colleges. This support was offered partly due to the additional funding incentive but also because providers reported it related to their ethos, to focus on helping claimants into sustainable work, rather than just ‘any job’.

‘We’ve learned very quickly that you’re going to fail there, because they [the claimant] will be back next week. And it actually causes you more work in terms of trying to sort everything out. So in terms of sustainability, we know that’s the right thing to do...it’s right for the person, obviously, and it’s right for us as a business model to look at sustainability.’

(Welfare-to-work training provider)

The main example of job retention support given by providers was keeping in touch with the learner by phone every couple of weeks, to ask how they were getting on and to identify any issues which might cause the job to break down, so that they could offer advice or support to help the learner address them. Occasionally this might involve the provider liaising with the employer as well.

4.5 Working with Jobcentre Plus and Next Step

4.5.1 Decisions on provision

All the providers reported they delivered training to unemployed claimants under various contracts. These tended to be managed by the Skills Funding Agency or the DWP. Some providers (in particular, FE colleges and large welfare-to-work providers) offered provision under multiple contracts such as the Six Month Offer and Routes into Work, as well as ESF funded provision. Others, often smaller, more specialised providers, were more reliant on one particular funding stream. Several of these small providers were part of a larger consortium, sub-contracted to a lead provider such as a large FE college or welfare-to-work provider.

Some small providers did not have to make many decisions about which type of provision to offer, as they specialised in one particular area of work, such as ESOL, and/or were limited about what level of provision they could offer due to funding criteria. For example, one ESOL provider described how they could no longer accept claimants with English Language below Entry Level 1. This was because a change in the funding mechanism meant all their learners had to pass two qualifications while they were on the programme, and this was felt to be unattainable by those who had no English language skills at all at the start of the course. Learners assessed as being in this category were referred back to Jobcentre Plus.

Larger providers such as FE colleges and some of the nationwide welfare-to-work providers faced more decisions about the type and content of provision they could bid for and deliver. Organisations took into account various considerations of what they could deliver locally, including:

- whether they had the appropriate number of qualified staff to deliver specific types of training;
- available funding streams;
- opportunities for partnerships or sub-contracting with other providers; and
- existing areas of subject expertise within the organisation.

Several large FE colleges described how they provided a wide range of provision under Routes into Work, spanning a diverse range of sectors. This reflected the broad base of learning delivered by ‘mainstream’ programmes within the college, on which they could draw for facilities and staffing, and for offering learners progression routes to other qualifications.

Some of the FE colleges interviewed for this study had only been delivering large-scale training provision aimed specifically at unemployed people for four or five years and some were still building up their capacity in this area. All the provision managers interviewed within FE colleges mentioned this type of provision was increasingly in line with their college’s role in combating social exclusion and supporting local people and businesses.

Provision was also influenced directly by input from Jobcentre Plus. This was either at the local contracting stage or, once contracts were awarded, in response to changes in local labour-market demand or feedback from Jobcentre Plus advisers and managers. At the contracting stage, some large FE colleges which had proposed a range of sector-specific training reported that some of these proposals had been turned down by Jobcentre Plus and the Skills Funding Agency on the basis there was insufficient local demand for vacancies in that area of work.

‘Under the Six Month Offer we have to get permission from Jobcentre Plus to run the courses. We wanted to do a driving course but they said no. Under Routes into Work, they have given us areas where we can actually run the courses. Where we liaise with Jobcentre Plus we are under an obligation to get their approval to go into those sectors...we weren’t given all the sectors that we bid for.’

(FE college)

Post-contracting, there were several examples of providers being asked by Jobcentre Plus to adapt their courses or put on new provision in response to changes in local labour market demand. These requests were often based on the latest LMI and vacancy information supplied by Jobcentre Plus, and were often also informed by intelligence-gathering done by the providers’ own employer

engagement teams. Overall, providers said they were responsive to making such changes, and indeed sometimes initiated them as the following quotes demonstrate:

'We have regular meetings with Jobcentre Plus, they come into the college and tell us what the vacancies are...We could see that there was catering, and security...So we have built up those courses according to the vacancies.'

(FE college)

'It was the Jobcentre's idea for us to run the sports course, and the Jobcentre and Next Step both came to me and said, the Business Admin course is really good but the thing out there at the moment is Sage. So I spoke to the head of division and she was more than happy to introduce Sage and manual accounts into that course.'

(FE college)

4.5.2 Feedback on claimants to Jobcentre Plus and Next Step

All the providers interviewed reported they gave feedback to the referring organisation (Jobcentre Plus or Next Step) on whether the person referred had attended or not. Some providers mentioned they would attempt to make contact with the claimant three times before referring them back to Jobcentre Plus as an FTA.

Feedback on attainment, for example, whether the claimant had achieved a qualification on the course, or how they had performed more generally, was both requested and offered less systematically than on attendance. Providers reported the provision of feedback on attainment depended on the closeness of the relationships between individual Jobcentre Plus or Next Step advisers and course tutors or employment support workers.

Some Jobcentre Plus and Next Step advisers said that they would like more 'good news' stories on people who had been referred to the provision and then found work, as it helped them to promote the course to other claimants. In response, some providers collated monthly or quarterly newsletters for advisory staff, describing their activities and providing 'good news' case studies of individual learners. Providers felt this was important for maintaining their profile with Jobcentre Plus and Next Step advisers.

4.5.3 Relationships with Jobcentre Plus and Next Step

Overall, all the providers interviewed for this study reported they had good relationships with Jobcentre Plus and Next Step at district management and adviser level.²⁴ These relationships were fostered through regular direct contact at different levels of the organisations.

Provision managers attended regular local provider meetings (usually organised by the Skills Funding Agency) where district representatives of Jobcentre Plus also attended (usually the Third Party Provision Manager) along with representatives of Next Step. At these meetings Jobcentre Plus would provide updates on policy and new initiatives, on local LMI and vacancy information and there would be a discussion of upcoming employers moving into the area or planning major recruitment drives, which could inform the development of new employer or sector-specific courses. Several providers felt Jobcentre Plus could share this type of information with them more systematically in order to develop a more unified approach to employer engagement.

²⁴ It should be noted the provider sample was sourced via district-level managers at Jobcentre Plus and Next Step, and therefore they would inevitably have a working relationship with one or both of these organisations.

'It would be nice if at some point Jobcentre Plus could work out its employer engagement and start linking up its providers, without us having to contact them [the employer] separately. They've got loads of vacancies but they'll never link you up with the employer to do pre-employment training...All we do is go on the website and get the vacancy and then phone up the employer. The employer engagement team at Jobcentre Plus could have been doing that from day one, and that unified approach seems to be missing.'

(FE college)

'Rather than five or six different organisations doing the same thing, it's trying to bring it under one umbrella, to work together to strengthen it.'

(Welfare-to-work training provider)

These meetings were also an opportunity for Jobcentre Plus, Next Step and providers to discuss:

- referral rates;
- the appropriateness of referrals; and
- any other provision-related issues which might arise, such as the availability of certain types of course or whether there was a need to fine-tune the content of a course; and if this had been updated on the local Jobcentre Plus provision directory, often referred to as a provision 'tree'.

Most providers interviewed for this research reported such meetings to be effective for sharing this type of information at the district level, although, as discussed below, they felt that having direct contact with advisers was a key element of addressing local issues regarding referrals.

'The provider meetings are very useful, yes. It gives us the opportunity to voice any problems that we're having with anything regarding Jobcentre Plus, any problems with referrals. It helps promote our courses to other providers as well as Jobcentre Plus.'

(FE college)

At adviser level, providers often visited local Jobcentre Plus offices to promote their provision so advisers had a better awareness and understanding of it. Providers reported this helped maintain or increase referral numbers. Even small providers made the effort to liaise with Jobcentre Plus advisory staff in this way as they recognised the importance of building a profile and good working relationships at the adviser level. For example, one small ESOL provider made weekly visits to different local Jobcentre Plus offices in order to help maintain the profile of the provision and referral numbers. As well as this, providers often spent time on the telephone talking to individual Jobcentre Plus advisers about referrals, attendance and sometimes sorting out administrative issues, such as whether a claimant's benefit payments had gone awry at the start of the course. Although some providers felt it was time-consuming, most said that regular direct contact with Jobcentre Plus advisers helped them to resolve such issues and also fostered effective working relationships. Providers reported this could improve the profile of, and knowledge about, their provision among these advisers.

'It's essential to have that [direct] relationship. I think it wouldn't work without it...we're trying to get our outreach workers to go into Jobcentre Plus because we have a lot of people coming through these programmes and what we need to do is maintain that. So we want to give Jobcentre Plus as much co-operation as possible so that they can inform their clients and keep that momentum going.'

