Evaluation of the Standard Operating Model new and repeat claims process review pilot

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A report of research carried out by ECOTEC on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions
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Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped with this evaluation, especially all Jobcentre Plus Staff who were interviewed and observed. The nature of pilot delivery meant that the research was conducted at a time of operational change; staff were very accommodating, patient and willing to share their views on the process. Similarly, we would like to thank Jobcentre Plus customers who participated in the research for the readiness and frankness with which they expressed their views.

Our particular thanks go to Janet Allaker, Rebecca Hutten, Elizabeth Cole, Clare Morley and Kevan Barber of the Performance Measurement and Analysis Division of Jobcentre Plus for providing clear guidance and support throughout the evaluation. We would also like to thank all members of the project team for their invaluable efforts during the fieldwork and analysis stages of this research: Zeta Astra, Graham Bukowski, Rachel Gardner, Vanessa Lee, Kate McPhillips and Naomi Winchurch.

Thanks also to INFOCORP, for conducting the customer telephone interviews for the quantitative customer research.
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# Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AACT</td>
<td>Actual Average Clearance Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDC</td>
<td>Benefit Delivery Centre</td>
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<td>BF</td>
<td>Brought Forward</td>
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<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>Black or Minority Ethnic</td>
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<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>Benefit Processors</td>
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<tr>
<td>BPS</td>
<td>Benefit Processing Site</td>
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<td>BPT</td>
<td>Benefit Processing Team</td>
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<td>BPTO</td>
<td>Benefit Processing Team Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Customer Management System</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>Claims Preparation Team</td>
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<td>CPTO</td>
<td>Claims Preparation Team Officer</td>
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<td>CSA</td>
<td>Child Support Agency</td>
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<td>Claim Service Team</td>
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<td>Claim Service Team Officer</td>
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<td>DEX</td>
<td>CMS Dialogue Expert</td>
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<td>DiD</td>
<td>Difference-in-Difference</td>
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<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
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<td>FA</td>
<td>Financial Assessor</td>
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<td>FAM</td>
<td>Financial Assessor Manager</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCO</td>
<td>First Contact Officer</td>
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<td>FTA</td>
<td>Fail To Attend</td>
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<td>Human Resources</td>
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<td>Habitual Residency Test</td>
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<td>Information Technology</td>
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<td>Interactive Voice Routing</td>
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<td>Local Service Outlet</td>
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<td>Telephone Team</td>
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<td>Work Focused Interview</td>
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Summary

In February 2006, Jobcentre Plus commissioned ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd to evaluate the Standard Operating Model (SOM) Process Review (SPR) pilot. The pilot was launched in North Lincolnshire in February 2006, and was subsequently extended to cover offices serving customers from Central London. The detailed findings from the evaluation of the pilot are presented in the accompanying main report. This builds on an earlier report covering findings from research with staff in North Lincolnshire1 by:

- providing evidence of customer perceptions and experiences in North Lincolnshire and Central London;
- presenting detailed findings from research with staff serving the Central London area;
- presenting the latest analysis of management information (MI) and performance data; and
- updating the overall assessment of the impact and effectiveness of the SPR pilot.

The primary purpose of this summary is to draw out the principle findings and associated recommendations from the evaluation to help inform decisions about the future roll out of the pilot. As such it considers whether, and the extent to which, the pilot addressed previously identified problems/bottlenecks and highlights any outstanding issues. It also reviews how key aspects of the pilot worked and how it impacted on staff and customer experience and efficiency.

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1 Evaluation of the SOM New and Repeat Claims Process Review Pilot – Findings from research with North Lincolnshire staff before and after the pilot’s implementation, ECOTEC (July 2006).
Headlines

Many of the processes introduced through the SPR pilot have largely been validated. Many of the bottlenecks and issues previously identified have been addressed, though some remain and others have emerged. In general, the SOM used by the SPR pilot proved to be transferable to different local operating contexts. The pilot had a positive impact on staff and customer experience, and efficiency, particularly at the front-end of the process. A key recommendation is that priority be given to a review of the resources and capacity given to dealing with the back end of the claiming process.

Key messages

Successes:

• Significant improvements in the front-end of the claiming process, allowing claims to be passed on to Benefit Processing more quickly than previously, and thus providing better customer service.

• Benefits to Jobcentres attributable to the streamlining of First Contact as well as the new procedures and workload reallocation between the Claims Service Team (CST) and Benefit Processing Team (BPT).

• Some efficiency gains in claims processing on account of the earlier and more rapid transfer of claims information to the BPT and greater consistency at (some) pilot sites between claims preparation and processing.

• The process ‘makes sense’ to staff, once the inevitable initial period of uncertainty and adjustment had passed.

Issues to be addressed:

• Rectifying the bottlenecks at the back-end of the process is the major issue and arises partly from the introduction of an extra stage in the process (to safeguard against fraud) but also from difficulties in managing the flow of claims and the ‘Brought Forward’ (BF) system with the current level of resources.

• The quality and consistency of customer statements, which may or may not be a result of the emphasis on speed. There were a number of complex issues involved, many of which were not specific to the pilot.

• There are still too many contact points in the system. Though it is easier to access the Contact Centre using the Freephone number and the Interactive Voice Routing (IVR) system, it is difficult to get through to the Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC).

• Lack of cohesion between staff/teams across the business process.

• Increased workloads and the accompanying backlogs in parts of the process may impact on staff morale, job satisfaction and sickness rates.
The SPR pilot

Jobcentre Plus launched the SPR pilot to address concerns about delays in handling new and repeat claims and its attendant business processes. More specifically, the claims taking process was reported to be cumbersome, leading to increases in:

- the volume of emergency payments;
- avoidable enquiries; and
- complaints from customers.

The objectives of the pilot were to:

- improve the level of customer service with fewer contacts, easier access and speedier decision making;
- improve staff experience by providing a process which is transparent, user friendly and makes more sense to those who deliver it; and
- provide a more efficient, affordable new claim process without having an adverse impact on performance.

The current pilot is delivered in two areas: North Lincolnshire in the East and North Yorkshire and Humber District; and offices serving customers from the Central London District of Jobcentre Plus.

The evaluation

The evaluation aimed to test the robustness of the SPR pilot and assess the extent to which it met its objectives. The methodology involved:

- **Depth interviews with staff.** Over 250 depth interviews were held with staff delivering the pilot. These interviews were conducted before, and after, the pilot was implemented and covered both pilot areas.

- **Depth interviews with customers.** A relatively small number of customers (36) who started a new or repeat claim for benefit under the pilot in North Lincolnshire were interviewed in depth.

- **Observational research.** Over 60 observations were conducted in Contact Centres and Jobcentres before and after the pilot was implemented.

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3 Efficiency was considered in terms of clearance times/accuracy and amount of reworking.
Customer surveys. In June 2006, two surveys were completed: one with 394 customers who made a claim for benefit in North Lincolnshire (the pilot area); and one with 288 customers from the rest of the East and North Yorkshire and Humber District. In September 2006, two further surveys were conducted in London: one with 700 customers who started a claim under the pilot in Central London; and one with 300 customers who made a new or repeat claim in West London, where the pilot was not in operation.

Analysis of performance and management data, completed by the Performance Measurement and Analysis Division (PMAD) of Jobcentre Plus.

Summary findings
The rest of this summary provides key findings for each stage of the claiming process and against the pilot’s key objectives.

First Contact

The SPR pilot delivered clear improvements to the early stages of the claims process; replacing the dual call process with a single call was particularly significant in achieving this. The main improvements included:

- increased speed with which new and repeat claims were taken and First Contact was completed;
- reduced duplication and re-working; and
- increased efficiency with which First Contact was delivered.

However attention needs to be given to improving the quality and consistency of customer statements.

The introduction of a Freephone number led to a reduction in customer complaints about the cost of calls and requests for call-backs. The IVR system helped to reduce the volume of inappropriate calls received in the pilot areas and made it possible to effectively route customers according to the nature of the benefit they wanted to claim. Staff were able to deliver a quicker and more tailored service to people who wanted to make a Rapid Reclaim, as these customers were identified through the IVR and staff were able to see the type of customer before answering the call.

The single call, which replaced the previous dual call process, was perhaps the most significant aspect of the pilot. Of all customers making a claim, 77 per cent in North Lincolnshire and 70 per cent in Central London were dealt with in a single call. Staff and customers generally preferred handling claims in a single call because it helped to get claims up and running more quickly than before. This approach also provided a greater incentive for First Contact Officers (FCOs) to record full and accurate information as they were responsible for completing all of First Contact, rather than
just parts of the initial process. Customers were able to provide the information requested in the single call so that their claim could be progressed quickly. Mini-breaks were rarely used. Single calls generally took less time than the combined length of the previous inbound and outbound process, and so allowed resource savings to be made. The standard process single call took 42 minutes on average in North Lincolnshire and 50 minutes in Central London.

The set-up and delivery of the pilot revealed new or emerging issues that affected the model’s ability to improve the speed, accuracy and efficiency of the claims process. These included:

- **Resource allocations for administration**

  The streamlining of the FCO workload meant that Admin Teams bore additional responsibilities such as printing/posting Rapid Reclaim and failed letters. For some Contact Centres, this meant that fewer customer statements could be handled per day.

- **The completeness and accuracy of data gathered at First Contact**

  Whilst FCOs were satisfied with the robustness of the single call, a number of gaps were identified at the next stages. Jobcentre staff reported inaccuracies and missing data in the customer statement and Customer Management System (CMS) data. The MI does not allow accuracy levels to be compared before/after the SPR pilot. However, potential factors were identified as:

  - the quicker process for Rapid Reclaims – this led to more claims being inappropriately defined as Rapid Reclaims at First Contact; and
  
  - a need for improved awareness of ‘benefit critical’ questions within CMS.

The evaluation also identified a number of external factors that affected the pilot’s ability to streamline the claiming process at First Contact. These may be inherent to a call-based system, and not specific to the SPR pilot:

- **Calls from mobile phones.** Mobile networks charge for ‘freephone calls’. A high proportion of mobile phone users were also cut-off during the call. It proved time intensive to follow-up and complete the record.

- **Customers with English language problems.** The duration of calls increased where an interpreter was required. Staff found it difficult to access the required information using three-way dialogue, and there was a higher risk of processing error.

- **Inappropriate calls received by the Contact Centre.** A proportion of customers continued to call with general enquiries, benefit enquiries, and calls aimed at Jobcentres. This was not fully addressed by the IVR routing, as customers would persist with the call.

- **High demand or peaks in call volume.** This led to some delays for customers, and placed pressure on the single call policy.
Meetings in Jobcentres

- There have been numerous benefits to the Jobcentre, attributable to the streamlining of First Contact as well as the new procedures and workload reallocation between the CST and BPT.
- Managing customer flow was a key challenge, which was largely met; the new system has also freed-up staff time.
- The transfer of the BF system to the BPT did relieve pressures, but contributed to the accumulation of bottlenecks with the latter.

The SPR pilot brought numerous benefits for meetings in Jobcentres. These were due in part to the streamlining of First Contact, but also reflected new procedures and workload re-allocation between the CST and BPT. It helped to:

- reduce workload commitments of full-time staff;
- streamline the appointments management process;
- reduce the amount of waiting time in Jobcentres for clients; and
- provide greater flexibility and responsiveness for bookings.

The process changes for First Contact were felt by Jobcentre staff. In particular, there was a more appropriate scheduling of Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) appointments during the pilot, as evidenced by a higher percentage of WFIs booked within the four day target (88 per cent in North Lincolnshire and 62 per cent in Central London compared to a national figure of around 40 per cent). This helped synchronise the booking time with the arrival of the customer statement, to the customers’ benefit.

The single call allowed staff to book WFIs more efficiently. In Pembroke Dock Contact Centre, 85 per cent of WFIs booked in a single call were three-five days after the Initial Date of Claim (IDOC) compared to only 52 per cent in a call back. However, in North Lincolnshire, there was no real difference in the numbers of WFIs booked within three-five days.

The move to an ‘on demand’ CST was a positive development, resulting in a more flexible and responsive service to customers. The use of staggered appointments better equipped Jobcentres to deal with late arrivals and cancellations. Furthermore, the new system reduced time pressures on Claims Service Team Officers (CSTOs), by reducing the time spent managing diaries and removing the requirement for ‘blanket’ pre-calls. This freed-up considerable staff time, which could be applied elsewhere.

The transfer of the BF processes to the BPT was a key area of change under the SPR pilot. This transfer relieved workload pressures from Financial Assessors (FAs) that were previously acute. On balance, however, it was questionable whether end-to-end processing time had been reduced. Certain bottlenecks were perceived to have shifted further down the system to the BPT. The SPR pilot also underlined the importance of communication between the two sites, to manage the transfer of data.
Across the SPR pilot, Human Resources (HR) planning was identified as an important implementation issue in Jobcentres. The changes to key processes made it important for staff to be well briefed. This was particularly the case for CSTOs, regarding their role in gathering evidence and checking the accuracy of customer statements. Further clarification was required, regarding the overlap in responsibilities between the CST and BPT.

Claims processing

- Some efficiency gains at the BDC arose on account of the earlier and more rapid transfer of claims information to the BPT and greater consistency at (some) pilot sites between claims preparation and processing.

- Significant drawbacks in the pilot emerged at this stage. Introducing an extra stage (to safeguard against fraud) created a bottleneck at the BDC, which also struggled to handle the flow of claims, and found the BF system difficult to manage. This resulted in a reduction in the numbers of claims processed and an increase in both the number of calls ‘not answered’ (the Tele-team lacked capacity) and customer complaints.

The main advantage of the SPR pilot was to provide the BPT with the claims information more rapidly than before. Additionally, where a joint Claims Preparation Team (CPT)/BPT team was in place there was greater consistency between claims preparation and processing tasks, on account of the same staff being responsible for the claim at each stage. This approach also helped to minimise the risks of transferring claims between sites, which might otherwise lead to the information being mishandled.

The drawback of the joint CPT/BPT model was that it required an extra stage in the process, to safeguard against fraud (as a result of the same individual overseeing a claim at all stages). Claims were passed to colleagues at the BDC whose role it was to ‘push’ the claim from CMS to legacy. This additional link, whilst enabling the model to work, was also the main source of bottlenecks to the system at the BDC. This was because:

- There was a large build-up of claims to be pushed from CMS to legacy. Delays occurred at this stage because the staffing resource was insufficient to manage the volumes of work.

- Additional time and cost was incurred where ‘failed’ pushes happened, requiring staff at the BDC to manually enter data from CMS to legacy.

- Jobcentre Plus guidelines entailed that not all claims could be ‘pushed’ in this way. Whilst Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) and Income Support (IS) could be processed in this manner, the same was not possible for Incapacity Benefit (IB). This meant that the processor had to ‘rebuild’ the claim every time.
Analysis of the CMS push rates showed a slight increase in the proportion of claims successfully transferred from CMS to Legacy electronically over the course of the pilot. There have, however, been national improvements recently so the improvement can not be directly attributed to the pilot, although the analysis has shown no adverse effect from the new processes.

The bottleneck at processing stage further related to the transfer of claims preparation functions to the BDC, which would previously have been completed at the Jobcentre. This brought a (related) increase in customer service responsibilities. Although a Telephone Team (Tele-team) was instated at the BDC to handle customer enquiries for the pilot, this lacked the capacity to manage the volume of calls from customers who were enquiring about the progress of their claim. This resulted in a high number of unanswered incoming calls, leading to customers redialling and an increase in complaints. Courtesy calls were rarely made, unless gathering further information from customers.

The BDCs struggled to manage and handle the flow of all new and repeat claims in difficult circumstances, including Rapid Reclaims and claims for IS and/or IB that were sent directly by customers and found the volume of work required for the BF system difficult to manage. A range of factors, unrelated to the pilot, affected their ability to deliver an efficient service, including: under-resourcing; a backlog of claims; requests for emergency payments; and the quality of customer statements sent to the team.

There is evidence of an adverse impact on JSA Actual Average Clearance Time (AACT) for both pilot sites beginning around the time of pilot implementation. North Lincolnshire has shown some signs of a recovery but has still not returned to pre-pilot performance levels. There is little evidence to suggest that performance is likely to return to pre-pilot levels soon in Central London. There has been no observed change in performance for IS AACT since the pilot began. Both pilot sites have improved IB AACT since the start of the pilot.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the pilot validated many of its core processes. Specifically, the efficiency of First Contact for new and repeat claims improved. Waiting times for customers have reduced and a more flexible booking system for new appointments has developed. Pressures on staff in Jobcentres have also been alleviated.

