Department for Work & Pensions

Government Social Research

Co-location Research – Qualitative Study

October 2024

Executive summary

Background and approach

In spring/summer 2023, DWP carried out exploratory research on six co-located jobcentres across England and Wales. Co-located jobcentres share a permanent lease agreement with other external organisation(s).

The research aimed to understand what co-located models look like, including which organisations are co-located; to understand the experiences, benefits, and challenges of using sites; and to capture a variety of experiences across specific geographical contexts and models.

This report aims to outline the common and local findings of the sites visited and provide key insights to improve the strategic evidence base for future delivery. While the research aimed to include a range of co-location models and experience, findings cannot be generalised to all co-located sites as all sites shared a similar model of co-location.

Headline findings

Operational environment

Buildings were generally considered accessible spaces that could meet user needs; however, lack of control over décor, signage and space, increased burdens for staff providing information. Concerns were raised around lack of privacy including in shared staff areas which were considered limited or unsuitable, with implications for service delivery. DWP staff felt that the space they occupied within sites was ineffective; lack of space impacted the feasibility of increasing staff capacity and resource.

Communication, integration and engagement

Customers using the sites had positive experiences of staff. Signposting often took the form of physical handovers, which was perceived as effective customer service. Proximity and willingness of staff to interact with other services was regarded as contributing to effective integration and staff communication. Successful integration was sometimes attributed to individual rather than collective strategies; personality type, management style and job roles could shape experiences, with key individuals sometimes acting as conduits between and across services. DWP staff felt communication and engagement with other DWP staff was also positive, despite there being different service staff on site. Security officers' ability to provide adequate support to staff and customers influenced working relationships from participants' perspectives and shaped how comfortable site users said they felt.

External factors impacting service integration

Staff had a better understanding of services within the building and local area than customers, but encountered issues when they were not aware of up-to-date contact information. Signposting to external support was less effective when travel was required by customers. Police presence as a co-located organisation on site caused frustration and confusion for some, particularly when they were not accessible because they did not offer face-to-face services. The best service integration came when co-located or closely located services were supporting the same customer types. COVID-19 and increased digitalisation had an impact on face-to-face services offered, with more hybrid working, which reduced opportunities for service integration in some sites but allowed additional organisations on sites in other cases. Access to high quality and consistent wireless connectivity was a priority and, in some sites, poor quality connections impacted service delivery. On-site access to computers for customers has become an increasing priority, as well as the necessity to support customers to move to digital services. More commonly, access to technology was provided by co-located organisations instead of DWP.

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Acknowledgements

Author Details

This report was written by Poppy Heppell, Sophie Talbot, Ellie May and Callum Sean Lynch, research officers from DWP.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Co-delivery	Staff from different organisations within a co-located site working together to provide an integrated approach to service delivery.
Co-location	In this research context, co-location refers to any jobcentre site which shares a permanent lease agreement with another organisation(s), where parties are actively operational on site.
Communication, integration and engagement	One of the key findings identified in this research. Refers to communication, joint working and service delivery within or between staff and/or customers using sites.
Deductive approach	An approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which research is influenced by existing theory. For this research, the analysis coding framework was initially produced deductively before being iterated using an inductive approach.
Ethnography	A qualitative method for collecting data often used in the social and behavioural sciences. Ethnographic studies aim for rich insights by visiting the sites and observing real-time action and activity.
External factors impacting service integration	One of the key findings identified in this research. Factors that may impact service integration but are outside DWP and/or other organisations' remit to control or influence.
Inductive approach	The opposite of a deductive approach; here theory is generated out of the research. For this research, the analysis coding framework was reiterated using insights from the data and researchers.
Operational environment	One of the key findings identified in this research. Refers to space, environment and preparation to co-locate services.
Opportunity and contextual sampling	A sampling technique whereby participants are chosen based on who is present and available to be interviewed from the target group at that given moment in time. Contextual sampling refers to

	opportunity sampling within the natural context of the fieldwork, in this case, within co-located sites.
Organisation	Organisation in this report refers to the co-located organisations, or businesses, situated within the site.
Pilot	Piloting a research design involves testing the design at a small scale to help identify and mitigate any issues prior to the commencement of additional fieldwork.
Services	Services refers to the different provisions offered to customers within organisations, e.g. DWP can support with job search, benefit advice, disability support, etc.
Signposting	Any communication between staff and customers that involved informing customers about, or directing them to, internal or external services within and around sites.
Social interactions	Relates to one of three key research findings. Refers to any interaction had between staff and/or customers.
Spradley's nine dimensions	An approach to observing and note taking which includes detailing observations under the following nine dimensions: space, actors, activities, objects, acts, events, time, goals and feelings.
Thematic analysis	A form of analysis in which key themes are drawn from qualitative data.
Warm handover	Relates to two of three key research findings. Refers to staff physically taking customers to engage with other services on site rather than telling customers to go to these other services.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
BSA	Business Strategy Analysis
CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
CASS	Central Analysis and Science Strategy Unit
DEA	Disability Employment Advisor
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESA	Employment Support Allowance
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
NHS	National Health Service
UC	Universal Credit

Summary

Introduction

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is the government's largest public service department with an extensive portfolio of jobcentres providing frontline services to over 5 million people (Cabinet Office, 2023). As of 2022, there are over 800 venues with running costs of the estate totalling £462 million (Cabinet Office, 2023).

DWP receives ongoing requests to pursue new co-locations, and currently has over 70 jobcentres that were set up as co-locations. Additionally, there is a national push towards co-locating services through the "One Public Estate" initiative, led by Cabinet Office and Local Government Association (Local Government Association, 2023).

Whilst there is evidence focusing on the impact of co-location on staff performance (see Kharicha and others, 2005; Johnson and others, 2011; Bennet and others, 2018) and some evidence on the benefits and challenges of co-locating services (see Bowes and others, 2012), there has been limited evaluation to date to understand whether these co-locations deliver a more effective service and value for the taxpayer. In addition, there are evidence gaps around variation of co-located models across geographies and socio-economic environments.

Research aims

The co-location research provided an opportunity to obtain evidence from co-located jobcentre sites across England and Wales.

The research aimed to understand:

- what co-located models look like, including with whom they are co-located.

- the experiences, benefits and challenges of using co-located sites for DWP staff and customers, and for co-located organisation staff and customers.

- variation across specific geographical contexts or co-located models.

Methods

Six co-located jobcentre sites were visited in England and Wales across different geographical and socio-economic areas. These were purposively selected, ensuring variation across the following indicators: Universal Credit caseload, performance measures (including payment timeliness and percentage into work), percentage of face-to-face appointments, geographical classification, and socio-economic cluster information. Geographical classification varied from largely rural to urban with major conurbation, and cluster information also varied, including levelling up towns, representative agents, affluent commuter belts and small cities and large towns.

Staff were recruited by email through colleague contacts with opportunity and contextual sampling used during the fieldwork period. All customers were recruited through opportunity and contextual sampling. Fieldwork ran from June 2023 to July 2023. In total, there were 80 participants in this research, with 40 staff interviewed and 40 customers interviewed.

This research employed an ethnographically orientated approach to capture participants' experiences of co-location. Data collection involved observations including informal conversations as well as semi-structured interviews.

Analysis was informed by thematic analysis and Spradley's nine dimensions (Spradley, 1980) to establish recurring ideas and patterns seen within ethnography, acting as significant themes to represent findings.

This research is designed to give rich insight and context to how co-location works in practice, including staff and customer experiences. While the research aimed to include a range of co-location models and experience, findings cannot be generalised to all co-located sites as all sites shared a similar model of co-location, with local authorities or councils being the building owners or primary leaseholders.

Headline findings

The elements of findings relating to key themes which respond to the research questions, are outlined below:

Operational environment

- Staff and customers felt co-located sites were accessible spaces, but this could sometimes be limited.

- Lack of control over décor meant that DWP staff were unable to display customer information or signage to services in some buildings.

- Concerns were raised around lack of privacy due to the layout of the occupied space in sites.

- DWP staff across the board felt the space they occupied was not conducive to effective working and there were implications for the feasibility of expanding jobcentre staff in the future.

- Staff areas including canteens, staff rooms and wellbeing and first aid spaces were considered limited or unsuitable across all sites.

Communication, integration and engagement

- Customers had positive experiences of staff within co-located sites.

- Signposting between co-located services often took the form of 'taking,' namely conducting warm handovers – which was perceived as more effective customer service for staff and customers – rather than 'telling'.

- Proximity to other services was also seen as contributing to effective service integration and staff communication.

- The willingness of staff to interact and engage with other services could impact the effectiveness of service integration.

- Where staff discussed instances of successful service integration, some attributed personality type, management styles and/or job roles as contributing to this.

- Communication and engagement between DWP staff were discussed positively and they felt there were limited impacts on these relationships despite having staff from multiple services on site.

- Security officers' ability to provide adequate support impacted working relationships between staff across services.

External factors impacting service integration

- Staff had a better understanding of the number and perceived efficiency and/or effectiveness of support services within the building and local area compared with customers, but encountered issues when not aware of up-to-date contact information.

- Signposting to external support was less effective when customers were required to travel to access it.

- Police presence (as a co-located organisation) caused frustration for some staff and customers, particularly when they were not accessible because they only operated on a back-office basis, which in turn caused some confusion when customers expected to be able to speak to them.

- The best service integration came when co-located or closely located services were supporting the same customer types.

- The COVID-19 pandemic and increased digitalisation more generally had an impact on face-to-face services offered, with more hybrid working, which reduced opportunity for service integration in some sites.

- Access to high quality and consistent wireless connectivity was a priority, and in some sites, poor quality connections impacted customer service.

- Access to computers for customers has become an increasing priority, as has the necessity to support customers to move to digital services. More commonly, access to technology was provided by co-located organisations instead of DWP.

Conclusions

On the whole, most co-located staff felt positive about the principles of co-location and its potential to support customers. Where issues were raised by staff and customers, these tended to arise due to a lack of communication within sites and between co-located services, but staff and customers felt that improved and

increased communication could help overcome current issues and provide additional benefits.

There was a perception from many DWP staff in this research that co-location had not been given thorough thought when being planned, and additional benefits could be had from more thorough planning prior to co-locating. Co-location is therefore not a simple solution; it requires detailed premises, services and infrastructural planning to ensure that the differing current and future needs of participating organisations are reflected. If co-located organisations are able to work together effectively, additional benefits may be accrued for customers. Finally, it was important to understand staff perspectives on co-location and integrate these into planning to improve morale and therefore the service provided to DWP customers.

Main report

Introduction

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is the government's largest public service department with an extensive portfolio of jobcentres providing front line services to over 5 million people (Cabinet Office, 2023). As of 2022, there are over 800 venues, with running costs of the estate totalling £462 million (Cabinet Office, 2023).

Co-location is often viewed in the literature as a means to create collaboration between organisations: *"Co-ordination and collaboration do not happen on their own, that co-location is not just bricks and mortar. It is about strategies to bring people together in a meaningful way"* (Lawn and others, 2014). This is further exemplified by Memon and Kinder (2016), who conceptualise co-location not as space, but rather as the creation of a new place characterised by new forms of interaction.

DWP receives ongoing requests to pursue new co-locations, and currently has over 70 jobcentres that were set up as co-locations. Additionally, there is a national push towards co-locating services through the 'One Public Estate' initiative, led by Cabinet Office and Local Government Association (Local Government Association, 2023).

Whilst there is evidence focusing on the impact of co-location on staff performance (see Kharicha and others, 2005; Johnson and others, 2011; Bennet and others, 2018) and some evidence on the benefits and challenges of co-locating services (see Bowes and others, 2012), there has been limited evaluation to date to understand whether these co-locations deliver a more effective service and value for the taxpayer. In addition, there are evidence gaps around variation of co-located models across geographies and socio-economic environments.

In spring/summer 2023, the DWP carried out exploratory research on co-located jobcentre sites across England and Wales.

This report aims to outline the common and local findings of the six co-located sites visited during the research and provide key insights to improve the strategic evidence base for future delivery.

Research aims

This co-location research provided an opportunity to obtain evidence from co-located jobcentre sites across England and Wales.

