

GfK. Growth from Knowledge



Green Paper Qualitative Research

*No one written off: reforming
welfare to reward responsibility*

DWP Department for
Work and Pensions

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1 Executive Summary

In August of this year (2008) a range of Green Paper policy proposals were tested with a spread of members of the general public to explore their reactions to these.

Overall, research participants supported the Green Paper policies in theory, but raised a number of concerns regarding how they would work in practice.

"I think the whole system is good...it's just whether it's run right at the end of the day"

(Taxpayer, C1C2, 26-50 years, Barnstaple)

Participants were particularly positive towards the provision of individual support to help people gain employment. However, key concerns regarding implementation focused on:

- Barriers to employment: participants cited current barriers to employment such as financial concerns and attitudes of employers. It was felt that these must be taken into account and tackled by the Green Paper policy proposals.
- Fairness: participants perceive current inequalities in the welfare system. They felt that any policy proposals must be intrinsically fair and opportunities must be available to all.
- Individual support: there was widespread agreement that individual support will help people gain employment. Participants felt that this support should be tailored to the individual, face-to-face and continual.
- Choice: participants felt that some of the Green Paper policy proposals should be voluntary rather than mandatory, often noting that they themselves would prefer a choice.
- Reassurance: participants sought reassurance that any Green Paper policy proposals would not negatively impact on their personal circumstances or negatively impact society in general.
- Monitoring: there was agreement that any Green Paper policy proposals must be monitored to ensure that they are applied appropriately, fairly and to prevent fraudulent use.
- Clarity: participants noted that the welfare system is currently complex and sought clarification regarding how any policy proposals would work in practice.

In October (2008) further research was conducted to determine whether changes to the economy had any effect on peoples' views regarding welfare reform. Overall, October participants raised concerns regarding how the economy would impact on the availability of job opportunities.

2 Background

The Green Paper *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility* was published on 21st July 2008. The Green Paper was a wide ranging consultation on the future for welfare reform. It set out a range of proposals and ideas which could simplify the benefits system and provide jobseekers with the work focused support and skills they need to help themselves. As part of the consultation process DWP commissioned GfK NOP to undertake a two-stage research study.



This report details the findings of the qualitative research which was carried out during July and August 2008. The quantitative research took place in September 2008.

Additionally, further research was conducted to determine whether wider changes to the economy had had any effect on peoples' views about welfare reform. This was carried out in October 2008 and is referred to as the October update research throughout this report. It should be noted that direct comparisons should not be drawn between the August research and the October update as groups took place in different locations with different participants. However, the research did explore how changes in the economy may have affected peoples' views of the policy propositions explored across the research.

3 Methodology and Sample

Twelve focus group discussions were carried out. Each included between 6 and 8 participants and lasted for 2 hours. The focus groups included a range of participants to reflect the different people who may be affected by the Green Paper policy reforms including both taxpayers and DWP customers aged 18+ years. The sample for the research included:

- Those claiming income-based benefits
- Those claiming no benefits
- Those currently unemployed who have
- Those claiming non-income-based benefits
- Those currently working
- Those currently unemployed who have not



- worked within the last 2 years
- worked for 2+ years
- Lone Parents
- Carers
- Disabled people

In addition four depth interviews were carried out with people with learning difficulties to gather their views on the Green Paper.

The research was carried out in five research locations to ensure a spread across the country and representation from both rural and urban areas. These research locations were Glasgow, Cardiff, Newcastle, London and Barnstaple.

The October update research consisted of four focus groups, two in London and two in Birmingham. The groups included a spread of participants including DWP customers and taxpayers. Two depth interviews with participants with learning difficulties were also conducted.

Sample tables are provided in the appendix.

A discussion guide for use during all of the focus groups and depth interviews was developed by GfK NOP Social Research in consultation with the DWP. A series of show cards displayed nine propositions outlining a number of Green Paper policy proposals. These were tested across the focus groups and depth interviews. The discussion guides and show cards are included in the appendix.

4 Key Findings

The focus of the qualitative research was to gather and explore reactions to Green Paper. This was achieved by showing participants a series of propositions that encapsulated Green Paper policy proposals. The key findings are outlined below.

4.1 Attitudes towards the Green Paper

The research gathered views and attitudes from people with a variety of backgrounds and circumstances. When considering the Green Paper policy propositions, they often drew on their experiences and views of the current welfare system. During discussion of the policy propositions, a number of themes emerged. These focused on concerns that people had regarding the implementation of the proposed changes, and how they perceived the changes may affect themselves or other people.

The following themes emerged and are fully explored below:

- Employment attitudes
- Clarity
- Reassurance
- Individual support
- Choice
- Monitoring
- Fairness

Additionally, the economic downturn was discussed by participants in the October update research.

4.1.1 Employment attitudes

- Desire for financial support when seeking employment and, in low income employment
- Perception that employers are unwilling to employ people with particular circumstances and backgrounds
- Desire for Green Paper reforms to ensure increased support and information from Jobcentre Plus staff

Employment is the focus of the Green Paper, and participants considered both the benefits of employment and barriers to employment when commenting on the Green Paper policy propositions.

A) Benefits of employment

Taxpayers and working claimants were particularly keen to advocate the benefits of being in paid employment, although benefits of employment were recognised across the research. A key benefit and motivation to enter paid employment was being **financially independent** and supporting any family and dependents.

"It's support, it's like you have to support your family which if you want to support family obviously you've got to go out there and work"

(DWP Customer, non-working, 18-25 years, Newcastle)

Participants also mentioned the social aspect of employment as important. Many noted that it was a good way of increasing their social circle, and **meeting new people**. Similarly, participants noted that employment was a good way of keeping **mentally and physically active** and **learning new skills**.

"You need to keep yourself physically and mentally alive, and part of wellbeing is being part of society"

(DWP Customer, non-working disabled, 51-65 years, London)

Employment was also seen as a way to **contribute to society** and those who were currently working commented that this gave a feeling of **satisfaction and achievement**.

B) Barriers to employment

Across the qualitative research a range of barriers to employment were noted by participants:

Financial Support

A key financial barrier for current claimants was the concern that they would not benefit financially from being in paid employment.

"I mean I'd be better off being unemployed and its stopping people going out to work"

(Taxpayer, C1C2, 51-65 years, Glasgow)

Participants from low income families felt that current benefits thresholds were too rigid. Many perceived that there were few financial benefits to being in paid employment and that people who are



unemployed and claiming benefits acquire similar incomes. There was a widespread perception that being a few pence over the threshold meant that you could potentially miss out on a range of benefits which could discourage people from working.

"A lot of guys I've worked with...because this threshold they don't get anything [benefits]...so they turn around and say 'well, why am I working?'"

(Taxpayer, C1C2, 51-65 years, Glasgow)

Many participants were especially concerned about losing auxiliary benefits such as housing benefit and council tax benefit if they were to enter employment.

Across the research participants noted that financial support should be supplied to help people with the costs of interview expenses (transport and clothing). Lone parents were particularly keen to note the expense of childcare, and felt that childcare should be provided to make it easier for them to enter employment.

"Make them [crèches] affordable because they're so expensive. These crèches, what you have to pay...it's not worth it"

(DWP Customer, working, 51-65 years, Newcastle)

Disabled people noted that financial support should be provided to help disabled people travel to and from work, and to provide any aids and adaptations that they may need at their place of work.

"If they're going to say 'okay, we've got a job for you, it's there', how do you get there?"

