

**DWP Customer Insight
Directorate**

Well enough to work

Customer Transitions

Customer Insight findings report

July 2010

Well Enough to Work findings report

- Summary 3
 - Background..... 3
 - Aims of research..... 3
 - Findings 3
- Methodology 4
 - Phase 1 4
 - Phase 2 4
 - Staff discussion groups..... 4
 - Customer interviews 4
 - Pathways providers 4
 - Intermediary organisations 4
- Findings 5
 - Customers 5
 - Repeating information..... 5
 - Lack of joined up services 5
 - Gaps in payments can cause financial difficulties and stress 5
 - Varying levels of support 5
 - Support arrangements provided by Pathways providers 6
 - Making new claims 6
 - Letters are confusing 6
 - DWP Staff 6
 - Knowledge of a customer’s circumstances..... 6
 - Medical concerns..... 6
 - Using information already held 7
 - Disruption in payments causes additional work..... 7
 - Providing effective advice and guidance..... 7
 - Pathways providers 7
 - Intermediary organisations..... 7

Summary

Background

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) recognises that moving back into work is an important step for customers, but that this transition may sometimes be difficult. This research was commissioned to provide an insight into the issues and problems that customers encounter as they move nearer to the labour market; but especially as they make the important first step moving from Incapacity Benefit (IB) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or work.

Aims of research

The aim of the Customer Insight research was to identify the core issues for a small sample of customers who had recently, or were in the process of, moving from IB or ESA to JSA or into work. The aim of the research was to:

- gain an understanding of the customer journey as they transition from IB/ESA to JSA or work;
- seek views from staff of the current operational processes used to support customers through this particular transition and how they could be improved;
- gain an understanding of customers' interaction with the Pathways providers and the value of the support arrangements provided by them; and
- gauge intermediaries' views on the kinds of issues customers bring to them with regards to the transition from IB/ESA to JSA.

The high level insight obtained will help increase understanding of the customer experience of this specific transition. It will supplement existing DWP research held on this subject.

Findings

This report provides details of the research carried out between December 2008 and January 2009. The findings highlighted that the transition could be difficult due to the need to repeat information, the possibility of financial concerns caused by gaps in payments, and communications within the Department and to the customer.

Methodology

The research was conducted in two phases:

Phase 1

DWP Customer Insight carried out a comprehensive review of existing research relating to customers' experience of moving from one benefit to another.

Phase 2

DWP Customer Insight carried out interviews which elicited the views of a sample of staff and customers on the issues faced by customers who moved from IB/ESA to JSA or into work. The interviews took place between 10 December 2008 and 20 January 2009.

Staff discussion groups

DWP Customer Insight conducted three discussion groups with a total of 25 members of staff. Five in depth interviews were conducted with staff from Jobcentre Plus districts and Benefit Delivery offices.

Customer interviews

DWP Customer Insight conducted in depth interviews with a small sample of 24 randomly selected customers who had recently moved from IB/ESA to JSA or had taken up employment. Their interactions with DWP were mapped to give a detailed understanding of their experience.

The customer and staff interviews were supplemented with views provided by:

Pathways providers

DWP Customer Insight conducted three in depth interviews with providers who deliver a service to customers who are on IB/ESA to help them into work.

Intermediary organisations

DWP Customer Insight conducted one in depth interview with a local Citizens Advice representative.

The high level findings are being used to inform the work being carried out by DWP aiming to improve customer transitions. The small sample size means the findings are not representative of all customer groups, but highlight some key strengths and weaknesses within the existing transition from IB/ESA to JSA or into work.

Findings

The focus of this research was to look at the specific transition from IB/ESA to JSA as part of the move into work, and gain an understanding of any specific issues and problems customers encountered.

Customers

Repeating information

Customers frequently reported that they were surprised to be asked for information which they had already provided. For example, when a customer's health improves and they become well enough to work the information already held for IB is disregarded when they make a new claim for JSA.

“This is a change of circumstances – you already have all my information... why are you asking for it again”

Source: male JSA claimant age 41 – 50

Lack of joined up services

Customers don't understand why, when they transition from one benefit to another, their information is not actively shared with other partners (such as Local Authorities for Housing Benefit). This would avoid the necessity of making new claims or incurring gaps in payments.