(FE college)

Providers also hosted occasional visits from Jobcentre Plus advisers, which they felt helped to give advisers a better insight into the type of provision they offered, because they could see it being delivered in practice. This was endorsed by some Jobcentre Plus advisers interviewed for this research.

Several providers reported, however, that their relationship with Jobcentre Plus tended to fall down at local office manager level.

'Jobcentre communication is good with advisers, not so good I'd say with some [office] managers. I might email some managers to let them know about changes to courses that I run, or for changes to programmes, and they're not very good at letting their advisers know so we're better off phoning the advisers. We do have good communications with some of the higher-up managers [at district level] but sometimes with the individual managers in the offices it isn't so good.'

(FE college)

One provider attributed this to local managers in their district doing placements across different offices, which made it difficult for the provider to maintain a consistent contact at office level. The implication of providers relying mainly on personal contact with advisers to keep them up-to-date about provision is that the information advisers receive may not be standardised, and not all advisers may receive it, as providers cannot talk to every individual adviser by telephone.

Providers reported similar types of activity with Next Step advisers and managers, although on a more limited scale as they had fewer referrals from Next Step. Some Next Step advisers were based within FE providers' premises for part of the week and could deliver careers IAG through appointments or drop-in sessions. This co-location helped to build good working relationships as well as awareness of what each organisation (the provider and the Next Step service) could offer to support claimants.

5 The claimant experience

This chapter explores the claimant experience from initial skills screening at Jobcentre Plus through to referral to Next Step and, for some claimants, on to skills provision. The claimants taking part in this research had all attended an interview with Next Step (see Section 1.4 for how the claimant sample was generated). Outcomes for these claimants following their interaction with Jobcentre Plus, Next Step, and in some cases, skills provision are discussed at the end of the chapter. However, because of the qualitative nature of this research, it should be noted these outcomes are not intended to be generally applicable to the claimant population: they are presented as examples of the range of outcomes such claimants can achieve.

5.1 Claimant backgrounds

Most of the claimants interviewed for this research had worked in a variety of jobs before becoming unemployed. Many claimants had worked in low-skilled employment, such as assembly work, kitchen portering, retail and factory operative work, and had changed jobs several times. Claimants who were trained in a specific occupation, such as a skilled trade, generally had less diverse work histories with fewer job changes. A small number had been self-employed. For other claimants, their current period on JSA followed time spent on other benefits such as Income Support (IS), Carers Allowance, ESA or Incapacity Benefit, and Bereavement Benefit. A few of these claimants had been out of the labour market for long periods due to caring responsibilities, while others still had caring responsibilities which restricted the amount of work they could do.

The majority of interviewees had been unemployed for over 12 months with the remainder unemployed for less than six months or between six and 12 months. At the time of the fieldwork, a small number of the interviewees had moved into work.

5.1.1 Attitudes to training

Many of the claimants taking part in the research reported they had no formal qualifications from school but a majority had undertaken training while in work, mainly following short courses, in subjects such as warehousing and manual handling. Most of these claimants were qualified to NVQ Level 2 or equivalent. The remaining claimants were evenly split between those qualified at Level 1 or below or with no formal qualifications, and those with qualifications at Level 3 or higher. Some claimants taking part in the research were graduates.

Given that the majority of claimants taking part in this research had undertaken some training since leaving compulsory education and that this sample originated from Next Step (see Section 1.4), virtually all the interviewees were likely to have, and did have, a positive attitude towards training. Some claimants expressed a desire to do training but reported they could not afford to follow the courses they wanted to do on their own and looked to Jobcentre Plus to provide financial support or advice on financial support to help them. Claimants generally felt they could use their time out of work constructively by undertaking training, either to help them get back into the type of work they had done before, to embark on a new career, to demonstrate commitment to employers, or to help build their confidence if they had been out of the labour market for a while.

'I knew I'd need it because of being out of work for so long and I'd generally lost confidence. I knew what I had to do but I didn't have the confidence to go and do it and any training that I was offered I would take it and do it because it would always help.'

(Claimant interview)

Several claimants wanted to improve their computer skills: one person wanted to learn a specific software package, but the majority wanted to learn basic computer skills, such as how to use a computer, and to refresh and update their IT skills. Claimants recognised that computer skills were now needed in a wide variety of jobs and were also important for job searching.

5.1.2 Aspirations

Most of the claimants taking part in the research, whether low skilled or highly qualified, reported that they were looking for jobs in similar fields to those they had worked in before. However, some claimants who were more highly qualified were also considering jobs that did not require such high-level qualifications, possibly as a ‘stop-gap’.

‘I was looking more within my field, so it was in the science field...But considering I’ve had no luck there, I’m having to [look elsewhere], because I don’t want to stay on JSA. I couldn’t do it for another two months, so I’m looking within retail, even doing it part time and then constantly looking for more of a career-job.’

(Claimant interview)

Claimants who were looking for a change of occupation often reported there was no longer a demand for the type of work they had done before or that they could no longer do the work because of health problems. These claimants often needed re-training or new qualifications to be able to take up new work opportunities.

A handful of claimants talked about wanting sustainable work, which they reported to be a permanent job with security and access to a pension, rather than a job with opportunities for career progression.

5.2 Experience of screening at Jobcentre Plus and referrals to Next Step

Most claimants did not explicitly recall any skills screening activity by their Jobcentre Plus adviser, reflecting the light touch nature of the screening discussed in Section 2.1. Many of those claimants who reported Jobcentre Plus had done no explicit skills screening were those who had been claiming JSA for less than six months. Most claimants did, however, recall general discussions with their Jobcentre Plus advisers about their work history, regardless of how long they had been unemployed, which may reflect the conversational nature of Jobcentre Plus advisers’ skills screening techniques (see Section 2.1).

A few claimants thought that asking about their work history and qualifications, rather than what their previous jobs had involved in detail, was not enough to give Jobcentre Plus advisers a good appreciation of their skills or what else they could do. They felt that this approach had not really identified which jobs they would be most suited to, or broadened out the type of jobs they could look for, using their transferable skills.

‘When I first signed up, when I first claimed Jobseeker’s, they go through and they ask you all your qualifications and it’s all kept on file. But, they haven’t really spoken to me about transferable skills or anything like that. And, to be honest, it wasn’t really something I’d thought about until I saw the Next Step adviser.’

(Claimant interview)

Only one claimant taking part in this research recalled undertaking a written basic skills assessment (using the Fast Track assessment tool) with Jobcentre Plus.

5.2.1 Referrals to provision

The main examples of training provision claimants stated they had been referred to (by Jobcentre Plus or Next Step²⁵), other than a referral to the Next Step service, were:

- job-search skills provision (such as interview skills and how to complete application forms, and often incorporating employability skills);
- basic skills provision for literacy and numeracy; and
- provision that they were required to attend as part of the JRFND.

Fewer claimants had been referred to specific vocational skills training. However, from claimants' reports, there was evidence that Jobcentre Plus advisers were linking referrals to this sort of provision to the needs of the local labour market. One claimant described how an adviser showed them that their job goal was unrealistic in the local labour market:

'When I was younger I would have liked to have worked with animals, but when I went to the Jobcentre the man sort of pushed me away...and said, oh, there're not very many jobs in there.'

(Claimant interview)

In addition to Jobcentre Plus advisers identifying suitable training opportunities, some claimants said that they had proactively requested specific training although this was not always possible. Some of the claimants who asked to do training were told it was not available, or that they were not eligible, and that they had to wait for Jobcentre Plus advisers to raise it at their Stage 3 (six month) interview. Several claimants had expressed an interest in training that Jobcentre Plus were unable to help with, because they were in specialist fields such as excavator licences, plumbing, welding, electrical or technical drawing courses.

'The courses I wanted to do weren't available, apparently, because they were specialised courses. And they didn't give me the information, and nor were they interested in helping me at all.'

(Claimant interview)

In some cases claimants reported they had raised the subject of training as they felt that otherwise this would not have been discussed:

'Well if I enquire about it, yes they will tell me about the training, and the education or whatever that you want to do. But otherwise they don't go out their own way to give you that kind of motivation. Whereas if I enquire about it, then they will reply.'

(Claimant interview)

A few claimants reported they had been presented with training options that did not reflect their needs; for example, some claimants said they had been given a general list of training options to choose from rather than being offered training that was clearly related to their skills needs and specific job goals.

Some claimants reported they ended up doing courses that they did not actually want or need because they thought the choice had been limited, or that they attended because they either felt obligated to, or because they were persuaded by their adviser that the training would benefit them. As discussed in Section 4.2.1, referrals to provision that is not clearly related to claimants' needs or is inappropriate can result in higher FTA rates once the claimant starts a course.

