

# Post Office signing proof of concept trial

Equality Impact Assessment

September 2011

# Equality impact assessment for Post Office signing proof of concept trial

## Introduction

The Department for Work and Pensions has carried out an equality impact assessment on the proposal to introduce a proof of concept Post Office signing trial assessing the proposal in line with the current public sector equality duties.

- This process will help to ensure that the Department has paid due regard to the need to:
  - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups; and
- foster good relations between people from different groups.

This proportionate equality impact assessment will show how the Department has demonstrated it has paid due regard when developing new services or processes to on the grounds of the protected characteristics. These are; race, disability, gender, age, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief and marriage and civil partnerships (in terms of eliminating unlawful discrimination only).

## Brief outline of the policy or service – Pilot description

As part of exploring ways in which we might work more closely with the Post Office to improve the delivery of public services, we are undertaking a proof of concept trial in parts of the Highland and Islands of Scotland and Essex. The trial will involve the Jobcentres in Chelmsford, Braintree, Stornoway, Wick, Invergordon, Fort William and Inverness; and 26 associated Post Offices. The trial will commence 19 September and run for 13 weeks and will involve approximately 350 Jobcentre Plus 'postal claimants' who will be required to attend a Post Office on a fortnightly basis.

Postal claimants are those who, in accordance with current business rules, have been exempt from attending the Jobcentre for Jobsearch Reviews and are required to provide evidence of their jobsearch by post instead. A postal claimant must meet the same conditions for receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance as claimants who are required to attend the Jobcentre for face to face Jobsearch Reviews by showing that

they have undertaken sufficient jobsearch activity. The [annex](#) provides further information on the business rules for postal customers.

During the trial, some existing postal claimants will be required to 'sign-on at a local Post Office. The Post Office will **not** be undertaking jobsearch reviews, but simply taking receipt of documentation (ES24 declaration of unemployment and evidence of jobsearch activity) the claimant would, under existing arrangements, send to Jobcentre Plus by post. At the end of each day, the Post Office will send, by secure post and guaranteed delivery, all documentation received from claimants to the local Jobcentre for processing the next day.

This is a proof of concept trial and we will be undertaking an evaluation to quantify the cost and potential business benefits. This will include seeking views from claimants and staff within the Post Office and Jobcentre Plus.

## Consultation and involvement

Local and National consultation and engagement has been between Jobcentre Plus (within the corporate centre and relevant districts), DWP policy lead and the Post Office.

Interested external organisations will be notified of the trial in advance of it starting and will be invited to comment, either directly or on a representative basis. To date, we have received positive feedback from a local Member of the European Parliament who considers that the proof of concept rationale would be of significant benefit to her constituents.

## Impact of the Pilot

During the trial, some existing postal claimants will be required to 'sign-on at a local Post Office. In requiring attendance at a specified Post Office, existing Jobcentre Plus postal rules will apply (see [Annex 1](#)).

The Post Office will **not** be undertaking jobsearch reviews, but simply taking receipt of documentation (ES24 declaration of unemployment and evidence of jobsearch activity) that claimant's would, under existing postal arrangements, send to Jobcentre Plus by post.

For postal claimants, jobcentre Plus staff will always check jobsearch evidence to ensure Jobseeker's Allowance conditionality has been met, and this will remain and challenged where appropriate. The impact on Jobcentre Plus job roles will be minimal throughout the period of the proof of concept trial.

As part of the above, the PO will seek confirmation of claimant identity. Claimants will be notified of the acceptable documentation. Failure to provide an acceptable form of identity will not stop the Post Office processing the claimant, but this will be followed-up (with the claimant) by Jobcentre Plus.

At the end of each day, the Post Office will send, by secure post and guaranteed delivery, all documentation received to the local Jobcentre for processing the next

day. This process will not normally delay claimant benefit payment and is more likely to improve on the time it takes for the claimant to receive their payment.

This is a proof of concept trial and we will be undertaking an evaluation to quantify the cost and potential business benefits. These may include helping people off benefit more quickly than would otherwise be the case; and minimising the risk of fraud and error through strengthened verification of identity process and the secure transfer of claimant documentation to Jobcentre Plus.. The evaluation will seek views from claimants and staff within the Post Office and Jobcentre Plus.