Alongside these improvements the pilot highlighted certain issues for attention. A major issue is the development of bottlenecks at the BDC; improvements to the handling of claims at the customer-facing end have been achieved in part with a shift in workload onwards to the BDC. This was counterproductive and has not yet resulted in a decrease in the processing time. Concerns were found over the quality and consistency of customer statements. This may or may not be a result of the emphasis on speed of handling claims at First Contact stage. There were a number of complex issues involved, many of which were not specific to the pilot.
The resource/capacity at each stage of claims processing should be reviewed as a priority if the SPR pilot is to be fit for purpose. Moreover, the pilot underlined the importance of administrative capacity to manage the increased volumes of data inputting at key stages of the process. The pilot also highlighted a need for improved awareness for FCOs on ‘benefit critical’ questions within CMS, and for the clarification of roles and responsibilities for staff more widely under the new system.

• The SPR pilot appeared to be transferable to different local operating contexts. Though the key findings from the North Lincolnshire Pilot and that serving offices in Central London are broadly similar, some are distinct. In North Lincolnshire, the CPT believed their ‘back room function’ helped improve the accuracy of claims. However complex claims for IS and/or IB were double handled because staff from both the CPT and BPT looked at these in detail.

• In the pilot covering Central London, there is some suggestion of reduced footfall in Jobcentres. However, staff received a high number of call back requests from mobile phone users or people using Jobcentre phones and customers continued to use the Jobcentre to send evidence. Large numbers also incorrectly selected Rapid Reclaim on the Contact Centre IVR.

Overall, the SPR pilot successfully achieved improvements across all of the pilot objectives. Not unsurprisingly, given the design and delivery issues highlighted above, there is a distinction in terms of performance according to each stage in the business process.

**Staff experience**

• Following the inevitable period of uncertainty and adjustment, the pilot ‘makes sense’ to staff.

• Lack of cohesion between staff/teams across the business process is an ongoing issue.

• Increased workloads and the accompanying backlogs in parts of the process may impact on staff morale, job satisfaction and sickness rates.

**Customer service**

• It is too early to say whether decision making has speeded up. Customers experienced a faster front end of the process, however some customers continued to experience delays and there is dissatisfaction with the availability of information about progress with claims.

• There is evidence of an adverse impact on JSA AACT for both pilot sites beginning around the time of pilot implementation. There has been no observed change in performance for IS AACT since the pilot began. Both pilot sites have improved IB AACT since the start of the pilot.

Continued
There are still too many contact points in the system. Though it is easier to access the Contact Centre using the Freephone number and the IVR system, it is difficult to get through to the BDC.

Efficiency

- It appears that there is greater efficiency in First Contact for new and repeat claims however, the knock-on effects to the BDC need to be addressed.
- The process in both the Contact Centre and Jobcentres is speedier and there is less duplication; this is at the expense of transferring bottlenecks to the BDC.
- The implementation effect is likely to explain the increases in AACT in the months immediately after the pilot began, but is unlikely to explain why performance has not returned to pre-pilot levels after six months. This implies that there are still refinements to be made to the process if AACT is to be managed effectively.
- There remain issues in the accuracy/completeness of customer statements which may or may not be a result of the emphasis on speed.

Recommendations

The following key recommendations were identified by all staff across the end-to-end process that would further improve the SPR pilot:

- **Rectifying the bottlenecks at the back-end of the process.** At the time of the research, claims preparation and processing resources were insufficient to cope with the volume of claims inherited from Jobcentres BF systems. The balance of resources across different BDC functions needs to be revisited.
- **Effective planning of resources.** Staff, particularly from Jobcentres and BDC, routinely emphasised the need for effective planning to manage call and customer flow. Managers and Team Leaders across offices felt that more work was needed to understand the different patterns of customer demand and the impact on available resources.
- **Quality Assessment Frameworks.** Quality procedures for all offices need to be adapted to fit with the pilot.
- **Staff training.** Further training and a detailed walk-through diagram were requested.
- **Greater emphasis on educating customers.** Each role within the process should be clearly outlined to the customer and placing the onus on customers to provide accurate and timely evidence to process the claim.
- **Further MI evidence** from the pilot on clearance times and accuracy should be undertaken to support national roll-out the pilot and further improvements.
Recommendations for the Contact Centre included:

- the previous SOM for new and repeat claims and the SPR pilot should be operated by different members of staff;
- review the resourcing of the Admin. Team;
- all FCOs should take both new claims and Rapid Reclaim calls;
- specific Admin. Team training and preparation should be delivered before the pilot;
- training for FCOs should incorporate practical elements, such as practice calls and the opportunity to shadow trainers; IT equipment should be available to FCOs in a quiet designated space for the training; and
- greater clarification on the level of information required to progress a claim should be provided.

Recommendations for the Jobcentre included:

- improving the transfer of information between Jobcentres and the BDC, specifically the ability for staff to track the progress of a claim and update to clearance times;
- ensure that CSTOs understand the remit of their meetings;
- CSTOs and Personal Advisers (PAs) to provide clearer explanation about their roles to reduce the amount of customers that ask PAs benefit related questions – freeing up PA time to focus on work discussions; and
- placing greater responsibility on customers for gathering and sending evidence, as they continued to use the Jobcentre as a resource to send evidence from.

Recommendations for the BDC:

- combine the BPT/CPT role to improve efficiency and reduce delays;
- review resources available for staffing the Tele-team;
- review staffing needed on the JSA Registration Team;
- review cost of training BDC staff to perform joint IS and IB claims preparation and benefit processing;
- improve the use of existing systems used by BDC, that are available to Jobcentre staff so they can find out directly about a customer’s claim without calling the BDC to find out where the claim has got to; and
- improve the process for labelling claims arriving from the Jobcentre so that they can be easily distributed and tracked within the BDC, particularly between IB and IS benefit teams.

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4 We understand that this issue has been addressed since the time of the research.
1 Introduction

In February 2006, Jobcentre Plus launched the Standard Operating Model (SOM) Process Review (SPR) pilot for new and repeat claims in North Lincolnshire. In April 2006, the pilot was extended to offices serving customers from Central London. This report presents the detailed findings from the evaluation of the pilot. It builds on an earlier report based on research with staff in North Lincolnshire\(^5\) by:

- providing detailed evidence of customer perceptions and experiences in North Lincolnshire;
- presenting detailed findings from research with staff serving the Central London area; and
- updating the overall assessment of the impact and effectiveness of the SPR pilot.

The report provides some comparison of the delivery of the pilot in the two areas and incorporates the latest findings from analysis of Management Information (MI) completed by the Performance Measurement and Analysis Division (PMAD) of Jobcentre Plus.

1.1 Background/context

Jobcentre Plus launched the SPR pilot to address concerns about delays in handling new and repeat claims and its attendant business processes. More specifically, the claims taking process was reported to be cumbersome, leading to increases in:

- the volume of emergency payments;
- avoidable enquiries; and
- complaints from customers\(^6\).

\(^5\) Evaluation of the SOM New and Repeat Claims Process Review Pilot – Findings from research with North Lincolnshire staff before and after the pilot’s implementation, ECOTEC (July 2006).

The pilot was launched in North Lincolnshire. Piloting of some changes began on the 27 February 2006, with the full process going live on 13 March 2006, and covered the following sites:

- Grimsby Contact Centre;
- Scunthorpe and Grimsby Benefit Processing Sites (BPS); and
- Four Jobcentres – Grimsby, Scunthorpe, Barton-on-Humber and Immingham.

From 24 April 2006, the pilot was extended to the Central London District, covering:

- Pembroke Dock Contact Centre (South West Wales);
- Glasgow Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC); and

1.2 Summary of key changes introduced by the pilot

Key changes to First Contact in the pilot included:

- **Freephone access**: A standard Freephone 0800 number was introduced for the pilot.

- **IVR routing**: The pilot used an Interactive Voice Routing (IVR) system that asked customers to select whether they wanted to make a new or repeat claim for benefit and provided alternative numbers for queries that should be dealt with elsewhere.

- **Handling the majority of cases in a single call**: Where possible, First Contact Officers (FCOs) working on the pilot collected all information in one single call, rather than the dual inbound/outbound process.

- **Fast tracking Rapid Reclaims**: Customers self-identified themselves as Rapid Reclaim claimants through the IVR – rather than being identified by FCOs at the end of the inbound call, as previously. Under the pilot, the FCO only collects minimal information from the Rapid Reclaim customer, then sends out a clerical form.

- **Removing job searches from First Contact**: Previously, FCOs conducted job searches during inbound and outbound calls for customers who were perceived to be ‘job ready’ and submitted individuals for jobs where suitable vacancies were found. For the pilot, FCOs were not intended to conduct any job searches. Instead, FCOs ask customers if they want help with a job search and, if so, arrange for someone from Jobseeker Direct to call the customer back to conduct the search.

7 Six of these Jobcentres were covered by the research, as follows: Barnsbury, Finsbury Park, Highgate, Kentish Town, Marylebone and Westminster.
• **Providing contact numbers for customers:** There was an increased emphasis on providing customers with relevant contact numbers for queries relating to their claim introduced under the pilot.

Key changes to Jobcentres in the pilot included:

• **A new ‘on-demand’ Claim Service Team:** The pilot introduced a new ‘on-demand’ Claim Service Team (CST) to replace the Financial Assessor (FA) team within the new and repeat claim process. The scope of meetings with customers was reduced from the previous FA role to concentrate on checking the claim and its supporting evidence. Unlike FAs, CST Officers (CSTOs) were not designated to specific customers for appointments. Instead, customers were seen by the first available member of the team. The intention was that this ‘on-demand’ CST would provide a more efficient and flexible service and thus reduce waiting times. Since the pilot, CSTOs have reverted to the title of FAs.

• **Targeted pre-calls to replace blanket ‘previewing’:** Prior to the pilot, FAs ‘previewed’ customers due to visit the Jobcentre for a Work Focused Interview (WFI) with a Personal Adviser (PA). This enabled FAs to check the customers’ details held on Customer Management System (CMS) with those held on legacy. Under the pilot, full previews were removed and WFI preparation activity required PAs to identify customers that had special requirements, such as language line or disabled access, which were not picked up by the Contact Centre FCO. Under the pilot, these pre-calls were only planned to occur if the Fail To Attend (FTA) rate was 17 per cent or more, or if the WFI date was booked five days or more after the initial inbound call to the Contact Centre.

• **Reduced check and initial data gather:** Under the pilot, the CSTO meeting was confined to verifying the customer’s identity, checking the completeness of the statement, addressing any unanswered questions, and gathering initial evidence. To reflect this streamlined meeting, the length of the appointment was reduced and customers were asked to arrive at the Jobcentre 15 (rather than 20) minutes before their WFI. During the course of the evaluation, however, this reverted back to 20 minutes.

• **Revised process for updating the Customer Statement:** The pilot introduced the use of a new A10 form to record amendments to the customer statement. If a customer statement required changes or additional information, the CSTO noted them on an A10 form that the customer then signed. CSTOs updated the CMS after the meeting, once the customer left, rather than during the meeting as previously. The CSTO forwarded the signed A10 and statement to the BDC at the end of each day.

• **Brought Forward (BF) system transferred to BDC/BPS:** Before the pilot, FAs collected outstanding evidence delivered by customers after their WFI. The SPR pilot aimed to remove the BF workload from the CST by asking customers to send outstanding evidence direct to the BDC/BPS. Furthermore, the pilot placed greater emphasis on customers’ responsibility for providing the required evidence.
In addition to the creation of a new, dedicated team for claim preparation at the BDC/BPS, the pilot made the following key changes.

- **Courtesy calls to customers**: Upon receipt of the claim, the Claims Preparation Team (CPT) were expected to contact the customer by telephone to explain that they had received the customer statement and to outline what happens next.

- **Customer statements for people whose WFI was waived or deferred sent direct to the BDC**: Before the pilot, some Income Support (IS) and all Incapacity Benefit (IB) customers sent their statements back to a Jobcentre where they were either prepared for processing by an FA or placed in the BF system because information or evidence was missing. Under the pilot, customers were asked to forward their claim straight to the BDC.

- **Answering customer queries**: Before the pilot, Benefit Processing Team (BPT) handled calls received from customers who were enquiring about the progress of their claim. Under the pilot, in North Lincolnshire this function was moved to the CPT. In Glasgow BDC, a new telephone enquiries team (Tele-team) was set up at the same time as the pilot to answer and direct all telephone enquiries from customers.

- **A10 forms**: The pilot introduced A10 forms, which allowed customer statements and CMS to be amended where necessary rather than having to resend a new customer statement and build a new claim record from scratch. The A10 form detailed the necessary amendments required to original documents and CMS and these were authorised by the customer’s signature on the form.

### 1.3 Evaluation aims and objectives

The overall aim of the SPR pilot evaluation is to test the robustness of the SPR model in a small controlled area (North Lincolnshire) and to see if it meets its objectives in a wider area (covering Central London and North Lincolnshire customers). The objectives of the pilot were to:

- improve the level of customer service with fewer contacts, easier access and speedier decision making;

- improve staff experience by providing a process which is transparent, user friendly and makes more sense to those who deliver it; and

- provide a more efficient, affordable new claim process without having an adverse impact on performance.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) Efficiency was considered in terms of clearance times/accuracy and amount of reworking.
1.4 Methodology

The findings presented in this report are based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative research and analysis, as follows:

- **Qualitative research with staff**
  
  Over 250 depth interviews were conducted with staff, before and after the pilot was implemented. The purpose of these interviews was to identify any concerns with the claims process and expectations of the SPR pilot before it was launched, and to explore experiences of the claims process after it was implemented.

- **Observations at Contact Centres and Jobcentres**
  
  Over 60 observations were conducted in Contact Centres and Jobcentres before and after the pilot was implemented. Observational research at pilot sites was used to understand staff interactions and experience in delivering the new and repeat claims process.

- **Qualitative research with customers**
  
  In May 2006, 24 depth interviews were held with customers who started a new or repeat claim for benefit under the SPR pilot in North Lincolnshire. A further 12 interviews were conducted in June 2006. The purpose of these interviews was to explore customers’ experience of the claim process and their views of specific aspects of the pilot.

- **Customer survey**
  
  In June 2006, two surveys were completed: one with 394 customers who started a new or repeat claim for benefit under the SPR pilot in North Lincolnshire; and one with 288 customers who claimed in the rest of the East and North Yorkshire and Humber District, where the pilot was not in place, to act as a comparator. In September 2006, two further surveys were conducted in London: one with 700 customers who started a claim under the pilot in Central London; and one with 300 customers who made a new or repeat claim in West London, where the pilot was not in operation. The surveys aimed to quantify customers’ views and experiences to establish how rare or common they were amongst people who started a claim and any differences in experience between pilot and non-pilot areas.

- **Management Information analysis**
  
  PMAD of Jobcentre Plus analysed local and national MI and performance data to assess the pilot’s impact on speed and accuracy of delivery. The results of this work are presented in Chapter 9.

This report presents the detailed evidence from all aspects of the evaluation outlined above.
1.5  Presentation of data

Throughout the report, all percentage figures are rounded to the nearest whole number, which means figures may not always sum to 100 per cent. An asterisk (*) indicates values of less than 0.5 per cent.

Where figures are reported for ‘Good’ or ‘Satisfied’ this combines scores for ‘very’ and ‘fairly’ good/satisfied.

Tolerances are involved in the comparison of results from different parts of the sample. A difference, in other words, must be of at least a certain size to be considered statistically significant. Differences in survey results between the pilot and comparator areas have only been highlighted where the variation is statistically significant. For example, when comparing responses in our two samples, where 50 per cent of the people in a sample of 600 respond with a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that this result would need to vary by more than four percentage points, plus or minus, from the comparator sample of 300 to be significant. A guide to statistical reliability used in this report is presented in Appendix A.

1.6  Report structure

The rest of this report is structured around four parts, as follows:

Part I presents the findings of the pilot’s impact and effectiveness in North Lincolnshire. This includes:

• a summary of the findings from research with staff (Chapter 2); and
• customers’ views and experiences in North Lincolnshire (Chapter 3).

Part II details the findings for the extended pilot in Central London. It starts with a short introduction to the pilot’s delivery in the Central London District (Chapter 4) followed by staff views and experiences for each stage of the process and customer experiences, as follows:

• First Contact (Chapter 5);
• Meetings in Jobcentres (Chapter 6);
• Claims preparation and benefit processing (Chapter 7); and
• Views and experiences of customers in London (Chapter 8).

Part III contains the findings from the analysis of MI and performance data for both North Lincolnshire and Central London (Chapter 9).

Part IV draws together the overall conclusions of the evaluation (Chapter 10).
Part I
Findings from staff and customers from North Lincolnshire
2 Summary of North Lincolnshire staff research

This chapter summarises findings from qualitative research with staff delivering the Standard Operating Model (SOM) Processing Review (SPR) pilot in North Lincolnshire. It examines the extent to which the pilot improved the process of delivering new and repeat claims for benefits, highlighting lessons learnt and recommendations for future action.