(DWP Customer, non-working disabled, 51-65 years, London)

Attitude of employers

There was much discussion across the groups regarding the attitude of employers. Particularly among participants who had been job seeking for some time, there was a perception that some employers were unwilling to employ people on the basis of their background, age or disability.

"I have been clean [from drugs] for three years now ...and I still find it difficult to get work"

(DWP Customer, non-working, 26-50 years, Barnstaple)

Disabled people perceived that it was difficult to find employment where flexible working hours would be offered which was a key concern for those with a mental health condition or those with a fluctuating condition who could not predict how their health would be on a day-to-day basis.

Flexible working was also a concern for lone parents, who felt that employers would not be amenable to allow working lone parents to fit their working hours around childcare needs.

Many participants felt that the DWP should work with private employers to tackle these barriers to employment.

Support and information

A number of participants – again, those who are currently or had in the past been job seekers – suggested that Jobcentre Plus staff could provide more support and information to help people find



employment. Many felt that they were encouraged to accept jobs that they were not interested in and resultantly, had no desire to retain.

These participants felt that more could be done to help people find a job that suited their needs, requirements and aspirations.

"What if they put me in a course say in childcare where I want to become a fitness instructor...I'm wasting my time"

(DWP Customer, working or studying, 18-25 years, Cardiff)

4.1.2 Choice

- Desire for choice regarding job type to ensure job matches interests and employment aspirations
- Suggestion that some Green Paper policy proposals should be voluntary

Overall, participants felt that some of the proposed changes addressed in the Green Paper propositions shown during the focus groups and depth interviews should be voluntary rather than mandatory. Choice was also considered important specifically when thinking about what type of employment opportunities would be available to those currently unemployed. Jobseekers Allowance claimants were keen to note that they did not want to be "forced" to take a job that they had no interest in.

"If they put me on a farm and I hate farm work then my heart is not going to be in it and I am just going to jack it after a while...if they just throw you in anything then you are not going to like it"

(DWP Customer, non-working, 26-50 years, Barnstaple)

These claimants were concerned that if they entered employment in a profession that they had no interest in they would struggle to enjoy their work, and felt that they would be unlikely to stay in the job. They were worried that if they subsequently decided to leave the job, they would not be able to easily claim benefits again and therefore felt that they were better off remaining on benefits until they could find a job that they really wanted to do and perceived to be more 'long term'.

However, it should be noted that particularly among the taxpayer focus groups, participants felt that it was important that job opportunities and training offered to those currently unemployed should fit the employment needs of the local area. In this regard it was recognised that it is not always possible to provide ideal jobs to people as it did not realistically reflect the types of jobs that the local economy could support.

"It's all well and good provided that you are providing training in something that is relevant, there is no point in training a nation of hairdressers if we're all going to be bald"

(Taxpayer, C1C2, 26-50 years, Barnstaple)

Across the research disabled people reacted positively to increased choice and control for the individual. They felt that greater personal control would facilitate them in either gaining employment or receiving benefits and support that were best suited to their needs and requirements.

Choice was also discussed during the October update research. Overall, participants agreed that choice should be made available to people to ensure that they enter appropriate and engaging employment. However, taxpayers in particular felt that choice should be provided, but not open-ended. They suggested that choice be available, but within the confines of a time limit or of a specific number of choices.

4.1.3 Fairness

→ Current and future welfare policies must deliver fair support based on individual needs

When discussing the current welfare system, participants talked about how fair they felt the system was. On one hand they felt that the system was vital to supporting many people in genuine need.

“For those that genuinely need it, that’s when it’s [the welfare system] good for people”.

(Taxpayer, C1C2, 26-50 years, Barnstaple)

However, concerns were raised around whether available help and support was always delivered to those that needed it most. Many noted that entitlement to benefits and support was unclear and therefore questioned whether those who were entitled to help actually received this, or were aware of their eligibility. One participant gave an example of the difficulties involved in claiming disability living allowance.

“In 1993 when I had cancer, my company agreed to pay me statutory sick pay and I phoned the DSS to see if there was anything else I was eligible for and they said ‘no’. I subsequently found out five years later I was entitled to disability living allowance as I had cancer, and didn’t know whether or not it was terminal”

(DWP Customer, non-working disabled, 51-65 years, London)

Across the focus groups participants were keen to advocate that any Green Paper policy reforms to the welfare system must be fair. In particular, they felt that it was important that any employment opportunities and support should be available to all regardless of background, age or disability.

“If you want to go out there and you want to do some work there should be the support to enable you to go out there and do it”

(DWP Customer, non-working disabled, 51-65 years, London)

“They have to treat people as individuals and give everybody a fair chance no matter what their background and what their status, they have to give people a fair chance”

(DWP Customer, non-working, 26-50 years, Barnstaple)

It was suggested that any opportunities and support be well communicated to ensure that people were aware of them.

When thinking about fairness, there was widespread agreement that returning to work was not appropriate to all people in society. Many suggested that people such as disabled people, carers, elderly and those with ill-health should not be expected to work and that their ability to work should be

considered on the basis of their individual needs and requirements. It was agreed that the welfare system was vital in ensuring that these people were supported to lead full lives.

4.1.4 Individual Support

→ Current support could be improved by providing more information and tailored support to the individual

Across the focus groups the theme of individual support emerged repeatedly. Many felt that an intrinsic element of any proposed reforms to the welfare system should ensure that people receive individual support. Many participants felt that the current welfare system did not always take into account individual circumstances and needs. For example, some participants felt that the system was quick to “pigeon hole” people on the basis of broad definitions such as ‘disability’ or ‘age’.

“Unfortunately with the government...everything in their world is black and white with no grey areas”

(DWP Customer, non-working disabled, 51-65 years, London)

Many envisaged that the individual support outlined in the Green Paper policy propositions would provide a tailored approach to:

- Helping people find employment that best suited their needs and aspirations
- Helping provide appropriate and fair support – such as financial support – to those in genuine need

Some participants felt that the current support supplied by the DWP – particularly at Jobcentre Plus – needed to be improved. Some felt that this support should offer a more flexible approach that reacted to peoples’ circumstances and needs. For example, those claiming job seekers allowance noted that fortnightly payments made budgeting difficult and felt that the system could be more flexible to their individual needs by providing weekly payments.

Among participants there was a widespread perception that the Green Paper propositions shown across the research indicated that current support would be improved.

Two areas where participants sought improvement were information provision and signposting. Participants noted that there were few official sources of information where they had, or could obtain information about benefits and support. Many relied on friends and family for information, and cited national charities such as the Citizen’s Advice Bureau and Age Concern as places where they could seek information regarding benefits. Those who had claimed in the past or were currently claiming, felt that Jobcentre Plus staff could improve information provision. They felt that staff could help people to navigate the system by providing increased information and signposting regarding the full range of benefits and support.

“They could give more help...they only sit with you for five minutes going through all the jobs”

(DWP Customer, non-working, 18-25 years, Newcastle)

Alongside improved information provision, participants also hoped that the Green Paper policy reforms would provide support that is: supplied by proactive Jobcentre Plus staff; individual; one-to-one and face-to-face.

“They will have to change the way they answer people, the way that the people who see people [Jobcentre Plus staff], the way they see people because they don’t see them face to face no more”

(DWP Customer, non-working, 26-50 years, Barnstaple)

“[Currently] you don’t tend to see a lot of people [Jobcentre Plus staff] because they just tend to shove you out the door rather than sit you down and ask you what the problem is.”