The research aimed to understand:

- what co-located models look like, including with whom they are co-located
- the experiences, benefits, and challenges of using co-located sites for DWP staff and customers, and co-located organisation staff and customers

- variation across specific geographical contexts or co-located models.

Methods

The research was undertaken in six co-located sites in England and Wales during June and July 2023.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited in two different ways:

- Staff were recruited via regional managers, informing the site of our intention to conduct research and requesting contact information for site-level contacts. These contacts were then emailed with an information sheet detailing the research, and a request for contact information of partner organisations co-located at the jobcentre site. This was followed up via email to agree dates to visit the site and to request the pre-scheduling of interviews with staff during the visit. Outlook calendar invitations were sent to individual members of staff. Some staff were opportunity and contextually sampled during site visits.

- Customers were recruited by opportunity and contextual sampling during site visits. They were provided with an information sheet and verbal consent was obtained for participation in research interviews.

In total, there were 80 participants in this research, with 40 staff interviews and 40 customer interviews. In this report customers will refer to both users of DWP services as well as users of other co-located organisations.

Sampling

As participants were sampled at a small scale, it was not possible to consider all relevant characteristics when sampling. Researchers considered age, gender, benefit status and use of services on site when recruiting customers, and staff organisation and job role when recruiting staff. The sample did not aim to be representative of the customer or staff population across these characteristics but did aim to ensure some representation across these variables. To do this, participant numbers were monitored during recruitment, being aware of underrepresented characteristics when approaching people to seek participation. The ethnographic approach meant that observations helped obtain a snapshot of common activity over the course of the working day in 'real time.' This enabled richer insights to be captured and issues to be discussed in the moment.

Of the 40 customers interviewed, 19 were male, 20 were female and 1 preferred not to say. Customers were all aged 18 or over, with representation across groups between 18–25 and Over 65 (for further breakdown, see Table 2 in the annexe). Customers participating were on various benefits including Universal Credit (UC), Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP). There were between 12 and 15 customer participants interviewed per site. Of the 40 staff interviewed, 33 were DWP staff, with

21 being work coaches or work coach team leaders. There were 7 interviews with staff at co-located organisations. Further details have been restricted to reduce the likelihood of disclosure.

Six co-located jobcentre sites were visited across different geographical and socio-economic areas. These were purposively selected, ensuring variation across the following indicators: Universal Credit caseload, performance measures (including payment timeliness and percentage into work), percentage of face-to-face appointments, geographical classification and socio-economic cluster information. Geographical classification varied from largely rural to urban with major conurbation, and cluster information varied, including levelling up towns, representative agents, affluent commuter belts, and small cities and large towns.

Methodological considerations and limitations

This research was designed to give rich, contextual insight into how co-location works in practice, including staff and customer experiences. While the research aimed to include a range of co-location models and experience, findings cannot be generalised to all co-located sites as all sites shared a similar model of co-location, with local authorities or councils being the building owners or primary leaseholders.

There is a risk that the participants included in this research were subject to the Hawthorne Effect: what they shared with researchers and how they shared it was likely to be influenced by their knowledge that they were being observed and interviewed. To minimise this effect as far as possible, researchers provided reassurances about anonymity and the voluntary nature of the research.

It is important to recognise the above, but also to acknowledge that mitigating measures were taken in designing, implementing and quality assuring the research and findings presented in this report.

Reporting conventions

Interview quotations and notes in this report were collected by notetakers. Where quotation marks have been included, these are verbatim, with any missed parts identified with […]. The […] convention is also used to omit parts of longer quotes that do not relate to the point being made in the report. Where notes that do not constitute direct quotations have been included, either from observations or interviews, these are identified in italics without quotation marks, referenced with researcher notes and participant information where available.

Any personally identifiable data has been redacted to preserve anonymity of participants and protect confidentiality.

Findings

There are four elements of the following findings chapter which respond to the research questions; these are reported separately and include:

- context of co-location

- operational environment

- communication, integration and engagement

- external factors impacting service integration.

This report uses a combination of quotations and extracts from researcher notes collected during the fieldwork to evidence findings. Significant themes are identified in text boxes and pull together core motifs based on the experiences of staff and customers within sites.

It is important to note the interdependencies across findings to fully understand the impacts they had on staff and customer experiences. The distinction made between planning and social interactions is particularly important, as often the planning, seating and layout of the building impacted social dynamics between staff within and across organisations and vice versa. This in turn impacted the experiences of those working within and using the co-located sites.

Context of co-location

Models

Whilst this research aimed to look at a variety of models of co-location, all jobcentre sites visited were co-located with the local authority or district council. Other co-located organisations included social services, government services such as the National Health Service (NHS), police, and various charitable and voluntary organisations including Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), with an example provided below. The space within sites occupied by DWP varied, as did the impact of DWP on other services, and vice versa which is explored further in the significant theme text box below. The most common services accessed by customers participating in the research were DWP, and for the council, services involving housing or council tax, which were impacted by DWP benefit claims and vice versa, as seen below.

> *I didn't know what to do […] so I went to [co-located organisation] reception. I went to the housing part of the site and gave my details and the homeless charity in the site […] helped me sign up for benefits.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, male, 46-55**

Across sites, there was a mixture of front-facing and back of house services, that is services that are not accessible to the public, including administrative services and DWP services that are not customer facing. Many services (excluding DWP) adopted a hybrid approach, as shown in the quotation below, whereby customers could use telephones or computers to access services online that could not be dealt with in person. This was commonly seen across local government, charity and voluntary

services in sites. On smaller sites, services sometimes adopted an appointment-only approach and so were not available for walk in customer queries. Back of house services, those which were not public facing, tended to have limited perceived impacts for customer outcomes, and often staff did not feel there was much value added in integrating these services, either due to a lack of communication between services or their customers not needing to access the type of service offered.

> *"We have different people we work with – housing, economic development officers – but a lot of that is done virtually."*

> **DWP staff member**

Larger services, including DWP and government services, had issues with resource, meaning staff had less time available to spend with customers or to co-deliver services. One site mentioned the impact of COVID-19 on staffing and how this had impacted communication between services. DWP staff in most sites mentioned increasing caseloads, more people seeking support (due to the cost-of-living crisis) and short appointment length as impacting their ability to integrate services. However, staff across sites were optimistic that co-location had the potential for significant benefits for customers if given the time and resource to implement, as illustrated below.

> *DWP staff member associates and networks with [co-located organisation] staff […] Has time to be able to go over to [co-located organisation] services, including sometimes with customers as they have less appointments so can deal with walk-ins. Can say I'll be over there for half an hour if no appointments are scheduled in calendar. Customers don't know what they need so they can help by going and talking to the [co-located organisation] reception and explaining for them.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member**

Supermarkets or shopping centres?

Many sites referred to co-location as a *"supermarket of support"* or *"one-stop shop"* for their customers to access a range of services in one convenient location.

Supermarkets

It was commonly observed that organisations were not easily distinguished by signage, notices or colours, making them feel more like an integrated 'supermarket' rather than separate services:

> *Bright colours […] make the entrance to site inviting – no distinct difference between [co-located organisations] and jobcentre in terms of furniture, colour scheme etc.*
>
> ***Researcher observation***

In addition, organisations in a few sites, particularly those with dedicated staff to work with other services, worked together to spread resource, finances and space to improve delivery for all customers using the space. This was, however, a rare occurrence:

> *"If it's not something they offer I will go and find it […] tell them what we're doing and then see if they can also expand […] financial resource to be able to […] support our customers […] in conjunction […] joint bid for things that can support people […] local authority may pay in kind with a free space to host it".*
>
> ***DWP staff member***

Shopping centres

Researchers reflected that the co-locations were more generally comparable to shopping centres, where staff from different organisations worked independently of one another, despite being at the same site. It was sometimes unclear which organisations were operating from the building beyond the primary building owner or leaseholder. In one site, the DWP youth hub was located in a shopping centre separate from the co-located jobcentre, which was noted by one customer as the preferred site to visit (compared with the co-location).

In both urban and rural sites, having multiple entrances or separated areas of the building meant there was a necessity to redirect people out of the building and into a different entrance to access the service they required:

> *Man came in and sat down in waiting area and was asked by security (who appear to be acting as Front of House, i.e. managing customer appointments, providing relevant help and advice to walk-in customers and liaising with customers of other services) if they are there to see jobcentre staff or someone else. Man was actually there to see [co-located organisation], and security then had to explain how to get to the other door leading to the [co-located organisation].*
>
> ***Researcher observation***

Perhaps most importantly, staff across the board felt that there was room for improvement to better communicate between services, with integration currently being limited, as shown in the observation extract below.

> *Work coaches have less connections with [co-located organisation] staff, seems like DWP staff know what services they offer [as DWP] and for the rest [co-located organisations] they just direct people to [co-located organisation] but no real idea of everything going on.*
>
> **Researcher observation**

Site mapping

Rural sites tended to be smaller with one or few floors, whilst urban sites tended to be larger or spread over several floors, meaning staff and customers had further to travel to access other services on site. Rural sites tended to have one main entrance and shared reception or waiting areas, meaning that customers physically crossed service boundaries to access the available services. Urban sites, however, tended to have more than one entrance, reception or waiting area, meaning the customer flow of movement was more restricted to the service that they required. Customers generally felt that they only came for their appointment and didn't use other services unless necessary, as shown below. They did, however, think it was convenient to co-ordinate appointments if using more than one service.

> *I go straight to my appointment unless I have a problem then I'll go to reception to ask them a question.*
>
> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, female, 56–65**

Expectations and working in practice

Many staff and customers expected co-location to have positive impacts, with easier access to multiple services, and were pleased with moving to a co-located site:

> *It's good having them all in one place, you don't have to go looking for these services.*
>
> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, male, Over 65**

Others felt that while they had high expectations of co-location initially, in practice these expectations weren't always met (see the researcher notes below).

> *No, it is not what I expected – those already in the building view it as a new service invading their space, but it makes no difference to my work.*
>
> **Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member**

A few DWP staff had previous experience of co-located jobcentre sites, which helped to manage expectations. Many of these felt that relationships between services, building layout and external factors impacted how each co-location worked in practice, as shown in the below quotation.

> *"They were a bit different […] relationships were different in all of them."*
>
> **DWP staff member**

Finances and costs

While this research did not consider contractual agreements, leases or Estates-related information, some staff gave financial insights, regarding both supply and demand, in relation to their experiences of co-location.

Many staff felt that the decision to co-locate was based on financial savings and not the implications for service integration or co-delivery, although this was an additional benefit if collaboration and integration happened within sites. Not all staff were privy to the specific contractual arrangements for the building:

> *"I can't comment on the arrangements because I'm not part of them […] must be a mutually beneficial cost saving […] focused on customer outcomes […] if we were putting anyone at detriment we wouldn't be doing it."*

> ***Co-located organisation staff member***

In one site, as illustrated by the following quotation, DWP staff felt the building owner created additional costs for using space, even when it mutually benefited customers from both organisations.

> *"When [employer] wanted to come in [to host an induction event] they [co-located organisation] wanted to charge £70 an hour even though it benefits their community."*

> ***DWP staff member***

DWP staff often felt they were unfairly treated compared to other co-located services due to contractual agreements. The most prominent example of this was use of car parking on sites, with an example shared in the quotation below, where often DWP staff were unable to use, or were charged for use of, the car park while other services had agreed within contractual arrangements on the use of the car park for employees at no cost.

> *"Parking has been an issue here and we don't know why […] they put two hours […] they've never allowed us round the back [..] 3 monthly charge […] if we can get in there […] they've tried to kick us out"*

> ***DWP staff member***

Finding summary

Generally, staff and customers saw the benefit in services being in the same building as there was the opportunity to ask and answer questions more quickly than if services were located elsewhere. This saved the customer time and potentially a financial cost of having to travel to multiple places, which was seen as beneficial.