Research was conducted by a combination of researchers from Performance Measurement and Analysis Division (PMAD) of Jobcentre Plus and ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd. More than 80 interviews were carried out with staff across Jobcentre offices before and after the pilot’s implementation. Staff were also observed interacting with customers.

Key findings

• The SPR pilot was successful in speeding up and reducing duplication in the front-end of the claiming process.

• A bottleneck occurred at the claims preparation stage where staff were overwhelmed by the volume of work.

• Complex claims for Income Support (IS) and/or Incapacity Benefit (IB) were double handled because staff from both the Claims Preparation Teams (CPTs) and Benefit Processing Teams (BPTs) looked at these in detail.

First Contact

• First Contact Officers (FCOs) perceived that the Freephone number led to a reduction in complaints about the cost and length of calls at First Contact.

• Contact Centre staff reported that the new Interactive Voice Routing (IVR) system reduced the volume of inappropriate calls and was crucial for the new Rapid Reclaim process.

Continued
• The new process for identifying and handling Rapid Reclaims worked well, reducing the amount of information collected unnecessarily.
• The single call helped customers to start their claim more quickly and delays between inbound and outbound calls were removed.
• FCOs believed that the single call was shorter than the combined time taken for inbound and outbound calls.
• Mini-breaks were rarely used.

**Jobcentres**
• Less time was spent managing diaries for the new on-demand Claim Service Team (CST).
• The removal of routine pre-calling reduced the volume of work handled in Jobcentres.
• Some staff felt that the removal of blanket pre-calls did not significantly affect customer attendance rates or the number of customers who remembered their evidence.
• Managing the flow of customers and matching them to available CST Officers (CSTOs) was the key challenge faced by the new CST.
• CSTOs met around ten customers a day but struggled to meet the pilot’s target of 15-20 customers a day.
• Meetings with customers were generally delivered within 15 minutes, except in complex cases, where customers did not receive their statement in the post or if there were a lot of unanswered questions on statements.
• CSTOs felt that they were more likely to miss errors on customer statements than before the pilot because their new remit focused on checking unanswered questions.
• Jobcentre staff believed that customers were more likely to see a Personal Adviser (PA) on time for the Work Focused Interview (WFI) under the SPR pilot.
• Officers from the CST felt that the new A10 forms increased work because they required changes to be made twice; once on the form and then onto CMS. \(^9\)
• The transfer of claim preparation to a dedicated team allowed CSTOs to focus on delivering face-to-face services for customers.

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\(^9\) Since the time of the research this has been addressed. CSTOs now amend the form directly without completing an A10 form.
Claim Preparation

- Staff believed that the new CPT in a ‘back room function’ enabled them to focus on preparing claims and to be more thorough in collecting the correct information and entering accurate information onto Customer Management System (CMS).

- The CPT struggled to manage and handle the flow of all new and repeat claims in difficult circumstances, including Rapid Reclaims and claims for IS and/or IB that were sent directly to the CPT by customers.

- A range of factors, unrelated to the pilot, affected their ability to deliver an efficient service, including: under-resourcing; a backlog of claims; requests for emergency payments; and the quality of customer statements sent to the team.

- Courtesy calls were rarely made.

- CPTOs prepared five-eight claims a day against a target of ten-15 for the pilot.

- The A10 forms worked well, allowing CPTOs to update CMS rather than rebuilding CMS and producing a revised customer statement.

- Requests for emergency payments interrupted the team’s work, slowing down the speed with which they were able to work through the flow of new and repeat claims, and meant that officers were looking at the same claim twice.

Benefit Processing

- Benefit processing staff reported that the number of successful CMS pushes from CMS to Legacy increased under the pilot.

- The flow of work into the team was not always adequate for the staff resources available.

- Staff were generally able to process claims within four days of receipt and to complete ten claims per day.

2.1 Background and context

The SPR pilot was launched by Jobcentre Plus in selected sites across North Lincolnshire in February 2006, although was not fully live until 13 March. Key findings from the research are presented for each stage of the claims process in turn.

2.2 First Contact

In research carried out before the pilot was implemented, Contact Centre staff identified a number of inefficiencies with the First Contact process that created unnecessary work for staff or delays for customers. The main issues raised by staff that relate to changes introduced under the pilot included:
• The dual call system

Customers were frequently annoyed at having to wait for a scheduled outbound call. In addition, failed outbound calls were identified as a significant problem, potentially causing considerable delays in progressing customers’ claims and also wasting staff resources.

• The length and cost of calls

FCOs felt that the target length of outbound calls was not realistic for customers with complex cases. Staff reported that customers regularly complained about the cost of inbound and length of outbound calls for First Contact.

• The script and structure of CMS

Staff felt that the mandatory script read by FCOs at the beginning of calls was too lengthy, including information that was not relevant for most customers. FCOs also reported frustration that ‘Rapid Reclaim’ customers were only identified at the end of inbound calls, which meant that 20 minutes of staff and customer time had essentially been ‘wasted’.

• Inappropriate calls

Contact Centre management reported that 12 per cent of calls received by Grimsby Contact Centre related to queries outside the Centre’s remit. These calls took up staff time, which impacted on their ability to deal with new and repeat claims for benefit.

2.2.1 Expectations of Contact Centre staff

Although some FCOs were apprehensive about learning a new system, Contact Centre staff generally appeared optimistic in their expectations for the SPR pilot and its ability to address some of the concerns identified above. Potential benefits of replacing the inbound and outbound system with a single call were identified as:

• reducing total length of time to complete First Contact;
• reducing delays caused by failed outbound calls reducing customer complaints; and
• reducing total processing time.

It was hoped that the new IVR system would help reduce the number of inappropriate calls received by the Contact Centre, as well as allowing FCOs to identify Rapid Reclaim customers before starting the call.

The two main concerns raised by FCOs before the pilot was implemented related to the single call. Firstly, staff anticipated a possible increase in unanswered questions on customer statements. The rationale behind this was that customers would not have the opportunity to gather information required that they did under the dual system. In addition, it was felt that managing call flow would be more difficult with single calls, which could result in longer waiting times for customers.
Contact Centre staff interviewed generally felt they had received adequate training in preparation for the pilot. A formal two-day training schedule that included presentations, a walkthrough and handouts was supplemented with ‘consolidation time’ – time off the phones to read through toolkits and ask questions. Both FCOs and Management considered the consolidation time highly valuable, although it was not planned initially and introduced in light of low call volume. More generally, Team Leaders and Managers recognised that training would be difficult without a cushion of spare capacity. This suggests potential benefits of staggering any wider roll out of the pilot.

### 2.2.2 Key successes at the Contact Centre

Broadly speaking, it appeared that the SPR pilot met the positive expectations of Contact Centre staff and addressed some of their specific concerns expressed before implementation of the SPR pilot. It was felt that the SPR pilot led to increased efficiencies in delivering First Contact, particularly with regard to time and resource savings. Staff believed that these improvements impacted positively on both customer service and job satisfaction.

The Freephone number was felt to mark an improvement for customers, for whom the cost of a call was often significant, and also for staff, who dealt with less complaints as a result. In addition, staff asserted that most customers in areas covered by pilot were coming through via the Freephone number, concluding that any publicity used must have worked.

The IVR was widely welcomed by staff. Its perceived benefits were outlined as follows:

- **Reducing inappropriate calls by effectively re-routing customers, resulting in less staff time wasted.** In order to properly understand the extent and patterns of inappropriate calls, however, FCOs were asked to write down the exact reasons for all calls that were not new or repeat claims.

- **Allowing FCOs to identify Rapid Reclaim customers, and therefore implement the new accelerated Rapid Reclaim process.** The majority of repeat claimants were reportedly self-identifying and the new process was felt to create savings in staff resources and also reduce the number of customer complaints.

- **Reducing FCOs’ mandatory script – and therefore the length of call for an FCO – through including an automated recording explaining the process.**

Staff reported that the majority of incoming calls were being dealt with in a single call, which were generally agreed to improve First Contact for both staff and customers. (See Chapter 9 for further detail.) In particular, First Contact became quicker by eradicating the delay between inbound and outbound calls. In addition, staff believed single calls were typically completed more quickly than the previous combined inbound and outbound calls. Reasons for this were unclear since the script was basically unchanged, but staff frequently put it down to a rapport built up...
over the two calls that allowed FCOs to complete the second component more efficiently. Other reasons for the increased speed of single calls offered by staff included:

- only collecting 26 weeks’ employment history (as opposed to 12 months previously);
- not conducting job searches (which were conducted in a dedicated call-back); and
- not having to re-confirm personal details.

Contrary to the initial concerns outlined above, staff consistently reported that conducting First Contact in a single call did not significantly affect the volume of missing information on customer statements. Moreover, FCOs asserted that they had not frequently used mini-breaks, which could be offered to allow the customer five minutes to find information. The general perception was that the customers had ‘sufficient information’ to hand to complete First Contact without the need to call back. It was not clear, however, what FCOs deemed to be ‘sufficient information’ and this generally appeared to be a question of personal judgement.

‘A lot of people know it in their head anyway. Say if they had had a job, they can give you the majority of details and it’s just the odd few bits missing out so you have got the majority of what you needed anyway, and it’s the same for bank details and things like that. People often have them, their cheque book or card with them anyway.’

(Contact Centre staff)

‘There was a worry that there’d be a lot of unanswered questions, you know people wouldn’t have the information we needed in order to process the claim in a single call. Because what you do on an in and out, on the ins you would say to them, right someone’s going to call you between 1 and 6…and you’d tell them what they need. So they had time to get it…But it’s surprising how many people have the information [in the single call] and personally I’ve been able to go and do it, without any missing questions.’

(Contact Centre staff)

2.2.3 Potential issues and limitations of the pilot at the Contact Centre

In line with concerns raised before the SPR pilot’s implementation, Contact Centre staff interviewed in the second round identified managing single call flow as a potentially significant challenge. Management staff believed that longer inbound calls and a reduced number of scheduled outbound calls would impact on staff resource requirements. In particular, inbound calls tend to be concentrated at the beginning of the week, particularly in the mornings, while staff work throughout the week. As a result, Management staff felt that it would be more difficult to match customer demand against staff working patterns. While there was no evidence that
such difficulties were encountered at the time of this research, one member of staff felt that the Centre had been experiencing a quiet period since the pilot’s implementation.

In addition, management staff pointed to flexibilities built into the pilot that helped manage call flow. These were:

- the ability to draw on a large pool of staff trained to work on the pilot; and
- an option of reverting to the dual call system in busy periods.

Although Contact Centre staff stressed that these measures were resisted as far as possible, the fact that such flexibilities were in place must be taken into account when considering the pilot’s real efficiency and whether these efficiency levels could be maintained through national roll out.

Despite most staff reporting no change in the level of missing information, Management staff did discuss the potential impact that incomplete customer statements could have further downstream in the claims process. These interviewees recognised that outstanding evidence would have to be collected elsewhere, which could cause delays. As demonstrated in the quote below, one staff member suggested that there could be potential trade off between getting the customer through First Contact quickly and collecting all information.

‘I’m sure the evaluation of the pilot from the Department is looking at, “Well, where is it most cost-effective?” So is it getting dealt with quicker there? Is it better for us to deal with the customer and just let it go through, because the customer’s happier, or what? So I don’t know, but it will form part of the evaluation of the pilot, so we’ll see how it goes.’

(Contact Centre staff)

2.3 Meetings in Jobcentres

Jobcentre staff identified a number of issues under the previous SOM regime that affected their ability to handle new or repeat customers and progress their claims. Those most pertinent to changes implemented under the previous SOM for new and repeat claims included:

- **Financial Assessor (FA) workloads.** Some FAs reported struggling under existing workloads. Generally, FAs prioritised face-to-face work with customers and therefore struggled to complete claims’ preparation work. Claims for people whose WFI was waived or deferred were routinely left in backlogs and were not worked on.

- **Appointments booked to occur seven days or more after First Contact.** FAs and PAs reported that a gap of seven days or more between First Contact and the WFI led to an increase in the number of customers who forgot their appointment or to bring the correct documentation.
• **FA appointments running over.** FA meetings frequently took longer than 20 minutes and, as a result, routinely ran into the appointment time allocated for a WFI with a PA.

• **Diary management.** FA Managers (FAMs) reported that up to half of their time was spent organising the FA diaries.

• **Incomplete and inaccurate customer statements.** FAs routinely complained about customer statements that required amendments or contained unanswered questions. When this occurred, FAs had to spend time making changes on CMS that reduced the time available for face-to-face work with customers.

• **Footfall.** Staff in some offices reported high numbers of customers visiting local Jobcentres to either provide documentation or to chase claims. This was felt to impact on the level of service staff could provide to customers with appointments.

### 2.3.1 Expectations of Jobcentre staff

Jobcentre staff had mixed expectations about the SPR pilot. On the one hand, FAs felt that the new on-demand CST would award more flexibility to see customers as and when necessary, helping to create a more steady flow of customers. On the other hand, however, concerns were raised surrounding how customer flow would be managed at peak times of demand. Staff questioned whether 15 minutes was sufficient for CSTO interviews and speculated that customers may be more inclined to try and continue discussing benefits in the WFI as a result.

Splitting the FA role with the creation of new CST and CPT also provoked a mixed response. Broadly, staff felt that the new CST would be better able to concentrate on customer appointments, potentially improving customer service, but wondered if the price for transferring claims preparation was another tier to the process. This latter view was particularly stressed by staff from offices that had suffered no real backlog in claims preparation under the previous SOM for new and repeat claims.

From a management point of view, it was speculated that the smaller CSTs would be easier to manage and pressures surrounding diary management should be eased. Some staff, including many PAs, thought their role was unlikely to be affected, while a few talked in more general terms about how the pilot was intended to speed up the overall process for customers.

Training for the pilot in Jobcentres focused on walkthroughs and toolkits. Some staff commented that the former could have been more detailed and better linked to impacts on specific jobs rather than an overview of process changes. A view raised in post implementation research across staff more generally was that preparation and training had been too heavily directed at FAs, underestimating the SPR pilot’s potential impact on other staff roles.
2.3.2 Overall views from Jobcentre staff

Jobcentre staff views about the SPR pilot were generally in line with expectations. As indicated above, this varied across individuals and also across offices. With regard to the latter, views tended to be divided on the basis of how effective operations had been under the previous SOM for new and repeat claims. In offices where staff, particularly FAs, had struggled with the customer work flow and workload, staff generally felt that the SPR pilot had led to increased efficiencies that impacted positively on both staff experience and customer service.

‘The pilot has so far gone better than anticipated. It was hard to say at the time how well it would go. We were just told, this is the model, this is what you are doing. I thought anything had to be better than what we were doing before, so thought it was best just to give it a go and wait for it to be evaluated. At the time there was a backlog of work and no customer service, so anything had to be an improvement, even if our role didn’t change.’

(Jobcentre staff)

In contrast, staff in offices that reported no real backlog of claims before the pilot felt that aspects of the revised SOM process for new and repeat claims were impacting negatively on operations within their offices and the overall processing of claims. The overriding concern amongst these staff was that taking claims preparation out of the Jobcentres and centralising it in a CPT reduced efficiencies, resulting in greater delays for their customers. They reported frustration at having ‘lost control’ over the claims process, which meant they were powerless to speed things up or even provide customers with information about their claims’ progress once it had left the office.

‘Our understanding had been that the pilot was being introduced as a way of speeding things up, but it had the opposite effect on us. Although we didn’t really believe it would actually speed things up for us. It is very difficult to see this whole thing as a positive step because things worked for us quite well under the old system. But I can see that it could be a positive step for other offices that were struggling under the old system.’

(Jobcentre staff)

2.3.3 Key successes at Jobcentres

Despite the differences in overall opinion outlined above, there was some general agreement that the SPR pilot addressed some specific concerns raised in relation to the previous SOM for new and repeat claims. In particular, interviewees reported that some of the difficulties surrounding work and diary management were alleviated. Firstly, the removal of FA diaries reduced the amount of managerial time spent allocating staff to customers and synchronising FA meetings with PA appointments. This meant more time freed up to support team members and undertake interviews. Some staff members also believed that replacing the appointment system with a flexible ‘on demand’ CST meant greater flexibility for customers to be seen when needed.
PAs and PA Managers (PAMs) consistently believed that customers were more likely to arrive at the WFI appointment on time following introduction of the pilot. This was supported by comments from CSTOs, who believed that keeping strictly to the PA diary was ‘a critical part of the pilot’. PAs saw this as a significant improvement since it ensured that the full 40 minutes was allocated for a WFI. Some staff also asserted that sticking to the appointment schedule meant less waiting around for customers. Overall, PAs did not believe that the increased emphasis on delivering customers on time had significantly impacted on the extent to which benefits were discussed in WFIs. However, fewer benefit-related discussions in Rapid Reclaim WFIs were reported now that these customers were seen by a CSTO first.