²⁵ Although claimants were sampled on the basis of having attended a Next Step interview, they can also have experienced direct referrals to provision from Jobcentre Plus.

Although some claimants reported frustrations with accessing provision, claimants generally found that the way they were referred from Jobcentre Plus to training providers worked well. Jobcentre Plus tended to take a direct approach and claimants said they liked it when Jobcentre Plus advisers rang up training providers during the interview, booked them in for an initial appointment with the training provider, and gave them written information about the appointments. Most claimants said that they had started on provision within a few weeks of the referral being made.

'I had an interview on a Thursday and I started on the Monday.'

(Claimant interview)

A few claimants reported they needed additional support in order to access the provision and, in the main, this was support with travel costs.

5.2.2 Referrals to Next Step

The majority of claimants taking part in this research reported they had been referred to Next Step early in their claim, and a smaller proportion referred to Next Step at Stage 2 or Stage 3 of JRFND. A couple of claimants had been referred before they were on JSA, for example, as lone parents claiming IS.

As with referrals to other provision, claimants reported they generally had a wait of less than two weeks for appointments with Next Step. Claimants in all areas said that Jobcentre Plus advisers had booked the Next Step appointment while the claimant was with them so they could agree a mutually convenient time. In some cases where there was co-location, Jobcentre Plus advisers had referred the claimant to a meeting with the Next Step adviser immediately following the Jobcentre Plus interview. This was well received by claimants as they could get answers to their questions about training immediately, and with CV support referrals they could start making progress straight away.

Claimants identified two main reasons for referral to Next Step, to:

- have a CV done; and
- discuss training options.

A small number of claimants said they were referred specifically for in-depth careers advice and this was generally when the claimant had identified they needed help to change careers. Some claimants thought referrals to Next Step were triggered at certain stages of the claim, rather than in response to specific skills needs.

'I think, really, once I'd been signing on for a certain period of time they called me in just to say, you've been signing on for a certain amount of time, what are you doing to find work? And as an extra shove to get me into work, they suggested training, so I think that's where I was put in touch with the Next Step.'

(Claimant interview)

Moreover, a small number of claimants felt the referral from Jobcentre Plus to Next Step was merely passing them along and this was particularly the case when Next Step then also referred the claimant on to another provider.

'They recommend you to see the other one that specialises in it and she sent me to another lady, and I just kept seeing different people...I just got a bit frustrated really.'

(Claimant interview)

Most claimants felt they had to go to the Next Step appointment in order to demonstrate they were taking all steps to look for work, but very few perceived this as a mandatory part of the JSA process.

Almost all claimants referred to Next Step for a CV reported this process to be very straightforward and they felt Jobcentre Plus advisers had offered them a good explanation of the CV service that Next Step could provide:

'I actually told them that I'd like to get a CV set up and they actually turned round and said to me, if you go to Next Step, there's a bloke there who will be willing to help you. That's what they're all about. So she rang him for me and that was it, made an appointment and then I went down there.'

(Claimant interview)

Evidence was mixed however, about whether claimants had been given a comprehensive explanation of the full Next Step service by their Jobcentre Plus adviser and this seemed to very much depend on the individual adviser concerned. Some claimants who had been referred by Jobcentre Plus to Next Step for CV support were often unaware of what other services they could provide as this was the only support they had been offered by Next Step. However, some claimants reported a referral to Next Step was a chance to be seen by a specialist who would be more able to help with their questions about careers and training and many of these claimants said their Jobcentre Plus adviser had told them Next Step could answer these questions.

'I'm looking to go into teaching at the moment, so I was passed onto Next Step because the Jobcentre just doesn't know.'

(Claimant interview)

5.3 Experience of skills assessment and referrals at Next Step

A key element of the Next Step service under IES trials was to carry out skills assessments and many claimants reported that Next Step advisers had been very thorough in identifying their skills and checking for skills gaps. Most interviewees recalled having an in-depth discussion about their skills with the Next Step adviser, although only a few recalled the use of a diagnostic tool.

Claimants thought the benefits of attending the Next Step interview included being able to identify transferable skills which they might not have previously considered:

'Yes, it was really eye-opening actually, just what skills I had picked up. And you don't really think of them as skills, obviously, like the main ones that every job asks for like timekeeping and stuff like that. But, active listening and problem solving and things like that.'

(Claimant interview)

'He helped me get a CV going, so he made me realise what I can do – like communications, can communicate, and good on the telephone, and all these sort of things. He was able to help me list all these positive things because I said that I can't do this and he was able to bring out that. And I did create a CV from that.'

(Claimant interview)

However, some claimants reported the limitations of the Next Step interview when they had been referred solely for help with their CV:

'They didn't go beyond that. They were sort of just more focused on how it was laid out in the best way for an employer to look at it.'

(Claimant interview)

Onward referrals were common from Next Step. Claimants reported they had been referred to providers for:

- sector-based training or licences linked to specific types of work, such as Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards;
- support that would lead to further progression, such as Access to Higher Education courses;
- vocational course, for example, a Prince 2 project management course; and courses offering general employability support such as making online job applications and improving interview techniques.

Skills Action Plans were not something claimants consistently recalled; nevertheless, those who did remember developing an action plan with the Next Step adviser were very pleased with the document and the extra push and focus it gave them in looking for work.

'At least if you have a plan of action you think, right, well, today I'll go and hand CVs around... the town centre or wherever. I do think it actually makes a difference.'

(Claimant interview)

5.3.1 Referrals to provision

Next Step advisers reported that they encouraged claimants to undertake independent research and source provision themselves, or signposted them to it, reflecting the less-directive ethos of the organisation compared to Jobcentre Plus. They also reported they had access to a wide range of provision (see Section 4.3.1) and as well as signposting and referring to DWP- and Skills Funding Agency-funded provision, they also had links with local colleges and other training providers. Nevertheless, claimants had experienced some restrictions in the training they could access via Next Step; for example, one claimant wanted funding for driving instructor training but Next Step was unable to help with this. There were also a couple of examples of Next Step referring to inappropriate provision: one claimant reported they had been referred to Business Link for support setting up a business (support which Business Link did not provide) while another had been referred for an SIA licence but their English language skills were not good enough to pass the test. In most of these cases the claimants reported they were then referred again (often at the instigation of the inappropriate provider) to somewhere more appropriate, such as an ESOL course or to a provider offering self-employment support.

5.3.2 Reasons for non-attendance at the Next Step interview

None of the claimants who participated in this research had failed to attend their Next Step interview but they were asked for their opinions on why some people may not attend and how the offer of support from Next Step could be made more appealing. Most of the claimants thought there should be better information given out by Jobcentre Plus about what Next Step can offer, such as leaflets or marketing material which make the service sound interesting.

A few claimants thought the meeting with Next Step should be compulsory or at least arranged for immediately after the appointment with a Jobcentre Plus adviser. One also felt that if Next Step got a chance to sell their services directly to the claimant, more people would attend the appointments.

'I think if Next Step could actually turn round and say, we could offer you a little bit more than what the Jobcentre can, I think you'd get a lot more people actually turning up at these interviews.'

(Claimant interview)

As noted earlier, the claimants who participated in this research were keen on the idea of doing training (see Section 5.1.1) and were motivated to take additional support to help them back into work. Accordingly, they thought that those who failed to attend Next Step appointments may not be enthusiastic about doing training or as motivated to get back to work.

5.4 Views on co-location

Claimants who saw Next Step advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices reported mixed views on this arrangement and some felt that, although it was convenient, there was a lack of privacy if interviews were held in the open plan office. Many other claimants were ambivalent about the location of the interview as long as it was easy for them to get to.

Claimants who saw Next Step advisers away from Jobcentre Plus offices viewed this arrangement positively and many reported that the interview was often held near to the Jobcentre Plus office so they were not inconvenienced and were able to find it easily. These claimants thought the atmosphere away from Jobcentre Plus was less formal and more welcoming.

'I think I preferred having the interview where I had it rather than the Jobcentre. I do think... you felt more one-on-one. In the Jobcentre, you go and sit in a line of desks and feel pressured. Somebody's behind you waiting to sit on the seat. It was nice. It was more an informal chat than anything else. I was pleased with it.'

(Claimant interview)

A few claimants were confused about which organisation they had seen, or whether they had indeed seen a Next Step adviser and this seemed to be linked in some cases to co-location. This indicates that Next Step services can lack distinction when they are based within Jobcentre Plus offices, which can be compounded if the description of Next Step is vague or if claimants' understanding of the service is poor.

