

## Jobcentre Plus evaluation: summary of evidence

By Jo Corkett, Stuart Bennett, John Stafford, Mari Frogner and Kim Shrapnell

Jobcentre Plus brings together the Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency dealing with people of working age to deliver a single, work-focused, integrated service to both employers and benefit claimants of working age. The aim of this service is to help more people into work and employers to fill their vacancies; to provide people of working age with the help and support to which they are entitled; and to improve continuously the quality, accessibility and delivery of services to all working age customers. This work-focused approach to the benefits system intends that people of working age making new or repeat claims for working age benefits should consider work as an option before proceeding with their claims.

In October 2001, the Jobcentre Plus service began operating in 56 Pathfinder sites and associated contact centres in 17 clusters across the UK, and now covers over fifty per cent of the country. In order to monitor the extent to which Jobcentre Plus is meeting its service delivery and labour market objectives, a continuous evaluation has taken place, involving analysis of administrative data on service delivery and labour market outcomes (conducted internally); and social research (commissioned externally).

### Key findings

- There is growing evidence that integrated offices in Jobcentre Plus are getting more lone parents and people with health conditions and disabilities into work. Job entries for these clients have increased both absolutely and relative to non-integrated districts. Evidence also suggests that increased interventions for these two groups have led to increased off

flows from benefits. There is little evidence to suggest any impact on carers and the bereaved.

- Evaluation evidence shows that there has been progress made in meeting the vision, and that the service is mainly delivered according to the vision. However, there still remains some difficulties in delivering a work focus to people with health conditions and disabilities, and carers, although much more of a work focus is evident for people with health conditions and disabilities in IB Pathways to work areas.
- The response of customers is very encouraging, with the majority reporting that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the new service. Staff also expressed very positive views about the office environment, indicating it helped them to provide a more professional service to customers.

### Labour Market Outcomes

Job entries have risen since the introduction of Jobcentre Plus; in Pathfinder offices (rolled out between October 2001 and March 2002) both absolutely and relative to non-integrated districts, in both Pathfinder and Day 2 (offices rolled out between October 2002 and March 2003) districts performance initially fell due to the disruption of office rollout, although these districts have now recovered to levels that occurred prior to rollout.

Administrative data shows an increase in short term off-flow rates for Lone Parents, and evidence from Pathways to Work areas shows that increased support has a significant impact on off-flows for people on IB.

## **First Contact**

*Clients wishing to initiate a benefit claim are encouraged to do so through a Contact Centre where they speak to a First Contact Officer (FCO), who should explain the requirement to take part in a WFI, and its purpose.*

Around eight in ten customers across all client groups reported being 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with the service they had received at First Contact.

The majority of customers across all client groups were informed by FCOs that attending a Work Focused Interview (WFI) was a compulsory condition of benefit entitlement. Between 67 per cent - 80 per cent of customers also reported that FCOs informed them that the purpose of the WFI was to discuss work.

Administrative data indicates that there is an increasing work focus element at First Contact for Jobseekers, where the proportion with a job submission at First Contact increased from six per cent in October 2001 to 16 per cent in July 2004. A smaller increase has also occurred for lone parents, rising from one per cent to three per cent in 2004. However, for people with health conditions and disabilities the proportion remains constant at one per cent. However, less than one per cent of each client group is recorded as having a job entry at First Contact, although in some Contact Centres, Office Managers continued to report that they were placing a higher emphasis on job brokering and as such FCOs acknowledged that these targets increased their awareness of the need to conduct job searches and submissions.

The process for deferring and waiving WFIs was broadly delivered in line with the Jobcentre Plus vision.

## **Financial Assessor meeting**

*The client first attends a Financial Assessor (FA) meeting, where the FA is responsible for checking claim forms, Customer Statements, and any supporting evidence, and making the claim processable.*

Around nine in ten customers across all client groups reported being 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with the service they had received from their FA.

Three quarters of jobseekers were told by the FA that they would not receive benefits unless they attended a WFI, compared to around half of the other client groups.

FAs and FAMs were confident that they checked customers' claim forms or customer statements in line with the requirements of the Must Dos.

Progress has occurred across all offices in that FAs were providing customers with more information and advice about entitlements to benefits and financial help. However, some FAs, especially those without a benefit background, felt that there were some gaps in the training and information provided on certain benefits, particularly those felt to be more complicated such as IB and Carers Allowance.

In some Jobcentre Plus offices, FAs continued to telephone customers the day before their appointment to check on their attendance, that claim forms had been completed and to remind them about bringing supporting identification and evidence to the meeting. It was felt that this helped to reduce the 'Failure to Attend' (FTA) rate.

## **Work Focused Interview**

Six to seven in ten customers from all other client groups reported being 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with the service they had received from their Personal Adviser. Non-JSA customers especially found PAs approachable and friendly.

Administrative data suggests that only 48 per cent of clients are booked to attend their WFI within four days of First Contact, of which lone parents are the most likely. The rollout of Day 2 offices caused this rate to fall further.

FTA rates for booked WFIs have been rising slightly since May 2003, from 20 per cent to 24 per cent in September 2004. FTA rates for deferred WFIs have been falling from a peak of 45 per cent in September 2002 but have fluctuated between 25-30 per cent from November 2003 onwards. It appears that the FTA rate increases as the number of days between First Contact and the interview date increases.