(DWP Customer, non-working, 26-50 years, Barnstaple)

Many envisaged support being provided via a ‘social worker’ type role where the support offered would be wide ranging including career guidance, training, work experience, financial support, aids and adaptations (for disabled people) and the provision of childcare (particularly for lone parents). Participants suggested that this support be continual and include follow up telephone calls or appointments with people once they were in employment, to help maintain their job.

Individual support was similarly deemed a vital element of the policy propositions by October update research participants. They similarly felt that tailored support should be one-to-one, consistent and continual and envisaged that current Jobcentre Plus provision would be improved.

4.1.5 Reassurance

→ Seek reassurances that Green Paper policies will not negatively affect personal financial wellbeing or society in general

The presence of a welfare system brought financial reassurance to participants who were claiming benefits. It also brought reassurance to those currently in paid employment that should they become unemployed, there would be help and support available. The term ‘safety net’ was used by many.

“It’s nice to know if I was ever made unemployed or I couldn’t work due to ill-health that I wouldn’t be short of money due to the fact that I paid benefit taxes”

(Taxpayer, C2D, 26-50 years, Cardiff)

However, when considering the Green Paper policy propositions, participants sought reassurance that reforms to the welfare system would not negatively impact on themselves personally, or on society.

A) Personal reassurances

When thinking about the impact that the proposed changes could have on their personal circumstances, participants sought reassurances regarding their financial wellbeing. If returning to employment, they wanted to know that they would be financially better off compared to their current financial situation. They also expressed concern regarding auxiliary benefits such as housing benefit and council tax benefit and what would happen to these if they entered paid employment.

Reassurances regarding what would happen if the employment did not work out were also sought – this was particularly pertinent for disabled people who worried about what would happen if their health condition deteriorated. Concerns focused on the ease of re-claiming benefits, especially for those who had experienced problems and delays in making their original claim. These concerns regarding personal reassurances were echoed in the October update research.

B) Societal reassurances

From a wider viewpoint, participants across the research sought reassurance that the proposed changes would not negatively impact on society or their local area.

Additional concerns raised by participants in the October update research focused on the impact on the economic downturn on the job market. Specifically, participants sought reassurances that adequate employment opportunities would be available.

4.1.6 Monitoring

→ Current and future policy must be monitored to ensure fairness and prevent miss-use

When discussing the current welfare system many participants felt that there is a lack of monitoring, enabling people to exploit the system.

There was widespread discussion across the focus groups regarding benefit fraud with most participants providing examples of people in their local area who were considered to be known 'benefits cheats'. These local examples were often backed up by media reports of benefits cheats and participants mentioned recent examples such as 'marathon man'¹. Many felt that the current welfare system lacked strict monitoring which meant that it was open to abuse. The following examples were mentioned on numerous occasions across the groups:

- Long-term unemployed people remaining on benefits when they are able to work
- Young women purposely having children to ensure their entitlement to benefits and housing
- People claiming to have an illness when they are able to work

Many felt that allowing the system to be open to abuse meant that other people could lose out on more financial support.

"The genuine people would probably suffer because there are too many fraudsters so they would maybe lose out on a [benefits] increase"

(DWP Customer, working, 51-65 years, Newcastle)

When contemplating the Green Paper policy propositions participants felt strongly that any changes must be monitored.

¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/nottinghamshire/6248307.stm>

4.1.7 Clarity

→ Low levels of knowledge regarding the welfare system affect comprehension of Green Paper policy proposals

Across the groups there were mixed levels of knowledge of the current welfare system. Typically those who had been claiming benefits for a long period of time had the highest knowledge levels and tended to know to a greater degree the intricacies of the welfare system. Those with lower levels of knowledge were those who had only claimed for a short period of time, and those who had had little or no interaction with the welfare system. Participants aged 18-24 years also tended to have lower levels of knowledge. However, across the groups there was agreement that the welfare system is unclear and difficult to navigate. Many discussed the complexity of the system, difficulties in completing claim forms (something that participants with learning difficulties were keen to highlight) and determining eligibility for claiming benefits.

"Nobody tells you that you can get these things [benefits], the onus is on you to claim, and a lot of people don't, because they're ignorant to the fact"

(DWP Customer, working, 51-65 years, Newcastle)

The cited complexities and difficulties in understanding the current welfare system made some of the Green Paper policy propositions difficult to comprehend. For example, current confusion around the child maintenance system meant that participants found any propositions on this topic complicated.

Additionally, across the research some issues around the clarity of the Green Paper policy propositions, and the language used to describe them emerged. Many sought more information about the finer details of the proposed changes suggested in the propositions.

Exploration of clarity was not a key objective for this research. However, the findings on this topic have informed the development of the quantitative questionnaire and prompted some minor re-wording of the policy propositions for the October update research.

4.1.8 Economic Downturn

During the October update research, participants generally spoke about the economy impacting on two overall areas of the policy propositions. Firstly, they discussed the perceived impact on employment opportunities and availability of jobs. Secondly, they discussed the perceived usefulness of the government implementing changes – such as increased training for jobseekers – and whether these changes could be financed in the current climate.

4.2 Overall Findings: Green Paper policy propositions

For the purposes of the research, key Green Paper policy proposals were distilled in to a series of nine propositions. The above themes encapsulate overall views and concerns regarding these, and the current welfare system. The next section of this report details responses and comments for each of Green Paper policy propositions.

4.2.1 Policy Proposition 1 (written off on welfare)

Nobody should be written off on welfare if they can get into work with the right support, skills training and opportunities.

Overall participants agreed with the principle of this policy proposition noting that it is important that adequate support be available to those seeking employment. It was mentioned that this provision should be **fair** and available to all regardless of background, disability and age.

Those currently seeking employment were very positive towards the provision of training, and felt that the current provision could be improved. Participants felt that increased support, skills and training would open more doors to employment for many people.

A number of participants – particularly those currently in employment – felt that training and support should specifically target those who had been unemployed for a long time. There was a widespread perception that these people were able to work, but that the DWP could do more to get them into employment.

When considering this Green Paper proposition, it was clear that participants felt that a range of support should be available to help people gain employment. Discussions around support focused on the provision of **individual support** such as financial support for interview costs, childcare costs for lone parents and finances to provide aids and adaptations for disabled people where required. This view was echoed in the October update research.

Barriers to employment were raised when considering this policy proposition. In particular, participants sought **reassurance** that they would be financially better off on benefits with many participants questioning whether there are enough incentives for people close to the benefits threshold to be in paid employment. Others mentioned that they had concerns over how much **choice** they would get in deciding what profession they entered. **Choice** was also mentioned by disabled participants who sought choice and personal control in determining their personal capabilities.

When considering the **economic downturn**, October update research participants reflected on whether the government would be able to finance more individualised support. Some participants also debated the wisdom of training people for jobs that may not actually be available. Some agreed that it is better to train people than to do nothing, whilst others had concerns about raising peoples' hopes and expectations in an economic climate where jobs may be scarce.

4.2.2 Policy Proposal 2 (training and community work)

The majority of people on benefits should take part in activities such as training and/ or community work in return for their benefits².

² Please note that this policy proposition was re-worded for the October update research and read 'The majority of people on benefits should take part in activities such as training or work experience in return for their benefits'.



Overall, participants were positive towards the idea of training and community work as a way of preparing people for employment. They felt that there were a number of ways in which their local area could benefit from people doing community work. Examples given by participants included people helping to regenerate local community centres and parks.