5.5 Views on provision

There was wide variation in the type of training to which claimants had been referred or had accessed due to different skill needs, differences in the stage of their JSA claim, or different local availability.

Provision linked to real job opportunities was particularly well received by claimants. A retail course in one district visited provided a good example of this sort of training and included general job-search skills, such as interview techniques, preparing for interviews and background research on

retail companies. A few claimants taking part in this research had followed this training and reported that the provider also had a virtual shop to practise specific vocational skills such as stock rotation and the use of tills, and a couple of these claimants had found work with a major retailer at the end of this training:

'They put me on a four-week retail routeway and it was basically going to work every day, nine until five, and just learning what it involved and basically picking up on what you could do better, and interview techniques, just setting you up with job interviews, shops and what have you, that's basically how I got into [major supermarket retailer].'

(Claimant interview)

Claimants also reported positively on other sector-specific courses; for example, health and social care. One person who was referred to health and social care provision stated it had given them 'a new lease of life' and another said:

'I enjoyed it; I wouldn't have changed anything...It's given me more confidence as well.'

(Claimant interview)

Several claimants reported the training they followed had topped-up and refreshed their IT skills, helped with job-search techniques and increased their confidence.

Many long-term unemployed claimants taking part in this research had been referred to job-search provision on several different occasions. For the most part they did not mind doing similar courses again as long as they learned new things. One claimant reported on what they gained from the most recent job-search skills course:

'They've gone through how to dress for an interview, how to prepare and what sort of questions you're probably going to get asked, planning the route there and what to do to prepare and how to talk to the interviewer and all that. So it seems pretty all right. I mean. Lots of it I knew already, but it's a few things I didn't know, so I'm not complaining.'

(Claimant interview)

Many claimants reported providers were able to spend more time with them than Jobcentre Plus advisers so they were better able to get to know them and hence to support them in a more personalised way.

'The Jobcentre, I don't think they knew anything about me, but [the provider] took the time to find out my strengths and my weaknesses and they worked on my weaknesses, which was my interview techniques. I was appalling at them, I was.'

(Claimant interview)

Having said this, a large number of claimants had to wait for six months before they could access provision, due to JSA regulations, and this led to some frustration as they would have liked to access training earlier. Several claimants reported that, had they received training sooner, they may have been able to find employment sooner.

'As I said, as soon as I'd been made redundant if they'd put me on a course, like for driving or a bit of computers, or I don't know any sort of skill that would be needed: an electrician or anything. At least I would have stood a chance earlier on. But when they leave it so late before they actually give you a chance to do anything, it's too late then.'

(Claimant interview)

In a few cases, claimants reported the courses that Jobcentre Plus had referred them to were not at the right level, being either too advanced or too basic, for claimants' abilities or their job goals. For example, one claimant had successfully completed an NVQ Level 1 course in Health and Social Care but on completion discovered that this level of qualification was not enough to get them into care work, which usually demanded a Level 2 qualification. Jobcentre Plus in their area were not able to refer to a Level 2 course (although in another area, Jobcentre Plus were able to fund this course).

5.6 Follow-up

There was very little evidence of follow-up with claimants from either Jobcentre Plus or Next Step. Claimants said they would have appreciated Jobcentre Plus advisers asking them how they had got on with Next Step, although few could recall this happening, and many pointed out this could help to increase attendance at Next Step appointments, as the advisers would have more 'good news stories' to tell other claimants. Some claimants expressed frustration at the lack of follow-up by Jobcentre Plus advisers in relation to the provision they had been referred to, particularly where that provision had not been suitable:

'You have to go back to the Jobcentre and tell them they sent you on the wrong course. When I went back and said to them nothing came out if and they said, okay, we'll let you know about other [options]...nothing happened.'

(Claimant interview)

There was also frustration at the lack of follow-up by Next Step advisers. Although claimants reported that Next Step advisers had made it clear that they could be re-contacted at any time, the onus was on the claimant to make the contact. Furthermore, claimants reported on a few occasions that Next Step had not contacted them when they had said they would, leading to disappointment for the claimants who were relying on Next Step to provide information about funding, other training options or with feedback on CVs.

'I was thinking of doing counselling, but it's £135. And I asked [the Next Step adviser], what do I do, because I can't, what about funding?...And I never heard back from her.'

(Claimant interview)

5.7 Overall satisfaction with support received

Some claimants taking part in this research reported a lack of consistency in the level of service they received from Jobcentre Plus staff, which included interactions with advisers and FJR staff.

'I used to ask them, but sometimes there are different people. Some people are very nice, and some they don't bother. So it depends on the people who are interviewing you.'

(Claimant interview)

However, most claimants were satisfied overall with the support they had received from Jobcentre Plus advisers.

Most claimants also reported they had gained something from their engagement with Next Step, namely information on employability and job-search skills, goal-setting, or advice about changing careers. Claimants inevitably compared the services they received from Next Step with those received from Jobcentre Plus: Next Step compared favourably, in particular for their in-depth knowledge about different occupations and the skills and qualifications associated with them.

Generally though, claimants were happy with the support they had received from Jobcentre Plus, Next Step and providers, although they did make suggestions about how the support they received could be improved. These included:

- more provision linked directly with employers and real jobs, and work experience placements with actual vacancies at the end;
- more information about funding for training;
- more help with job search, help with filling in application forms and feedback on their CV; and
- help to research different types of jobs.

A few claimants were frustrated that they were not getting more support from Jobcentre Plus or Next Step, and felt the support they wanted was not outside of the remit of Jobcentre Plus and Next Step.

‘Somebody who will sit down and help you fill in the application forms, send off the CVs, show me how to email [employers] and stuff like that; it would be more helpful if they were doing that for me, helping me, recommending me for a course to improve my writing and spelling and things like that.’

(Claimant interview)

‘I just need someone probably to sit down with me and just say with your skills or with your educational background, these are the fields that you can actually look into...I completely understand that they’re not going to do everything for me. I want to do some independent work of my own, but it’s just when you don’t actually know where you’re supposed to be looking, it’s very daunting. It can be quite scary.’

(Claimant interview)

5.8 Claimant outcomes

Despite the fact that most claimants were satisfied with the support they had received from Jobcentre Plus and Next Step, many claimants felt neither organisation had moved them closer to employment. In most cases, this was because they had not been successful in helping claimants to start work. However, there were claimants who, although they had not started work or gone on training provision, felt they had moved closer to the labour market, some because they had a new CV or because their confidence had increased. Some claimants reported their Next Step interview had remotivated them and helped them to broaden their job search and think about other jobs they could do. One claimant reported Next Step had helped them become more independent by teaching them research methods, giving information about how the adult education system worked and signposting to other sources of information.

‘...now that I know what sort of things I’m good at, I suppose I can pick a job that suits me better than maybe another job would, which would enable me in the long haul to keep that job and enjoy it for a longer period than maybe a job where I wasn’t so well suited due to either my own personal outlook or a personality clash.’

(Claimant interview)

‘I remember going out of the interview and being really positive about things; and before that I was like I didn’t really know what was available to me.’

(Claimant interview)

6 Progress in integrating employment and skills: an overview

This chapter draws on the findings from earlier rounds of the qualitative evaluation of the IES trials and the 2009 evaluation report on early implementation²⁶, to outline the progress made in integrating employment and skills. The chapter explores the learning from the whole evaluation around three important themes:

- working together and joint working between Jobcentre Plus and Next Step²⁷;
- culture change and organisational understanding; and
- the embedding of processes and practices to support the integrated delivery of employment and skills services.

The chapter concludes by looking at the key findings in EJW areas from a Jobcentre Plus perspective.

6.1 Progress made during the IES trials

6.1.1 Implementation and set-up

The first districts to adopt the IES trials in September 2008 had only a short time to set up training for staff and put operational procedures in place. Districts that joined the trials later, in February and March 2009, had more time to prepare and were able to learn some lessons from the early-adopting districts. In all the IES trial districts, training prior to the launch of IES focused generally on operational processes at the expense of a broader and deeper understanding of the aims of IES. Consequently, Jobcentre Plus advisory staff felt they lacked sufficient knowledge about what nextstep did under IES in relation to the Skills Health Check interview, and reported that this impaired their ability to make suitable referrals and promote the service effectively to claimants. In some districts joining the trials later, joint-learning activity between Jobcentre Plus and nextstep advisers did take place, but again this fell short of fully-integrated and shared training, and instead involved operationally-focused meetings between groups of Jobcentre Plus and nextstep advisers, or nextstep advisers attending Jobcentre Plus communication meetings.