CSTOs generally agreed that the new reduced role was less stressful than the previous FA position. Some CST staff routinely commented that they felt more able to meet their work commitments on time and focus on improving customer service. For CSTOs who had previously struggled juggling customer appointments with collecting outstanding evidence, the new system was clearly considered an improvement. However, this was not universal, and a small number of CSTOs did not like the reduced role, pointing to a lack of variety they used to enjoy. In the main, these individuals were from smaller offices which, as noted above, did not struggle with workload under the previous SOM.

2.3.4 Potential issues and limitations at Jobcentres

The use of A10 forms was consistently felt to lead to increased duplication of work since changes were made twice – once to record changes clerically on a form A10 and then another to update CMS once the customer has gone\(^{10}\). Although recognising they were introduced to reduce the amount of time CSTOs spend with customers, it was felt that overall the A10 form created inefficiencies in the use of staff resources.

Despite the reduced responsibilities, some CSTOs still raised concerns surrounding the volume of work. In busier offices, CSTOs reportedly struggled to see the target number of customers set by the pilot. This was in part due to the more common complaint that 15 minutes was often insufficient for CSTO meetings, particularly if the customer arrived late or had not received their customer statement. As a result, CSTOs often had to rush through their meeting in order to deliver customers to PAs on time, or alternatively the customer had to return to the CSTO after their PA meeting\(^{11}\). Some CST staff felt they probably missed more errors on customer...

\(^{10}\) Since the pilot, there is an option for staff to amend the form directly rather than completing an A10 form.

\(^{11}\) Since the research was undertaken, the pilot has been amended so that customers are now instructed to arrive 20 minutes before their PA appointment. This is intended to ensure that the CSTO gets their full 15 minute allocation, rather than any of it being wasted whilst the customer arrives and is dealt with by front line staff.
statements as a result. The pilot did not, however, directly address the pre-pilot concerns surrounding incomplete and inaccurate customer statements noted above.

While the ‘on demand’ system for CSTO reportedly allowed the CST team more flexibility, it was also felt to bring new challenges in relation to managing customer flow. Staggering PA appointments was intended to even customer flow out to a certain degree but Floor staff asserted that in practice this did not always work. Customers often turn up early or late, causing queues. CST staff reported that problems with customer flow frequently impacted on their ability to see customers on time, and felt under pressure to work through breaks and lunch in order to make sure all customers were seen.

For some Jobcentre staff, the SPR pilot’s main impact was not on operational issues within the Jobcentre but rather a decline in customer service in the following stages. PAs and CSTOs in smaller offices typically believed that the transfer of claims preparation to the new CPT led to longer delays in the payment of benefit for their customers. Staff in these offices pointed to a notable increase in the number of customers visiting the Jobcentre to complain, which front line staff were bearing the brunt of. Moreover, these staff were unable to provide customers with reliable information about what was happening with their claim, which they would have been previously when they held the BF system themselves. For these staff, then, removing claims preparation from Jobcentres had impacted negatively on both staff experience and customer service.

2.4 Benefit processing site

The main change introduced to benefit processing by the SPR pilot was the introduction of a new CPT in North Lincolnshire. The BPT remit remained largely unchanged. CPTs were intended to manage the BF system previously held by FAs in Jobcentres. Perceived problems with the system before the SPR pilot’s implementation relating to claims preparation set out in Section 2.3 are, therefore, also relevant here, in addition to the issues and expectations identified by BPT staff below. Key findings from research carried out after the pilot was implemented described in the following sections relate to both CPTs and BPTs.

Key concerns articulated by BPT staff under the previous SOM for new and repeat claims mainly related to inefficiencies and resource issues that resulted in delays in getting claims processed. Specific problems identified included:

- **Incomplete information and re-building claims**

  BPT staff reported frequently receiving claims from Jobcentres that were inaccurate or incomplete and required a lot of re-working. It was asserted that 80 to 90 per cent of claims built on CMS were not successfully pushed on to Legacy systems by FAs/FA Admin Teams. This meant processing staff had to rebuild the claim, re-entering all details on to the Legacy system.
• Prioritising claims
  It was felt that complex claims could be discriminated against in the Brought Forward (BF) system, as claims preparation prioritised straightforward claims that could be completed quickly – typically Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) and Rapid Reclams. This is supported by comments from IB processors that they were over worked.

• Emergency payments
  A high volume of emergency payment requests impacted on processors’ ability to address processing of standard claims.

2.4.1 Expectations of benefit processing site staff
The BPT had mixed expectations of whether the SPR pilot would deliver a more efficient claim processing system. Some felt that it was going to address problems identified under the previous process; others viewed it with apathy, stating that they had seen so many revisions come and go they did not have a view as to whether they would work; and some felt that the SPR pilot would make the process less efficient.

Staff training for BPT staff comprised a walkthrough explaining the SPR pilot and their role within it. Some BPT staff found this useful, although there was also a view that BPT staff should have been more involved in planning and preparation ahead of the pilot. A few interviewees felt that BPT staff had been overlooked to a certain degree because the pilot did not significantly impact on their specific roles. The CPT felt that the lead-in time for the pilot was inadequate and did not give them a real opportunity to consider the implications of the revised processes before it was in place.

2.4.2 Overall views of benefit processing site staff
Overall, neither the CPT nor the BPT believed that the SPR pilot significantly improved the claims process. BPT staff interviewed felt that the process was still too long, with some customers still experiencing long delays. This is supported by Management Information (MI) analysis of clearance times, (see Section 9.2). CPT staff had strong reservations about the SPR pilot, consistently believing that it simply shifted many of the problems identified with the previous SOM for new and repeat claims from the previous FA role to the CPT.

2.4.3 Key successes at benefit processing site stage
Despite overall reservations, staff did feel that the pilot had impacted positively on some specific aspects of the system. CPT staff frequently asserted that separating claims preparation from face-to-face interaction with customers, which was now carried out by the CST, meant that staff could be more thorough. This reportedly led to improved accuracy in claims preparation and a subsequent increase in claims successfully ‘pushed’ from CMS to Legacy.
BPT staff confirmed that the number of successful pushes had increased since the SPR pilot’s implementation. However, they also cautioned against placing too much emphasis on this fact as a gauge of overall efficiency, since a fairly large proportion of claims processed were not built on CMS. Claims that do not go through CMS included: clerical claims for IB; Rapid Reclaims; and claims that should be pushed but aren’t due to ‘glitches’ in the system.

‘…our processing systems from CMS are very small, as a total of our claims intake, it is probably something less than 20 per cent. If we get 100 claims in, there will be a certain number that are Rapid Reclaims or are clerical claims that do not go through the CMS system. Of the ones that are taken in CMS, there is a proportion that will not push to Legacy’

(BPT)

In order to address the backlog it inherited, the CPT introduced a new ‘work pending’ system that filed all incoming claims by the date they arrived. This meant that claims were dealt with in the order that they arrived, irrespective of the amount of work required before they could be pushed to the BPT. Some staff believed that this countered the ‘discrimination’ of more complex IB and IS claims noted under the previous SOM for new and repeat claims. However, it was not clear from research undertaken whether IS and IB claims were generally being dealt with more quickly. Moreover, there is an associated risk that the more straightforward claims – such as JSA – would take longer to process than previously because they had to wait in line behind the more complex and time consuming ones. A revised process, agreed at the end of fieldwork in North Lincolnshire, saw Rapid Reclaims sent direct to the BPT. This should improve the speed with which such claims are processed.

CPTOs reported that the new A10 forms worked well. Being able to amend customer statements on CMS using the A10 form rather than re-building claims from scratch and sending out a whole new statement reportedly led to significant time savings. Some BPT staff also felt they had more time to concentrate on processing claims since CPT were dealing with customer enquiries.

2.4.4 Potential issues and limitations at benefit processing site stage

The main complaint from both CPT and BPT staff after the pilot centred on continued backlogs in the BF system. Current staff capacity within the CPT was inadequate to manage the existing load. CPT staff felt they were constrained in their ability to provide good customer service in terms of getting claims to processing on time, which impacted negatively on their experience of the job. Conversely, some sections of the BPT were over-resourced as they waited for claims to come through from CPT.

Staff identified the following factors as contributing to the severe strain on CPT resources:
The CPT inherited a backlog of unprepared claims from FA teams operating under the previous SOM for new and repeat claims. It was felt that starting with a backlog gave staff no time to adjust to the new system.

Poor quality of customer statements. CPT Officers (CPTOs) asserted that customer statements often arrived at claims preparation incomplete or inaccurate, requiring significant work to prepare them for processing.

An unrealistic expectation to transfer ten to 15 claims a day to the BPT in order to clear the backlog. This resulted in growth in the backlog of claims waiting to be processed.

High volumes of telephone enquiries from customers waiting for benefits. In order to minimise interruptions to claims preparation work, two team members on a rota basis were dedicated to dealing with telephone enquiries.

The requirement to make courtesy calls to customers. Some CPTOs felt this call was unnecessary since customers were already informed of the information required to process their claims. As a result, some CPTOs were not making the calls, prioritising working through the backlog of claims and responding to requests for emergency payments.

Although the issue of backlogs was not regarded as new, but rather simply transferred from FAs at Jobcentres to the new CPT, there was a view amongst some staff that the CPT had created an additional tier to the process that reduced overall efficiency. Some BPT staff felt that it would be more efficient for claims to come straight from CST to the BPT. The new hand off between the CPT and the BPT meant that complex claims were viewed in detail by both teams and so duplicated work.

The high number of incomplete claims reportedly arriving at BPT was in part attributed to this backlog at CPT, which meant that CPTOs had insufficient time to collect the required evidence before the 30 day hand off. In order to deal with these incomplete claims, the BPT set up a BF system – that was independent of the one at CPT – to manage claims awaiting additional information. Staff asserted that this should not have been necessary, since according to the SPR pilot’s model, claims should arrive at BPT ready for processing. The accuracy of claims arriving at BPT continued to be an issue, although staff generally felt this was unchanged since the SPR pilot’s implementation.

Interview findings indicate that many of the operational problems causing delays at benefit processing existed prior to the SPR pilot’s implementation. While this implies that the pilot can not be blamed for many of the backlogs and associated delays experienced, its design failed to address the root of existing problems, simply shifting them from one place to another.
2.5 Impact of the pilot

This section draws on the findings presented in preceding sections to consider the SPR pilot’s impact in relation to its main objectives of delivering improvements in: efficiency; staff job satisfaction; and customer service. It concludes with key lessons learnt from the North Lincolnshire experience.

2.5.1 Delivering efficiency

Speed

There was clear evidence that the pilot was successful in speeding up the front-end of the claims process. The single call at First Contact was shorter than the dual-call system used before the pilot and it removed the delay previously built in between inbound and outbound calls. Jobcentre staff believed that, if all went smoothly, customers were being dealt with at offices more quickly than previously. Moreover, under the pilot customer statements were leaving the Jobcentres and being sent to the new CPT at benefit processing on the same day as the WFI.

A bottleneck then occurred at the CPT stage of the process where staff were overwhelmed by the volume of work. Although the delays were mainly attributed to factors unrelated to the pilot’s design, there was some evidence that flow and organisation of work implemented under the pilot did not help. In particular, it was felt that, while the CPT’s new ‘work pending system’ might help counter previous discrimination against ‘complex’ IS and IB claims, it may conversely have contributed to longer processing times for the more straightforward JSA claims. Likewise, staff in smaller Jobcentres routinely reported that their customers were facing longer delays than previously because the claims were now stuck in backlogs inherited from other, busier offices.

A cautionary note should also be included in that, while research did appear to show that the pilot sped up the process at the front end, it was reportedly operating in a relatively quiet period for Jobcentre Plus, with additional resources available in the Contact Centre. The pilot was not, therefore, fully tested by high customer demand. (See Section 9.2 for performance against clearance times).

Accuracy and integrity of the benefit system

Staff in Jobcentres, the CPT and benefit processing consistently complained about the accuracy and completeness of customer statements. They generally perceived that the Contact Centre was responsible for incorrect information or unanswered questions but there were more complex issues involved, many of which were not specific to the pilot. Table 2.1 provides a summary of the different issues encountered that affected the accuracy and completeness of customer statements.
Table 2.1  Issues affecting the accuracy and completeness of new claims

| Contact Centre | • FCOs reported leaving some CMS questions unanswered at First Contact but they also routinely told customers to address these when they received their statement and before their appointment at a Jobcentre. There was no clear evidence to show that FCOs left more or less unanswered questions as a result of the pilot.  
  
  • In observations of First Contact, FCOs did not routinely check uncertain answers given by customers to some questions – such as the date their last employment ended. As a result, there was a risk that the information provided was inaccurate.  
  
  • FCOs were not always aware of the consequences of incorrect information and unanswered questions on the work required at later stages of the claim process or the implications for customers receiving their benefit payment. |
| Hand-off between the Contact Centre and Jobcentre | • Jobcentre staff reported that customers did not always receive their statements before attending the Jobcentre for their PA appointment, particularly when customers’ WFs were booked to occur one or two days after date of claim. As a result, customers were not able to read, check and amend their statement before seeing a CSTO. |
| Claim Service Team | • Staff did not feel that 15 minutes was sufficient to check complex claims, such as claims by lone parents, for IB or IS, for people with more than two children, or those who required a Habitual Residence Test (HRT). In these instances, CSTOs struggled to fully check the claim or make sure that it was complete. Consequently, there was a risk that such claims were not as complete as they were before the pilot when FA meetings lasted 20 minutes or longer (when they ran into PA appointment times).  
  
  • The fast moving nature of the CSTO role allowed little time to check the A10 forms before they were sent to the CPT. CSTOs were concerned that they missed questions that would need to be picked up at a later stage. |
| Customers | • Even when customers received their statement, either before attending the Jobcentre or in a meeting with a CSTO, staff reported that they did not routinely read and check their statement. Some staff perceived that there was a need to educate customers to check their statement before arriving at the office.  
  
  • Customers did not routinely bring evidence to support their claim to the Jobcentre. In these cases, CSTOs were not able to verify basic details and so this needed to be picked up later by the CPT. |

Duplication of work

The SPR pilot appeared to reduce duplication of work and lead to increased efficiency in the use of resources at the front-end of the overall claiming process in a number of ways. At the Contact Centre:
• The IVR was thought to redirect inappropriate calls away from the Contact Centre, as well as allowing FCOs to identify Rapid Reclaim customers and implement the new accelerated process. The accelerated process for Rapid Reclaims created time savings, because the call was shorter than for a new claim, as well as reducing duplication in that details that were already on the system were not collected again.

• The single call meant less staff resources were wasted on failed outbound calls. In addition, less staff resource was required to complete a single call than the combined inbound and outbound calls under the previous system.

In contrast, CSTOs in Jobcentres consistently felt that the introduction of A10 forms contributed to increased duplication of work, asserting that they were making the same changes twice. More generally, staff in Jobcentres, the CPT and BPT routinely expressed concern that the SPR pilot had led to increased double handling of claims across the whole claims process. In particular, it was felt that the new CPT added another ‘layer’. Information for some claims was now gathered at four different stages, rather than the three previously, as follows:

• verbally at the Contact Centre;
• during face-to-face meetings with the CST;
• within the CPT; and
• within benefit processing (because incomplete claims were transferred to the BPT after 30 days).

2.5.2 Delivering job satisfaction

In relation to improving staff experience, the pilot intended to provide a process that:

• was transparent;
• was user friendly; and
• made more sense to those that use it.

Contact Centre staff generally felt that the pilot had impacted positively on staff experience. The key changes implemented – including the IVR and single call system – appeared straightforward and logical, making First Contact easier to deliver. More broadly, FCOs routinely reported a generalised increase in job satisfaction that was strongly associated to a perceived improvement in customer service. It was felt that there were fewer customer complaints, which impacted positively on staff experience. Some FCOs also preferred the ownership of each claim that the single call allowed.

Staff job satisfaction was much more mixed in the Jobcentres. Some CSTOs felt that the change in their role enabled them to focus on a smaller number of tasks that were achievable in the working day. Consequently, they reported that their job was much less stressful than the previous FA role before the pilot. Other CSTOs were disappointed that they no longer used their benefit knowledge and experience in
their job. In addition, some reported frustration that they did not know what happened to customers’ claims once their statements left the office, or were unable to help prepare claims so that customers received their benefit payment quickly. For these staff, then, the claims process overall had become less transparent and seemed to make less sense. This view was typically expressed by staff in smaller offices where claim preparation reportedly worked well before the SPR pilot and Jobcentre staff perceived that processing was taking longer since the pilot was introduced.