"I agree for the people that are able to work, and haven't got a job, if they could put something in [to society]"

(DWP Customer, non-working disabled, 51-65 years, London)

Many felt that unemployed people had many skills to bring to their local area, and that involvement in community work would act as a form of work experience. Again, some felt that this initiative should aim to target long term unemployed people in particular, as they were seen as a group of people that needed to be encouraged to participate in some form of work.

A small number of people felt that participation in community work would mean that receiving benefits could be considered as receiving a 'wage'. Those currently employed recalled the sense of satisfaction that earning a wage gave them, and felt that receiving benefits in return for participating in community work could give people the same feeling.

"It's got to do something for their self esteem as well, to actually go out and do that, to build up confidence and their self esteem"

(Taxpayer, C1C2, 26-50 years, Barnstaple)

However, this Green Paper policy proposition raised a number of concerns among non-working participants. Many sought **reassurance** that any involvement in training or community work would not negatively impact on the benefits that they received.

Across the research, participants sought **reassurance** regarding who would be required to participate in training and community work. There was much discussion around this and participants commented that community work and training would not be appropriate for certain groups in society. Disabled people in particular noted that they would be interested in becoming more involved in their local community through community work, but were keen to point out that their involvement would need to be tailored to their personal capabilities. These views were echoed in the October update research.

Participants wanted **reassurance** that community work would not take away from paid jobs that already exist in their local community.

Participants additionally sought **reassurance** that if they participated in training, their new skills would lead to more job opportunities – some noted that they did not want to continually undertake training without subsequently gaining employment.

"I think [with] the training, if you were, at the end [of the training course], promised a job rather than 'just do the training but there's not jobs'"

(DWP Customer, working, 51-65 years, Newcastle)

Among those currently claiming benefits there were some fears about being forced to take part in community work. Many felt that people should be given the **choice** over whether they wanted to

participate. This was often because participants were unclear about what community work would actually involve and were cautious about making a judgment over whether it should be mandatory or voluntary. Others noted that from a personal point of view, they would prefer a choice regarding community work rather than it being an enforced activity. A couple of participants from the taxpayer groups noted that they felt that community work in particular should not apply to people who had been taxpayers, as they had already paid into the benefits system, so should be able to receive benefits whilst looking for work without having to participate in community work.

Conversely, many participants in the October update research were more positive towards some benefits conditionality. Specifically, many taxpayers felt that doing some form of training or work experience should be a condition of receiving benefits. DWP customers were open to the idea of some element of conditionality for benefits – although not all of them felt that it should be mandatory. It was suggested that people who had been unemployed for a long period of time would be more negative towards the idea of this conditionality but it was also noted that these people should be required to undertake training/ work experience to help them and encourage them into employment.

Across the August and October update research, the theme of **individual support** emerged when discussing this policy proposition. Again, many noted that any training and community work should be tailored to the individual, and be part of a wider system of support to help people achieve appropriate employment. Lone parents noted that any support provided should include either the provision of crèches or financial support to pay for childcare - especially if they were expected to participate in training or community work during hours when their children would be at home.

It should be noted that some issues around **clarity** emerged for this message. Many people felt that the term 'community work' was synonymous with 'community service' and therefore some felt that it had punitive connotations.

"What does community work actually mean? Are they trying to say we've got to go out and scrub streets?"

(DWP Customer, non-working, 18-25 years, Newcastle)

"Community service, that smacks of punishment doesn't it?"

(Taxpayer, C1C2, 26-50 years, Barnstaple)

A few participants suggested renaming community work to 'unpaid work'.

4.2.3 Policy Proposition 3 (support to help disabled people)

The benefits system should give more support to help disabled people and people with ill-health to stay in work or get into work³.

³ Please note that this policy proposition was re-worded for the October update research and read 'The government should give more support to help disabled people and people with ill-health stay in work or get into work'.



There was widespread agreement across the August and October update research that the principles of ensuring that disabled people have fair access to support and employment opportunities encapsulated in this policy proposition were essential. Many participants perceived that whilst disabled people sought employment, not enough was being done to support them in achieving jobs.

Disabled people were keen to note that it was important that support helps people build their confidence in returning to employment, or entering employment for the first time. In this respect, they felt that **individual support** should provide emotional support as well as financial support for aids and adaptations and transport to and from work.

Across the August focus groups among disabled people there was discussion around assessments to identify whether people are able to work or claim benefits, and the doctors that carry these out. There was agreement that these assessments should be carried out by doctors who see the individuals on a regular basis - and not DWP doctors.

"I ended up getting a letter saying basically that their [DWP] doctor says I'm fit enough for work. I had to appeal it basically. You get a normal GP that doesn't know your case judging you and he was overruling hospital consultants"

(DWP Customer, non-working disabled, 51-65 years, London)

It was felt that personal doctors would be able to bring greater context to the assessment which was felt to be particularly important for those with mental health conditions or a fluctuating health condition.

Again, a number of **employment barriers** emerged when discussing disabled people gaining employment. In particular, the accessibility of the working environment, and the attitude of employers when employing disabled people were at the forefront of participants' minds.

Disabled people across the depth interviews and focus groups were keen to note concerns about their financial welfare should any employment not work out, or should they need to leave their employment because their health condition deteriorated. They sought **reassurance** that it would be easy to return to benefits should this situation arise.

When discussing this Green Paper policy proposition, some issues regarding **clarity** emerged. These included a lack of awareness regarding what support is already available to disabled people - many wanted more information about this and hoped that it would include a range of support mechanisms for disabled people throughout the job seeking and employment process. In particular, many were concerned that any support would end once they were in employment whilst ideally, they wanted support to ensure that employers were flexible, and that aids and adaptations were appropriately provided. There was also discussion around how disabled people and those with ill-health are defined, and how mental health conditions would be taken into account under any new provisions for disabled people.

4.2.4 Policy Proposition 4 (child maintenance)

At the moment, child maintenance may affect the benefits people who are caring for children receive. This needs to change. Children should be able to keep all the maintenance that is paid for them

without it affecting the benefit paid to their parent.⁴

Across the research, this policy proposition was received positively as it suggested that children would be financially better off.

“That’s good because then we can have a nice schooling and afford nice shoes and that”

(DWP Customer, working or studying, 18-25 years, Cardiff)

However, there were many queries around how the current child maintenance system worked, and many felt that this lacked **clarity**. In particular those without any experience of the Child Support Agency did not understand how the system works, and were therefore unable to comment to what extent they felt that policy proposal 4 would impact on people. Even those who did have experience of the Child Support Agency did not fully understand the system. Some participants received money or paid money to an ex partner on an informal basis to avoid using the CSA, and therefore the Green Paper policy proposition did not change their current financial arrangements.

When thinking about this policy proposition, there were some concerns among participants that there would not be any thresholds regarding the payment received from the ex partner. For example, it was considered **unfair** for someone to receive a substantial amount of money from an ex partner and still be able to claim benefits.

“When it reaches a certain point in what you are getting in CSA I think benefits should be stopped or halved”

(Taxpayer, C2D, 26-50 years, Cardiff)

Others queried whether people receiving the money would actually spend it on their child or themselves. There were suggestions that this could be **monitored** in some way by the DWP.

4.2.5 Policy Proposition 5 (drug users preparing for work)

It is fair to expect drug users to prepare for work by completing a treatment programme or face losing their benefits.

Across the research there was widespread agreement that the issue of drugs use needed to be tackled and many were positive towards the DWP taking some form of action. A number of people in the research were personally affected by drugs use themselves, and they were positive towards the idea of being offered a place on a treatment programme - something that they reported as currently difficult.