The majority of customers across all client groups reported that PAs had explained 'very' or 'fairly' well that the one of the purposes of the meeting was to talk about work, and between 77 per cent-97 per cent of customers across all client groups discussed work at their WFI; although the depth of this discussion varied throughout the groups.

Around six in ten people with health conditions and disabilities and lone parents discussed barriers to work with their PA. IBPAs felt that helping the customer to overcome some of their key barriers to work was as important as moving them immediately into work, but it appeared that in Jobcentre Plus, customers' self-assessed barriers to finding work remained unchallenged by PAs, especially where they were not confident in dealing with clients with more severe physical or mental health conditions.

However, there was progress, in that PAs felt more comfortable discussing work with most other non-JSA customers, and some staff reported feeling more knowledgeable about the organisations and service to which customers could be referred.

Nearly all JSA customers recalled completing a mandatory Jobseekers Agreement, but only between seven per cent and 16 per cent of non-JSA customers recalled completing a voluntary Customer Action Plan, with whom there remains little explicit action planning.

Administrative data shows that 46 per cent of Jobseekers, 10 per cent of lone parents and six per cent of people with health conditions and disabilities were submitted to vacancies at their initial WFI.

Around six in ten Jobseekers reported that they were made aware of future compulsory meetings, compared to a much smaller proportion of non-JSA clients (between 26 per cent-51 per cent).

## *Caseloading*

PAs continued to view caseloading as an important method for achieving overall job submission targets; the initial WFI was seen as an opportunity to build up a rapport with non-JSA customers, with work discussed in more detail at future meetings.

Caseloading is concentrated on more job ready customers; those whom PAs believed were ready to start looking immediately and had good prospects for getting back to work. As such, lone parents were routinely given information about the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) during the WFI, whereas promotion of the New Deal for Disabled People to people with health conditions and disabilities was rare. However, it appears that some customers deemed not ready for work at the time of the initial WFI are re-contacted at a later date. In addition to the New Deals, PAs offered what they regarded as 'informal' caseloading support which included additional face to face contact and telephone contact.

The impact of the introduction of WFIs in April 2001 can clearly be seen on movement into NDLP on a national basis, as can the introduction of Jobcentre Plus on take-up in Pathfinder areas, which increased from six per cent at the time of rollout to 12 per cent in March 2002. Take-up in Pathfinder areas has generally been above the other rollout stages. There has been a general upward trend in NDLP take-up since then. NDLP take-up has been increasing since offices went live in March 2003. Take up rates increased from six per cent at the time of rollout to ten per cent. This rise however occurred after a reduction, possibly associated with the disruption that rollout initially causes.

The proportion of clients caseloaded onto NDDP has been rising since rollout began in July 2001. At the time of integration, just 0.1 per cent of people with health conditions and disabilities moved onto NDDP within six months of the claim start, but the latest evidence suggests this to be nearly three per cent. Pathways to Work districts are more effective (although were also more effective prior to rollout), now caseloading six per cent of clients within six months.

As well as NDLP and NDDP activity, about 19 per cent of lone parents and 30 per cent of people with health conditions and disabilities attended further meetings. (The numbers will be lower for lone parents as they only cover the period before the first trigger meeting is due).

Evidence shows that caseloading is effective in securing job outcomes, suggesting that of lone parents who are caseloaded directly from the initial WFI, 52 per cent achieve a job entry. Similar results are illustrated for people with health conditions and disabilities. Overall, perceptions of caseloading varied both across and within offices.

### *Mandatory Review and Trigger Meetings*

Analysis suggests that a significant proportion of lone parents are not having their six month review booked, and although progress is being made, there is still a significant gap in arranging these triggers meetings. It also appears that a significant volume of people with health conditions and disabilities are not having a triggered WFI following their Personal Capability Assessment (PCA). Of those who had their initial PCA between April and June 2004, 18 per cent had a triggered WFI booked in the three months; whilst over 50 per cent do not have any activity and remain on benefit. However, the proportion being triggered has risen slightly and the proportion of clients having no further contact has fallen, which is encouraging.

### *Fraud, Error and Accuracy*

Small sample sizes have led to large uncertainties in the analysis so we cannot conclude whether the Monetary Value of Fraud and Error performance in the Pathfinder and non-integrated offices was significantly different. Although in the wider evaluation there is some indirect evidence that process and Gateway security have not suffered through the introduction of new procedures, there is not enough evidence to say conclusively whether this has been the case.

### *Office Environment and Safety*

In general, both staff and customers expressed very positive views about the office environment. Staff felt the new offices were nicer places to work, and helped them to provide a more

professional service to customers, and around 80 per cent were 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with office environment, feeling it had improved over time. Customers have however expressed concern about a lack of privacy in the open plan environment.

Staff generally felt safe working in the integrated Jobcentre Plus office environment, valuing the safety measures put in place, and reporting that the more professional and open plan environment had a positive effect on customer behaviour and customer service. However, there was limited consistency in the operation of safety procedures, and staff were generally unaware of the content of safety guidance. There was also under-reporting of less serious incidents by staff. Generally, customers reported that they felt safe in Jobcentre Plus offices, although attitudes towards the presence of security guards was mixed.

The full report of these research findings is published for the Department for Work and Pensions by Corporate Document Services (ISBN 1 84123 829 5. Research Report 252. June 2005).

It is available from Paul Noakes at the address below.

You can also download this report free from: [www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/)

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Paul Noakes, Strategic Research and Modelling Division, 4th Floor, The Adelphi, 1-11 John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT. E-mail: [Paul.Noakes@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.Noakes@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)