Gaps in payments can cause financial difficulties and stress

Some customers were afraid to sign off IB even if they were well enough to work, as they were worried about benefit payments stopping, causing a knock-on effect for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. For example if a customer moved from IB to JSA, their IB claim would be closed, which automatically triggers Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit payments to cease.

“Why don't you talk to each other and pass on my information”

Source: female JSA claimant age 21- 30

Delays in advising customers of the outcome of decisions relating to their IB/ESA claim may lead to delays in making a new claim to JSA, which can cause a gap in payments and financial stress.

Varying levels of support

Customers may establish a strong relationship with their IB adviser and find it difficult to make the transition to JSA as they need to start the process over again with a different adviser. Some customers said that the approach to helping customers on JSA was very different to that on IB and they found it difficult to make the transition.

Support arrangements provided by Pathways providers

Customers stated that they found the tailored support arrangements provided by the Pathways providers invaluable. In particular the 'Condition Management Programme' which was delivered by health care professionals. This helps clients understand and manage their conditions and assists in getting them back to work.

Making new claims

Some customers were unaware that they had to make a new claim when they moved from one benefit to another, for example from IB/ESA to JSA. They believed that they were dealing with the same organisation so were unaware of the need to complete a new claim. The resulting delay in making a new claim created a negative experience of the overall service provided.

Letters are confusing

Letters advising customers on decisions relating to their IB/ESA claims are seen as confusing. For example, customers are asked to contact the Jobcentre rather than advising them to contact the Contact Centre direct to make a new claim. This results in unnecessary contact for the Jobcentre and is frustrating for customers.

"I had a letter to say that I wouldn't be entitled to Incapacity Benefit and to contact the Jobcentre. When I did, I was told to ring the contact centre – why didn't the letter say this is in the first place and provide a contact number?"

Source: male JSA claimant age 31- 40

DWP Staff

Knowledge of a customer's circumstances

IB and Pathways personal advisors build strong relationships with customers and have a lot of knowledge of their circumstances. This vital knowledge is not always transferred to the JSA personal adviser who draws up a Jobseeker's Agreement without this information. This can lead to a customer's Jobseeker's Agreement not fully reflecting their personal circumstances or suitability for certain types of employment.

Medical concerns

When customers move from IB/ESA to JSA, their Jobseeker's Agreement is drawn up by the JSA advisers who have no access to the customer's full medical findings from the Work Capability Assessment. As a result, some customers (especially those with mental health conditions) may be unwilling to talk about any additional support they may need, for fear that they will then be considered 'unfit for work' by the JSA advisor. As a consequence customers may experience difficulties and delays in proving their eligibility for either benefit.

Some customers may subsequently be referred to Disability Employment Advisers who are trained to provide specialist support. However, not all customers will get this

Well Enough to Work findings report

referral or there may be some delay during which time the customer may feel unsupported.

Using information already held

Different IT systems across the agencies that cannot share information between one another make it difficult to use information already held for customers. Information has to be requested and recaptured again causing unnecessary paperwork and increased cost of delivery.

Disruption in payments causes additional work

When payments are not received on time, customers contact the Department for crisis loan applications which results in additional work processing the application, making the payment and then recovering it.

Providing effective advice and guidance

Staff feel that they are sometimes unable to provide effective advice during the first work focused interview as customers are preoccupied with concerns about their benefit payments. Staff are therefore unable to concentrate their discussions on the customers' readiness for work.

Pathways providers

Providers stated that ensuring payments continue to be made without gaps would help customers focus on the positive aspects of seeking work. Any breaks in benefit payments caused uncertainty for customers and was a distraction from seeking work.

Intermediary organisations

Intermediaries were concerned that customers' ability to work is not always taken into account when making decisions (in particular customers with mental health conditions). They were concerned that on the day of their Work Capability Assessment their health condition may not be appropriately visible and an incorrect decision about their ability to work could be made. This may lead to people who are unable to work being deemed fit for work. As a result the customer could potentially be receiving the wrong benefit where they may not get the support or help they require.