²⁶ As noted in Section 1.2, there have been five rounds of research for this evaluation. The first three rounds were conducted as a rolling programme of fieldwork visits to 10 of the 12 IES trial districts between December 2008 and July 2009, and fed into an implementation report which was published in December 2009. A fourth round of research was conducted between December 2009 and February 2010 and included fieldwork in five districts where EJW had been adopted, in addition to re-visiting five IES trials districts from the third round of the research. The most recent, fifth round of research was conducted between September and November 2010 and comprised visits to a smaller sub-section of those visited in round four (three IES trials districts and two EJW districts).

²⁷ Prior to August 2010 Next Step was branded nextstep.

Jobcentre Plus advisers taking part in the research reported they had followed the standard adviser ‘learning routeway’²⁸ training – which covers questioning techniques such as asking open questions to identify claimants’ barriers to work, including skills-related barriers – and that they had shadowed other colleagues (on-the-job training) but they did not report receiving any additional or specific training on skills-screening methods as part of the introduction of IES as such. Jobcentre Plus advisers were generally happy with the ‘learning routeway’ training, and most thought that it enabled them to engage with claimants and find out about any skills needs.

‘I think, in terms of questioning and getting the customer to identify what issues they have...I don’t think there’s probably anything additional that’s needed.’

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

A couple of advisers mentioned they had undertaken enhanced or advanced advisory skills training which provided (among other things) more in-depth training on how to get claimants to reflect on their own skills, expertise and experience, and how to build these skills into their job-search activities and Jobseeker’s Agreement, and encouraging claimants to use these skills also to market themselves to potential employers. Jobcentre Plus advisers who had received this training said they had found it very worthwhile; although again, the training was not specific to the IES trials or to skills screening as such.

6.1.2 Screening and referral

Earlier stages of the evaluation, which took place in IES trials districts only, found that the skills screening Jobcentre Plus advisers carried out with claimants during the initial stages of their claim was adequate to identify those who would benefit from a referral to nextstep. The appropriateness of the referrals to nextstep for a Skills Health Check interview was perceived by local and district-level Jobcentre Plus and nextstep staff to have increased during the first three rounds of research and more recently, and as reported in Section 2.2, in areas where the two organisations were co-located. However, the understanding of the Skills Health Check process did not generally increase over the early part of the evaluation, as Jobcentre Plus advisers reported they were unlikely to have seen the Skills Diagnostic Tool being used or seen an output.

The fourth round of research found many Jobcentre Plus advisers in IES trials districts did not know what took place at a nextstep interview. Jobcentre Plus advisers frequently expressed disappointment at the lack of feedback they received about claimants who had been referred to nextstep; that is, what happened to them next. The lack of understanding by Jobcentre Plus advisers contributed to a lack of understanding of nextstep services among claimants, as advisers reported they were often unable to tell claimants about the content of the nextstep interview.

The FTA rate for nextstep appointments was also reported by nextstep staff to be relatively high in IES trials districts during the penultimate round of research although it had stabilised by the final round of research. The FTA rate was reported by district nextstep staff to have had a negative impact on nextstep’s capacity to deliver the service, because it was not time-efficient for their advisers.

Early on in the IES trials areas, the referrals process was seen to be burdensome by Jobcentre Plus advisers, with duplicated referral information and lack of electronic administration adding time to interviews and detracting from time available for discussions with claimants. As the trials progressed, the paperwork was slimmed-down with the removal of two of the three forms Jobcentre Plus advisers formerly had to complete to make a referral and in the final round

²⁸ This was replaced by the Personal Adviser Learning Centre in April 2010.

of research they reported that the referral process was now relatively straightforward. The exception to this had been the issues around the new national telephone booking number detailed in Section 2.2.

6.1.3 Skills Health Check interviews at nextstep

In the IES trials districts visited in the first four rounds of fieldwork, the Skills Health Check interviews delivered by nextstep could incorporate the use of the Skills Diagnostic Tool. How often the tool was used varied between nextstep advisers: some advisers interviewed in earlier rounds reported they used it with all claimants referred under the IES trials, others used it more selectively, and some used it relatively infrequently. The nextstep advisers reported a number of criticisms of the tool which made them less likely to use it, including:

- problems with some of the language which they felt could be difficult for claimants to follow;
- the time taken to complete the tool in the interview; and
- they felt the output could be cumbersome and required quite a lot of interpretation by the claimant.

In the most recent round of fieldwork Next Step advisers reported using the diagnostic tool relatively infrequently, and they continued to express concerns over the time taken to use it and to interpret the output (see Section 3.3).

In IES trials districts, the earlier research identified a lack of integration at the later stages of the process between nextstep and Jobcentre Plus. The nextstep advisers in these areas did complete Skills Action Plans but these were generally not followed up or used by Jobcentre Plus. As reported in Section 3.5.2, the latest round of research suggested that follow-up remains an issue, with Skills Action Plans often not being consulted or used consistently by Jobcentre Plus advisers.

In the earlier rounds of research in IES trials districts, Jobcentre Plus staff reported the quality of Skills Action Plans had improved incrementally over time. This was supported by the findings of the latest round of the research (Section 3.4) in which Jobcentre Plus managers and advisers reported the quality of Skills Action Plans, in terms of their level of detail and usefulness, had improved as concerns were fed back to Next Step.

6.1.4 Onward referrals and follow-up

During earlier rounds of the research, nextstep advisers reported there was an adequate range of provision available to them to make referrals, although they identified some gaps, particularly for popular programmes leading to licences to practise in the security and construction sectors. Some Jobcentre Plus staff felt there was insufficient provision available for claimants who were more highly skilled and/or required re-training for a new career and a similar picture was reported in the latest round of research.

In earlier stages of evaluation there was little evidence of consistent, ongoing monitoring of claimants once they had been referred to training by nextstep or Jobcentre Plus. The latest research found claimants quite widely reported they had not received any follow-up from either Jobcentre Plus or Next Step advisers to discuss what progress they had made and any issues they had experienced as a result of a referral.

6.2 Working together

6.2.1 Co-location

Co-location refers to Next Step advisers working from Jobcentre Plus offices, which pre-dated the IES trials in some districts. Over the course of the qualitative evaluation of IES, the research found two models of co-location in operation:

- **The same Next Step adviser attending the same Jobcentre Plus office.** This was the model operating in the Jobcentre Plus districts visited in the final round of research in Autumn 2010. In each locality, the same Next Step advisers were assigned to the same Jobcentre Plus office for varying amounts of time depending on demand in that office and available funding. Next Step advisers tended to be present around two to three days a week. In some large Jobcentre Plus offices where demand was higher, Next Step advisers were co-located five days a week.
- **Different nextstep advisers attending different Jobcentre Plus offices (peripatetic co-location).** In the earlier rounds of the evaluation, co-location was being operated on a peripatetic basis in some areas with different nextstep advisers rotating between Jobcentre Plus offices. This meant that some Jobcentre Plus offices had different nextstep advisers from week to week.

Advisers and managers from Next Step and Jobcentre Plus highlighted both the importance and the increasing difficulty of facilitating co-location. Staff from both organisations reported that it was a key feature of successful implementation of the IES trials.

Where co-location was not possible or had been reduced, Next Step held the Skills Health Check interviews in their own offices or, if these were too far away from the Jobcentre Plus office, in an alternative venue closer to it, often a library or other community building. Next Step staff felt there was a detrimental impact on communication between Jobcentre Plus and Next Step where this had happened, which had a negative impact on the number of referrals.

Managers and advisers in both Jobcentre Plus and Next Step generally felt that co-location builds mutual understanding between Jobcentre Plus and Next Step, facilitates effective long-term relationships between advisers in the two organisations and allows better communication about referrals. For example, Next Step advisers reported that they were more comfortable about raising issues with either the appropriateness or the number of referrals directly with Jobcentre Plus staff if they were co-located in the same office on a regular basis. The other main benefit of co-location identified by staff in both organisations was that it maintains the profile of Next Step among Jobcentre Plus advisers. Managers and advisers in both organisations felt this supported referral rates and contributed to Jobcentre Plus advisers' understanding of the role of skills and careers advice in helping support claimants back into work.

'For me, it was just always important that we were together...It appears to me that if you're working away from each other, it loses [impact], and over time, that's when your referrals dip up and down and we have changed the staff and then they don't know who the Next Step adviser is because...they [now] work elsewhere, so those new people, they might not refer as well as those where you have built up those relationships.'

(Jobcentre Plus district-level IES lead)

Advisers and managers in both organisations reported that peripatetic co-location was not as effective as the model deploying Next Step staff who were dedicated to a particular office, in terms of facilitating the development of good working relationships or improved adviser understanding.