Staff also understood the financial benefits to co-location from a strategic perspective, but many felt at an operational level there were complexities when the building was not owned by DWP. An example of this is provided in the following quotation:

> *"You have to jump through so many hoops to get things done […] around things that are broken […] nothing seems to be straightforward […] a lot of steps involved when you're in a co-located site […] it became obvious quite early on that it was as if they didn't really want us here."*

> **DWP staff**

Finally, there were mixed views on the effective use of space on site, with many feeling that occupied space was inadequate for the number of staff. Despite the differing circumstances across sites, good communication and willingness from staff to engage with one another lessened the impacts of a lack of space and/or resources.

Operational environment

The building, facilities and accessibility was reported by staff, customers and observed by researchers as having an impact on site users. The design and layout impacted perceptions of services, staff and other customers using it with varying results.

Generally, staff were positive about the move into a co-location, and buildings were considered comparably modern to standalone jobcentres previously worked in. They felt the buildings were aesthetically pleasing and created an environment that was more inviting, brighter and cleaner.

However, staff in more rural sites tended to feel less content with the buildings, finding them older and more worn, with furnishings considered to be in a bad state of repair and not appealing to customers. They felt this made the environment feel less professional and they wanted to update the space to make it more appealing. Décor and design were seen as vital in creating a positive working environment and atmosphere, as explored in the following significant theme.

Reflections on décor: tracksuits and dress suits

Staff in one site likened the modern and professional design to a dress suit, comparing the previous site (prior to co-locating) they had worked in to being like a tracksuit.

> *DWP floor walker – this building is like a suit and the old one was like a tracksuit. In a suit you feel good, you want to avoid trouble, you don't want your suit damaged. It's the same with this building: people feel more professional, it's not like the old building. Had so many kick offs in the old building, can't remember the last time we had to call police here. The building doesn't feel like a jobcentre so people don't act like it's one. It's corporate, professional. Also, the staff give better customer service because of the way the building is and looks.*

> **Researcher notes from conversation with DWP staff**

Staff and customers felt co-located sites were accessible spaces, but this could sometimes be limited.

Accessibility across sites was perceived positively by most. Access to disabled parking and lift facilities (or ground floor locations as shown below) was seen across sites, as well as proximity to transport links. Open plan layouts meant colleagues could be easily seen and spoken to, speeding up the ability of staff to meet customer needs (see quotation below). This also enabled some staff to feel safer, as they were consistently visible to security and one another. Others felt the open-plan layout created vulnerability, as there was no separation between customers and staff or safe exits if customers became volatile, though this was sometimes mitigated by co-locating with policing and community services.

> *"I like the open plan aspect of the building […] half-moon seating […] nice and comfy settee type area […] leather seating more comfortable […] nicer for […] customers."*

> **DWP staff member**

> *This site is alright because its all on one level. […] easy access having one level.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, female, 36-45**

In most sites, the desks provided by the building owner or leaseholder somewhat impacted accessibility for DWP staff (see quotations below which illustrates how). These were smaller than the standard used in standalone jobcentres and sometimes included dividers between desks. In some cases, barriers were also used to distinguish services from one another. These did not improve privacy (as shown below) and led to staff feeling isolated and customers feeling uncomfortable. There were also issues raised where staff had accessibility requirements which were yet to be met due to approvals required from the building owner or leaseholder. Also, some staff mentioned having to move their screens to effectively communicate with customers.

> *"The other thing is the desk sizes […] they've just squashed everything in so there's no privacy. So a claimant is literally sitting next to [an]other."*

> **DWP staff member**

> *I can hear everything people are talking about with my hearing aids in. I can hear the keys clacking of keyboards and phones ringing. I feel a bit nervous with people walking around me […] people mingling in the meeting areas.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, male, 56-65**

Across sites, opening hours of each service differed, which impacted on access to the building or service required. DWP staff felt this negatively impacted customers who had to wait for appointments despite staff being visible, leading to frustration (such as in the quotation below).

> *"The doors here open I want to say about half past 8 […] can have a lot of customers sitting, waiting for us […] especially on a Wednesday […] a whole hour to congregate."*

DWP staff member

DWP staff were also unable to access the building on days that the building owner or leaseholder was closed unless it was written into the contractual agreement, impacting overtime and access to face-to-face services – on Saturdays, for example. Differences between operating services practices, such as locking the building, could have an impact on customers, particularly those experiencing distress. As DWP staff could not control the locking of doors, they sometimes mitigated negative effects for customers by using non-risk assessed exits (see illustration in researcher notes below).

> *The council close the building at 4.30pm, so we are shutting for no reason. So at 4.30pm I have customers crying, I can't just throw them out of the building, so I let them out the back door but it's not safe.*

Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member

Control of space

Across sites, as DWP were not the leaseholders or building owners, many DWP staff members felt a lack of control of the space and facilities in it including toilets, temperature, and lighting. Complications and delays in resolving issues led to DWP staff feeling unheard and powerless, in some cases having to escalate concerns to legal teams to agree a resolution with the building owner.

This had implications for the comfort of staff and customers, and in some cases impacted their health and wellbeing: see the significant theme below which explores an example of this. Some sites had incurred additional expenses, such as the hire of under-desk heaters, to address DWP staff discomfort due to a lack of control over building temperature.

Lighting provision also had implications for data protection, privacy and customer comfort (as shown in the researcher notes below) as some sites were required to keep windows closed, blinds down or provide additional screens to ensure data was protected or staff areas obscured.

> *There are too many lights […] with these lights on […] it causes migraines and headaches […] I physically can't see […] They think I'm just nervous, but I literally can't see.*

Researcher notes from interview with customer, female, age unknown

Lack of control over décor meant that DWP staff were unable to display customer information or signage to services in some buildings.

Across sites, DWP staff were unable to fully utilise their space within the building due to restrictions on adding posters, signage and notices to walls internally and externally, as well as presenting the organisation through distinction of colours, styles and exterior signage. This often created confusion, particularly for customers who were attending the site for the first time and struggling to find the service they needed, in some cases having to ask staff to signpost them. The following quotation provides one example of this in practice:

> *"The first time I came here I took about 20 minutes in this area trying to find the jobcentre so the signposting for it is poor. Sent a journal note to say look I can't find it […] went into another building […] they pointed it to me."*
>
> **Customer, female, 46–55**

This also meant less visual information could be displayed in most sites, such as available jobs or voluntary work opportunities (see one example of this in the below quotation). Compromises had to be made, like providing this information verbally during the already short appointments, or spending additional resource producing bespoke leaflets or printouts for customers.

> *"Less information we can put out there for the customers to see visually […] could use the walls […] [customers] could be walked around [to] look."*
>
> **DWP staff member**

Concerns were raised around lack of privacy due to the layout of the occupied space in sites.

DWP spaces in sites often had limited private areas or a lack of security resource to enable private conversations. This caused concerns for both customers and staff, particularly due to the nature of sensitive personal information necessary to share with work coaches, with one example provided in the quotation following this paragraph. The ingenuity of some staff meant they had created workarounds such as white noise to try and prevent overhearing, or using other spaces, either on site or in other local buildings, to hold personal conversations. Some staff also raised that GDPR created issues around being able to share information about customers between services to best support them. In the smallest sites, the layout also meant staff and customers from other services could overhear conversations, raising concerns for data protection and honesty from customers.

> *"Been asked for my address […] I'm a survivor of domestic violence and I'm wary about giving this […] I don't want to stand there hearing someone else's private life, I feel for them too."*
>
> **Customer, female, age unknown**

In some sites, particularly the smallest, the location of DWP services meant that staff and customers from multiple services passed through areas where customers were attending meetings. This created distractions, impacted privacy and in a few cases, as illustrated in the quotations at the end of this paragraph, distressed staff and customers. Privacy concerns also impacted service delivery, particularly those who dealt with vulnerable customers or sensitive circumstances. For example, DWP staff felt they could not abide by the privacy rules for video consultation, such as preventing people walking behind them during calls.

> *"We have nowhere to take customers […] I had a case, I had to bring him into this room […] and he had a meltdown at my desk. […] It was not nice for kids and others to see because he was shouting."*
>
> **DWP staff member**

> *"I don't like the space […] sitting out there […] I could hear the conversation he was having with the other two people [...] you can't help but hear […] from a privacy perspective it's not great"*

> ***Customer, female, 46-55***

Across sites which had a larger available DWP space, benefits were seen in being able to bring vulnerable customers to quieter areas to prevent them feeling overwhelmed. In addition, larger spaces meant more providers could access the building and provide support. However, in one site, the separation of space had an impact on the ability to integrate services, as it took time moving around the building to access different support, illustrated in researcher notes below. Ethnographic observations showed that the space, atmosphere and emotions of service users and staff were intertwined, impacting service delivery and outcomes.

> *I would prefer to be downstairs with the work coaches, but you can overhear everything going on and everything the customer says. But I could make links with the work coaches and they can talk to me if I was downstairs.*

> ***Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member***

DWP staff across the board felt the space they occupied was not conducive to effective working and there were implications for the feasibility of expanding jobcentre staff in the future.

Despite most staff being content with the building itself and the potential of co-location, some perceived there was a lack of flexibility to share certain spaces between organisations, such as meeting rooms and conference areas (see quotation below as an example). Staff felt it could cause confusion for customers where signposting to services was unclear, due to lack of signage and/or the building having similar décor throughout. In addition, issues arose with staff misunderstanding customer needs and signposting them incorrectly, which created confusion.

> *"Why can't we just make use of all the facilities? […] Had to turn down meetings because […] if you wanted a room for like 16 people you can't get it."*

> ***DWP staff member***

Even when users were content with décor and design, the amount and practicality of space impacted goodwill and service delivery. DWP staff generally felt space was inadequate, and in smaller sites, some staff had to work from other jobcentres due to lack of desk availability (see quotation below as an illustration). Customers sometimes had to wait standing, outside the building, or on another floor during busy periods due to small waiting areas. Lack of space led to reduced services in some sites, for example being unable to host on-site jobs fairs. In some cases, other services or events on site made some areas feel overcrowded or noisy, which limited staff capacity to deliver services to customers and impacted the wellbeing of customers using the site (as shown in the quotation below). The necessity of security meant that some spaces were underutilised, as there was not enough security resource to allow customers to access private rooms or other floors of the building.

> *"For us, crammed into small space, no room for back of house [services], once the desks are full, we need to find somewhere else for our staff to work. No way of expanding."*

> ***DWP staff member***

> *"I did attend a session which was a group session and there was quite a lot of us in it […] wasn't enough room for chairs for everybody in it […] cramped"*

> ***Customer, female, 46-55***

Many DWP staff raised concerns that there was not enough space to meet increasing demand for resource. Even in the largest sites, staff felt the space they occupied was separated (e.g. over multiple floors), and so additional resources could not be integrated to improve services offered. The following quotation explores this issue found in one large site:

> *"We don't have enough room […] it's not easy. I can't just go over for a quick chat […] They are providing support that I can't access easily."*

> ***DWP staff member***

Staff areas including canteens, staff rooms and wellbeing and first aid spaces were considered limited or unsuitable across all sites.

Most sites had shared spaces such as canteens or staff rooms with variation in satisfaction with these. The quotation at the end of this paragraph illustrates some of the frustration with regard to shared spaces. Shared spaces enabled information sharing and helped build informal working relationships. While some saw benefit in shared communal spaces, including larger break rooms, outdoor areas or communal relaxation spaces, the majority felt they were overcrowded or unfit for purpose. Some complained that building owner or leaseholder rules meant they did not have sufficient facilities to make lunch, such as ovens, microwaves or toasters. Others felt these facilities were limited due to sharing with other organisation staff, which led to long queues, meaning staff felt they did not have a sufficient break or could not bring the food they wanted to work with them.

> *"We have the one break room […] we share […] so we don't actually have our own space […] they have their other own break rooms […] what's theirs is theirs […] this is communal."*

> ***DWP staff member***

The smallest sites had limited space, meaning the building had to close or staff had to go out of the building during their breaks (shown in researcher notes at the end of this paragraph), which impacted the services delivered to customers and sometimes meant staff incurred additional expenses purchasing lunch. In addition, if staff chose to stay in the building during breaks, they were visible to customers and therefore sometimes had to forego their break to deal with urgent queries.