⁴ Please note that this proposition was updated following the first four focus groups to aid clarification of the proposition. The original proposition read: ‘Parents who receive benefits should not have these reduced when giving or receiving child maintenance’



"It would be a good idea because then other people who don't get a chance to go in rehab, because...I have done drugs for ten years and never been offered a rehab place in my life. And funding, that would give people a chance to go on the actual programme"

(DWP Customer, non-working, 26-50 years, Barnstaple)

Although participants agreed that something should be done to tackle the problem of drugs use, there were many concerns about how this Green Paper policy proposition would work in practice. In particular, participants sought **reassurance** that drug users would not turn to crime if they did not attend a treatment programme and therefore did not receive benefits.

There was much discussion around the complexities of drugs use, resulting in many concerns that the Green Paper policy proposition was not realistic. Those affected by drugs use personally sought **reassurances** regarding what would happen to any benefits if they started using drugs again following a treatment programme. Similarly, other participants wondered how re-use of drugs would be **monitored** by the DWP, and how initially people would be identified for a treatment programme.

People were keen to note that attending a drugs treatment programme was only one step in becoming ready for employment and perceived that this would be one element of **individual support** provided by the DWP which would also include counselling, training and work experience.

There was discussion around whether this Green Paper policy proposition should be voluntary or mandatory. Many felt that there should be a **choice** in attending a treatment programme primarily because a programme was only likely to work if the individual attending it wanted to be there.

"If they don't want to get off drugs then they're not going to go for the treatment programme"

(DWP Customer, non-working, 18-25 years, Newcastle)

Some participants felt that this Green Paper policy proposition lacked any mention of support for ex drug users who needed support in gaining employment - many cited the **employment barrier** of employer attitudes as a problem for ex drug users in finding employment. Others also felt that families and dependents of drug users should also receive support.

There was some discussion across the research regarding whether this policy proposition would apply to alcohol users.

"There's alcohol as well, isn't there, it's not just drugs"

(DWP Customer, working, 51-65 years, Newcastle)

Many felt that alcohol use could be as harmful to individuals and society as drugs were and therefore felt strongly that something should be provided to help alcohol users, and their dependents.

4.2.6 Policy Proposition 6 (supporting people in improving their lives)

Work is the best route out of poverty and means of supporting people in improving their lives⁵.

Participants felt that employment brings many benefits and that one of these is financial independence. They noted that this Green Paper policy proposition should also cite other benefits such as self esteem, self respect and contributing to society. These benefits were strongly advocated by those currently in employment.

When considering the reality of entering employment, many participants again discussed a range of **employment barriers** including attitudes of employers and the need for **individual support** to help people gain employment that is appropriate. Some further mentioned their concerns in not having any **choice** regarding what type of job as they sought employment that matched their aspirations and interests.

Many wanted **reassurances** that employment would not disadvantage them financially.

"The people that do work are sometimes worse off than people on benefits because they've got their rent, the council tax, your childcare; you've got to pay for everything. Whereas if you don't work then you get it all for nothing"

(DWP Customer, non-working disabled, 26-50 years, Glasgow)

It is interesting to note that some participants raised issues around **clarity** particularly for the word 'poverty'. The concept of poverty was not understood by some participants, whilst others felt that it suggested being 'homeless' or referred to third world countries and therefore was not an appropriate word in this context.

Some participants in the October update research felt that the **economic downturn** would affect specifications of available jobs. Some participants noted that job specifications were asking for longer hours, at reduced wages, and in light of this they were more inclined to feel that employment would not be financially beneficial. A couple of participants suggested that employers may be less likely to offer flexible working during the current economic climate, as other people would be willing to do the job without flexible options. Additionally, some DWP customers expressed concern regarding job stability in the current economic climate and were worried that it would be difficult to return to benefits (citing the length of time taken to claim benefits) if they were made redundant from a job.

4.2.7 Policy Proposition 7 (help lone parents to get back to work)

We need to help lone parents to get back to work once their children start school to give their families a better future.

⁵ Please note that this policy proposition was re-worded for the October update research and read 'Work is the best route out of poverty – being in work means that people can support themselves and improve their lives'.



Participants across the research generated a number of benefits that employment would bring to lone parents. These included being financially independent, being exposed to a wider social circle and becoming a role model for their children. Therefore, they were positive towards this Green Paper policy proposition promoting support for lone parents to gain employment.

There was some discussion around what age the lone parents' youngest child should be before they looked at returning to/ entering employment. In line with the Green Paper policy proposition, many felt that when the child started school would be a good time for lone parents to enter employment. This view was popular as it allowed the lone parent to be at home for the formative years but go to work when there were fewer pressures on childcare as the child would spend a large amount of the day at school.

"I think it's quite encouraging as well that they've got the bit about once the child has gone back to school, because at least it's encouraging parents to be at home for the formative years"

(Taxpayer, C1C2, 26-50 years, Barnstaple)

Across the focus groups, lone parents in particular were concerned about how much support would be available for childcare - many had experiences of this being difficult to source and expensive.

"The cost of childcare has always been...a real problem"

(DWP Customer, non-working disabled, 26-50 years, Glasgow)

Another key **employment barrier** around childcare was flexible working. Lone parents were concerned that they would struggle to find a job where flexible working - to fit in around childcare - would be provided. This was top of mind for many as the research was carried out during school summer holidays. Many questioned whether they would be required to gain full time or part time employment. Lone parents were also concerned that they would not be financially better off in employment, especially if they were to take a low-income job. Resultantly they sought **reassurance** that there would be financial help if required.

Again, the provision of **individual support** was considered key in helping people to find and prepare for employment. Confidence building for parents who may have been out of employment for a long period of time, or never have been in employment was considered a key element of any support.

Some participants suggested that there should be some element of **choice** in whether parents go back to work or be a stay at home parent. Again, many thought about this policy proposal from a personal viewpoint, and felt that they personally would prefer a choice regarding whether to enter employment or stay at home.

4.2.8 Policy Proposition 8 (individual support and responsibility)

It is right to provide more individual support for people to find work and in return expect them to take responsibility for finding a job⁶.

Participants were particularly positive towards the 'individual support' element of this Green Paper policy proposition. Many perceived that this message meant that the current support would be improved.

When discussing preferences for **individual support** many talked about support that is one-to-one and face-to-face. Participants who were currently job seekers mentioned a range of support that could be provided including help with CV writing and interview skills, help with building confidence for entering employment, work experience, training, and help in developing numeracy and literacy skills. Many felt that support should be holistic, and continue once an individual had entered employment to help them retain their job.

Choice was mentioned with regards to choice over job type. In particular, participants across the research felt that entering employment would be more successful if job seekers were able to choose their job type, and gained a job that reflected their interests and aspirations. However, it was also noted that the jobs offered should reflect the available job opportunities and economic requirements in the local area. In light of the **economic downturn**, October update participants further raised concerns regarding the availability of job opportunities and noted that the government should work with employers to create and sustain the job market.

There was discussion around the 'responsibility' element of this message. Some felt that they already took responsibility for finding a job through proactively seeking job opportunities, requesting training at Jobcentre Plus and attending interviews. These participants were keen to enter employment. However, across the research participants sought **reassurance** that they would not be solely responsible for finding employment, and that they would receive some support from Jobcentre Plus. In particular, people did not want to be in a situation where Jobcentre Plus provided training, but then no further support in helping people to find an employment opportunity.