In the current round of research co-location was considered to be beneficial more by staff than by claimants, whose views on it (reported in Section 5.4) were mixed. Some claimants preferred to attend their Next Step interview in the Jobcentre Plus office, because they saw it as familiar or convenient. However, other claimants were ambivalent about the location, as long as it was easy to get to, while some preferred to have their Next Step interview elsewhere, because they felt more relaxed away from the Jobcentre Plus office.

Barriers to effective co-location

Managers and advisers in both organisations reported the main barriers to effective co-location were practical barriers, particularly around space and IT access.

‘There’s a big push on us co-locating and working in partnership, but when their infrastructure doesn’t support it, it makes it incredibly hard.’

(Next Step district IES lead)

Where co-location did not take place or had been reduced, managers in both organisations reported this was mainly because of pressures on desk space in Jobcentre Plus offices. Jobcentre Plus and Next Step managers attributed this to increasing numbers of claimants and hence the recruitment of additional Jobcentre Plus advisers, as a result of the recession. This was seen to worsen during the course of the evaluation. The other main issue was limited access to computers and the internet for Next Step advisers while in the Jobcentre Plus office, which inhibited how efficiently they could work as well as the type of signposting they could do with claimants (for example, they might be unable to show the claimant provider websites). Next Step advisers reported that access to IT within Jobcentre Plus offices improved over the course of the evaluation.

A few managers in both organisations also reported that occasionally Next Step staffing patterns could be mismatched to the level of referrals. At the start of the IES trials it could take several weeks for Jobcentre Plus and nextstep managers to identify the optimum nextstep staffing levels in each location due to fluctuation in referrals and the number of FTA. Subsequently, sudden peaks or troughs in the number of referrals by Jobcentre Plus advisers could lead to a temporary mismatch in nextstep staffing, although this could usually be adjusted if the peak or trough turned out to be a more permanent trend, by transferring nextstep advisers from quiet offices to busier ones.

Making the most of co-location: good practice

Managers and advisers in both Jobcentre Plus and Next Step reported that co-location had the biggest impact on improving organisational understanding (and thereby the number and appropriateness of referrals) where the Next Step advisers were seen to be proactive and highly visible by Jobcentre Plus staff and where Jobcentre Plus staff were seen to be open and welcoming by Next Step staff. This was also observed by researchers during the evaluation.

Staff in both organisations reported that the benefits of co-location could be enhanced by relationship-building measures like attendance at team meetings; joint training, briefings and events; and Jobcentre Plus advisers shadowing Skills Health Check interviews with Next Step. Although some of these activities were done in some local offices, they were not done consistently among all staff or across all offices. Sometimes they had only been done because of the proactiveness of an individual Jobcentre Plus or Next Step adviser.

Next Step advisers who had their own dedicated space or desk in the Jobcentre Plus office and access to a computer and the Internet, reported that it not only helped them to work more efficiently but they felt more welcome and Jobcentre Plus staff tended to view them as ‘part of the office’.

Managers and advisers in both organisations observed that co-location made it more straightforward for Jobcentre Plus advisers to book regular Jobcentre Plus advisory interviews and Next Step appointments for claimants on the same day, by having a shared local diary. Managers and advisers in both organisations felt this helped reduce FTA rates. There were practical limitations on this in some offices because Next Step advisers were only present on certain days of the week, which may not coincide with claimants' signing days. In some offices Next Step advisers took 'walkover' appointments if they had gaps caused by an FTA. Advisers in both organisations viewed this as beneficial for the claimant, as they could attend an appointment without having to wait.

A few Next Step and Jobcentre Plus advisers developed informal casework approaches where they discussed claimants' needs, referral options and follow-up together. Advisers in both organisations reported that this led to better information-sharing and so helped provide claimants with more joined-up employment and skills support.

6.2.2 Working relationships

District-level staff generally reported strong working relationships between the two organisations at that level. Most also said they held regular meetings between key Next Step and Jobcentre Plus staff with strategic roles for IES.

'It is about the working together and sharing information and determining what is the impact for both parties...So my thing all the way through was the joint meetings, they were key for me, and we would talk about things on both sides.'

(Jobcentre Plus district IES lead)

There were also many examples where advisers from both organisations reported excellent relationships at a local office level. These strong relationships at local office level were felt to be most effectively supported where there was co-location. However, these were said to be highly dependent on individuals and therefore vulnerable to personnel changes. In particular, Next Step advisers and Jobcentre Plus office staff often built up a good rapport, but if the Next Step adviser moved to another office, left the service or there was re-organisation due to a change in sub-contractor, these relationships had to be rebuilt.

6.2.3 Administration and paperwork

The research undertaken during the first year of the IES trials found the paperwork and administration associated with IES was difficult for advisers from both organisations. As the trials progressed, Next Step and Jobcentre Plus advisers reported that this administrative burden was eased. The main example cited was that the duplication of forms, in particular the use of different data sharing forms, appeared to have been eradicated, although the duplication of action plans was still causing some consternation (see Section 3.5.2).

Next Step advisers reported they had better access to computers in Jobcentre Plus offices than they had in the first year of the trials, allowing them to show claimants provision options on the internet and giving the potential for more of the required paperwork to be completed and shared electronically. However, Next Step advisers had limited or no access to email and shared drives in Jobcentre Plus offices. This lack of fully-shared Management Information (MI) systems meant that time was still being spent collecting information from claimants that had already been supplied.

Although managers and advisers from both organisations welcomed the improvements that had been made, most felt that more could be done to improve this aspect of joint working.

'We're operating a system but there can't be shared information and there's no synergy in that sharing information and somebody may well want to know, well, what's happened [to that claimant] and we haven't got the facility or route or process in order to share that, which is frustrating to say the least.'

(Jobcentre Plus district EJW lead)

6.3 Culture change

6.3.1 Jobcentre Plus advisers' understanding of the role of skills in getting people back to work

Previous rounds of the qualitative evaluation of IES found that there had been some progress towards changing cultures within the two organisations – for Jobcentre Plus to think about longer-term career outcomes and for Next Step to consider employment in the short term, but that there was still more that could be done. The same was true of the most recent round of research.

Almost all the Jobcentre Plus advisers interviewed spoke of the need to consider claimants' skills – alongside other factors such as local labour-market demand, childcare needs, health issues, etc. – when identifying realistic job goals. The fact that skills were usually discussed in relation to immediate job goals (as described in Section 2.1) indicates that, although skills were an important consideration, Jobcentre Plus advisers' focus largely remained on 'work first'. Some Jobcentre Plus advisers identified skills as important mainly when they formed a barrier to getting a job; for example, due to a lack of basic skills or a mismatch between the claimant's skills and the jobs available.

'I wouldn't say that all the time it is skills that's the problem, but I think the key skills for a lot of them is initially; the literacy and numeracy, and maybe in a lot of cases, probably tied in with that, IT skills, I guess...[and] particularly for people returning to the labour market.'

(Jobcentre Plus Stage 2 adviser)

Advisers particularly highlighted the importance of employability skills when dealing with people who had been out of the labour market for a long time, and of vocational skills when dealing with claimants who needed to develop new job goals after the recession had curtailed job opportunities in their previous type of work.

A few Jobcentre Plus advisers mentioned that taking account of skills, or addressing any skills issues, were important in helping claimants to attain a job goal that was sustainable, as well as realistic. This is more in line with thinking about longer-term career outcomes, but it was not a widely-articulated view among Jobcentre Plus advisers interviewed for this research.

6.3.2 Organisational understanding between Next Step and Jobcentre Plus

As discussed in Section 4.5, organisational understanding between Jobcentre Plus and Next Step had improved over the period covered by the IES trials. This was mainly a result of the improved communication and informal working relationships fostered by co-location and other elements of joint working, such as Next Step attendance at Jobcentre Plus team meetings.

However it was also the case that Jobcentre Plus advisers' understanding of Next Step continued to vary both across individual advisers and between local offices. In some offices, this lack of

understanding, coupled with a lack of management information on the impact of Next Step referrals on claimants, led to some Jobcentre Plus advisers questioning the added value of the service Next Step offered to claimants.

Next Step advisers continued to perceive Jobcentre Plus as having a strong focus on 'work first' and as being relatively target-driven compared with Next Step. This perception was not found to have changed substantially over the course of the evaluation.

6.4 Embedding the IES approach in Jobcentre Plus practice

The profile of, and priority afforded to, IES among advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices in IES trials districts appeared to diminish over the course of the evaluation, and this became more apparent in the most recent round of research. Some managers and advisers attributed this to the waning of the impetus provided by its launch, as the novelty declined and newer initiatives were introduced and some managers reported that this had led to a reduction in referral rates to Next Step. However, there was no evidence that the lower profile of IES detracted from the quality of the service claimants received, or that the processes were forgotten or ignored, albeit it for possibly fewer claimants. This was because, while it was felt that the profile had diminished, an understanding of the referral process to Next Step had become more embedded. Most Jobcentre Plus advisers reported that the IES approach was still present and often improving, for example, in the last round of research, many Jobcentre Plus advisers said that discussions about skills were becoming a more common feature of their interactions with claimants. Thus although the profile of the IES trials had waned over the course of the evaluation, their impact was perceived to be more longstanding. Some advisers and managers talked of it becoming another tool in the box.