Staff morale and job satisfaction was generally very low within the CPTs. Overall, Officers and Team Leaders were disappointed in the SPR pilot delivery to date, particularly the inability to manage the workload with their current resources. This disappointment affected the way that they felt about their job. CPT staff reported high stress levels and perceived that the team was inadequately resourced. Staff also reported that the lack of improvement in claim delivery times under the pilot caused low morale and poor motivation about their work.

Similarly, BPT staff questioned the logic of introducing a new CPT, which had apparently not addressed problems in claim preparation that existed before the SPR pilot. Benefit processors were reported to be waiting for work to come through from the CPT. As a result, they were frustrated that the pilot did not reduce the time taken to process claims (and possibly took longer) and were disappointed that customer service did not improve.

Team identity was relatively strong and Jobcentre Plus staff were generally clear about their new roles and responsibilities within their teams. There was, however, a lack of cohesion across the entire end-to-end business process. Officers’ understanding and awareness of the roles and responsibilities of teams in other parts of the business process was poor. Although the SPR pilot was not the root cause of the apparent divisions between different parts of the process, there was an indication that it may have deepened them. There was certainly no evidence that the pilot had helped to increase transparency across the process. For instance, the volume and quality of work sent through to the CPT compounded negative perceptions held by the team’s staff regarding the earlier stages of the claiming process, including the set-up and organisation of the ‘new look’ CST. Likewise, Jobcentre staff and CPTOs continued to point the finger at FCOs in relation to incomplete or inaccurate customer statements.

### 2.5.3 Delivering customer service

The pilot was intended to improve customer service through creating:

- fewer contacts;
- easier access; and
- speedier decision making.
The pilot had mixed success in relation to achieving its objective of ‘fewer contacts’ for customers. Replacing the dual inbound and outbound system with a single call meant customers only had to deal with one operator rather than two. There was no change in the number of staff handling customers in Jobcentres. However, the new CPT did introduce another team handling customer statements and contacting customers about missing information or evidence. Jobcentre, CPT and BPT staff were concerned that this approach was confusing for customers. CSTOs perceived that customers believed that they were looking after their claim and did not understand why another team was involved.

The Freephone number, single call and IVR appeared to improve access for customers at the front end of the process. Specifically, customers were less inclined to object to call length if they were not paying for the call and the single call meant they did not have to wait around for an outbound. The IVR not only explained the claims process, but also helped re-route inappropriate calls, which theoretically should free up FCO time to address new and repeat claims, reducing call queues.

The evidence suggests, however, that access for customers trying to obtain information about the progress of their claim in the latter stages of the process did not improve, and in some cases had worsened. It was reported that customers frequently visited Jobcentres when claims were delayed because they could not get through to the processing site or did not know where else to direct complaints. Problems with access at this stage under the pilot may be attributed in part to the apparent lack of courtesy calls being made by CPT and BPT. This meant that customers were not routinely being informed of the progress of the claim and when they could expect to receive benefit payment. As a result, when delays did occur, customers tried getting through on any number they could.

There was no evidence that the SPR pilot had led to speedier decision making at the processing end and some customers still appeared to be experiencing significant delays. While the main cause of this was reportedly a backlog that pre-existed the pilot, there was a clear suggestion that particular customer groups were likely to face longer delays than under the previous system. Specifically, these were customers with straightforward claims – typically JSA – that may have been prioritised previously and customers at smaller Jobcentres that had no backlog under the previous SOM for new and repeat claims.

It should also be noted that, while the SPR pilot was able to meet customer demand at the front-end of service delivery, it was not in fact tested at peak times of demand. When the fieldwork was conducted, the Contact Centre reverted to the dual inbound-outbound call system to handle high call volumes. Such periods of high demand are a pinch point for the delivery of new and repeat claims and were one of the factors that affected Jobcentre Plus’ ability to deliver timely and effective service before the pilot. While the reversion only happened once during a morning of particularly high call flow, it does raise questions about the ability of the revised SOM process for new and repeat claims to meet customer demand at peak times in the Contact Centre.
2.6 Lessons learnt

Staff shared a wide range of lessons learnt from their experience of implementing the SPR pilot in North Lincolnshire. Overall, these included:

- **Be prepared.** Ensure enough time to train staff before implementation and allow time for staff to read through information so that they are comfortable with the new process.

- **Staff training.** Where possible, arrange for entire teams to receive training at the same time so that information is consistent.

- **Effective planning.** Staff routinely emphasised the need for effective planning to manage call and customer flows. Managers and Team Leaders across offices felt that more work was needed to understand the different patterns of customer demand and the impact on available resources.

- **Have people with the right skills in the right positions.** This needs to take into account the entire flow of the claim. Both the CPT and the BPT felt that if those that were handling the claim earlier in the system had adequate benefit knowledge it would prevent unnecessary work later in the process.

- **Quality Assessment Frameworks.** Quality procedures for Contact Centres and Jobcentres need to be adapted to fit with the SPR pilot.

Specific lessons for each stage of the SPR pilot are outlined below.

2.6.1 Contact Centre

Lessons for the Contact Centre included:

- **Call flow.** Work is needed to understand the different patterns of call flow and the impact of the single call on the demand for resources at the front-end of the process. Grimsby Contact Centre was able to draw on people from other teams in the Centre to manage during peak periods, but this may mask problems for a smooth national roll-out.

2.6.2 Jobcentres

- **Booking appointments.** Set-up and implement the appointment system with the Contact Centre two or three weeks before the revised SOM for new and repeat claims to avoid using and managing a mixture of the old diary and the new diary.

- **Monitoring.** The new CST was unsure how and when customers would flow through to the team. CSTs suggested that arrangements should also be put in place to monitor the number of customers they see, how many return to see a CSTO after their WFI, and how many see a PA before a CSTO.
• **Advise customers to arrive 20 minutes before their PA appointment.** CSTOs in large offices struggled to complete claim checks within the allocated 15 minutes because customers were late arriving at the Jobcentre, delayed by queues at the entrance to the office or took time walking across the office to reach the CST.

• **More time to deal with complicated claims.** CSTOs felt that 20 minutes was a more realistic time allocation to handle claims for more complicated benefits, such as IB or IS, and for people with complicated circumstances. Officers also perceived that the additional time would provide them with more scope to deal with any problems that occurred.

• **Better communication between the Jobcentre and CPT.** Jobcentre staff suggested that the CPT provides a weekly update on their progress with claim preparation and processing. This would equip CSTOs with information when customers came in to complain, and would avoid disrupting the CPT.

• **Involve all Jobcentre staff from the outset.** Pilot-related training and information was primarily targeted at the intended CSTOs and PAs, and so some key Jobcentre staff were overlooked. Jobcentre staff believed it was important to involve all staff in the changes, particularly Floor Managers as they tend to be a customer’s first point of contact in the office and so need to know how the new system works.

### 2.6.3 Claim Preparation Team

• **Clear any backlog of claims.** Jobcentre, CPT and BPT staff recommended clearing any backlog of claims before a new process is introduced to avoid a negative impact on delivery. The backlog of claims in North Lincolnshire made it difficult for the CPT to manage the flow of work coming into the team, particularly during the early weeks of the pilot.

• **Prepare and train a CPT telephone handling team before the pilot is implemented.** Ensure that scripts are in place and that they have the skills to respond to customers appropriately.

• The CPT believed it was vital to have a CMS expert on site to answer queries or help to address problems.

• **Allow time before the pilot to develop MI and toolkits.**

### 2.6.4 Benefit processing

• **Single processing site.** The CPT and BPT felt that having all processing functions within one centre was an advantage as it reduced the time that claims spent in transit.

• **Telephone enquiries.** Be prepared for a large number of telephone enquiries that require handling.
3 Views and experiences of customers in North Lincolnshire

This chapter outlines customers’ experiences and perceptions of the claims process under the Standard Operating Model (SOM) Process Review (SPR) pilot in North Lincolnshire. The findings show how customers interact with each stage of the claims process, as well as looking at their overall experience. This research is particularly relevant for helping to evaluate the pilot’s customer service objective.

Key findings

- The pilot was successful in improving customer service within the front end of the new and repeat claim process, including:
  - customers were less likely to object to call length because of the Freephone Contact Centre number;
  - the Interactive Voice Routing (IVR) system was a straightforward way of routing customers according to their needs;
  - customers generally preferred to be dealt with in a single call rather than a dual system;
  - customers reported that they were generally able to provide the information required;
  - the pilot reduced overall call time.
Around four-fifths (82 per cent) of customers said that the service received at First Contact was ‘very good’ or ‘good’. Levels of satisfaction, and customers’ confidence in the claims process, however, deteriorated over the course of the claims process. Slightly less than two-thirds (57 per cent) of customers said that the service received at the processing stage was ‘very good’ or ‘good’.

Under the pilot, new and repeat claim customers experienced some bottlenecks and issues with the processing of their claim, including:

- delays in the processing of their claim;
- inadequate information provided explaining the cause of delays;
- difficulty in getting through to the Benefit Processing Site (BPS); and
- claims were often held up by incomplete customer statements or outstanding evidence and customers were not aware of what was required.

Recommendations that would further improve the SOM pilot included:

- better customer access to information about the progress of their claim; and
- fewer contact points in the process where customers are required to give the same information.

The findings draw on 36 depth interviews with customers who started new or repeat claims for benefit in North Lincolnshire after the pilot was introduced. In addition, a quantitative telephone survey was carried out with 394 respondents from the pilot area and 288 customers from a comparator area, which were offices across the rest of the East and North Yorkshire and the Humber District. The combined quantitative and qualitative approach aimed to explore the ways in which the pilot affected customers’ experience of the claims process, and the prevalence of these experiences.

The chapter begins by briefly looking at customers’ expectations of the claims process. Their experience of each stage of the claims process in turn is then considered (Sections 3.2 – 3.5). The chapter concludes by looking at how the pilot impacted on overall customer service and the specific customer service objectives stated above.

### 3.1 Expectations

Customers’ expectations of the claims process were generally shaped by past experience. Individuals with no history of claiming typically had no expectations, whilst those whose previous claims had gone smoothly did not anticipate any problems. As the claims process continued, however, confidence tended to wane and expectations fell amongst interviewees that experienced delays and problems.
'No, not really, I didn’t know how much I was going to get, I didn’t really know what would happen. I just decided to claim.’

(Male, new claim for Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), aged 18-24)

‘Like I say, I claimed before in the past and it was always so straightforward. You put the claim in and then a week to two weeks later you received your money. And that was it. This time, no.’

(Female, new claim for JSA, aged 25-39)

Some Rapid Reclaim customers sometimes thought their claims would be processed faster because they perceived that there was a new accelerated process.

‘I mean, it should have been fairly quick because they already knew all my details, you know, within a couple of days I thought they’d let me know.’

(Male, Rapid Reclaim for JSA, aged 40-49)

3.2 First Contact

Customers claiming for the first time, or those who had not claimed for a while, routinely went to the Jobcentre in the first instance, believing that was how to initiate a claim. On arrival, they were typically given the Contact Centre number ‘on a little card’, handed out by Security or Reception staff. Some expressed surprise or irritation that they had made a ‘wasted’ trip to the Jobcentre only to be told to go home again and make a phone call. One customer specifically suggested that the number should be available on the internet. These comments suggest that the First Contact process – and Freephone number – could be more effectively and more widely publicised.

‘I just went to the Jobcentre and they gave me a leaflet. I thought I was going to do it all at the Jobcentre, but you have to ring them up, which was a bit of a waste…I just thought you went through everything at the Jobcentre, but obviously you didn’t. So I went in to town for no reason basically…’

(Male, new claim for JSA, aged 18-24)

In the qualitative interviews, customers suggested that Jobcentre staff, and particularly Security staff, did not offer much information or advice about the overall claims process. Some customers felt frustrated when they did not know what would happen when they made the call, or what to do if they had problems trying to do so.

‘And it was like, ‘Well yes, cheers, thanks a lot.’ What do I do now apart from ring this number. You’ve given me absolutely no information whatsoever so somebody that basically can’t use telephones, or even as clued up as most people, they would be stuck.’

(Female, new claim for JSA, aged 25-39)
Once given the number by Jobcentre staff, customers generally did one of three things:

- went home and called from there;
- called from a pay phone near the Jobcentre; or
- called from a warm phone in the Jobcentre, usually followed by a scheduled callback either at home or on one of the Jobcentre’s dedicated phones.

Some customers highlighted the lack of privacy when using warm phones as a concern. These comments were generally raised by individuals whose claim was handled through the dual call process. This may reflect the fact that the pilot discouraged Jobcentres from allowing customers to use warm phones for single calls, which last 45 minutes or more. A potential impact of this, however, is an increase in customers using public phone boxes, particularly those that do not own a phone. Customers interviewed for this research complained that public phone boxes were ‘noisy’, and made it hard to hear the operator. A few also thought it could be ‘stressful’, particularly if there were a queue of people waiting to use the phone.

‘Yes, I was on a public phone and it was just like people behind me, trying to get to use the phone and basically giving me grief, and I was trying to be polite and saying ‘I’m trying to make a claim here. And at one stage this guy was so abusive I got cut off halfway through my claim.’

(Male, new claim for Incapacity Benefit (IB), aged 40-49)

Other ways in which customers routinely found the Contact Centre number included:

- Yellow Pages;
- being given it by friends or family;
- as part of advice on claiming from employer; and
- calling ‘the old IS number’ or ‘main Jobcentre’ and being given the Contact Centre number.

### 3.2.1 Making the call to the Contact Centre

More than two-thirds of survey respondents (72 per cent) in the pilot area indicated that they initiated their claim by telephone and roughly one-fifth of these customers (19 per cent) used, and got through on, the Freephone number.
The relatively large proportion of respondents still dialling either the old 0845 number or a local Jobcentre number, however, suggests that many customers in the pilot area were either not aware of, or not using, the Freephone number. It is possible, though, that some of these customers were either transferred or told to call-back on the Freephone number. The relatively high number of respondents selecting ‘don’t know’ or ‘can’t remember’ in both areas highlights the extent to which customers struggled to remember what happened at First Contact.

In qualitative interviews, customers who remembered calling the 0800 were routinely pleased that they did not have to pay for the call, particularly in light of call length.

‘It was good, because you can spend hours on the phone to them. I mean I was on the phone a good 50 minutes I think.’

(Female lone parent, new claim for Income Support (IS), aged 25-39)

Similarly, individuals who remembered the IVR generally found it straightforward and easy to use. Some customers, however, appeared confused about the definition of a Rapid Reclaim.
‘It [the IVR] was just like new claims press option whatever, it was really easy, it wasn’t complicated.’

(Female lone parent, new claim for IS, aged 25-39)

‘Well, I knew because it said ‘renew a claim’…But I thought I was renewing a claim because I’d claimed before, whereas I wasn’t because it was a new claim, because it hadn’t been in that few months.’

(Female, new claim for IB, aged 25-39)

Table 3.1 shows that customers were more likely to get through to the operator within five minutes in the pilot area than in the comparator area (75 per cent compared to 57 per cent). Reasons for this are unclear, particularly given the use of IVR in the pilot. The trend suggests, however, that changes introduced by the pilot are helping achieve speedier access for customers at the front end of the claims process.

**Table 3.1 Length of time to get through to operator**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pilot (%)</th>
<th>Comparator (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than one minute</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-five minutes</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six-ten minutes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15 minutes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 15 minutes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/can’t remember</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Weighted base 285 155*

Base figure: all respondents in the pilot and comparator areas who initiated their claim by phone.

In depth interviews, customers were generally satisfied with the speed at which they got through to an operator, although there were some exceptions. More than about five minutes was typically considered too long to be on hold. In some cases, customers reported that they abandoned several calls before managing to get through. However, these individuals tended to try calling from phone boxes or warm phones in Jobcentres, rather than at home, which may influence perceptions of what is ‘too long’.

‘It took ages. That’s the trouble with the Jobcentre now. It takes too long to get in touch with them…I couldn’t get in touch with them for a week…I tried calling] loads of times, too many to count. I rang a couple of times first, but it was just waiting and waiting and waiting. So I just got impatient and left it.’

(Male, new claim for IS, aged 18-24)
3.2.2 Call content from Contact Centre

Around two-thirds of survey respondents (67 per cent) who initiated their claim by phone in the pilot area were dealt with in a single call. This rises to three-quarters (75 per cent) of Jobseekers who initiated their claim by phone. This finding supports staff comments reported in Chapters 2 and 5 that Child Support Agency (CSA) gathers were the most common reason for booking call-backs.

Complaints about the delay between inbound and outbound calls under the dual system suggest that the single call signals an improvement in customer service. In general, customers wanted to get through First Contact as quickly as possible and get their claim up and running. They could not understand why a call-back was necessary.