Responsibility was discussed in detail by October update research participants. Echoing the August research, participants felt that there was a joint responsibility between Jobcentre Plus and the individual to find employment. When thinking about responsibility for getting people into jobs, people felt that although the individual had responsibility to find employment, the government had a responsibility to ensure that there are jobs available; to work with employers to incentivise them to take people on; and to provide appropriate support to job seekers through Jobcentre Plus. However, participants also reflected that individuals have a responsibility to use the system fairly and correctly.

⁶ Please note that this policy proposition was re-worded for the October update research and read 'It is right to provide more personalised support for people to find a job and, in return, expect them to take responsibility for making the most of this support to find work'.

4.2.9 Policy Proposition 9 (decisions about support for disabled people)

Disabled people should be able to make more decisions about how they use the support they get from government such as social care, grants for aids and adaptations and help into work.

Disabled participants were very positive towards this Green Paper policy proposition noting that greater control would help them, and others like them, obtain the support and help that best suits their needs. They felt that currently, people are often 'pigeon holed' meaning that support is not always individually tailored. This message was perceived to change this, enabling disabled people to be treated as individuals and make their own decisions.

"It's saying we should be able to make our own decisions, not them make it for us when they don't know what problems we've got."

(DWP Customer, non-working disabled, 51-65 years, London)

Many participants voiced support for direct payments and individual budgets, and were therefore positive towards the continuation of these and this Green Paper policy proposition.

When thinking about how this policy proposition would work in practice, many felt that some people would require help in determining what support was needed and how to budget this. This view was particularly put forward by participants with learning difficulties.

Some had concerns that they would be required to not only make the decision about the support needed, but would also be responsible for sourcing the support. Many felt that they, and others, would need help in sourcing the support and envisaged that there would be a DWP professional or intermediary to assist with this.

Across the research a small number of people raised concerns about how this policy proposition would be **monitored** in practice to ensure that people did not receive finances for support that they did not really require.

5 Conclusions and Summary

Overall the qualitative research found that on a theoretical basis, participants showed support for the Green Paper propositions. Many of the policy propositions shown to participants reflected their own views on how the welfare system could be improved - for example, the provision of individual support and training.

However, a range of concerns were raised by participants when thinking about how the propositions would work in practice. Key concerns regarding implementation focused on:

Barriers to employment

The Green Paper policy propositions focused on supporting people in gaining employment. When thinking about entering employment participants – particularly those currently unemployed - noted a number of barriers that they felt would hinder them and others like them. Many noted the requirement for **financial support**. This was particularly salient for lone parents who wanted help with childcare



costs and disabled people who sought financial support for transport to and from work and any aids and adaptations at work that they may require. Participants also discussed the **attitudes of employers** and their willingness to employ people that may be disabled, a lone parent, or have a criminal record. Overall participants sought more **help and support** from Jobcentre Plus staff in finding employment opportunities.

Choice

There was much discussion during the research regarding choice. Many participants seeking employment noted that they had concerns over having to take a job that they did not have any interest in. They wanted Jobcentre Plus staff to help them identify job opportunities that matched their skills as well as their aspirations. They felt that this would help them retain their job. Choice also emerged during discussions regarding whether people should have to return to work (e.g. policy proposal 7 (lone parents) and policy proposal 2 (training and community work)). Participants found it difficult to specify whether these policy propositions should be voluntary or mandatory, but were clear that they personally would prefer a choice on these matters.

Fairness

There was widespread agreement that any reforms to the welfare system must be fair and well communicated.

Individual support

Individual support was considered crucial to any reforms to the welfare system. It was felt that individual support would ensure that people receive appropriate support regardless of their situation. Interestingly, responses to policy proposal 8 (individual support and responsibility) indicated that people feel that finding employment is a joint responsibility between the individual seeking employment and the DWP. The importance of providing individual support was also a strong theme in the October update research.

Reassurance

Participants sought reassurance that the Green Paper policy propositions would not negatively impact on society – for example, that community work (policy proposal 2) would not take away paid jobs. They also sought reassurances that the proposed changes would not negatively affect their financial wellbeing.

Monitoring

There were concerns that any reforms to the welfare system would not be monitored and therefore would be open to abuse. Participants felt that the DWP should effectively monitor any changes to ensure that they are adhered to.

Clarity

Issues around clarity were raised across the discussions of the Green Paper policy propositions – many of these focused on the current low levels of awareness of the welfare system resulting in a lack of understanding how the propositions would change the current system. Overall, participants desired more information regarding what the Green Paper policy propositions would actually entail.

Economic downturn



Finally, participants in the October update research raised concerns that the current economic climate would result in fewer job opportunities and questioned whether the government would be able to fund reforms at this time.



Appendix

Sample Structure: August research

	Life stage	England location London	England location Barnstaple	England location Newcastle	Scotland Glasgow	Wales Cardiff
DWP customers	18-25 years (mix of those living at home, with parents and those living independently)	-	-	Group 1 Non-working Not on disability benefits (JSA, IS, HB, CTB)	-	Group 2 Working or studying (IS, CTB, HC, DLA)
	26-50 years (mix of single people, couples and families)	Group 3 Working (IS, CTB, HB, DLA)	Group 5 Non-working Not on disability benefits (JSA, IS, HB, CTB)	-	Group 4 Non-working Disabled people (IB, DLA, IS)	-
	51-60/65 years (mix of single people, couples and families)	Group 6 Non-working Disabled people (IB, DLA, IS)	-	Group 7 Working (IS, CTB, HB, DLA)	-	-
Taxpayers <i>None to be claiming any means-tested benefits</i>	18-25 years (mix of those living at home, with parents and those living independently)	Group 8 ABC1	-	-	-	-
	26-50 years (mix of single people, couples and families)	-	Group 9 C1C2	-	-	Group 10 C2D
	51-60/65 years (mix of single people, couples and families)	-	-	-	Group 11 C1C2	-
	Pensioners	-	-	Group 12 C1C2	-	-

Across the groups:

- Mix of male and female participants in each group
- Spread of participants from ethnic minority communities to reflect location of the groups
- Spread of participants with children (aged 0-6 and 7-16)
- Inclusion of lone parents
- Inclusion of carers of disabled child/ adult or elderly person
- Inclusion of people touched by drugs and/ or alcohol personally or through their family/ friends
- Those currently unemployed: spread of those who have been in paid employment within the last 2 years and those who have not been in employment for 2+ years

In addition, 4 x depth interviews:

- All participants have a learning difficulty
- 2 x female and 2 x male participants
- All aged 26-50 years

Sample Structure: October update research

	Life stage	England location Birmingham	England location London
DWP customers	20-55 years (mix of single people, couples and families)	Group 1 Non-working	Group 3 Non-working
Taxpayers <i>None to be claiming</i>	20-54 years (mix of single people, couples and families)	Group 2 BC1	-
<i>any means-tested benefits</i>	55+ years (mix of single people, couples and families)	-	Group 4 C1C2D

Across the groups:

- Mix of male and female participants in each group
- Spread of participants from ethnic minority communities to reflect location of the groups
- Inclusion of lone parents
- Inclusion of carers
- Inclusion of disabled people

In addition, 2 x depth interviews:

- All participants have a learning difficulty

Qualitative Discussion Guide: August research

Green Paper Research: Discussion Guide FINAL

Objectives:

- To explore key Green Paper consultation questions. Specifically to:
 - Investigate current understanding of the benefits system
 - Gather detailed understanding of people's attitudes towards the Green Paper; investigate drivers and causes of opinions
 - Identify motivations and barriers for supporting benefits reform and behavioural change, and how barriers can be overcome

INTRODUCTIONS

10 mins →

MODERATOR NOTES

Moderator Introduction:

- Thank participants for taking part in the research.
- Introduce self, GfK NOP, any observers, discussion will last 2 hours. Please let me know if you'd like to take a break during this time.
- Explain purpose of research – *Moderator: we'll be talking about some ideas for changing aspects of the benefits system, and I'd like to get your views on these*
- Reassure re: confidentiality, recording and MRS Code of Conduct
- Explain importance of everyone being able to say what they think, no right or wrong answers, need for honesty, validity of all opinions
- Any questions?