50% of existing postal claimants in the trial areas will be randomly allocated to the trial and required to attend a specific Post Office. The remaining 50% will be unaffected and act as the control group.

## Impact of the Post Office Signing Proof of Concept Trial

### **Staff**

For Jobcentre Plus staff it will be 'business as usual' as they will continue to process 'Postal' customer claims in the same way. There will be some minor additional work within the Jobcentres involving the collection of Management Information to inform the Proof of Concept evaluation report

### **Disability**

Existing Jobcentre Plus postal rules will apply, so where someone has a condition that makes attendance at a Post Office unreasonable, they will not be required to attend. Local Jobcentres are undertaking a review of all existing postal customers who appear within close proximity of a nominated Post Office and potentially in scope of the trial and, using existing postal rules, see if it is reasonable to require attendance. Where this is not so, the claimant is excluded from the trial. The assumptions around customer exclusion from the proof of concept will remain under consideration.

### **Gender**

People within scope of the trial will be required to participate, regardless of their gender. Existing postal business rules will be applied and these include the provision to exclude from the trial those with caring responsibilities and who are unable to make arrangements to cover their attendance at a Post Office.

### **Ethnicity**

People within scope of the trial will be required to participate and treated fairly and equally, regardless of their ethnic background

## **Age**

Where no public transport is available, irrespective of age, people will be expected to walk from home to a Post Office within existing business rules (Please refer to the Annex for further information) and reasonable adjustments will be taken into account, where appropriate.

## **Sexual Orientation**

People within scope of the trial will be required to participate and treated fairly and equally, regardless of their sexual orientation.

## **Gender Re-assignment**

People within scope of the trial will be required to participate and treated fairly and equally, regardless of gender re-assignment.

## **Sensitive Records**

Some claimants, depending on their circumstances, are given Special Customer Records, to protect their privacy and prevent unauthorised disclosure of information. The security criterion required to grant access to Special Customer Records is fully documented and closely monitored so that any claim is managed securely and sensitively, and that the privacy of the individual is protected. This group may be excluded from the proof of concept trial.

## **Religion and Belief**

People within scope of the trial will be required to participate and will be treated fairly and equally, regardless of religion and belief.

## **Pregnancy and Maternity**

Expectant and new mothers must be available for and actively seeking work to maintain entitlement to JSA, but there are limitations and flexibilities that may apply. These will be taken into account along with existing business rules governing claimants who are allowed to maintain their claim by post and where these make it unreasonable to expect someone to attend a Post Office branch, they will be excluded from the trial.

## **Security**

Claimant documentation retained by the Post Office branch and sent to the local Jobcentre Plus office at the end of each day will be stored/shipped securely and in accordance with existing Post Office/Jobcentre Plus security standards.

## **Monitoring and evaluation**

This equality impact assessment will be reviewed and updated as the design process progresses.

Feedback from Jobcentre Plus staff involved in the proof of concept, Post Office staff, claimants and external stakeholders will be considered and the Equality Impact Assessment will be updated, where appropriate, throughout the course of the trial.

## Contact details

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## Annex 1

### Existing Jobcentre Plus criteria for signing-on by post

Claimants must be offered postal status if:

- they have caring responsibilities for a child and are unable to make arrangements for short-term childcare to cover their attendance, e.g. during school holidays; or
- they live more than one hour, door to door, in either direction, from the nearest jobcentre by public transport; or
- attendance would result in an absence from home in excess of four hours; or
- they have a mental or physical disability, which restricts their mobility.

If no public transport is available, postal status is determined by whether or not the claimant can reasonably be expected to walk from home to a Jobcentre Plus office within one hour. Claimants must not be expected to walk more than 3 miles, taking into account factors such as their age and health and the terrain.

Rather than attempting to calculate the specific time span for each individual claimant, decisions should be taken locally on which areas are beyond the one hour/four hour limits.

The one-hour travel criteria is calculated from door to door, home to office, or office to home, with each way classed as a separate journey. If either journey takes longer than one hour, the claimant qualifies for postal status. The criteria are also based on public transport, as the availability of personal transport may vary throughout the course of a claim