‘The phone call should be done completely there, not ring up there, give them so much, go home and give them the rest. No, it should be done in one go and then it’s finished with.’

(Male, new claim for JSA, aged 25-39)

However, some customers found operators to be very helpful in offering a break or call-back if needed by the customer. The reasons for these breaks included: that the phone battery was running out; or childcare commitments (this mainly related to lone parents).

In some cases, however, it was unclear whether customers were booked an outbound call or received a call-back as part of a single call.

‘I think she might have rung back actually. She might have put my details in and said can we call you back, and then she called back when I had long enough to fill...because I think I had my daughter with me, my little one was running out you see...and obviously I didn’t have all that information next to the phone, so she said somebody would call you back.’

(Female lone parent, new claim for IS, aged 25-39)

The data in Table 3.2 shows that there was no significant difference in the proportion of calls completed in less than 45 minutes in North Lincolnshire than across the rest of East and North Yorkshire and the Humber. According to Management Information (MI) data produced by the Performance Measurement and Analysis Division (PMAD) of Jobcentre Plus, single calls were taking 42 minutes on average when data relating to Rapid Reclaims was included. The average time rose to 50 minutes if Rapid Reclaims were not included.12

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12 Rapid Reclaims are explained and discussed in Section 1.2.4.
Table 3.2  Length of telephone call for overall claims process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pilot (%)</th>
<th>Comparator (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to five minutes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15 minutes</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30 minutes</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45 minutes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One hour</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over one hour</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/can’t remember</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 285 155

Base figure: all respondents in the pilot and comparator areas who initiated their claim by phone.

In depth interviews, some customers commented that they did not mind spending time on the phone at this stage if it meant ‘getting the claim right’. Strong objections to call length were found amongst customers who had been through First Contact relatively recently. This included people who had claimed recently, or those whose had to make a repeat claim because initial ones failed.

‘DHSS has already got this information three or four times but every time you put a claim in, a different claim, you have to give them it all again, so they’ve got it about five times from me on the computer and it just seems silly when all they need do is turn round and say right, there is a change in my circumstances, say what it is so they can add it to the information they’ve already got and then make a decision but they don’t, you’ve got to go through all these forms all over again.’

(Male, new claim for IS and IB, aged 50+)

An alternative sentiment expressed was that some questions seemed ‘irrelevant’, serving to make the call longer than necessary. In particular, IB customers typically questioned why they were asked for financial details when they believed their benefits should not even be means tested. Claimants across all benefit types found some of the questions about savings ‘personal’, with some feeling uncomfortable answering them.

‘Well they [the questions] were pretty straightforward really… I think the only one I really couldn’t understand, they wanted year end turnover figures… We asked if the incapacity claim was means tested and he said no, and I couldn’t quite understand why they needed to see his accounts. If it wasn’t means tested, that to me didn’t make any sense at all.’

(Male, new claim for IB, aged 50+)

Customers were generally told about their Jobcentre Plus appointment at the end of the First Contact where relevant. Some said they were surprised – and annoyed – at the length of time they had to wait for a Work Focused Interview (WFI), since this delayed their claim getting to processing.
‘I made a claim for Income Support in January, changed it to Jobseekers, I’ve received no money whatsoever from January till now, now you’re telling me I’ve got to wait another week before I’ve even got another interview.’

(Female, new claim for JSA, aged 32)

‘I was expecting it [the Jobcentre appointment] to be like the next couple of days, not the next week.’

(Female lone parent, new claim for IS, aged 25 to 39)

Other information that customers recalled that they were given at the end of calls included:

- that they would receive a ‘pack’ through the post, which would include a form they needed to sign; and
- what evidence they needed to take with them to the Jobcentre.

In general, customers struggled to recall whether or not they were told how long it would take for payments to come through. Some individuals asserted that First Contact Officers (FCOs) said it would be one or two weeks.

### 3.2.3 Customers ability to provide information to First Contact Officers

The vast majority of survey respondents in the pilot area who initiated their claim by phone (92 per cent) felt that it was ‘very easy’ or ‘fairly easy’ to provide all information required in a single call. In depth interviews, some customers felt they did not understand some questions initially, but that operators then explained them well when asked. Generally customers felt they ‘just knew’ most of the information and could find any specific pieces fairly easily whilst on the phone. Where they could not, operators generally told them they could fill it in at a later stage. The findings discussed here support staff assertions reported in Chapter 2 that customers could generally provide most information in a single call, and mini-breaks were not used often.

‘Really straightforward I think. There wasn’t – I can’t remember being perplexed by anything or – I kind of keep everything together, everything to do with jobs, so I just referred to any documents I had… I can’t remember there being any problem with that.’

(Male, new claim for JSA, aged 18-24)

‘Because I wasn’t prepared for having the questions asked, I didn’t know the end dates of my terms and stuff like that, and what dates I started exactly. So that was a bit of messing about looking for the notes and stuff that I’d got.’

(Female, new claim for IB, aged 25-39)
Specific details that customers did appear to struggle with included:

- previous employer details for JSA claimants; and
- information relating to CSA for people claiming IS (lone parents).

### 3.2.4 Rapid Reclaim at First Contact

Rapid Reclaim customers reported that the call at First Contact was considerably shorter than when they made the initial claim, which they were generally pleased about.

‘No, it was a fairly quick conversation really; it didn’t take more than five or ten minutes at the most. And it was just basic information. I explained to her that it was a quick claim because I had been on holiday.’

(Male, Rapid Reclaim for JSA, aged 40-49)

‘I just phoned the number I was given and they just asked me for full details because it was a Rapid Reclaim, my address, date of birth, National Insurance number, and sent me the form out. It is not as bad as the first time when you make the claim.’

(Female, Rapid Reclaim for JSA, aged 40-49)

### 3.2.5 Job search at First Contact

Customers in North Lincolnshire were as likely to be offered a job search as those across the rest of North Yorkshire and the Humber (46 per cent in both areas). This finding is not in line with expectations since the pilot removed job searches from First Contact and only offered them as a dedicated call-back. It is possible that survey respondents were not correctly distinguishing between being offered a search and actually having one.

Discussions about job searches did not feature prominently in qualitative research with customers. This could be because they did not occur routinely. Alternatively it may be that job searching was not a priority for many customers at the point of First Contact. There were some exceptions, however, where interviewees felt that job searches were useful. These customers tended to be Jobseekers who were clear about what they wanted or had found their previous employment fairly recently. In an isolated case, a customer reported that they opted for a dedicated job search call-back, and waited at the appointed time, but never received it.

### 3.2.6 Overall service at Contact Centre

Comparing customer views from pilot and comparator areas, Figure 3.2 points to an improvement in customer service at First Contact stage as a result of the pilot. This finding supports staff perceptions in North Lincolnshire that the pilot process offered better customer service than previously (see Chapter 2 for further information).
In depth interviews, customers found that staff were friendly and helpful. In general, interviewees reported feeling confident that their claims would be processed without any major problems, typically saying that they had no reason to suspect otherwise. The main exceptions were those who had the most negative expectations at the outset.

‘Yes, she [the FCO] seemed really confident…she sounded like she really knew what she was saying, and I just thought when the forms came back I just had to fill in what I didn’t know and send them off. So I mean I was expecting money really the next week. I thought we’d just go for a week without any money, that we’d get a giro for that week and then it’d just get paid into the bank. But nothing.’

(Female, new claim for IS and IB, aged 40-49)

Customers’ concerns with First Contact centred on issues that existed before the pilot’s implementation. Interviewees routinely asserted, for instance, that while they had no real cause for complaint, they equally had not felt particularly well informed about the overall claims process.

‘It wasn’t until 8 March, when I got to the Jobcentre, had the interview and then was told that the reason I’d been called in for the interview was to find out if I was actually eligible for Jobseeker’s and I was like ‘What do you mean, I made the claim a week ago, surely to God it should be processed’.’

(Female, new claim for JSA, aged 25-39)
Customers provided mixed reports surrounding the level and quality of information about benefits provided by FCOs. Some customers felt clear about their eligibility for particular benefits prior to making the call, whereas others were not sure. In the latter cases, customers reflected that inadequate information or advice at First Contact stage had contributed to delays or failed claims later in the claims process.

Some customers were not clear following First Contact what benefits they were eligible for, or in exceptional cases, what they were claiming for. Confusion particularly arose about whether customers should apply for IS or JSA, and on another occasion a claim was put in for IB when the customer in fact wanted to claim for IS. Such instances generally led either to failed claims, or delays in processing because the customer had not been clear about what evidence to submit.

‘The first time they just said I can’t have it [IS], they [the FCO] didn’t give me any reason and then obviously the second time they said I couldn’t get Jobseeker’s because my mum was getting Child Benefit, and then the last time they just explained why I can’t get Income Support and that I can get Jobseeker’s.’

(Female, new claim for JSA, aged 18-24)

‘And all this, tax credit, child benefit, Income Support, it’s all very confusing, so I don’t know where I am with all that. Nobody says to you ‘You’re entitled to this from other people.’ So I didn’t know that. I made a bit of a fool of myself probably.’

(Female, lone parent, aged 25-39)

Some customers admitted that they found it hard to remember what they had said or been told at First Contact. Some lone parents in particular explained that they were very stressed or upset at the time of making the call.

### 3.2.7 Customer feelings about First Contact

Survey data suggests that the majority of respondents felt comfortable making their claim over the phone (87 per cent of respondents who initiated their claim by phone in the pilot area were either ‘very comfortable’ or ‘fairly comfortable’). In depth interviews, some customers were pleased to initiate their claim by phone, particularly lone parents who had negative expectations of Jobcentres or childcare commitments. In addition, some customers preferred the phone system because it meant they did not have to fill in forms themselves.

In contrast, however, some customers asserted that they would rather have spoken to someone face-to-face. These individuals tended to experience problems or delays, which they believed could have been avoided if they were dealt with in person from the start. Other customers, particularly Jobseekers, stated that they did not mind making the call per se but could not understand why it was necessary if they then had to check through all the forms and then visit the Jobcentre.
In some cases, customers did not feel able to make the call themselves. These customers included some people claiming IB, but also included some Jobseekers. In this situation, a friend or member of family helped. In one exceptional case, a customer went to Citizens Advice for advice when previous IB benefit payments stopped and staff there helped him initiate a new claim for IS. This customer did not understand why his previous payments had stopped and apparently was not provided with any information about the possibility of initiating a new IS claim, or how to do this.

3.3 Next steps after the Contact Centre

Figure 3.3 illustrates what survey respondents in the pilot expected to happen and what actually happened following First Contact. The low proportions of people who expected to receive either confirmation of a Jobcentre appointment or a Customer Statement reflects comments from qualitative research set out in Section 3.2 that customers did not feel well informed about the claims process following First Contact.

Figure 3.3 What customers expected and what actually happened following First Contact

![Bar chart showing expected versus actual outcomes after First Contact]

Base figure: All respondents in the pilot and comparator areas who initiated their claim by phone (285 + 155).
In addition, the survey responses suggest that a relatively large proportion of respondents did not actually receive a customer statement (59 per cent). It is unclear why this is so large, although an equivalent figure in the comparator area suggests any cause is not related to the pilot. If the figures are an accurate reflection of reality, however, they could be a cause for some concern since both staff and customers raised concerns surrounding customer statements not arriving in time for Jobcentre appointments. The knock on effects included: customers turning up late because they did not receive a reminder to arrive 20 minutes before their WFI; customers less likely to remember all correct evidence; and customers less informed about the overall claims process.

Interviewees who received customer statements, reported that they arrived within a couple of days of First Contact. In general, gaps and errors were felt to be fairly minor, but there were some cases where customers recalled widespread inaccuracies or completely blank forms that they had to fill in themselves. These instances did not appear concentrated in any particular benefit type. However, the findings do support those from research with Jobcentre staff, who routinely reported that customer statements were inaccurate or incomplete.

‘It was just minor little things, well to be honest I can’t remember what they were, but there wasn’t much. It was just like dates, when the first claim went in and how long I’d actually been on Incapacity. There was a discrepancy there about the date I actually became ill and the DHSS was confused about the date that I was diagnosed with depression being the date that I actually started to claim Incapacity.’

(Male, new claim for IS, aged 50+)

‘When you’ve actually got the form, and you’ve got the form in front of you, and they’ve filled it in incorrectly to the answers you’ve given in the telephone interview and you think ‘What is all this about?’ To this day that still doesn’t make sense to me.’

(Male, new claim for IB, aged 18-24)

Jobseekers tended to leave amendments for their Jobcentre appointment. Customers claiming IS and IB who did not have WFIs, however, made corrections and then sent their statements off with the necessary evidence. It is possible that the lack of opportunity to have the statement and evidence checked by Jobcentre could mean these customers are more likely to send incomplete or inaccurate statements. For instance, in one exceptional case, a customer asserted that inadequate instructions meant she detached and sent back only the back page of the statement. This then held up her claim, although she was not aware of the reason for a while.

Some customers also received other information relating to the benefit process, which they mainly described as ‘helpful’. For instance, the respondent quoted below stated that he got a booklet telling him about the different benefits and what he was entitled to, which made him feel better.
‘Because I know, it was in black and white, what I was actually entitled to and what I was getting, and once you’ve seen it, it makes it easier because you know exactly where you’re coming from.’

(Male, new claim for IB, aged 40-49)

3.4 Meetings in Jobcentres

Less than half of survey respondents (43 per cent) in the pilot area reported attending a WFI. A quarter of these respondents (25 per cent) received a reminder call prior to their Jobcentre appointment, which is slightly but not significantly lower than in the comparator area (31 per cent). This suggests that the levels of pre-calling did not change much under the pilot. Some customers interviewed qualitatively received reminder calls, although these were not generally discussed in much detail.

‘I did, actually. I received a phone call from the Jobcentre confirming the date and the time…they just said, “Did Income Support tell you what to bring with you? Like your passport ID?” and I said, “Yes, they told me to”.’

(Female lone parent, new claim for IS, aged 25-39)

3.4.1 Arriving and waiting at the Jobcentre

There was no significant difference between the time that customers waited to see either a Financial Adviser (FA)/Claim Service Team Officer (CSTO) or Personal Adviser (PA) between the pilot and comparator areas. This finding suggests that the new ‘on-demand’ CSTO was as able to meet with customers as the FA teams.

In depth interviews, customers’ overall experience and opinion of the appointments at their Jobcentre were mixed, and appeared to depend to some extent on the individual staff seen and how busy offices were on any given day. Some customers felt they were seen fairly quickly, whilst others commented that they were left ‘hanging around’. Some reports suggested that customers did not mind waiting as long as they were clear why they were at the Jobcentre and for how long.

‘If you’d have been told the actual process beforehand it probably wouldn’t have been as bad. The wait itself wasn’t too bad, it was just the fact that you are sitting there thinking, “Well what the hell am I here for? What’s this interview about?” And it wasn’t until you got to the desk they actually explain what the whole process is about.’

(Female, new claim for JSA, aged 25-39)

In general, interviewees appeared clear about the differing roles and responsibilities of different staff by the time they left the Jobcentre. Some customers saw the PA before the CSTO, but this was usually because they were late. No specific objections were raised regarding this.
3.4.2 Claim Service Team Officer meeting at the Jobcentre

According to survey data, almost three-quarters of survey respondents (73 per cent) who had a WFI in the pilot area completed their CSTO meeting within 20 minutes. This is slightly, but not significantly, higher than the equivalent figure in the comparator area. The pie chart below shows that the large majority of customers said that they took all necessary evidence to their meetings.

Figure 3.4 Whether customers knew what to bring to their Jobcentre visit

- 86%: Yes, and I brought it with me
- 7%: Yes, but I did not bring some/all of it with me
- 3%: No, I did not know what to bring
- 2%: No, but I brought some things anyway
- 2%: Don’t know/can’t remember

Base figure: All respondents in the pilot area who attended a WFI (170).

In depth interviews, customers who did not take all the necessary evidence asserted that they were not told what to bring. This was routine amongst customers who did not receive their customer statement, but also included some customers who had.

‘I was a bit annoyed that they didn’t tell me I needed one previously, otherwise I could have just got it and given them it with everything else.’

(Female lone parent, new claim for IS, aged 18-24)

‘I was meant to take a P45, but I haven’t got one from my last job. So that’s why I haven’t been paid yet. So, I’ve got to mess about getting that…and a couple of payslips. But I didn’t have them either, so I couldn’t bring them.’