> *There is nowhere for staff to eat their lunch. They have kitchen facilities but nowhere to sit and eat. We have to give people a break, there is nowhere for*

> *staff to sit and take a break away from work, so we have to close […] for an hour at lunch.*

Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member

Staff also raised the issue of a lack of wellbeing area in all sites. The shared nature of communal areas meant they were not appropriate for wellbeing purposes and limited space on site meant other spaces were full of staff or customers, also meaning they were not suitable, with an example shared below:

> *If you have a distressing customer […] you just need 5 minutes to yourself […] there's nothing here […] only place would actually be the first aid room if it's not being used […] no space that is dedicated for the staff […] we are not given additional space.*

DWP staff member

Desk chairs in the car park

DWP staff in some sites commented that they felt unwelcome when using communal spaces. In response to this, staff in one site carried their desk chairs out to the car park to take lunch communally and without complaint from other services.

> *They [DWP staff] have been complained about for laughing/joking in the canteen after a [co-located organisation] staff member listened into their conversation and got the wrong end of the stick. [Co-located organisation] staff member then complained to another member of staff about this. This complaint was then raised with DWP staff who refuted this and explained that what they had been accused was in fact not true.*

> *They [DWP staff] sometimes take their chairs into the car park for lunch as they can actually have a laugh there without being overheard.*

Researcher observation, conversation with DWP staff member

Findings summary

Co-located sites with a modern aesthetic were perceived positively by staff and customers, and open plan layouts were seen to improve staff engagement and speed up queries with colleagues. These sites were also seen as less intimidating for customers, which improved attendance. Staff felt more benefits could be had for service integration if staff from all services were mixed across the layout and easily visible for customers. This did, however, create challenges for privacy in that staff and customers could be overheard across services.

The layout of the building was perceived to have limited impact on customers, with many expressing a lack of interest in which services were located around the building. Many did not have strong opinions on the other services in the building and came to do what they needed to do and leave as quickly as possible. However, the

layout of the building sometimes impacted how easy it was for customers to do this, particularly those who suffered with anxiety. The building and waiting areas could become busy due to customers waiting in the same place for all services on site. It also sometimes proved a challenge for staff to identify the person they were meeting with, which in some cases led to delayed or missed appointments, particularly in those sites with shared waiting areas. Many also felt that the lack of space within the co-location had a negative impact on customers, for example through not being able to host jobs fairs or employers on site:

> *Think [other sites] have lots of jobs fairs that get put on. […] Can book an appointment and take around jobs fair, we can't do that here, how does the work coach know someone has been to a jobs fair? Not having the space for this is a disadvantage for customers.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member**

The choice of services in the space was important for staff and customers, impacting how comfortable they were coming into and accessing the space, as well as how much integration and engagement happened between services. Perhaps most important for staff was the ability to control the space and facilities within it, such as opening and closing the site in emergencies, access to rooms and spaces, and emergency procedures, for example, fire and bomb safety or site closure. In one site, differing procedures for extreme weather impacted service delivery:

> *[Co-located organisation] closed the building for 2 days due to the snow risk despite us actually having no snow, so I had to make decisions around going to telephone interviews and dealing with this unexpected situation.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member**

Communication, integration and engagement

Service delivery and interaction

Customers had positive experiences of staff within co-located sites.

Many customers spoke positively about staff, as shown below. However, there was some variation in the criteria by which customers assessed their experiences, with some referring to the interpersonal manner of staff and others in relation to their experiences to the service they had received.

> *They get to know you, the bloke downstairs [front of house], he's very helpful. Helped me fill in my form. Lovely. Haven't found a bad penny.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, male, 56–65**

> *I've got a lot of time for him and he's helping me with my mental health and other stuff. […] The personal touch, it's nice. […] it's not a tick box exercise with him. He has delivered on what he says he will do, a normal chat, like me and you now, and building up rapport […] lets work on you he says, it's quite therapeutic.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, male, 46-55**

Signposting between co-located services often took the form of 'taking,' namely conducting warm handovers – which was perceived as more effective customer service for staff and customers – rather than 'telling'.

In most cases, signposting between services involved staff physically taking customers over to other services, but in other cases it involved informing of and/or directing customers to other services (as shown in the researcher notes below), and this was the case across all sites. It appeared that the physical size of sites and the number of services within them did not impact how signposting took place, and staff and customers saw the 'taking' as the preferred approach. In some cases, staff were ill-informed of the services offered or customer needs, leading to inappropriate signposting.

> *Majority [of the] time [I] don't really liaise with [co-located organisation], just signpost. We literally say customers to go to the [co-located organisation] front of house and book an appointment, that is how signposting works.*
>
> **Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member**
>
> *Security helped me navigate the site. […] They're always helpful.*
>
> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, female, 46-55**

In a few sites, the ability to signpost to services within the building sometimes impacted processes such as DWP's duty to refer. While some felt co-location did not impact this duty, as it was a digital referral anyway, others, as in the quotation below, felt co-location meant this process could be missed as staff could actively signpost customers to the referred service in the building instead of completing the referral:

> *"We have a duty to refer but because they're there and you can speak to them you don't always [fill out a duty to refer]. But if you weren't in that building you would do a duty to refer every time they came in […] Things get missed because it is easy to go and talk to them."*
>
> **DWP staff member**

Proximity to other services was also seen as contributing to effective service integration and staff communication.

The size of the site, either being too large or too small, in some cases had an impact on the success of service integration and engagement. Smaller sites seemed to have been more successful in achieving effective co-delivery of services than larger sites, with an example provided in the researcher notes below.

> *If a customer needs the [co-located organisation] like housing, then we can interact with the support team, we can go over and ask them questions, same with [other co-located organisations].*
>
> **Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff**

This may be accounted for by staff in smaller sites being in closer proximity to other services than those in larger sites, which in turn may allow for better service integration and engagement. An example of problems with larger sites and

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awareness of services can be seen in the quotation below, although staff still worked to ensure customers received support, as shown in the researcher notes.

> *"They could do stuff in the [co-located organisation] […] and we really wouldn't know about it [...] part of the organisation was here, and I was like I did not know that".*

> **DWP staff member**

> *DWP have recommended all sort of services in terms of additional training, in terms of health and wellbeing, resources for finding things online. Some of it online, local, or [in] person, its sensible as they need to make sure [customers] can access it.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, female, 56-65**

The willingness of staff to interact and engage with other services could impact the effectiveness of service integration.

Instances where staff were unwilling to interact and engage with other services impeded effective integration and engagement. This occurred to varying degrees within and across sites and took place at a social and professional level, and was in some instances picked up on by customers, illustrated here:

> *No, the [co-located organisation] and jobcentre don't interfere with each other's jobs.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, male, over 65**

> *Front of house are expected to give information to anyone who needs it, but the [co-located organisation] don't care. Asked for [co-located organisation] to help with […] statement for a customer but the [co-located organisation] said no in front of the customer.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member**

Additionally, a lack of knowledge amongst staff in co-located services proved to be a barrier in achieving effective integration. Whilst attempts at engagement were made, in some instances, this proved to be more of a hindrance, due to out-of-date contact information or delays in engaging staff across services. This most often related to attempts made by services to engage with DWP customers, causing frustrations when misreferred to people or services:

> *[Co-located organisation] team that works with housing/homeless are more willing to talk and interact with DWP staff. [Co-located organisation] staff often send customers straight to the jobcentre if they're busy without asking the appropriate questions to understand what they need.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member**

> *Jobcentre […] were running that program to give us extra help […] being able to find a job […] The people there do care but there is more pressure and there are limited jobs out there for me.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, female, 56-65**

Joint meetings tended to occur between more senior staff, who therefore had more positive views on interaction, engagement and better service integration. Communication between services, both formal and informal (with two examples with varying success outlined in the following quotations), and desire from staff across services to build positive working relationships, were effective in encouraging interaction. Where these positive working relationships were formed, there were some positive results for customers, as shown in the text box in this section.

> *"It's often not necessarily social […] I smoke, a lot of those members of staff do […] only one communal smoking area […] get to see the same faces everyday [...] you get to know each other […] from a business point of view."*

> **DWP staff member**

> *"There is a quiz once or twice a year […] it's not frequent […] [co-located organisation] had a big picnic the other day […] we weren't invited."*

> **DWP staff member**

Homeless to housed – staff perspectives

Within the research there were multiple examples shared by staff of how integration of housing and DWP services had delivered effective customer service in a short space of time. Some of these reflections are shared below:

> *I once spent the whole day over here with a street homeless customer. Sat with a housing officer and got him into a hostel that night. If this hadn't been co-located it would have been very unlikely I could have travelled with them to do that. Said to him 'we won't leave until we get something sorted.' Mentioned regularly 'popping round' to [co-located organisation] side as customers often don't know what they don't know. They [DWP staff] know better what to say to [co-located organisation] to get the help needed and know what is within [co-located organisation's] remit.*

> **Researcher observation, conversation with DWP staff member**

> *"[DWP staff was] telling me just before Christmas he [was] seeing a customer […] broke down in front of him […] living in a shed with her three children at the bottom of her mother's garden […] the mother was a hoarder […] not a jot of space [for the family in the house] […] [customer was] without any water, a bucket for a toilet […] walked her over to the [co-located organisation] they sorted her out that day […] that's how working in co-located works […] that sort of thing we deal with."*

> **DWP staff member**

Where staff discussed instances of successful service integration, some attributed personality type, management styles and/or job roles as contributing to this.

Across several sites, staff commented on their personality (see the first quotation below), or that of managers (illustrated in the second quotation below), being the reason they were able to successfully engage with other services.

> *"It's worked for me but that is simply because […] who I am […] outgoing, I am not shy […] can be pushy […] in a nice way […] I was all across it [wellbeing fair] […] making them connections, but not everybody is like me […] they make it difficult."*
>
> ***DWP staff member***

> *"The team were a bit [aggravated] previously […] a lot of noise […] some alarming comments […] with the current management that's all been nipped in the bud [...] haven't had any grumbles from either side for quite some time now".*
>
> ***Co-located organisation staff member***

In other cases, specific job roles were discussed as being conducive to increased engagement with other services and more effective integration and engagement:

> *Good relationship with [co-located organisation], share freely and support one another, know who to go to, works well.*
>
> ***Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member***

In one site where concerns had been raised around a lack of cross-service communication, this was relieved by effective management:

> *"Sometimes people don't tell us about things [but] since [DWP staff member] has been one of the team leaders… a lot more interaction and information [has taken place]."*
>
> ***Co-located organisation staff member***

Communication and engagement between DWP staff were discussed positively, and they felt there were limited impacts on these relationships, despite having staff from multiple services on site.

Other services in the building impacted the breadth of delivery; however, DWP staff across sites perceived themselves to have strong internal working relationships, with an example shown in the researcher notes following this paragraph. Being co-located with other services had minor implications on how effectively DWP staff were able to perform their business-as-usual tasks.

> *We are a real team. We help each other out and sit away from managers, most jobcentres have [managers] right there, we get on with each other and if someone kicks off, we will support each other.*
>
> ***Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member***

Security officers' ability to provide adequate support impacted working relationships between staff across services.

Across all co-located jobcentres, how safe staff felt whilst on site influenced their relationships with security staff and services who contracted security provision. In

comparison to standalone jobcentres, co-located jobcentres are not always responsible for providing security. This can result in guards being unable to provide the necessary level of security or cover at the times required by DWP staff. Where this was the case, relationships between services became strained, particularly when security were perceived to favour the organisation which employed or contracted them, making DWP staff feel more at risk. This was seen within several sites, with an example in the following quotation:

> *"Four or five people come through […] whilst all four guards are still stood there […] got to constantly be looking and checking what they're doing […] you want to feel safe […] my team are probably not going to feel that so much today."*

> **DWP staff member**

Findings summary

Many understood and appreciated the potential benefits of service integration and engagement for customer experiences. Across sites, the benefits of co-location were widely acknowledged and often discussed in relation to the positive implications that multiple services sharing customer bases had in comparison to standalone jobcentres. Some staff felt that effective communication and engagement would not have been achievable if not co-located. The most complex or vulnerable customers were perceived to benefit the most from co-location, given their need to access multiple services in one place (with an example of this shown in the researcher notes below). In comparison, less complex customers benefitted from co-location as and when they needed it and were not negatively impacted by co-location of services.