'We do not think of IES as separate from any of the other offers. We just think that it is a tool to help people.'

(Jobcentre Plus Office Manager)

Jobcentre Plus advisers who worked with the IES trials since they began were very comfortable with how the approach operated, particularly in relation to skills screening and referring to Next Step, and who it benefited. Advisers recruited after the district roll-out found the IES approach and referrals to Next Step often became lost amid the other welfare-to-work options introduced subsequently.

6.5 Differences in EJW districts

As described in Section 1.2, there have been five rounds of research for this evaluation. The fourth round between December 2009 and February 2010 included fieldwork in five districts where EJW had been adopted, in addition to re-visiting five IES trials districts. The most recent, fifth, round of research²⁹ comprised visits to a smaller sub-section of those visited in round four (three IES trials districts and two EJW districts). Due to the local circumstances outlined in Section 1.2, limited differences between IES trials and EJW districts were observed in this fifth round³⁰. Therefore the evidence on EJW presented here draws on the findings from the fourth round of research and covers the key differences observed between IES trials districts and EJW districts.

²⁹ Conducted between September and November 2010.

³⁰ Moreover, the EJW districts participating in the fifth round of research were essentially taking the same approach as they had when visited previously.

EJW was introduced in non-trial districts from April 2009, following the launch of the IES trials. In the districts visited, awareness of EJW and the nextstep offer was limited among Jobcentre Plus staff, particularly where there was no co-location or limited opportunities for informal sharing of information about the respective services between nextstep and Jobcentre Plus staff. In most districts, Jobcentre Plus staff reported that they were briefed about EJW largely through email and information cascade on the intranet, rather than receiving face-to-face training specifically on EJW. The introduction of EJW coincided with changes to the Jobseekers Regime under JRFND, as well as the introduction of Support for the Newly Unemployed and the Six Month Offer, which was reported to have resulted in EJW receiving a relatively low priority as these other changes took precedence.

6.5.1 Skills screening in EJW areas

Skills screening at Jobcentre Plus was carried out in similar ways in the EJW districts as it was in IES trials districts although, in general, the round four research found that skills had a lower profile and were less likely to feature strongly during interviews with claimants in the EJW districts, compared with the IES trials districts. Advisers in EJW areas were not as likely to report that skills screening had become as embedded in their interviews as their counterparts in the IES trials areas at any point in the research.

6.5.2 Understanding EJW

Jobcentre Plus advisers in EJW districts tended to have relatively little understanding of the rationale behind EJW and the moves to more closely integrate employment and skills support. EJW was viewed by many Jobcentre Plus advisers very procedurally, which was linked to how EJW had been implemented in some districts: in essence the nextstep referral represented a gateway IAG interview to the work-focused provision offered under the Six Month Offer at Stage 3. As with Jobcentre Plus advisers in IES trials districts, those in EJW reported a limited understanding of the content of the nextstep interview which they said impeded their ability to sell it to claimants.

6.5.3 Referrals to nextstep

Jobcentre Plus advisers in EJW districts benefited from improved administration processes and felt that the referral process to nextstep was quite straightforward because it only involved completing one form and making an appointment.

The round four research found that nextstep interviews were quite different in the EJW districts to the IES trials districts. Apart from one EJW district, which closely matched the trials model, nextstep interviews were set up largely as part of a referral mechanism to support Jobcentre Plus claimants into provision at the Six Month Offer stage, rather than as a more general IAG intervention which may or may not result in a referral to skills provision, depending on the claimants' needs.

Integration at the later stages of the EJW process between nextstep and Jobcentre Plus was particularly problematic in EJW areas and although nextstep advisers in these areas did complete Skills Action Plans, Jobcentre Plus advisers rarely reported that they followed them up or used the plans.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter summarises the key findings of the research, drawing out ‘lessons learned’ from the IES trials overall, and the implications of these in terms of embedding the IES approach into Jobcentre Plus and Next Step practice.

7.1 Conclusions and ‘lessons learned’

A more integrated approach to delivering employment and skills services is becoming more embedded in adviser practice

The IES approach has become a more established way of working, giving access to Next Step services and work-related training for many Jobcentre Plus claimants. Jobcentre Plus advisers recognised the importance of addressing skills issues in order to help claimants back into sustainable work, although this was not uniform in all areas. However, the new ways of working operate against a difficult background: increased volumes of jobseekers and reduced space in Jobcentre Plus offices; large numbers of new Jobcentre Plus and Next Step advisers; and a multiplicity of skills provision with different eligibility rules, which complicates the landscape of options for Jobcentre Plus advisers making referrals. The profile of IES appears to have diminished over time though, as other initiatives and provision has come on board, and referrals to Next Step are perceived by some to have fallen.

Co-location is important in developing an integrated service

The co-location of Next Step advisers within Jobcentre Plus offices helps to improve communication and the mutual understanding between Jobcentre Plus and Next Step advisers:

- maintains the profile of the Next Step service; and
- provides a smoother transition from Jobcentre Plus to Next Step for the claimant.

Co-location tends to work best where Next Step advisers are assigned to the same Jobcentre Plus offices on a regular basis, and where they are highly visible and proactive in talking to Jobcentre Plus advisers. However, space in Jobcentre Plus offices became increasingly limited during the course of the IES trials, with consequences for the extent of co-location. Claimants held mixed views on the importance of co-location, and overall it appeared to be more important for those delivering the service than for those receiving it.

The process of making referrals to Next Step appears to be effective, but Jobcentre Plus advisers’ understanding of the Skills Health Check and how it can benefit claimants has not improved

Staff in both organisations reported that most referrals made by Jobcentre Plus advisers to Next Step were appropriate. Although there was still some evidence of referrals being made for CVs only, this aspect had improved considerably since the start of the trials. However, there is still an evident lack of understanding among Jobcentre Plus advisers about what happens next. Even among those making appropriate referrals, few Jobcentre Plus advisers had a good understanding of what takes place during the Skills Health Check. These factors may contribute to low attendance rates since claimants were not told what to expect or how they might benefit from the Next Step appointment.

Jobcentre Plus staff consider that the quality of Next Step Skills Action Plans has improved, but follow-up of Skills Action Plans is still not done consistently at Jobcentre Plus

The transition for claimants from Jobcentre Plus to Next Step is smooth, aided by co-location, and advisory staff are fairly clear about their roles at the early stage of the customer journey. The roles and responsibilities for supporting claimants' Skills Action Plans were still not clear, however. Action plans should form an important part of the claimant's onward journey, yet while they appear to be improving in terms of how Jobcentre Plus advisers perceive their quality, many action plans still do not reach or are not used by Jobcentre Plus advisory staff, particularly if they are generated at Stage 1: follow-up was not built into the process consistently. The lack of support for claimants putting their Next Step Skills Action Plans into operation once they returned to Jobcentre Plus continues to limit the outcomes of the IES approach.

Jobcentre Plus and Next Step advisers feel they have sufficient options for making referrals to skills provision, although it is important that the information on what is available is kept up to date

In general, advisers in both organisations felt there was a sufficient range of skills provision available to them, although some localised gaps were identified from time to time. Directories were viewed as a useful tool in helping advisers to identify appropriate provision, but it was important that these were kept up-to-date otherwise advisers would be deterred from using them. Providers also appear to spend a lot of time liaising directly with individual Jobcentre Plus advisers in order to deal with specific claimant's cases; but also, generally, to 'market' their provision to advisers in order to raise or uphold their profile so referral levels are maintained and to reiterate the importance that this information is cascaded to all advisers consistently.

Administration has improved but still presents a barrier

Although paperwork and administrative processes have improved in IES trials districts, data sharing and tracking remains problematic: advisory staff across all areas feel that this inhibits rather than supports the delivery of an integrated service. In particular, the lack of a shared MI system was identified as a barrier to more effective joint working by managers and advisers in both Jobcentre Plus and Next Step. Some providers also commented that it would be helpful if they could receive more background information on the claimants referred to them.

A fully integrated, seamless service is still an unrealised goal

There are many examples where Jobcentre Plus and Next Step staff work together well and where Next Step staff are very much part of the local Jobcentre Plus office. Overall, there has been progress towards shared systems and processes but the claimant journey is still fragmented. The lack of co-ordination following the Next Step interview, the poor flow of information about claimants, and lack of shared IT means a truly integrated service is yet to be achieved.