(Female, Rapid Reclaim for JSA, aged 25-39)

Broadly, customers found the CSTO meeting straightforward, saying that forms were checked and amendments made. Some asserted that the CSTO did not appear familiar with their case prior to the interview. Customers were more routinely surprised or frustrated that they had to go through questions they had already answered at First Contact.
3.4.3 WFIs at Jobcentres

The majority of survey respondents in both the pilot and comparator area (82 per cent and 79 per cent respectively) indicated that their meeting with a PA lasted half an hour or less. Customer views on the value of WFIs varied across qualitative interviews. Some lone parents in particular commented that they welcomed the opportunity to talk about potential employment options even though they were not likely to be returning to work for a while. In contrast, some Jobseekers felt that their WFI was of limited use. These customers felt that their PAs seemed to just go through the motions, not appearing serious about helping them in to work. Typically comments were that the PA did not really listen to what they were saying, or made no attempt to tailor the job search accordingly.

Although customers generally understood the focus of WFIs to be job searching, some interviewees said that they discussed benefits with their PA. These were typically customers who were not planning to return to work in the near future, or had concerns relating to specific benefits that were not addressed through the CSTO. This was also supported by observations carried out in Jobcentres in North Lincolnshire as part of the research with staff, which is reported in Chapter 2.

3.4.4 Dropping off evidence at the Jobcentre

Customers who did not bring all the necessary information to their appointment at the Jobcentre, or customers whose WFI was waived or deferred routinely dropped off outstanding evidence at the Jobcentre. In general, they left information with security staff. These customers felt more confident delivering information and documents to an individual at the Jobcentre than sending them through the post.

3.4.5 Overall service at the Jobcentre

There were no significant differences in how customers rated the service at the Jobcentres in North Lincolnshire compared to the rest of North Yorkshire and the Humber. Over three-fifths (61 per cent in the pilot and 65 per cent in the comparator) rated the service as ‘very good’ or ‘good’.

In general, customers found individual staff friendly and helpful. There were a few exceptions, with one customer asserting that they had been ‘treated like a drug addict’ and another who was made to feel like ‘a sponger’. Conversely, however, there were other customers who felt that individual staff members provided an excellent service, addressing their specific problems or circumstances. One customer claiming IS, for instance, saw a dedicated disability adviser that advised him about support and opportunities that he had not been aware of.
‘They made you feel relaxed…it was nice and relaxed and they got the job done and filled your forms in and you felt you knew the claim was going through, there wasn’t anything you missed out, I wasn’t thinking what’s all that about, what have I wasted my time here for. I came away thinking well that’s sorted now, that’s what I came away thinking. I’ve sorted it out and I’ve got it. I’ve got my interview!’

(Female lone parent, new claim for JSA, aged 25-39)

‘I knew about the disability advisers, but I didn’t know they had extra [work and study options]...so there’s extra opportunities that opened up from previously…They said about work placements and other courses and things I can go on as well.’

(Male, new claim for IS, aged 25-39)

In a similar vein, opinion varied surrounding whether staff had provided good advice about specific benefits and eligibility. Some customers asserted that staff could not properly answer questions about specific benefits or other financial support. In contrast, one customer outlined how staff were very helpful in suggesting that he could more appropriately apply for IS and helped him change from his initial JSA claim. He did, however, concede that this would not have been necessary if the different benefits had been properly explained at First Contact.

More generally, customers consistently asserted that Jobcentre staff did not provide detailed information about what would happen to their claim once it left the Jobcentre. They felt that neither CSTOs nor PAs could give customers a clear idea of how much money they could expect to receive. Some customers were told they could expect to hear within a week or two, although others said that they were not given an indication.

‘If there was some information that [said] ‘right, you fill this form in and you will hear within X days.’ But there was nothing, just left to your own devices.’

(Female, new claim for JSA, aged 18-24)

Despite this, however, customers were relatively confident that their claim would be processed without problems when their Jobcentre visit had gone smoothly. Customers who were less confident tended to be those who had already experienced difficulties or problems such as being advised to claim an inappropriate benefit or not receiving their customer statement.

3.5 After visiting the Jobcentre

Just over an eighth of survey respondents (14 per cent) from the North Lincolnshire pilot area were contacted by someone from processing informing them of the progress with their claim. This figure was roughly similar in the comparator area and suggests that Claims Preparation Teams (CPTs) and Benefit Processing Teams (BPTs) were not routinely making courtesy calls. In depth interviews, customers interviewed
generally reported that they received calls in relation to specific outstanding evidence or in response to enquiries they had initiated. Comments from some customers clearly indicated that more frequent courtesy calls could improve customer experience.

‘I had rung more than once and I would have liked them to say ‘we’ll call you back once we’ve got your information, telling you your letter’s on its way out, everything’s been sorted, there’s no problems. Rather than waiting, waiting, waiting.’

(Female lone parent, new claim for IS, aged 25-39)

3.5.1 Delays after meetings at the Jobcentre

Figure 3.5 shows that customers were more likely to be satisfied (fairly or very) with the overall length of time taken to process their claim in North Lincolnshire than across the rest of North Yorkshire (59 per cent compared to 54 per cent). Conversely, customers in this pilot area were less likely to be fairly or very dissatisfied (30 per cent compared to 36 per cent). Nine-tenths of customers (90 per cent) who were dissatisfied with the overall length blamed problems at the processing stage.

Figure 3.5 How customers felt about the overall length of time taken to process claim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Fairly satisfied</th>
<th>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</th>
<th>Fairly dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Don’t know/can’t remember</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base figure: All respondents (394 in pilot and 288 in comparator).
Customers routinely reported that they found it difficult to establish why delays occurred. Over a third of survey respondents (39 per cent) in the North Lincolnshire pilot area said they had not felt well informed while the claim was being processed. In depth interviews, customers routinely reported simply being told that there was ‘a backlog’ when they tried to enquire about their claim. Staff were often unable to tell them what stage their claim was at and when they might expect payment. Customers asserted that this lack of information was very frustrating, although a few appeared fairly resigned to an ‘inevitable’ wait.

‘They told me that I signed on and then you get your money two weeks after. I signed on and two weeks after I should have got my money but I never did. Then I rang them up and they told me there was a backlog, there were lots of people who had started new claims, and it would take time to get around to mine. I said, “that’s not good enough. I’m out of work and I’ve got no money coming in”.’

(Male, new claim for JSA, aged 18-24)

‘Then we still didn’t hear anything, I rang again and that was when he told me that it hadn’t been processed, he couldn’t understand why, all the information was there and it was all correct, but there was staff coming in on the Saturday to deal with the backlog of claims.’

(Male, new claim for IB, aged 50+)

Where customers were given specific reasons for delays, these reasons generally centred on incomplete customer statements or outstanding evidence. Some interviewees asserted they were not clearly told what was required in the first place or that evidence went missing after they submitted it, although they could not be sure at which stage. This occurred across all types of customer, but emerging findings set out in Section 3.3 suggest that customers whose WFI was waived or deferred may be more likely to submit incomplete or inaccurate claims.

‘Then I rang them up and they told me there was a backlog…So I rang them the week after, and I still had no money…Then they rang me up a couple of days after that and said there’s a problem with my claim…she basically said, “This money that you’re expecting, we need some proof that you’re expecting it and that you haven’t received it yet.” I said to her, “Why couldn’t you have told me this at the beginning?” and that’s what bodged the whole claim up, that’s why it took so long.’

(Female, new claim for JSA, aged 18-24)

Once the problems were identified and addressed, or missing information submitted, customers reported that their claim was subsequently processed quite quickly. However, customers routinely reported that this took weeks, during which time no one could tell them what was going on with their claim. For instance, one interviewee reportedly had their claim held up because processing was waiting for evidence relating to IB that she had not submitted because she had in fact intended to claim for IS.
Other customers felt they received unclear or inconsistent information to explain delays or failed claims. A particularly common source of confusion with regard to the latter centred on the issue of National Insurance contributions and eligibility for JSA.

In exceptional cases, some customers appeared to encounter a number of – sometimes related – problems back to back that combined to result in delays of several weeks or more. One customer reported that her initial claim stopped because of a problem to do with her change of address, and then three separate subsequent claims were ‘lost’. Each time she phoned up or went into the Jobcentre, she was told that there was no record of her claim on the system and she had to start again from scratch.

### 3.5.2 Action taken by customers to chase their claims

Figure 3.6 compares action taken by respondents waiting to hear about their claim across the pilot and comparator areas. There were no significant differences between the two areas, with almost half of survey respondents in both areas taking action to chase their claim.

**Figure 3.6 Action taken by customers waiting to hear about their claim**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Pilot</th>
<th>Comparator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call contact centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call local jobcentre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call benefit processing office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit local jobcentre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base figure: All respondents (394 in pilot and 288 in comparator).

Table 3.3 shows that at least six out of ten customers who contacted Jobcentre Plus to enquire about their claim reported doing so more than once. These findings imply that footfall as a result of people chasing their claims was not significantly reduced under the pilot.
### Table 3.3 Number of customer contacts with Jobcentre Plus to enquire about their claim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Called the Contact Centre (%)</th>
<th>Called the Jobcentre (%)</th>
<th>Visited the Jobcentre (%)</th>
<th>Called Benefit Processing (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three times</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four + times</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base figure: All respondents in pilot area.

As noted above, customers in qualitative interviews routinely asserted that no one could tell them any specific information about their claim when they called the contact numbers they were given. Some customers said that they appeared to be passed around between different departments and were often unsure to whom they were speaking. Visiting local Jobcentres, or phoning specific Jobcentre staff, typically followed failed attempts to obtain information through phoning.

‘And I don’t mean one phone call to Income Support. I mean I phone Income Support, they’ll put me through to the claims preparation team, or they’ll put me through to Hull. Every week in one day I must make four or five phone calls, and sometimes I phone twice a week. So I mean I must be making between four and eight calls a week and we’ve still got no further.’

(Female, new claim for IB, aged 40-49)

### 3.5.3 Impact of delays

In depth interviews, customers discussed how they survived with no money whilst they waited for their benefit to be paid. They routinely reported borrowing money from friends or family, and lone parents typically pointed to the added worry of looking after dependent children.

‘Well I think it’s ridiculous when you’ve got children. I mean it’s bad enough if you were just adults on your own, you can pick and scrape out your freezer. But when you’ve got kids you can’t. I mean I can’t even claim free school dinners because I’ve got no way of claiming have I?’

(Female lone parent, new claim for IS, aged 25-39)

Some customers also explained how hold ups with their claims impacted on existing – or other pending – benefits, such as Housing Benefit (HB).

‘It is such a little bit of information, but that stops the whole process doesn’t it. And then there’s a knock on effect, because if you don’t get that, then you’re not entitled to your rent being paid. And then it all gets messed around.’

(Female lone parent, new claim for IS, aged 25-39)
Just over an eighth of survey respondents (14 per cent) in the pilot area said they needed to claim for an emergency payment or crisis loan, which was roughly similar in the comparator area (19 per cent). In qualitative interviews, customers routinely reported that they were not given any information or advice about applying for these loans. A few asserted that they were aware of the loans, but had not applied because their confidence in the system had been so badly damaged following delays to their initial claim.

3.5.4 Payment

Most survey respondents in both pilot and comparator areas had received payment at the time of the survey (84 per cent and 87 per cent respectively). Figure 3.7 shows that, of those that had received payment, customers in the pilot area were generally waiting for less time than in the comparator area. Just under three quarters (70 per cent) had received their payment within four weeks in the pilot area, compared to only half (50 per cent) in the comparator area. However, extreme caution is needed here. The key dataset used to sample survey respondents in North Lincolnshire was Midas, which is more likely to include customers whose benefits had been paid (see Section 9.2).

Figure 3.7 Overall length of time between making a claim and receiving payment

Base figure: All respondents in the pilot and comparator areas who had received payment (330 + 251).
3.5.5 **Overall service received after Jobcentre appointments**

When asked to rate the overall level of service received in the period following the Jobcentre appointment, more than half of survey respondents in the pilot area (57 per cent) selected ‘very good’ or ‘good’, while just over an eighth (14 per cent) selected ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’. This suggests that perceptions of service received at the end stage were not necessarily linked to opinions on the length of time to process claims, with which almost a third of respondents (29 per cent) were dissatisfied (Figure 3.5). Some reports emerged across qualitative interviews of operators or Jobcentre staff being individually helpful, but these generally co-existed with a generalised dissatisfaction with the service and a perception of poor information provision.

3.6 **Summary**

Figure 3.8 demonstrates that almost three quarters of survey respondents in the pilot area (73 per cent) were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘fairly satisfied’ with the claims process. There were no significant differences between the pilot and comparator area, however, suggesting that the pilot did not improve or worsen customers’ overall experience.

**Figure 3.8** **Overall level of satisfaction with the process of making a claim**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
<th>Pilot</th>
<th>Comparator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly dissatisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/can’t remember</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base figure: All respondents (394 in pilot and 288 in the comparator).
The data does, however, suggest that slightly less than a fifth of customers in North Lincolnshire were dissatisfied with the claims process, which points to continuing difficulties in delivering customer service. Findings to date suggest that problems were concentrated towards the end of the process, where customers experienced delays and received little information about what was happening with their claim. This supports findings from staff research reported in Chapter 2 that customer service appeared to deteriorate as the claims process progressed. Table 3.4 shows that the proportion of survey respondents indicating that they received ‘good’ or ‘very good’ service dropped markedly between First Contact and Jobcentre, and then by a smaller amount between the Jobcentre and the final stages.

Table 3.4  Summary of how customers rated the different stages of the claims process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First Contact</th>
<th>Jobcentre</th>
<th>After Jobcentre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very good/good</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very poor/poor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base figure: First contact: All respondents who initiated their claim by phone [285]. Jobcentre: All respondents who attended a WFI [280]. After Jobcentre: All respondents [682].

Relatively few survey participants (five per cent) from the pilot area said they made a complaint at some point during the claims process and a further 16 per cent said they wanted to but did not. These figures are slightly, but not significantly, higher in the comparator area (seven per cent and nine per cent respectively). Some customers explained that they either did not know how to make a complaint or did not think it would make any difference anyway.

‘It [the complaint] will get lost in the post, nothing’s going to be done about it. That’s just how it is, you get to that stage where you think, “What’s the point because it’s not going to get read, it’s going to get lost in the post and then I’ll just get even madder. They don’t receive anything else off me. It’s ridiculous”.’

[Female lone parent, new claim for IS, aged 25-39]

3.7  Extent to which the customer service objectives were met

The remainder of this section draws on the findings set out in the chapter so far to focus on customer experience of the claims process in relation to the pilot’s specific sub-objectives.
3.7.1 Fewer contacts

Customers perceived that there were too many links in the claims process. In particular, customers routinely highlighted that:

- they were repeating information to different members of staff, particularly across First Contact and the local Jobcentre;
- they wanted one person responsible for the claim who they could contact right the way through the service;
- they would have liked Jobcentre staff across the whole process to be more proactive about contacting them to inform them of progress, so that they did not have to keep phoning and speaking to different people; and
- they did not understand why the claim was being sent ‘all over the place’ once it left the Jobcentre.

“What do I think of the Jobcentre? I think it [the claim] gets passed on to too many people and it ends up being like Chinese Whispers because they get stuff muddled up all the time.’

(Male, new claim for JSA, aged 18-24)

‘I just found it was ridiculous that they were sending my claim to a processing department in Scunthorpe! So they had to have a courier to come and get it from here to take it to Scunthorpe, to process it, to then send it back.’

(Female lone parent, new claim for IS, aged 25-39)

“You just want to know if the information’s been received, what do you need from me so I can get on with this?’

(Female lone parent, new claim for IS, aged 25-39)

3.7.2 Easier access

Overall, customers’ access at the front end of the claims process was fairly straightforward. The changes introduced under the pilot – including the IVR, Freephone number and single call – made access to First Contact quicker and easier. Customers’ perceptions about starting their claim by telephone were mixed, but this was likely to be the case before the pilot was introduced as well.

At the other end of the process, access appeared much more difficult. Customers reported that they:

- were unclear about who to contact for queries about their claim;
- routinely found it difficult to get through to BPS; and
- were rarely given accurate or detailed information about what was happening with their claim and when they could expect payment when they did manage to get through to BPS.
3.7.3 Quicker decision making

Customers’ overriding concern over the whole process was generally getting the benefit up and running as soon as possible. From the customers’ perspective, quicker preparation and decision making at the processing end is therefore paramount for improved customer service. Evidence from the survey and depth interviews suggest continuing backlogs and delays at the processing end, which slowed down the speed with which customers were paid or given a decision about their claim. Tentative findings presented in this chapter suggest that the acute delays may be particularly concentrated within certain types of claims, specifically for customers whose WFI was waived or deferred. Qualitative interviews in particular indicate that specific claims were often held up because of problems that in fact turn out to be fairly straightforward to resolve – such as outstanding or missing evidence.
Part II
Findings from staff and customers from Central London
4 Key differences and contextual background to the pilot in Central London

This chapter provides an introduction and overview of the Standard Operating Model (SOM) Processing Review (SPR) pilot for new and repeat claims extended to Central London. It begins by providing the background context of the extension before highlighting the key differences between North Lincolnshire and Central London, specifically focusing on:

- differences experienced in pilot implementation across the two areas; and
- the contextual environment in Central London and how it differs to North Lincolnshire.