> *Someone told me I need to talk about UC and ESA. Easy, straight in the doors and the lady at reception [told me] where to go […] It's not someone giving you letters and telling you to go there, there and there. If nobody had said anything I'd not have gone I'd have just gone home.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, male, 56–65**

Those who perceived fewer benefits to co-location felt integration of services served no purpose, due to differing customer types or some services being accessed digitally. Many staff felt improvements could be made to working relationships, as demonstrated in researcher notes below. Both formal and informal information gathering and sharing between services was seen as a way to improve service integration and staff engagement. This is turn was viewed as a means to enhance co-delivery and create greater opportunities to support customers. More specifically, the sharing of customer data would be helpful given that many services shared similar customer bases. Such meetings were believed to positively contribute to effective co-delivery and overcoming barriers.

Many staff felt that working relationships could be improved and suggested that increased information gathering and sharing between services could help achieve this. It was felt that this would benefit service integration and staff engagement (see researcher notes below) by enhancing co-delivery and creating greater opportunities to support customers.

> *Come together on some formal basis to discuss what's going well, not well and future plans. How we can work together and have more joint up working. Formal communication. Picture what happens in the future, have a holistic approach to complex cases, to pull in DWP and [co-located organisation] to tackle these. Knowledge shared on both sides to provide a complete service.*
>
> **Researcher notes from interview with co-located organisation staff**

External factors impacting service integration

Proximity

The proximity to support services, both within and near the location of the co-located site, impacted customer access to, and use of, support. Access was also impacted by transport links to the location and associated costs, including parking and petrol. Easy access to a wide range of services meant more signposting from staff according to individual needs and created more positive customer experiences, as illustrated in the significant theme in the text box later in this section.

Many staff and customers using the sites lived within five to twenty minutes of the site and were happy with the time taken to travel to and from it. Various modes of transport were used and staff and customers were content with the convenience of location and associated costs (particularly considering the bus fare cap in place during the research). They were also happy with the location of convenient and available parking. Many customers timed visits to the location with use of other local services and amenities, e.g. supermarkets or shops, and staff also mentioned visiting other local services in their lunch break or after work.

There were a few issues raised by staff and customers around postcode mapping for jobcentres, meaning that a customer's allocated jobcentre was not the one closest to them by public transport. Those visiting more rural co-locations were more likely to experience issues with public transport, while those visiting more urban co-locations were likely to have access to a greater range of support services in the local area. A small number of customers were experiencing housing issues or homelessness, meaning that they were staying in a different area to the jobcentre, requiring further travel. Complaints were made by staff in some locations that more convenient parking was available on site, but not accessible to them due to contractual agreements with building owners or leaseholders.

'It's not just about getting the house, it's making sure you're okay living in it.'

Customer A had travelled to the site by bicycle, which took about an hour and a half. Although they could have caught the bus, taking around 30 minutes, they preferred their own company and did not like be surrounded by other bus users on mobile phones due to fears of technology. They had started visiting the co-located site to try and access everything in one place, namely housing and benefits, after being homeless for 20 years.

> *Customer A was waiting to see [co-located organisation] but DWP staff member walked over and asked if they were claiming Universal Credit.*

Customer A wasn't, so DWP staff member suggested they speak to the [co-located organisation] and then come and have a chat [with DWP]. DWP staff member suggested there was more support available – it's not just about getting the house, it's making sure you're okay living in it. Customer A said once he has a house "then I can get this sorted out" pointing to his head, referring to mental health.

Once Customer A had finished with the [co-located organisation], DWP staff member walked with him from [co-located organisation] area back to the waiting area, sitting with him while waiting for another DWP staff member to become available as well as providing leaflets on cost of living and budgeting, to which Customer A responded it's about "settling down […] I've got time then" referring to being able to access other support.

Researcher observations and interview with customer, male, 56–65

While Customer A spoke to both DWP and co-located organisation staff, they found that they needed to attend another jobcentre when they became housed. DWP staff supported in providing information about this and explaining what they needed to ask for when they arrived. Customer A's disability and anxiety around technology meant they preferred face-to-face services and were particularly grateful they could speak to everyone in one place rather than getting letters or phone calls. Housing was their biggest priority, and DWP could support in helping them understand and obtain benefits associated with this.

Staff had a better understanding of the number and perceived efficiency and/or effectiveness of support services within the building and local area compared with customers, but encountered issues when not aware of up-to-date contact information.

Staff used networks both within the building and with external support services to support customer needs and improve potential outcomes, as illustrated in the first quotation below. These networks were usually found through experience, online, or through guidance from colleagues; staff did not tend to be given key contacts for services on site and customers were sometimes unaware of which services were in the building (with an example illustrated in the second quotation below). Staff tended to encourage use of other services where appropriate, with variable take up from customers.

"Basically it's any service that the [co-located organisation] offer […] we're the front door to the organisation […] people come in and they don't understand how the organisation is organised […] put them in touch […] just literally put them through to the right person."

Co-located organisation staff member

"[I have] lived in this […] area for what 15 years […] this is the first time I've ever had to come to the building […] I have no idea what it offers […] probably other

things that actually would be useful for me […] complete loss as to what everything is."

Customer, female, 46–55

Signposting to external support was less effective when customers were required to travel to access it.

Many felt that if customers had to travel to access support (in some cases, even a few minutes down the road), they would be less likely to go or seek help.

"I went in looking for […] advice, the response was that […] the best we can offer you are 2 services in [place] […] I cannot get the […] services […] in this area. So the answer to the problem I have is nothing."

Customer, male, 26-35

Some of the most effective signposting happened when staff were able to conduct 'warm handovers', illustrated in the researcher notes below, physically taking customers to the other support and in some cases, staying with them to help other services understand their needs.

Easy to triage, if there is someone with an issue, I can walk them to the right service or speak to the relevant service and guide them to the right service. When [services are] more external, then signposting it isn't as cohesive.

Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member

Staff felt customers benefitted most from signposted support when it was easily accessible and they were actively supported to engage with other services. Some felt that customers engaged with services when provided a phone number or website, while others, as shown in the researcher notes below, felt engagement was increased by being able to give physical locations.

Signposting is more 'send them somewhere', today I had a customer quite upset, so I signposted her to a wellbeing centre, rather than giving just [the] number I try to give more information, not just [the] number, like the physical location. I think it's more positive to give [a] physical location, makes [it] more likely [for] people to engage, especially if they have positive response from where you have sent them.

Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member

Where public transport or very short distances to travel made locations easily accessible, some staff felt there were fewer impacts on customers' willingness to engage with further support. This was more common in urban areas than in rural. For those who had to travel to neighbouring towns, or even further to access support, customers often did not see this as benefiting them and often did not engage. In a few cases, co-location was felt to be the only effective way of engaging customers with other services, as illustrated below.

If they weren't in this building, I can say get in touch, but they won't do it. I see many people with mental health problems and they won't just pick the phone up or go to a different building, but because they're here they will go.

> *Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member*

> *Money doesn't go far for the cost of [the] bus fare […] half [my] money was gone in one day […] I could have used it for shopping.*

> *Researcher notes from interview with customer, female, 36-45*

Police presence (as a co-located organisation) caused frustration for some staff and customers, particularly when they were not accessible because they only operated on a back-office basis, which, in turn, caused some confusion when customers expected to be able to speak to them.

Police were present as a co-located organisation in some sites in this research. In these sites there was variation in staff and customers' familiarity with the police (or related community services) presence in the building. In all sites visited, police presence was as an operational base (e.g. emergency response from vehicles) and not an accessible face-to-face desk for the public.

> *I'd like to see the police as its own police station, confusing to find it when it's here. Don't think many people know if you can even access the police station.*

> *Researcher notes from interview with customer, female, 56-65*

Some staff and customers felt that police could be a disruptive presence when co-located as they were not on hand to help quickly when situations escalated, or to be able to report crimes, as seen below.

> *People know police are here on site and will come here and cause a disruption to get someone in uniform to deal with it. […] The phone wasn't working for a bit because someone had smashed it in because [the police] wouldn't come down.*

> *Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member*

Those who felt positively about police being co-located felt they were able to support criminal incidents, allow customers and staff to report crime or had a calming effect on customers, with examples of this below.

> *"Having the presence of the police does make a difference […] customer that was coming in […] as meek and as mild as anything […] it's because the police were there […] people are a bit wary."*

> *DWP staff member*

> *I had an issue that I needed to raise with the police, there was an intercom on the outside that I spoke to someone through.*

> *Researcher notes from interview with customer, female, 56-65*

In one site, DWP staff alluded to police presence of any kind (either co-located or called to sites in emergencies) having implications on certain customer types attending the site. This is explored in the researcher notes below. Those who had behaved inappropriately to one service may have limitations on access to the whole building and services working from there. In areas with high crime rates and gangs,

police presence was perceived as having potential negative impacts on attendance of customers to the jobcentre and put them at risk.

> *If the police were here, it would be worse. It's not just that they wouldn't come because of risk of arrest, but also that gang may see them near police and injure them assuming they are 'snitches.' Even being in a building with the [co-located organisation] puts some people off, they assume government means police and so it takes them longer to trust us.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member**

The best service integration came when co-located or closely located services were supporting the same customer types.

> *"[We] deal with the same customers although we deal with all of the residents."*

> **Co-located organisation staff member**

As mentioned, the most common model of co-location, and all sites in this research, included co-location of DWP and local or district councils. Complex customer cases, such as those facing homelessness, could be dealt with more easily with communication between services, leading to a more positive customer experience.

> *"Came in homeless […] [the complex case team] took over that […] with the complex case team layers in between us it makes this make things easier".*

> **DWP staff member**

> *That's why the jobcentre came here to this site. That's what I was told, that DWP wanted to have the jobcentre and social security here with the council so it's easier for people. If they have benefit enquiries with the council, they can then access DWP.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, female, 56-65**

In addition, where complex cases required more nuanced support, for example prison leavers, care leavers or those experiencing domestic abuse, in many cases additional co-located organisations or closely located services could provide holistic support for the customer, meeting a multitude of complex needs, such as in the researcher notes below.

> *We had a vulnerable lady last week... instantly got people from the [co-located organisations] […] in a meeting with her to support her. It's really good. I don't think there are any disadvantages.*

> **Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff member**

Organisations tended not to interact at all when it was felt that services offered were irrelevant to their customer bases, and in a small number of cases other unrelated services were seen as a hindrance, particularly considering access to the building, such as in the example below:

> *A lot of staff will tailgate into our area of the building. I have to challenge them. "I'm not prepared to lose my job" – we don't know they work here.*

Researcher notes from interview with DWP staff

Complications arose in a small number of sites where customers were only using one service and became dissatisfied, which could be overheard by customers using other services and cause disruption, despite there being no relationship between the customers or services, illustrated in the quotation below.

> *"Disadvantages are where the customers are concerned and that is […] two different groups of people […] two different reasons [for coming to the building] […] mob mentality […] disturb our customers […] shouting and screaming about things that don't necessarily align."*

DWP staff member

Digitalisation

Services used a variety of digital and non-digital delivery methods, including telephony, UC journal, and face-to-face appointments, with many staff and customers preferring face-to-face as their primary means of contact.

> *You can't talk to [them] anymore. It's all online, that's all I get told.*

Researcher notes from interview with customer, female, 56-65

It was felt that face-to-face appointments allowed information to be delivered more easily and prevented delays in response. Staff also appreciated flexibility in appointment type, although felt other services operating in a hybrid way reduced integration. Some customers didn't get the results they had hoped for virtually, either having long wait times, being unable to get through via telephone, or not finding the information they required, and therefore came into the site to discuss their needs.

All sites had experienced changes to working arrangements due to the pandemic, the most pertinent being restrictions on face-to-face services offered and reductions in staffing levels. There were also changes to access and layout (with the necessity to reduce contact) and the introduction of safety measures, such as screens. There was variation in how much these changes remained with the relaxation of COVID-19 measures.

The COVID-19 pandemic and increased digitalisation more generally had an impact on face-to-face services offered, with more hybrid working, which reduced opportunity for service integration in some sites.

