

In and Out of Work Project

Why local authorities are getting involved

Closer working between the Department for Work and Pensions, Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs and local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales

February 2009



Introduction

The In and Out of Work Project will make it quicker and easier for certain customers to claim and receive in and out of work benefits, by ensuring that different organisations share information and work together. Turning benefits on and off quickly gives customers more confidence to take up employment.

In and Out of Work pilots were implemented across six local authority (LA) areas from September 2007 by a joint project between local authorities, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC) Tax Credit Office.

Following the success of these pilots, national roll-out was launched in October 2008 with a plan to complete this by the end of December 2009.

Lindsay is a private tenant who has recently returned to work.

"I contacted Jobcentre Plus to advise them I had started work. I'd been told that they would then contact the Tax Credit Office and local council for me, though I wasn't confident this would happen. But it did, they did it all. It was so much easier than I expected. Last time I did this I didn't really know who to contact and it seemed like I had to fill in lots of forms to continue to get Housing Benefit. This time my Tax Credits were sorted out and paid in just over a week. My Housing Benefit was reassessed quickly as well – it was sorted out before my Extended Payment had ended."

"What is crucial is that we find ways of helping customers back into work and support them to stay in work while still being able to claim what they're entitled to."

Flo Clucas,
Deputy Council Leader,
Liverpool Council

Why introduce new processes?

Research showed that customers moving in and out of work had to make multiple contacts when claiming benefits; had to provide the same documentation to different organisations; found the claim process complicated; and waited too long for their benefit. Customers wanted a simpler and quicker process.

What are the main changes?

Jobcentre Plus gathers customer information and evidence at the first point of contact and shares it with the Tax Credit Office and LAs.

For customers moving out of work this includes private tenant details and non-dependant's income. A Housing Benefit (HB) Evidence Checklist is issued to the customer and the LA, making it clear what information the customer has provided or has been asked to send on to the LA.

Customers moving back into work are asked additional questions about their work and if they wish to claim Tax Credits and HB/Council Tax Benefit (CTB). 'Into work statements' are then sent via new secure links to the Tax Credit Office and the LA.

Richard Haddock is a local authority Customer Services Team Leader in Merthyr Tydfil.

“The In and Out of Work Project has helped local authorities gather the information required to process customers’ in and out of work claims far more quickly. Because Jobcentre Plus request the information from the customer at the first point of contact, we frequently have all of the necessary information without contacting the customer ourselves.

“The most successful aspect is the Into Work Process. We receive notification that the customer has started employment more quickly, and we’re provided with the customer’s in work details. This has really improved our ability to process the in work claim at an early stage, and it’s given our customers a greater incentive to take up short-term employment.”

What’s in this for staff and local authorities?



- **Less duplication.** As the HB Evidence Checklist confirms Jobcentre Plus has asked for outstanding information or evidence, LAs don’t have to send as many requests for further information.
- **Improved rate of completion** – LA Input Documents completed more fully.
- **Improved performance**, in part because the customer is asked to provide all documents at the start of the claim process and more information is forwarded on to LAs.
- **Better understanding** by Jobcentre Plus staff of HB/CTB issues and LA requirements.
- **Greater understanding** of the whole process and each other’s roles.
- **Increased trust** between organisations.
- **Improved customer service.**

What's in this for customers?



Customers get a simpler and quicker process

They contact one organisation to make their claim and don't have to provide the same documents to three different organisations.

They get their benefit paid quicker

In pilot sites the end-to-end process was 15% quicker on average.

Customers are more confident about being able to return to work

An independent report shows that the simpler process and quicker turnaround time give customers more confidence to take up work, especially short-term work.

"I am surprised at how quick and easy it was to sort out my entitlements."

Customer starting work in West Somerset

"I am really impressed by the service and by the fact that I can access all three services in one place."

Lambeth customer

"I like to be able to make a new claim to Tax Credit and give my Housing Benefit assessment information at the same time – this should be available to all customers."

Lambeth customer

"It's a great example of how joined-up processes can improve both customer service and overall efficiency."

Martin Jungnitz, Head of Benefits Services, Liverpool Direct Ltd

"The new process has brought significant improvements to the customer's experience when claiming Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit as a result of moving in or out of work. The information from the customer is now collected and exchanged more effectively, with these benefits being paid quicker."

Sandra Molloy, Benefit Team Leader, West Lothian Council

"The In and Out of Work Project has strengthened the working relationship between the local authority and Jobcentre Plus. We all now have a much clearer understanding of each other's roles in the process."

Simon White, Benefits Assessor in Sedgemoor

Craig is a council tenant who recently reclaimed Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

"I phoned Jobcentre Plus to make my claim. The phone call was quite detailed but I was told what documents to provide and was given an appointment at the Jobcentre the following day. My Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit were sorted out without me having to contact the council at all. I also got my Tax Credits amended without having to contact the Tax Credit Office. It was much quicker than last time, less fuss and my benefit came through much quicker. I'm hoping to get another job soon, and whilst I'm looking for permanent work I feel more comfortable in taking on short-term work, as I know that my benefit can be sorted out quickly."

What do local authorities need to do to implement the new processes?



Jobcentre Plus Regional Implementation Managers (RIMs) have been appointed. Your RIM will work with and support you in agreeing roll-out schedules and local implementation plans.

You must have Government Connect Secure Extranet (GCSx) and have achieved Code of Conduct (CoCo) compliance. This is to ensure that information is exchanged via the most secure methods.

You need to ensure your IT colleagues are working towards getting GCSx connection and CoCo compliance.

LAs joining now have the security of knowing that the pilot sites have thoroughly tested the new processes and refined them to ensure that they work well.

For more information:

- Watch our DVD for more about customer and staff experiences of the In and Out of Work pilots.
- Read the independent evaluation report – see DWP Published Research Report 508.
- Read General Information Bulletin HB/CTB G19/2008.
- Read Adjudication Circular HB/CTB A26/2008 for more details about the process.
- Email iow@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk
- Visit www.dwp.gov.uk and search for 'In and Out of Work processes'.

Sharon is a council tenant. She's a lone parent who has recently returned to work.

"I've suffered from arthritis recently but was keen to return to work. I was offered a job where I had been doing a work placement. I contacted Jobcentre Plus and they took all my details. They asked if I wanted to continue to claim Tax Credits and Housing Benefit and I said yes, as my pay isn't much. I couldn't believe it when my Tax Credit payment came through in only a week. As I worked fixed hours, the council amended my claim using the details Jobcentre Plus gave them. It took just two weeks for my claim to be amended. I had to send in some pay slips for them to make sure my Housing Benefit was correct – and it was."