Participants Introduction:

- Name
- Family circumstances, home life, hobbies, job etc.
- Favourite TV programme

- Aim: to introduce the research and the format of the group to participants.
- We're asking people to tell us their favourite TV programme as an ice-breaker – to get the group talking and sharing information on a light hearted theme.

GENERAL VIEWS & UNDERSTANDING OF BENEFITS AND INFORMATION SOURCES

15 mins →

MODERATOR NOTES

- ① *Moderator say: Over the years there have been different ways of supporting people when they are unable to work. I'd like to start by asking you about what you know about how the government supports people in this country nowadays.*

- Aim: to explore current understanding and views of the benefits system/

① *Write spontaneous responses on flip chart*

- Prompt:
 - What do you know about the support for people who can't work?
 - What do you think of it?
 - How has it changed over the years?
 - For better/ for worse?
- Where do you come across information about government support and benefits?
- Prompt:
 - National/ local television
 - National/ local radio
 - National/ local press
 - Friends and family
 - Jobcentre Plus
 - Social worker
 - Other
- When it comes to thinking about government support and benefits available to people, who do you trust/ believe?
 - Why/ why not?

ways in which people talk about the benefits system. Also, to identify where people get information regarding benefits system, and which sources they particularly trust

- Equipment: flip chart

SUMMARISE VIEWS ON BENEFITS SYSTEM

15 mins →

MODERATOR NOTES

- 📄 *Exercise: I'd like everyone to take some post-it notes. Firstly, I'd like everyone to write at least one thing that they think is positive/ good about the support available to people in this country*
- 📄 *Exercise: Now I'd like everyone to write at least one change that they would like to see made*
- Share post-it notes with positive/ good things and discuss
 - To what extent do you think the current system of government support and benefits works well?
- Share post-it notes with changes respondents would like to see made and discuss
 - What's the view in this group?
 - How do you all feel about this idea?
 - Which people or groups of people in this country would be
 - Positive and enthusiastic/ why?
 - Negative and not happy/ why?
 - How do you think the government would feel about making these changes?
 - Positive and enthusiastic/ why?
 - Negative and not happy/ why?

- Aim: to gather overall views of the benefits system and understand perceptions around how easy changing behaviour is
- Equipment: post-it notes
- People should write one idea per post-it note

INTRODUCING THE GREEN PAPER

5 mins →

MODERATOR NOTES

- ① *Moderator: The government is currently putting together a document about some changes that they are thinking about making. It is a consultation document called a Green Paper. And it is long, so we don't have time to go through all of it, but I'd like to show you a few sections of it and get your views.*
- Any questions before we carry on?

- Aim: introduce the Green Paper and topic for subsequent discussion

GREEN PAPER PROPOSITIONS

60 mins →

MODERATOR NOTES

① *Moderator: for each message use the following bank of questions and exercises*

📄 *Exercise: I'd like everybody to take some post-it notes. I'm going to read out a series of statements and show them to you on a card. I'd like you to think about how you feel about it. Please be as truthful as possible. We'll cover one statement at a time*

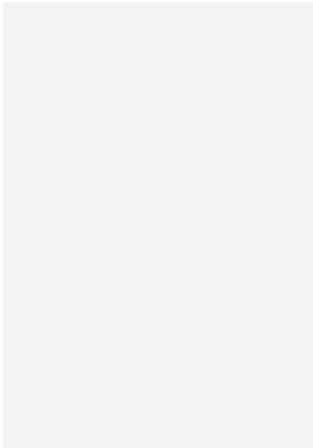
- *First, if you think that the statement will affect you or your family I'd like you to put a dot on the top right hand corner of the post-it note like this (show example). Other, just leave it blank.*
- *Second, I'd like you to think about whether you agree or disagree with the statement:*
 - *If you strongly agree with it put two ticks on your post-it note*
 - *If you slightly agree with it put one tick on your post-it note*
 - *If you slightly disagree with it put one cross on your post-it note*
 - *If you strongly disagree with it put two crosses on your post-it note*
- *Now I'd like everyone to put their post-it note on the big sheet of paper in the middle of the table at the same time.*

① *Moderator: sort post-it notes into groups of ticks/ crosses*

- [Number] of us gave this statement ticks. Why is this?
 - Which parts of this statement do you like?
 - Who do you think is going to like this statement?
 - What are the benefits/ positives of this statement?
 - Why the double ticks/ enthusiasm?
- [Number] of us gave this statement crosses. Why is this?
 - Which parts of this statement don't you like?
 - Who do you think will not like this statement?
 - What are the drawbacks/ negatives of this statement?
 - Why the double crosses/ rejection?
- What is this statement saying/ what does it mean?
- How do you think this statement will affect you/ your family/ your friends?

- Aim: explore attitudes towards propositions and reasons for supporting/ opposing the propositions – including individual responses before discussing these with the entire group. Investigate perceived impact on personal life, and how easy they feel it will be for the government to actually make the changes.
- Equipment: post-it notes, show cards with Green Paper propositions, show card with ticks/ crosses scale, flip chart paper.
- 4-5 propositions will be tested in each focus group. Refer to the table detailing which propositions should be covered in each group.
- Moderators to explore perceived barriers and enablers to making any changes that the propositions propose.

- What are the possible consequences?
- How easy do you think it will be for you/ your family to adjust to this change?
- What will make this change easy/ difficult for you?
- Who will find it easy to make this change/ why?
- Who will find it difficult to make this change/ why?
- In general terms, is this going to be a popular change among people in this country?
- Why do you think the government is proposing this change?



GREEN PAPER: FAST FORWARD EXERCISE

10 mins →

MODERATOR NOTES

-
- ① *Moderator say: I'd like you to imagine that the things that we've been talking about [recap] are put in place later this year. Now let's fast forward to 2010. You've just read an article in the newspaper that is looking back at the changes.*
- What does the article say about the changes?
 - What changes is it positive about?
 - What changes is it negative about?
 - Who has benefited from the changes?
 - Imagine that you have been interviewed for the article – what did you say about the changes?

- Aim: to gain an understanding of the propositions that people think will prove most/ least popular

SUMMARY AND CLOSE

5 mins →

MODERATOR NOTES

-
- Final thoughts?
 - Any questions?
 - Thank and close

- Aim: to round up the discussion and bring the group to a close.

Please note that if any participants feel some concern about potential effects of the Green Paper on their circumstances we propose to signpost them to their usual channel of support e.g. social worker/ Jobcentre Plus/ Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Qualitative Show Cards: August research

Message 1	Nobody should be written off on welfare if they can get into work with the right support, skills training and opportunities
Message 2	The majority of people on benefits should take part in activities such as training and/ or community work in return for their benefits
Message 3	The benefits system should give more support to help disabled people and people with ill-health to stay in work or get into work
Message 4	At the moment, child maintenance may affect the benefits people who are caring for children receive. This needs to change. Children should be able to keep all the maintenance that is paid for them without it affecting the benefit paid to their parent
Message 5	It is fair to expect drug users to prepare for work by completing a treatment programme or face losing their benefits
Message 6	Work is the best route out of poverty and means of supporting people in improving their lives
Message 7	We need to help lone parents to get back to work once their children start school to give their families a better future
Message 8	It is right to provide more individual support for people to find work and in return expect them to take responsibility for finding a job
Message 9	Disabled people should be able to make more decisions about how they use the support they get from government such as social care, grants for aids and adaptations and help into work.