Many organisations were reducing face-to-face services, directing people to engage by telephone, online, or by appointment only. In some cases, organisations were operating in a hybrid way, while for others, financial difficulties had led to a reduction or removal of services and/or staff. Staff felt there were challenges in understanding the continual changes being made to services they were co-located with and appreciated it when they were kept up to date. In addition, customers with limited digital skills struggled with this approach, and a lack of awareness and/or physical presence limited communication between services and with customers, illustrated below.

> *Lately though the people behind there [reception] don't like helping you very much. […] I've told them I'm not computer friendly. I come here with forms and phone calls, and they just tell me to do it online.*

> ***Researcher notes from interview with customer, female, 56–65***

DWP staff felt that their continual face-to-face presence throughout the pandemic meant they had a larger footfall than other services across all sites. Staff from co-located organisations often felt hybrid working had eased burdens for customers travelling to sites and increased the amount of space available for new services to join the co-location due to lower staff and customer footfall, as evidenced in the quotation below:

> *"So a number of teams that were based in other areas have moved into the building […] made possible by hybrid working […] more space for people when they are in to sit at a desk."*

> ***Co-located organisation staff member***

Access to high quality and consistent wireless connectivity was a priority, and in some sites, poor quality connections impacted customer service.

There was variation across sites as to the type of internet used by staff, from personal hotspotting from their own devices to cloud-based services having been successfully installed. More than half of the sites visited experienced issues because the internet provided by the building owner or leaseholder was not adequate to perform functions needed by DWP. This impacted both DWP staff and customers, as virtual services could not be effectively delivered (such as telephony via Teams, as illustrated in the quotation below) and customers could not access the internet in some sites (or at home), as shown in the researcher notes below, to be able to conduct job searches or enquire about virtual services offered by other organisations in the site. Other co-located services did not mention connectivity as a problem.

> *"On the phone […] We have to remember, if we know if it's going to go down, we save everything otherwise you lose everything. Phone you lose connection, you can hear them, but they can't hear you. Lately it seems to be going down twice an hour."*

> ***DWP staff member***

> *Got no Wi-Fi in here so had to cross the road […] and connect to the internet to get my email because [DWP staff member had] sent me an email.*

> ***Researcher notes from interview with customer, gender unknown, age unknown***

Access to computers for customers has become an increasing priority for staff, as has the necessity to support customers to move to digital services. More commonly, access to technology was provided by co-located organisations instead of DWP.

Many sites included a digital zone for customers to access virtual services, which varied in size and efficiency (for example, how many computers were working, or

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what kind of software they used, as in the example below). These were commonly run by the building or leaseholder and in some instances offered greater accessibility to customers than what would be available at a standalone jobcentre.

> *"Probably the best […] digital zone […] IT department have got much more freedom […] running Windows 11, full desktop PCs."*
>
> **DWP staff member**

A few people felt there were inadequate computers for the number of customers who needed to use them (as shown in researcher notes below), while others raised concerns that there was not the resource to support customers who were not digitally able, which increased frustrations and limited access to services. Despite this, across both DWP services and other organisations, there was a good understanding of the issue of digital exclusion, and many were keen to improve their customers' digital capabilities, with an example provided below.

> *There is only two computers here. They used to have […] more computers and you could do job searches from here. I couldn't use the computer today because there were too many people using them.*
>
> **Researcher notes from interview with customer, male, Over 65**
>
> *"It's something a little bit difficult […] getting people to work digitally […] doing lots of work […] to try and improve that."*
>
> **Co-located organisation staff member**

Findings summary

The proximity of co-located services was seen as having clear benefits for customers. Proximity allowed for more constructive working relationships to be formed, both within the co-located site and with services in the local area. The biggest impact of co-location was convenience for customers, with sites often being located centrally with good transport links and accessible parking, reducing the need for multiple journeys to be made, as evidenced in the quotation below. This was seen as most beneficial for vulnerable customers and complex cases requiring multiple types of support.

> *"The people that are accessing the DWP services are accessing the [co-located organisation] services […] you can lose the customer because they can't be bothered going somewhere else […] we lose a lot of people in transit […] bit lost or fed up […] it's a really good tie up […] often vulnerable people."*
>
> **DWP staff member**

Service digitalisation and the impacts of hybrid working were viewed in a less positive light, causing confusion for staff and customers as to who to contact and, in some cases, creating longer waiting times due to staff and customers not having contact information for something they previously dealt with on site. Vulnerable customers were often impacted by having to access services online, as illustrated in the quotation below, although staff and customers found benefit in being able to access

computers on site or nearby, or having support to access digital services, and saw this as a significant advantage to co-location.

> *"I went to take a customer to speak to someone because they were vulnerable […] and all she did was sit there and say she has to do it online but he has no digital skill so we had to [send] them off to CAB."*
>
> **DWP staff member**

Conclusions

This research gathered in-depth, contextual evidence from co-locations to understand what co-located models look like, including which services are co-located and how this varies across specific geographical contexts. In addition, the research captured the experiences, benefits and challenges of using co-located sites for DWP staff and customers, and for co-located organisations, whilst attending to variations of contexts or models.

Across all six sites visited, the model of co-location was sharing a council-owned (or council acting as leaseholder and subletting to other organisations) building with, in some cases, several other front-facing and back of house services. The more rural sites tended to be the smallest, although adequacy of space was an issue raised across all sites. Staff saw value in co-location, and believed it was a sustainable long-term model, although changes needed to be made for it to reach its full potential, like increasing regular engagement between services.

Co-located buildings were generally viewed positively, being well-located within the community and with accessible layouts. Having said that, DWP felt they needed more, or better laid out space than their current co-located buildings afforded to meet customer needs and provide events, such as hosting employers and holding jobs fairs. A lack of control of the space limited DWP's opportunities to provide visual information to customers and allow them to independently take in information on site. Building layout also raised privacy concerns, as did the inability to share customer information between services, which was limited by GDPR. For staff, shared communal spaces and a lack of private facilities had an impact on morale and wellbeing.

Customers tended to feel positive about staff in co-located sites and were content with the service they received, including being taken to other services to access appropriate support. If co-located organisations are able to integrate and work together effectively, additional benefits may be accrued for customers. The most effective integration occurred when services supported the same customer types. Between staff, communication was discussed as a positive to enhancing effective co-location, although unwillingness to interact and engage limited the possibility of good integration. In addition, support provided by other services, cultural differences of organisations, and scope of job role had an impact on staff morale and working relationships. Despite this, proximity to other services to support customers was

viewed as beneficial, enabling integration and communication and preventing customers disengaging due to having to travel to access services and support.

Staff tended to be more aware of services offered in co-locations than customers, although most customers were aware of the most visible front-facing services. Some frustration was evident among both staff and customers when services thought to be front-facing were not accessible when needed, particularly in sites where the police were co-located.

The COVID-19 pandemic and digitalisation more generally had an impact on face-to-face services offered and hybrid working tended to be viewed negatively by both customers and DWP staff, particularly in sites that experienced issues around access to digital services or where services no longer offered face-to-face appointments. For co-located organisation staff, hybrid working offered more opportunities to rent space within sites to other services. Where sites offered access to computers or support to customers in completing online forms, this was seen as a positive. With increasing digitalisation, it is important for sites to have access to digital services and to provide support on digitalisation. In some sites, poor access to internet or a lack of access to computers impacted the level of customer service, which had a negative impact on customer satisfaction.

Whilst there were issues across all sites, most felt positive about co-location and its potential to support customers. Negative views around co-location tended to be due to a lack of communication across services, and staff and customers felt additional benefits could be realised with increased communication. There was a perception that co-location had been poorly planned, and additional benefits could be had from more thorough planning prior to co-locating. Co-location is therefore not a simple solution: it requires detailed planning and relevant services to ensure that the differing current and future needs of participating organisations are reflected. Overall, the success of co-location was reliant upon staff goodwill and morale, and staff helping to mitigate strategic and financial issues around building ownership, leasing and access. It was important to understand staff perspectives and integrate these into planning to improve morale and the service provided to DWP customers.

Recommendations for future research

Whilst this research provides in-depth insight into co-located jobcentre sites across England and Wales, including the strengths and limitations of co-locations of this model, the findings are not representative of all co-locations. More research could be undertaken to understand what other models of co-location there are across the UK, for example those not co-located with local authorities or councils, as well as perceived effectiveness of and satisfaction with different models. It is also important to understand changes to co-located sites over time, and the impacts of this, e.g. services joining or leaving. Additional research could be undertaken to understand roles of communication and co-delivery amongst staff to develop stronger relationships, particularly focusing on lessons learned from current co-locations that can be shared to improve future delivery. As well as this, further research could be

completed to understand the impacts of co-location on building owners or primary leaseholders and their services, including the views of senior leaders to inform insights on lease agreements and building arrangements.

Further research could explore other models of co-location, such as those not co-located with local authorities or councils, and how these compare to both this model and standalone jobcentre sites, to better understand similarities and differences. It is also important to consider other models of service integration, such as DWP outreach services in communities, and the impacts these have on staff and customer experiences.

In addition, whilst this research infers the social value of co-located jobcentre sites and gleaned some anecdotal insights regarding financial impacts, more research is needed to understand the financial aspects and value for money of co-location. Further to this, additional research on the conceptual issues identified from this research could be explored in more depth, namely planning; communication, integration and engagement; and external factors impacting engagement.

Annexe

Methods

Sampling

The sample of sites was drawn from DWP administrative data provided by BSA using information provided by DWP Estates. The total sample of sites was drawn from a list of 72, selected based on management information on site performance, face-to-face services, and cluster and geographical information to ensure variation.

Achieving good representation across participant characteristics was important to gather insight into how contexts and characteristics impacted experiences. Customer age, gender and benefit status were monitored, and for staff, employer and job role were monitored and recruitment was targeted where possible to ensure characteristics were represented across the sample.

The research aimed to achieve a sample of 30 customer and 30 staff participants. To ensure breadth across sites, the sample was increased to 40 customer and 40 staff participants.

Sample characteristics

The sample characteristics are reported here to give a sense of the spread of characteristics across the research sample. While the research aimed to recruit across a range of participant characteristics, it did not aim for a representative sample.

The sample characteristics tables include those who took part in a formal interview but do not include informal conversations recorded in observation notes by researchers. Some information has been excluded to protect the anonymity of participants.

Table 1. Total customer participants by gender

Customer gender	Number of participants
Male	19
Female	20
Prefer not to say	1
Total	**40**

Table 2. Total customer participants by age group

Customer age group	Number of participants
18-25	3

26-35	10
36-45	5
46-55	5
56-65	12
Over 65	2
Prefer not to say	3
Total	**40**

Table 3. Total customer participants by benefit type claimed[1]

Customer benefit status	**Number of participants**
Universal Credit	33
Jobseeker's Allowance	2
Employment Support Allowance	4
Personal Independence Payment	4
Other	10
Total	**53**

Table 4. Total interviews conducted across sites (staff and customer)

Site	**Number of participants**
A	12
B	12
C	13
D	14
E	14
F	15
Total	**80**

Data collection

This research employed an ethnographically orientated approach to capture participants' experiences of co-location. Data collection involved observations as well as semi-structured interviews.

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[1] Some respondents were in receipt of more than one benefit, so the sum of benefits is greater than the sample.

This approach allowed for the experiences of participants to be grounded within their specific contexts with connections then being drawn between these experiences and the context in which these occurred.

Observation

Fieldwork involved researchers engaging with the everyday routines, practices and conversations of the site through observation and informal conversation. The role of a minimally participating observer was generally assumed by each fieldworker. Researchers positioned themselves along the spectrum of ethnographic roles, neither becoming full members of the group of interest nor acting as a non-participating observer (Weber, 1947 cited in Gold, 1997). Positioning ourselves between the emic (assuming full membership) and the etic (observing the group from an outsider's perspective) allowed for each researcher to assume and adapt their ethnographic roles based on personal preference. Observations primarily focused on location (interior and exterior, movement of staff/customers), models (partnerships, co-delivery), customer and staff experiences, and social value (behaviour, interactions and conflicts). These were captured at the time through extensive fieldnotes.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews were conducted throughout each day on site, which allowed for researchers to capture participants' experience of co-location as well as any benefits or challenges that they perceived as being a result of co-location. Interviews followed a semi-structured topic guide for both staff and customers. Prompts and probes were used to encourage discussions and to draw out interesting points raised during interviews. Observations made on site were also fed into these discussions, particularly where researchers had noted a participant engaging with other services prior to being interviewed.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork took place between June 2023 and July 2023. Observations and interviews were conducted by DWP social researchers. Interviews were conducted in person with a notetaker; they were not recorded. Observation notes were handwritten whilst on site and then transcribed onto DWP IT before being destroyed.