Attaining the right balance between integration and separation is difficult. For claimants, the fact the Next Step adviser is independent of Jobcentre Plus is important. At the same time, the transitions between the two organisations need to be smooth, seamless and without duplication – as if it were a single organisation providing the services. This has not yet been fully realised.

7.2 Recommendations

A number of recommendations arise from the qualitative evaluation of IES, based on the findings from all rounds of research:

- The difficulty in providing co-location and turnover of staff at Next Step and Jobcentre Plus has had a negative impact on understanding the IES approach; however, co-location is the ideal delivery setting if it is to become embedded within Jobcentre Plus and Next Step practice. While not affecting the claimant experience directly, co-location improves communications and the flow of information between Jobcentre Plus and Next Step advisers; and presents the face of a more seamless service to those who use it.
- There is a need to improve communication about, and understanding of, what takes place after a claimant has been referred to Next Step. The focus should be on the specific aspects of the process and rationale for the IES approach and include ongoing communications between Jobcentre Plus and Next Step about the purpose and format of the Skills Health Check, the content of the Skills Action Plans, and making sure Skills Action Plans are used to support claimants after the Next Step interview. Allowing Jobcentre Plus advisers to shadow Next Step interviews (with the claimant's permission) is a useful tool to build better adviser understanding about the Skills Health Check, as is the provision of success stories from Next Step to encourage referrals and promote understanding. Better feedback from Next Step to Jobcentre Plus should be both specific and general, including actions taken for people they refer and good news stories to show what can be achieved.
- A thorough review of all required paperwork and development of a simpler referral and booking system, combined with continuing moves towards computer-based systems and better data sharing, would help move towards a truly integrated system. In particular, there are various points at which action plans are drawn up and potentially duplicated, at Next Step, Jobcentre Plus, and (if the claimant has been referred) by training providers. In an integrated system the actions listed and done as part of these action plans should be taken into account by the different organisations involved. If MI systems allow, it would be more efficient and easier for the claimant to follow if there was just one action plan which could be updated by whichever organisation the claimant was dealing with at the time.
- Provision directories need to be kept up-to-date in order to make sure advisers are aware of what training and services are available in a more systematic way. The possibility of having specialised 'brokers' within Jobcentre Plus advisory teams who are experts on local skills provision and who can keep other advisers informed about what is available should also be considered.
- A comparison of outcome measures from the IES trials districts – including referral rates, attendance rates, referrals to training, claimant satisfaction and claimant outcomes – against those from EJW districts, would help to determine whether the significant investment in time and resources made in IES trials districts paid dividends in terms of claimant outcomes. Several managers in IES trials districts felt there should have been more quantitative analysis to assess the added value of the IES approach.

Appendix A

Components of the Integrated Employment and Skills trials

The IES trials contain six key components: co-location; skills screening; referral; Skills Health Check interviews; Skills Action Plans; work-focused skills provision. These components are described in more detail below.

Co-location

Co-location of nextstep³¹ advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices is an important feature of the IES approach. In the IES trials, the intention was to have co-location of nextstep advisers in all Jobcentre Plus offices where practicable. Co-location was intended to:

- raise the profile of skills within employment services;
- give claimants a more seamless customer journey; and
- improve communication between Jobcentre Plus and nextstep staff.

Co-location in the IES trials also enabled the government to test co-location of employment and careers advice services.

Enhanced skills screening

In all districts, Jobcentre Plus claimants see Jobcentre Plus advisers for work-focused interviews at several stages of Jobseekers Regime, including the New Jobseeker's Interview (NJI or Stage 1), at 13 weeks (Stage 2) and at 26 weeks (Stage 3). During these interviews the Jobcentre Plus adviser carries out skills screening to ascertain the claimant's existing skills – including basic skills, ESOL, employability skills and sector-specific skills – and how these relate to their job goals.

Skills screening is not new. Before the IES trials, Jobcentre Plus advisers were already carrying out skills screening in order to refer claimants to training provision, basic skills training, or for job-search help. However, in the IES trials, skills screening has been enhanced to improve identification of claimants' skills and to focus Jobcentre Plus advisers' and claimants' attention more on skills.

Skills screening is carried out using various techniques. At Stage 1 (the NJI), it is 'light touch' and consists of the Jobcentre Plus adviser discussing with, asking questions of, and observing the claimant. These techniques should enable the Jobcentre Plus adviser to screen the claimant's existing skills, including basic skills and identify (potential) needs or gaps. The results of skills screening are reviewed at Stage 2, and at Stage 3 a more in-depth skills screening takes place, which may also involve the use of formal tools such as the Fast-Track assessment tool for basic

³¹ In August 2010, the former nextstep service was restructured and re-launched as Next Step. The Careers Advice Service, which provided online and telephone careers advice to adults, and nextstep, who provided face-to-face advice and guidance came together under one brand. The new all-access adult careers service was rebranded as Next Step.

skills needs. The CAT, which records outcomes of work-focused interviews, would be expected to be used at Stage 2 and Stage 3 to help the adviser to monitor the claimant's progress and decide on appropriate actions.

Enhanced referrals processes

Skills screening is designed to reveal whether the claimant needs to improve their skills in order to enter sustainable work. When skills screening reveals a skills need, the Jobcentre Plus adviser will refer the claimant to nextstep for a Skills Health Check, or directly to other provision, such as a basic skills assessment centre, job-search workshop, or occupational skills training. Alternatively, where a skills need is not identified, the claimant may be 'signposted' – told about or given a leaflet – to the nextstep service for more general careers and skills advice.

Skills Health Check interviews

The Skills Health Check comprises an in-depth interview, or series of interviews, with a nextstep adviser to discuss the claimant's existing skills, the skills they need to acquire to move into and progress in sustainable work, and the types of education or training they could undertake.

The nextstep adviser may also employ the Skills Diagnostic Tool – a computer programme to identify and evaluate claimants' skills strengths and weaknesses – to help them make their assessment. A revised version of the Skills Diagnostic Tool was introduced in April 2009, with further releases available through Skills Accounts from October 2009. The Skills Diagnostic Tool is being evaluated separately.

The Skills Health Check is intended to help people whose skills needs are a barrier to entering sustainable employment, in particular:

- low-skilled claimants who are stuck in the 'revolving door' between benefits and short-term, low paid employment; and
- higher-skilled claimants who need more directional career advice and help in transferring to a new area of employment; for example, parents re-entering the labour market after a career break or experienced professionals leaving a declining industry.

Before the IES trials, Jobcentre Plus advisers could refer claimants to nextstep, but this was typically for help with their CV or where the claimant had specifically requested careers advice.

Skills Action Plans

At the Skills Health Check interview, the nextstep adviser will produce, in discussion and agreement with the claimant, a personalised Skills Action Plan. The Skills Action Plan identifies the individuals' skills needs and outlines their agreed actions and goals for the short, medium or longer term. The claimant is asked to give their consent to allow Jobcentre Plus advisers to see the Skills Action Plans, in order to allow Jobcentre Plus advisers to follow up the action plans in subsequent work-focused interviews.

Work-focused skills provision

The Skills Health Check interview may identify that the claimant needs to undertake further training or education to improve their skills in order to enter sustainable work. If so, under the IES trials the

nextstep adviser would identify suitable work-focused skills provision for the claimant and help them access the provision, in some cases by making a direct referral to a training provider. There is a wide variety of provision, including basic skills, short-term occupational skills courses and longer-term college courses or apprenticeships.

The 2006 Leitch Review of Skills recommended the creation of a new integrated employment and skills service. Since then, the welfare system has undergone reform to help meet this objective, of which the Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) trials, introduced in 2008 and ending in August 2010, have been a key element. In the later stages of these trials, a new system of Enhanced Joint Working (EJW) was introduced in non-trial areas. Like the IES trials, EJW was intended to identify claimants' skills needs through enhanced screening processes and where appropriate direct them towards support from Next Step.

The Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies to evaluate the IES trials. Between September and November 2010, visits were made to three IES trials districts and two EJW districts. Qualitative interviews were conducted with a range of respondents including Jobcentre Plus and Next Step district-level managers responsible for the implementation of the IES trials or EJW, Advisory Services Managers, Jobcentre Plus and Next Step advisers, Jobcentre Plus claimants who had been referred to Next Step and skills providers working with Jobcentre Plus or Next Step. This report builds on previous qualitative evaluation work and has a particular focus on whether, and how, claimants get access to appropriate work-related skills training via a Jobcentre Plus or Next Step referral.

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