Qualitative Discussion Guide: October update research

Welfare Reform Update Research

Discussion Guide

Objectives:

- To explore current attitudes to key Green Paper consultation questions. Specifically to:
 - Gauge the public's appetite for messages on our welfare reform proposals in the context of the current economic downturn.
 - Gather detailed understanding of whether people's attitudes towards the Green Paper have changed; investigate drivers and causes of opinions
 - Identify where people think support should be focussed given changes in the economy

INTRODUCTIONS

10 mins →

MODERATOR NOTES

Moderator Introduction:

- Thank participants for taking part in the research.
- Introduce self, GfK NOP, any observers, discussion will last 1 ½ hours. Please let me know if you'd like to take a break during this time.
- Explain purpose of research – *Moderator: we'll be talking about some ideas for changing aspects of the benefits system, and I'd like to get your views on these*
- Reassure re: confidentiality, recording and MRS Code of Conduct
- Explain importance of everyone being able to say what they think, no right or wrong answers, need for honesty, validity of all opinions
- Any questions?

Participants Introduction:

- Name
- Family circumstances, home life, hobbies, job etc.
- Favourite TV programme

- Aim: to introduce the research and the format of the group to participants.
- We're asking people to tell us their favourite TV programme as an ice-breaker – to get the group talking and sharing information on a light hearted theme.

GENERAL VIEWS & UNDERSTANDING OF BENEFITS AND VIEWS ON BENEFITS SYSTEM

15 mins



MODERATOR NOTES

① *Moderator say: Over the years, the way the government supports people when they are not working has changed. I'd like to start by asking you about what you know role of the government in supporting people in this country nowadays.*

① *Write spontaneous responses on flip chart*

- What do you know about the support the government provides for people who are not working?
- In what ways can the government help people who are not working?
- In what ways can people who are not working help themselves?
- Prompt for above 2 questions:
 - Jobs
 - Financial
 - Education and skills
 - Health
 - Care
 - Legal
 - Other
- To what extent has this changed recently?
- Thinking about support and how it is provided, what are the difficulties faced by: -
 - The government?
 - Individuals who are not working?
- What are the main reasons for these difficulties?
- *Optional Exercise (if time allows): I'd like everyone to write at least one change that they would like to see made to address the difficulties you have mentioned*
- ① *Share post-it notes with changes respondents would like to see made and discuss*
- What are the advantages/ disadvantages of making this change:
 - For individuals?
 - For the Government?
- Who should be responsible for making this change?

- Aim: to explore current understanding and views of the benefits system.
- Equipment: flip chart

INTRODUCING PREVIOUS RESEARCH

5 mins



MODERATOR NOTES

- ① *Moderator: The government recently put together a document called a Green Paper about some changes that they are thinking about making to how people who are not working are supported. We previously conducted research on some of the messages in the Green Paper but would like to look at the messages again and get your views.*
- Any questions before we carry on?

- Aim: introduce the Green Paper and topic for subsequent discussion

GREEN PAPER MESSAGES

50 mins



MODERATOR NOTES

- ① *Moderator: **for each message** use the following bank of questions and exercises*
- 📄 *Exercise: I'd like everybody to take some post-it notes. I'm going to read out a series of statements and show them to you on a card. I'd like you to think about how you feel about it. Please be as truthful as possible. We'll cover one statement at a time*
 - *First, if you think that the statement will affect you or your family I'd like you to put a dot on the top right hand corner of the post-it note like this (show example). Otherwise, just leave it blank.*
 - *Second, I'd like you to think about whether you agree or disagree with the statement:*
 - *If you strongly agree with it put two ticks on your post-it note*
 - *If you slightly agree with it put one tick on your post-it note*
 - *If you slightly disagree with it put one cross on your post-it note*
 - *If you strongly disagree with it put two crosses on your post-it note*
 - *Now I'd like everyone to put their post-it note on the big sheet of paper in the middle of the table.*
- ① *Moderator: sort post-it notes into groups of ticks/ crosses*
- What is this statement saying/ what does it mean?
- Why do you agree/disagree with this statement?
 - What are the benefits/ drawbacks of this statement?
 - Who do you think will like/not like this statement?

- Aim: explore attitudes towards messages and reasons for supporting/ opposing the messages – including individual responses before discussing these with the entire group.
- Equipment: post-it notes, showcards with Green Paper messages, showcard with ticks/ crosses scale, flip chart paper.
- 5 messages will be tested in each focus group.
- Moderators to explore changes to views on the messages from previous research.

- How do you think this statement will affect you/ your family/ your friends?
 - What are the possible consequences?
 - How easy do you think it will be for you/ your family to adjust to this change?
 - Who will find it easy to make this change/ why?
 - Who will find it difficult to make this change/ why?

① Prompt on each proposition after it has been spontaneously discussed

- When we tested these messages two months ago, participants were of the opinion that:

Proposition 1:

- Support should be individual and available for all people
- People should have a choice of the training they take
- People should be reassured that they will be financially better off by working

Proposition 2:

- The idea of training and community work is a good way of preparing for employment but should be voluntary
- People should have a choice of the kind of community work they do
- People should be reassured that there would be no impact on their benefits, training or opportunities for paid work.

Proposition 3:

- Disabled people should have fair access to work and received extra support to work
- Support for disabled people should be individual and continue once they are in a job
- Disabled people should have a choice not to work and should be able to go back onto benefits if they cannot continue working.

Proposition 6:

- Employment brings many benefits including financial independence and is a route out of poverty
- People should be given a choice of where they work and be supported by employers
- People should receive individual support in finding work

Proposition 8:

- It is the joint responsibility on the individual and the

- government (in the form of JCP) to find people work
 - People should be helped as much as possible to train and find work
 - People should have a choice of the job they go into
- To what extent are your views different to those previously took part in the research?
- What has caused you to have different/similar views to those of our previous findings on this message?
- Why is this the right/wrong time to make this change?
- How has this changed in light of the economic downturn?
- Bearing in mind the changes that are taking place in the economy, what do you think the responsibility of ...
 - The Government
 - People who are not working
 - Employers
- ... In getting (people) into work?
- ... In ensuring the system is fair?
- ... In supporting the economy?
 - Who is most responsible in each of these circumstances and why?

EXERCISE: KILLER QUESTION

10 mins →

MODERATOR NOTES

- ① *Moderator say: I'd like you to imagine that you are a government official in charge of organising support for people supported in the current economic crisis.*
- What reasons would you have for bringing in these propositions
- What reasons would you have for not bringing in these propositions
- What would be your ultimate decision about making changes to the system and why?

- Aim: to gain an understanding of the messages that people think will prove most/ least popular

Thank you and Close

Qualitative Show cards: October update research

Message 1

Nobody should be written off on welfare if they can get into work with the right support, skills training and opportunities

Message 2

The majority of people on benefits should take part in activities such as training or work experience in return for their benefits

Message 3

The government should give more support to help disabled people and people with ill-health to stay in work or get into work

Message 6

Work is the best route out of poverty – being in work means that people can support themselves and improve their lives

Message 8

It is right to provide more personalised support for people to find a job and, in return, expect them to take responsibility for making the most of this support to find work

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