Analysis approach

The co-location research analysis was informed by thematic analysis and Spradley's interpretive approach to establish key and significant themes to represent key findings from the interviews and observations.

Coding and thematic development

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe six key steps involved in thematic analysis, and the approach to the cross-sectional element of data analysis for this research aligns with these steps: (1) familiarising oneself with the data, (2) generating codes, (3) constructing themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (cited in Maguire, M. & Dalahunt, B., 2017). A

combination of deductive and inductive approaches was used in development of the coding framework. An initial deductive coding framework was developed with definitions coded based on the research aims, knowledge of the co-location context, and initial familiarisation with the data from the pilot research (2 sites). The initial coding framework was refined in an iterative process as fieldwork and preliminary analysis progressed. During this process, researchers made coding-related observations and suggestions for changes to the framework in a reflexive log which was discussed within the team during debriefs and regular coding meetings. Changes made as a result of this period of reflection and revision included combining codes into single 'parent' codes, adding and deleting codes, and redefining existing codes, based on growing understanding of the range of experiences of co-location.

After site visits, researchers came together to debrief and discuss the broad contexts and concepts observed and understood from interviews based on the nine dimensions of Spradley's framework (Spradley, 1980). Interviews were coded concurrently to bring together concepts based on researcher knowledge of the sites visited, but primarily on the research data itself. The contextual findings were developed through a process of understanding individual site level moments and then understanding the relationships and correlation between these moments and the contexts in which they happened. This was then combined with the coded interview data and brought together via workshops to consider the macro evidence this research provides based on the six sites visited and 80 interviews conducted.

Concepts used in analysis

Findings in the following report can be grouped broadly into the following three areas, with both common findings and local nuance included by sub-heading, defined as follows:

- Operational environment

- Communication, integration and engagement

- External factors impacting service integration.

These terms were assigned by the research team based on the contexts observed and concepts identified through the analysis to understand the influences and impacts of co-location.

Topic guides

There were two topic guides for the projects, one for staff and one for customers. Both topic guides were semi-structured and tailored as appropriate to individuals and what they wanted to share about their experiences.

Staff topic guide

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Section 1 – Background

This section is about understanding the staff background and experiences of the site.</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center"><u>IF DWP STAFF:</u></td><td align="center"><u>IF OTHER STAFF:</u></td></tr>
<tr><td>How long have you worked in this jobcentre?</td><td>How long have you worked for [employer]?</td></tr>
<tr><td>What is your current role? What does your work involve? Typically, which claimants do you work with?</td><td>What is your role?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Have you ever worked in another jobcentre site? Was it co-located? What is the same? What is different?</td><td>Have you always worked with your current employer in this building?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center"><u>ASK ALL:</u></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">How far from here do you live? How do you get here? How easy is it to get to work? What makes it easy/difficult?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Are your opening hours different from the other services in the building? What impact does this have? Has this site always been co-located?

[IF NO] Has there been any changes to opening hours since co-locating? Why? What impact does this have?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Do you always interact with your customers face-to-face, or also sometimes virtually? Are there some aspects of your work that are better in person than virtually or better virtually rather than in person? How many days a week do you work in this building? Are there specific tasks that you can only do in this building? (e.g. that can't be done from home, another building owned by the organisation)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">Section 2 – Models

This section is to understand the other businesses using the building.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">What services do people come here to access? Why? How did you find out what services there are here?</td></tr>
</table>

Do you know who owns the building or lease here? Are you aware of how the services came to be located together in this building? Do you know whether other options or alternatives were available? What were they?

What are the advantages or disadvantages of these services being under one roof? Do you work closely with the other services in this building? Why/ Why not? How would it affect you if these services were not located in the same building? Are there any additional resources provided or that would be helpful from working in a multi-service building?

How do you interact with other services? Why? How often are you approached because customers have been signposted to you by other services? What signposting do you do for other services in the building?

Who tends to be signposted to you? Any patterns/trends? What works well with signposting? Why? What could be improved? Why? How do you find the staff at the other services?

How well do the partnerships work for you? Do some partnerships work better than others? Are the partnerships the most appropriate for you? What about for your customers? Why/Why not? Are there specific advantages/issues? What are they? Why?

Are there any barriers or challenges for your customers that have improved or worsened because of the services located here? Are there any barriers or challenges because of co-location generally?

Are there any service users that you feel are better or worse off from co-location of services? Are there any challenges with service users coming into site?

Section 3 – Location
This section is about understanding the physical location of the jobcentre and any local nuance which might impact how well it works

How busy is the building? How does this affect how you work? Are there any times of day or specific days that are busier/quieter? Are some parts of the building busier than others? Where? Why?

How do you think your customers are different due to the other services here (for example, walk in customers as opposed to appointments)? What questions do (walk in) customers generally ask? Do you feel like you have the expertise to respond to them? How does this impact the work you do?

How easy is it to find what you need in the building? How often do you move around the building? What spaces do you use? Are they shared? How easy is it to get around the building? What makes it easier/more difficult?

Have there been any changes to how much space your service occupies in the building? Why? How has this affected your service?

What do you like about the building? What do you dislike?
Section 4 – Social and financial value
What values or challenges are there of being co-located in this site for: Staff engagement, Customer outcomes, Longevity and sustainability, Finances and costs
Is co-location what you expected? Why/ why not?
What impact does the jobcentre being co-located here with other services have on you and your service users? How do you feel about the other services in the building? How has having more than one service in this building changed your understanding of services offered?
Has there been any change in services that work from this building? What are they? Why did the changes happen? Have any organisations moved out of or into the building since you've been here? **What would be or are the consequences of services leaving the building or new services joining?**
Section 5 - Future
Are there any changes you'd like to see in this building that might need to be accounted for in future? Are there any other services you would like to see in this building? Who? Why?
Do you have any other reflections on the building or services here?
Is there anything else you'd like to share with me?

Customer topic guide

Section 1 - Background
How was your journey to the site today? How far from here do you live? How do you get here? How long does it take?
Did you come here alone today, or is anyone else with you?
How long have you been coming here?
What do you like about this building? What do you dislike?
How often do you visit? How long do you stay for? Do you use any other services in the area while you are here?
Do you sometimes speak to staff here over the phone or by email (virtually – UC journal)? Which do you prefer? Why? Are there some things that work better virtually or face-to-face?
Section 2 - Models
Can you tell me why have you come here (this building) today? Who have you come to see? Can you tell me why you came to see them today? What

happened? Did you get the information/action you wanted? What was the outcome of seeing [organisation/individual] today? **Do you see the same person each time you come here?**
Are you aware of any other services in this building? Who are they? **Which services have you or do you use?** When? How often? Why?
How often do you move around the building (e.g. to use more than one service)? Why? How easy is it to find your way around the building? What makes it easy/difficult? **How easy is it to find the service you need in the building?**
How did you find out what services are available here?
How do you feel about the other services in the building?
How do you find the staff in this building?
Have any staff in the building suggested you speak to a member of staff from any other services? Why? Are staff encouraging of using other services? Why? How? Do you think the staff work well across the services here to do what you need them to do? How?
What do you like and dislike about having different services in the same building? How has having more than one service in this building changed your understanding and access to services offered? What impact does having multiple services located here have on you? **How would it affect you if these services were not located in the same building?**
Do you use the services you can access here anywhere else? If so, where? Why?

[DWP CUSTOMERS ONLY]	[OTHER CUSTOMERS ONLY]
Are you currently seeking employment? [IF YES] **How does having multiple services here affect your job search?** Have you been to other jobcentres before? How are they similar/different? [IF NO] **How does having multiple services here help or hinder your daily life?**	Have you used a jobcentre before? If so, where? What happened?

Section 3 – Location
How easy is it to get to this building? What makes it easy/difficult?
How busy do you typically find this building? How does this affect how you feel about coming to the building?
Section 4 - Future
Are there any changes you'd like to see in this building?
Are there any other services you would like to see in this building? Who? Why?
Is there anything else you'd like to share with me?
Section 5 – Additional information
"Before we finish, I'd just like to get a bit more information about you so that we can understand a bit more about your circumstances and how this might affect your experiences, is that okay?"
INTERVIEWER NOTE: Please ask questions openly and then select appropriate responses. Use column 2 as prompts if needed, or if participant is more comfortable disclosing in this way (age).

What gender do you identify as?	Male / Female / Other / Prefer not to say
What age group best describes you (read options)?	18-25 / 26-35 / 36-45 / 46-55 / 56-65 / Over 65
Which benefits, if any, are you claiming currently?	UC / JSA / ESA / Other [please specify]

Observation template

Guiding principles

- Briefly explain that you're a social researcher, interested in the jobcentre site. Reassure them that you're not checking up on them and it's not a quality assurance review.

- Tell them it's completely voluntary: fine if they don't want you to observe. It's fine to change their mind half-way through.

- Explain that you're taking notes, but they won't make individuals identifiable. All information will be stored and handled securely, and then deleted/destroyed after our research.

- Ask if it is ok to ask them questions, or if they would prefer that you just silently observed.

- Ask how you can best observe without disrupting their work. Explain it's fine to ask you to move if inconvenient or disruptive to everyday business.

Top Tips

- **Capture context:** describe as much as possible, sketch if helpful, use your senses and think about how your perceptions change and why. Be aware of how contexts may change depending on where individuals are and who else is present.

- **Introduce yourself:** help people feel comfortable with you being there and informal conversations may help us understand what 'normal' or different.

- **Capture behaviour:** what do people do as well as what do they say? Body language, tone, manner. Make sure to pick this up in your notes.

- **Write everything down:** Remember to include time and location stamps.

- **Your emotions, thoughts and feelings are data:** Your own experiences are data so make sure to capture this in your notes.

- **Self-reflection:** consider your positionality as a researcher and your physical presence within the building, does this impact what you are observing? How?

- **Inaccessible spaces:** the areas you can't access are just as important as those you can. Make sure to notes these down.

Key Topics

- Location – interior and exterior, movement

- Models – partnerships, co-delivery

- Customer and staff experiences

- Social value – behaviour, interactions and conflicts

Date of observation:	
Name of observer:	
Site Location:	
Initial observations (external)	
Signposting – which businesses/organisations appear to be in the building? Language, font, accessibility, size, positioning. Are there noticeboards? Information in windows? Are these being looked at? How often? By who? How is the access to the co-located site? Are there good transport links? What type of transport links are these? (e.g. city centre trams, buses, taxis/Ubers?). Is there a car park available? What are the costs? How full is it? Are the people using the car park using the building, or going elsewhere? Does it get more or less full at different times of day? Location – is the area busy or quiet? What time of day is it? Lighting, presence, CCTV, does the area appear safe? What/who else is around? People and businesses.	
Initial Observations (internal)	
Is there a reception/welcome desk? What is it like? Are there signs for all the services? What are they like (font, images, colours, language(s))? How easy are	

they to read/understand? How visible are they? Do you feel like you can navigate? Is this easy or difficult? Is there someone you can speak to? What information is available (e.g. leaflets, posters, maps)? Can these be taken away? How many are there – how does this change throughout the day? What is the information about? What do they say? What are they like (font, images, colours, language(s))? Are there refreshments or vending machines? Are they working? What do they sell/provide? How much do they cost? Are they easily visible? Are they being used? Is there presence of security staff? If so, how visible/active are they? Does the jobcentre seem busy or quiet? Where is it most busy or quiet? (e.g., in the JC, in the co-located organisations?). What size is the building? How is it laid out (e.g. number of floors, stairs, lifts/escalators)? Accessibility – door width, ramps, handles, seating. Where are services positioned? How visible are they? How much space do they have available? How much are they utilising? What types of people are in the jobcentre? Is it crowded or spacious? If crowded, where is it crowded and why (e.g., are there specific co-located organisations that people seem more/less popular than others?) Are there queues for services? Which ones? When? Who is waiting? How is the general mood: do staff seem energized or lacklustre? Is this the same for all staff (DWP vs. Co-located organisation staff?). Does the workflow seem organised or is it more chaotic? How is the space organised? Are certain areas dedicated to certain activities? What was the 'atmosphere' like? (the 'mood' of the place). How did you feel yourself in the co-located site? (e.g., relaxed, stressed, or neutral)? Do you think the mood/atmosphere has an impact in any way on staff, customers or citizens? How did staff and claimants interact with you? Were they friendly or suspicious? Why do you think this was (e.g., they felt at ease, they were worried you were assessing them etc.)? Did staff behaviour around you or attitudes toward you seem to change after they discovered that you were researching them?

Observations over time (internal and external)

Location – is the area busy or quiet? What time of day is it? What/who else is around? People and businesses. Staff – any changes to visibility or activity through the day? How is the general mood: do staff seem energized or lacklustre? Is this the same for all staff (DWP vs. Co-located organisation staff?). How did staff interact with you? Were they friendly or suspicious? Why do you think this was (e.g., they felt at ease, they were worried you were assessing them etc.)? How do staff interact with each other and staff from other services? Did staff behaviour around you or attitudes toward you seem to change after they discovered that you were researching them? Do staff behave differently for different customers? For customers using different services? Citizens – any differences in customer type through the day? Number of customers? Use of jobcentre or other organisation. How did citizens interact with you? Were they friendly or suspicious? Why do you think this was (e.g., they felt at ease, they were worried you were assessing them etc.)? Did this change after initial interaction? After you explained why you were there? After you moved location/position? Over time? General - Does the jobcentre seem busy or quiet? Where is it most busy or quiet? (e.g., in the JC, in the co-located organisations?) Is it crowded or spacious? If crowded, where is it crowded and why (e.g., are there specific co-located organisations that people seem

more/less popular than others?) Does the workflow seem organised or is it more chaotic? How is the space organised? Are certain areas dedicated to certain activities? What was the 'atmosphere' like? (the 'mood' of the place). How did you feel yourself in the co-located site? (e.g., relaxed, stressed, or neutral)? Do you think the mood/atmosphere has an impact in any way on staff, customers or citizens?

Observing interactions

Who is interacting? (e.g. DWP staff, partner organisation staff, customer or citizen). Group or 1:1? Who approached who? How engaged is each person? Where does the interaction take place? Is the environment appropriate? How public or private is the space? Is anybody else present? How involved are they in the interaction? Are they paying attention? Is the interaction audible to the rest of the jobcentre? Does this impact anyone involved in the interaction? Does the interaction impact other activities in the jobcentre (e.g. distract customers or staff, obstruct physical space etc.)? Is there enough space? Do they move location or stay stationary? Is the space appropriate? Is it comfortable (e.g., cramped)? Is it dark? Does the space environment affect the mood/engagement or the motivation of staff and claimants? What might the purpose of the interaction be? Does the interaction appear planned or spontaneous? If planned, does it appear to be happening at the expected time? Has anybody had to rearrange? Why? Does the interaction appear serious or relaxed, important, casual or professional? What is the general mood? Do they appear comfortable, relaxed? Why/ why not? Is the sentiment positive (+), negative (-) or neutral (o)? Is there a hierarchy or does it appear one is more/less experienced? Does one/both appear to be a manager or senior leader? What topic is being discussed or activities undertaken? Does the dialogue match the body language and tone? Does the conversation feel tailored/personal, or generic? Is this a new topic, or has it been discussed before? Does the conversation flow smoothly? Any visible emotional reactions or mood changes during the interaction. Does any (potential) conflict arise? Are there any potential challenging or threatening behaviours or questions? Who from? How is this dealt with? Does it appear that those interacting know each other well or not? Why? Does anybody involved in the interaction put others at ease? Make others appear uncomfortable? Does anyone speak more than others? Are there any patterns or trends? Body language, tone, manner. Length of interaction – do they talk about the same thing, or different things? How long have they interacted for? How does the interaction begin and end? How does each party leave/move? Where do they go next? Do they approach anybody else? Are there any actions or follow ups agreed or undertaken? What is the mood of each person involved in the interaction after? Anything else that seems relevant?

Self-reflection & any other observations Notes

Reflections on how your positionality as a researcher might have impacted staff behaviour in the jobcentre. Inevitably, your presence as a researcher in the jobcentre will impact the staff's behaviour in some way and it is important to be as aware of this as possible. Researcher impact can partially be determined from self-reflexive observations, but it is important, if possible, to have a

conversation with the WC or citizen one-on-one afterward as well. To think through this, consider/explore the following: If possible, ask privately if they felt that your observation impacted how the interaction should or does normally go. Was the mood and rapport different? Did they talk about different things? Did you observe your presence as a researcher affecting the behaviour of anyone? For example, when observing other interactions from a distance in a jobcentre, did their behaviour seem noticeably different (e.g., louder or quieter, more or less confident, etc.) than interactions where you were more prominent? Similarly, did staff behaviour around you or attitudes toward you seem to change after they discovered that you were researching them? **Please note any other observations which you think are relevant. In particular, new topics of interest which we had not considered prior to conducting observational visits and which we may want to explore more in interviews.**

Coding framework

Topic guide section	Level 1	Description	Level 2	Description
BACKGROUND	**TRANSPORT**	Individuals travelling to or from the site including distance, time and mode of transport. Include any references to how participants feel about travelling. NOT relating to who individuals have travelled with (include instead in accompaniment).	**TIME TAKEN / DISTANCE TRAVELLED**	Anything relating to time taken or distance travelled to or from a site, including time/distance over multiple journeys if appropriate.
			PUBLIC	Anything relating to use of public transport to travel to or from sites or services.
			PRIVATE	Anything relating to use of private transport (including walking) to travel to or from sites or services.
			OTHER	Anything else relating to travel.

	ACCOMPANIMENT	Who people travel to or from the site with. This may include shared travel arrangements for staff (e.g. parking at a colleague's house).	CARING RESPONSIBILITY	Anything relating to appointees, carers or formal support for staff or customers in relation to visiting sites or services, including support with travel.
			INFORMAL	Anything relating to informal attendance with more than one individual e.g. family members, friends or children. ONLY include here if participant does not mention a caring responsibility or more formal arrangement of care and support, even if from a family member.
	EXPERIENCE OF LOCATION	How long individuals have known about or used the site. Include information around e.g. parking facilities or location information which could impact access to, or time spent in the building. NOT relating to anything about		

		the building itself (include instead in building interior or building exterior) or other locations used (include instead in other locations).		
MODELS	**EXPERIENCE OF SERVICE(S)**	Experiences of services by staff or citizens, including DWP and other services. Include here staff perceptions of citizen experiences. NOT relating to co-delivery (include instead in co-delivery) or signposting to other services (include instead in signposting).	**AWARENESS OF SERVICES**	Anything relating to awareness of services at the building, where participants do not mention using the service (e.g. I know there is X here on floor Y). ONLY include here if relating to awareness and not use, otherwise include instead in services used.
			SERVCES USED	Anything relating to services used by participants.
			VIRTUAL SERVICES	Anything relating to virtual delivery, including preferences for virtual or face-to-face services.
			OPENING HOURS	
	EXPERIENCE OF STAFF	Experiences of staff by staff, customers or citizens, including DWP	**DWP**	

		and other services. Include here staff perceptions of citizen perspectives.		
			OTHER	
			SECURITY	
	SIGNPOSTING	Staff or citizens signposting to other services, including how this has been done. This may be staff signposting service users, service users being signposted or service users helping to signpost each other, include all here. Include here any outcomes as a result of effective or ineffective signposting and views on this. NOT relating to co-delivery, where services work together as opposed to 'passing' citizens to another service (include instead in co-delivery) and NOT relating to posters, leaflets or		

		noticeboards (include instead in building interior).		
	CO-DELIVERY	Co-delivery of services, where staff from different services work together with citizens with an integrated approach. This may also include joint meetings of services or sharing of information between services. NOT relating to signposting to other services (include instead in signposting).		
	EXPECTATIONS	Staff or citizen initial expectations of co-location of services, expectations of the building or location. NOT references to future expectations/hopes (include instead in FUTURE codes as appropriate). NOT relating to impacts or outcomes of current co-location for staff or		

		customers (include instead in outcomes and impacts).		
	EXPERIENCE OF CUSTOMERS	Experiences of (types) of customers that attend, engage with or face challenges regarding access and use of sites or services, or are perceived to. IF relating to any other first-level code (e.g. accompaniment, co-delivery or signposting), include under that code		
LOCATION	**BUILDING INTERIOR**	Interior of the building, including layout, posters, notices and movement throughout the building.	**TEMPERATURE**	Temp of building
			SIGNS/NOTICES	Signs, notices. Not referring to staff signposting to where people need to go.
			PRIVACY	People overhearing or being overheard as well as physical privacy of protecting/viewing/visibility of personal data

			LAYOUT AND SIZE	Referring to space, where things are, lighting
			BUSY	Referring specifically to the word busy or references to number of people/wait times or generally how 'full' the location is
			OTHER	
	BUILDING EXTERIOR	Exterior of the building. NOT anything related to where the building is situated/located (include instead in experience of location).		
			PARKING	
	ACCESSIBILITY	Accessibility to the building or within the building including any strengths or barriers to access. Anything relating to the layout of the interior of the building IF relating to how accessible or comfortable it is to access. This may include tight spaces, stairs, distance to		

		walk/move. Anything relating to access getting to and getting into or around the exterior of the building or any references to access that aren't specific to the layout of the building.		
	SUSTAINABILITY	Sustainability or longevity of staff, customers, locations or services and reasons for this. NOT anything relating to changes participants want to increase sustainability or longevity (include instead in future section) and NOT relating to financial longevity or sustainability (include instead in finances/costs)		
	OTHER LOCATIONS	Experiences at other locations of services or staff, or any comparisons made about the building/services/staff.	**UNIQUENESS**	Uniqueness of service, location or delivery specific to a particular site, location or service in comparison to other sites/experiences. NOT anything unique

				specifically relating to co-delivery (include instead in co-delivery).
SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL VALUES	**OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS**	Positives or challenges to outcomes. Anything relating to performance for DWP customers (e.g. progress into work or more hours) and any references to the impact of co-location for staff. Social benefits of co-location, including access to services and positive impacts or challenges for different claimant types. Include here impacts of co-delivery, signposting of services and other impacts relating to first-level codes. Avoid duplication of evidence within those codes and just include here. NOT relating to expectations (include instead in expectations) or future	**STAFF IMPACTS**	

		changes (include instead in FUTURE codes).		
			CUSTOMER OUTCOMES	
	FIANANCES/COSTS	Financial costs, including savings or losses regarding the building, location, services or experiences. This may also include financial costs of travel or use of the service from a staff or customer/citizen perspective.		
FUTURE	**CURRENT OR PAST CHANGE**	Any changes that have already happened to the site, services, location or staff.		
	CHANGE OF LOCATION	Future changes or hoped for changes to the location. This may include a move of location or changes happening surrounding the area which participants reference.		

	CHANGE OF BUILDING	Future changes or hoped for changes to the building. This may include changes to layout, design, decoration, or hardware. Also include changes within the building (e.g. change of floor or work area). If change in building is in reference to services leaving or joining, include instead in change to service. NOT relating to future moves to a different building (include instead in change of location).		
	CHANGE TO SERVICE	Future changes of services within the building, including organisations leaving or joining the building. NOT relating to moving within the building for layout/design reasons (include instead in change to building).	DWP	

			OTHER	
			GENERAL	
	CHANGE TO STAFF	Future changes to staff within the co-location building. NOT relating to changes of staff as a subsequence of changes to a service e.g. organisations	DWP	
			OTHER	
			GENERAL	
	OTHER CHANGE (MISC)	Any other changes hoped for or expected in the future that do not relate to any other FUTURE codes.		

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