4.1 Background

The SPR pilot was launched in North Lincolnshire in February 2006. The area was chosen to lead implementation of the pilot because of its generally good performance across the range of Jobcentre Plus targets (including accuracy), and relatively high stability in operating Customer Management System (CMS). It also enabled the pilot to be tested in a small controlled environment. On 24 April 2006, the pilot was extended to offices serving customers in the Central London area, namely the Contact Centre in Pembroke Dock (South West Wales), six Jobcentres (Central London) and the Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC) (Glasgow). The extended pilot allowed the SPR pilot to be tested in a different setting from the North Lincolnshire area. Central London was a poorer performing district in terms of targets and also provided a cross section of different sized Jobcentres within a challenging inner city environment.

4.1.1 Comparator – West London

West London was selected as the comparator for Central London because it is served by the same BDC and Contact Centre and has similar types of large offices, complex and diverse demographics and performance levels.
4.2 Contextual background and differences of Central London area

When considering the findings of the evaluation it is important to consider the contextual environment in order to be aware of any impacts these may have had on the pilot delivery. Notable contextual factors specific to the Central London area include:

- **A more complex and diverse customer base**

  Demographically, Central London has a much more diverse population than in North Lincolnshire, with a significant proportion of people from black or minority ethnic (BME) communities and refugees who do not speak English. As such, it serves more vulnerable groups of customers, who often have more complex and multiple needs. A major issue for the London pilot is the high proportion of customers with ‘no fixed abode’ (NFA). Furthermore, the high proportions of customers who do not speak English and/or who are subject to the Habitual Residency Test (HRT) impacts on the amount of time spent in dealing with such customers at each part of the process.

- **A more complex logistical operation between sites**

  The Central London Jobcentres are served by a Contact Centre in Pembrokeshire and a BDC in Glasgow. In North Lincolnshire, the Contact Centre and Benefit Processing Site (BPS) are located on the same sites as the Jobcentres. This affects local knowledge, communication and time delays in sending documentation from sites to customers and between the Jobcentre and BDC. It would appear that on occasion this can cause tension between sites and heighten a blame culture.

- **A higher turnover of staff**

  Management staff felt that the relative geographic isolation of North Lincolnshire and limited job opportunities contributed to a stable workforce amongst Jobcentre Plus staff. In contrast, staffing in London’s inner city Jobcentres was less stable, where there were significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. Management staff felt that these difficulties reflected:

  - relatively low pay with higher living costs;
  - higher levels of staff mobility than other parts of the country;
  - higher staff turnover and lower morale; and
  - high levels of absenteeism.

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13 The Contact Centre is in Grimsby, and the BPC is spilt across Scunthorpe and Grimsby.
This higher level of instability appeared to affect the continuity of practice across the district\textsuperscript{14}.

### 4.3 Differences in SPR pilot delivery in North Lincolnshire and Central London

There were some key differences in how the SPR pilot was implemented in North Lincolnshire and London that affected staff experience and delivery of the pilot, summarised in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1 Key differences in how SPR pilot was implemented in North Lincolnshire and London**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of pilot implementation</th>
<th>Model adopted in the North Lincolnshire area</th>
<th>Model adopted in the Central London area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variation in resource management</td>
<td>With the creation of a new CPT, North Lincolnshire was able to redeploy experienced FAs to cover the role at the BPS.</td>
<td>It was not logistically viable to redeploy staff from London to Glasgow. Instead, existing staff at Glasgow BDC took on the responsibilities transferred from Jobcentres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claims Preparation and Benefit Processing roles</td>
<td>A separate CPT was introduced in the BDC.</td>
<td>The Claims Preparation role was absorbed into the existing Benefit Processing role whereby staff shared the information gathering, claims pushing and claims processing responsibilities between them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone enquiries at BPSs/BDCs</td>
<td>The telephone enquiries function was dealt with by two dedicated CPT staff.</td>
<td>A new Tele-team was created to handle all inbound calls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing Income Support (IS) and Incapacity Benefit (IB) claims</td>
<td>IS and IB were dealt with by one processing team.</td>
<td>Due to the specialised nature of IS and IB claims respectively, these continued to be handled by separate teams as staff were not trained sufficiently to process both together.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{14} It should be noted that during pilot delivery a number of Central London Jobcentres were undergoing management restructuring outside of pilot design, which affected the embedding of the pilot. The Jobcentre Plus Change Team felt that the extended pilot did reach a ‘steady state’ until at least the end of July 2006, after fieldwork was completed.
4.4 Report structure

The remaining chapters in Part II focus specifically on presenting detailed findings from the staff and customer research conducted in the Central London area, as follows:

• First Contact (Chapter 5);
• Meetings in the Jobcentres (Chapter 6);
• Claims Preparation and Benefit Processing (Chapter 7); and
• Views and experiences of customers in London (Chapter 8).
5 Findings from the First Contact serving Central London

This chapter outlines the delivery and impact of the Standard Operating Model (SOM) Process Review (SPR) pilot at First Contact. It provides detailed findings from the pilot Contact Centre serving Central London area, and draws comparisons against experience found in North Lincolnshire. The findings are based on qualitative research conducted before and after the pilot’s implementation, and an analysis of Management Information (MI).

Key findings

Many of the issues and bottlenecks identified before the pilot were addressed by its implementation, including:

- the number of inappropriate calls – customers were effectively redirected to Jobseeker Direct and, to some extent, to the Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC);
- lengthy dual calls;
- lengthy Rapid Reclaim process;
- interruptions caused by job searches, when taking customer claim information;
- duplication created by call-backs and the process for Rapid Reclaims; and
- errors in Customer Management System (CMS) entries and case notes.

Continued
The pilot was successful in making the process simpler and quicker for both staff and customers and was associated with time saving as the majority of new and repeat claims were handled in a single call. There were also a number of residual issues that the pilot meant to address, but did not. These included:

- staff continued to receive a high volume of requests for call-backs, particularly from customers using mobile phones, and First Contact Officers (FCOs) made call-backs to customers phoning from mobile phones or Jobcentre phones;
- where call-backs were arranged, failed calls continued to occur for the same reasons as before the pilot – because customers were not available or mobile phones were switched off;
- the volume of inappropriate calls, although reduced in comparison to before, was still quite high;
- a large number of customers were incorrectly selecting the Rapid Reclaim option on the Interactive Voice Routing (IVR) system; and
- the Admin Team struggled to routinely send out statements on the same day due to the additional responsibilities adopted under the pilot and operating both the old process and the pilot.

Some new issues emerged as a result of the pilot. These included:

- some customers from outside the Central London pilot area were starting to call the Freephone number; and
- the Admin. Team was inadequately resourced to deal simultaneously with both the increased tasks under the pilot and the old process.

There were also a number of issues that the pilot did not seek to address and therefore remained. These included:

- calls involving Language Line were felt to be longer under the single call; and
- frustrations with CMS remained under the pilot. The CMS script did not change dramatically under the pilot, and so the increased use of paper-based desk aids was perceived to increase errors.

Recommendations that would further improve the SOM pilot included:

- the previous process and the pilot should be operated by different members of staff;
- the Admin. Team should be adequately resourced;
- all FCOs should take both new claims and Rapid Reclaim calls;
- specific Admin. Team training and preparation should be delivered before the pilot;
training for FCOs should incorporate practical elements, such as practice calls and the opportunity to shadow trainers. IT equipment should be available to FCOs in a quiet designated space for the training; and
greater clarification on the level of information required to progress a claim should be provided.

The rest of this chapter presents the detailed findings on First Contact.

5.1 Receiving and routing calls for new and repeat claims

Overall, Pembroke Dock Contact Centre staff felt that the Freephone telephone number was an improvement and that customers were using the new number. This finding supports earlier evidence from the Contact Centre operating the pilot in North Lincolnshire. Some FCOs felt that the Freephone number reduced pressure on both staff and customers, because there was less of a rush to finish the call quickly as it was free. The Contact Centre reported that they received positive feedback from customers and representative groups about the Freephone. One of these included a day care centre manager, who reported that the Freephone helped him as he could now allow customers to phone from his phone as it was free. One FCO, in an isolated case, believed that customers were more likely to go home and call from their landline phone under the pilot than previously, because this type of call was now free.

FCOs stated that they continued to receive a high volume of requests for call-backs, particularly from customers using mobile phones (as 0800 numbers are not free for calls from mobile phones). When customers called from a mobile phone, FCOs reported that they encouraged customers to find a landline or a Jobcentre phone so that the claim could be taken in a single call. There is limited evidence as to how customers responded to this request. In some cases, FCOs agreed to book an outbound call for customers using a mobile phone if customers did not have a landline to use, knowing that the call was not free. It is unclear whether this was due to compassion for the customer who had to pay for the call or because phoning a customer back on the mobile was an easier process for the FCO than booking and calling the customer back on a phone in the Jobcentre. Call-backs were also necessary when customers called from the warm phones in their local Jobcentre as Officers did not want to tie up phones in Jobcentres for other uses such as benefit enquiries and job searches. These calls were typically booked to take place within three to five minutes. The impact and effectiveness of such call-backs are explored further in Section 5.2.

Some FCOs believed that more customers were calling from a public phone box since the introduction of the Freephone number. Some staff felt that this approach worked well because there was less background noise than when customers called from a mobile or from a Jobcentre. Other FCOs, however, found it difficult to gather
information from customers because either the phone box was too noisy or the customer could not hear the questions asked and so FCOs had to repeat themselves.

Contact Centre staff reported that some customers from outside the Central London pilot area were starting to call the Freephone number. Staff were unsure why this was the case, but speculated that customers obtained the number either from friends or because they were misdirected by other parts of Jobcentre Plus, such as the BDC. Staff reported that these calls were short and therefore they did not have an impact on FCOs being able to deliver their normal work.

‘The advantage to the customer is the Freephone number although that is drifting outside of Central London, you know Joe Bloggs is in Central London and his mate is just the wrong side in a different Jobcentre area. We are starting to get customers from other areas using the Freephone number which we re-direct…’

(Contact Centre staff)

5.1.1 Interactive Voice Routing

Before the pilot, Contact Centre staff reported a large volume of inappropriate or waste calls, ranging from 15 per cent to around 50 per cent of calls on a typical day. Staff perceived that most of these calls were concerned with general benefit enquiries, customers who were chasing payment of their benefit, and people who lived in areas that were not served by Pembroke Dock Contact Centre. The reasons for such high levels of inappropriate calls were similar to those found previously in North Lincolnshire, and included:

- customers who were not able to get through to other parts of Jobcentre Plus;
- Jobcentres misdirected customers to the Contact Centre without knowing the nature of their enquiry;
- customers did not know about or understand the different roles of the parts of Jobcentre Plus;
- customers called the Contact Centre because they had already spoken to someone there and received a good service; and
- the name and number of the Contact Centre manager was included on every letter sent out to customers.

Most staff believed that the new IVR system would reduce the volume of inappropriate calls and general enquiries received by the Contact Centre. However, some FCOs questioned how well the IVR system would work for their customers, particularly those who do not understand English. FCOs suggested that these customers might press any of the IVR options, regardless of its relevance to their circumstances or enquiry. Others wondered if customers would just press the first option on the IVR, for the Contact Centre, rather than wait for the following options. Other staff expected customers to persevere with the IVR to speak to someone at the Contact Centre, either because the call was free or because they were unable to get in touch with the BDC.
Findings from the First Contact serving Central London

‘I need to speak to somebody about this, who shall I phone? Shall I phone an 0845 number, which is the Benefit Delivery Centre that is going to cost me? Or shall I phone the free phone number 0800 number in the chance that somebody there might be able to answer my query. I can pretty much guess, which way they will go.’

(Contact Centre staff)

Pembroke Dock Contact Centre staff reported that the pilot’s IVR system was successful in reducing the number of inappropriate calls received compared to their experience before the pilot. Similar findings were also reported for the North Lincolnshire Contact Centre delivering the pilot. Further evidence from Team Leaders and Contact Centre management from the extended pilot suggested that the IVR effectively redirected customers to Jobseeker Direct and, to some extent, to the BDC.

Staff working on the extended pilot still described the volume of inappropriate calls as quite high, however, and pointed to the average call length of eight to nine minutes as evidence of a large volume of short and inappropriate calls. Staff reported that most inappropriate calls were benefit enquiries relevant to the BDC, general enquiries, phone calls aimed at Jobcentres (such as customers phoning to rebook their Work Focused Interviews (WFIs)), and calls for other Contact Centres. These were the same types of inappropriate calls that were found before the pilot was introduced. Staff identified a number of reasons for the continued high volume of inappropriate calls, including:

- difficulties with getting through to the BDC, especially between 8-9am;
- language difficulties; and
- not listening to the IVR.

Some FCOs doubted that the pilot’s IVR system helped. They reported that some customers incorrectly selected the Rapid Reclaim option because they thought it referred to a quicker process. FCOs routinely reported that they needed to verify that customers chose the right option on the IVR before proceeding with the call.

‘It just gives you an idea when you look on the system as to what you can expect but you still have to ask the questions to confirm that they haven’t misunderstood.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

Staff believed that the impact of inappropriate calls on their work was not considerable during the first few months of the pilot as calls were generally short and the Contact Centre was not experiencing long queues. Similarly, FCOs did not describe incorrectly self-identified Rapid Reclaim calls who were actually new claims as a problem because the same officer could handle the call and did not need to divert the customer to anyone else. Such instances were only felt to be problematic when the call was answered close to the end of a FCO’s shift and the officer had to work beyond their work hours.
5.2 Taking new and repeat claims for benefit

Staff generally looked forward to the pilot and had positive expectations for the single call. They were less keen, however, on the increased need to use new and/or additional desk aids. Team Leaders thought that the single call would be easier for FCOs to explain to customers, and easier for customers to understand. They expected the single call to reduce both the number of inaccuracies recorded on CMS during inbound calls and the number of failed outbound calls. Team Leaders also anticipated that the single call would increase staff’s ownership of a customer’s claim, because they were responsible for dealing with the same customer through the whole First Contact process. Team Leaders anticipated that this would give FCOs greater job satisfaction and a sense of achievement. FCOs agreed that delivering First Contact in one go would be an improvement for staff. Some felt that there was potential to improve the speed and efficiency with which information is collected, particularly for the later stages of the call. Others believed that the new process would be easier for customers, especially those in difficult or sensitive circumstances. In an exceptional case, one FCO anticipated that the proposed changes in the pilot would lead to improved job satisfaction.

‘The one good thing is, if we do the inbound and then we do the outbound, like I was saying the person on inbound has set it up wrong, you won’t have that then, if there is any problems then it is your fault. You haven’t got to rely on the inbound person doing it correct.’

(Contact Centre staff)

‘I think the FCOs will feel more satisfied if they are able to deal with a customer from beginning to end because you can build a rapport up and after everything has finished, you can put the phone down and think “Right, that was good, you know, I have sorted this, that and the other, and they asked me this that and the other”, you know, they will probably think “I really helped that customer”, rather than, sometimes you are trying to help, but sometimes it feels like you are fobbing them off elsewhere.’

(Contact Centre staff)

Staff working at Pembroke Dock Contact Centre were routinely more concerned about the potential length of a single call before the pilot started. Although the length of the single call was not anticipated to be longer than the combined length of the inbound and outbound call, staff had concerns about being on the phone consecutively for a long period of time without a break. FCOs explained that it was tiring, stressful and physically uncomfortable to handle long calls. The length of calls involving Language Line was a particular concern, and one FCO suggested that outbound calls would still be needed for these more challenging circumstances.
‘I don’t feel comfortable doing an outbound for the length of time that it takes with an interpreter let alone trying to extend and do even more at the same time. To top it off we could have something such as child support interest as well, you know, it just all gets very complicated.’

(Contact Centre staff)

Overall, the single call met staff expectations. After the pilot was launched, Contact Centre staff reported that the majority of new and repeat claims were handled in a single call. Management confirmed that the proportion of single calls at the time of the research was around 70 per cent of the calls. This is further supported by an analysis of MI data on the pilot, which showed that 77 per cent of new claims were dealt with in a single call and 57 per cent in North Lincolnshire (see Section 9.4).

Overall, staff felt the single call gave them more control and a sense of achievement. They felt it was easier to build a rapport with customers on a single call, as customers could be more relaxed with the same FCO, and this made information gathering easier. Staff also believed that errors were reduced as there were no more inbound calls, and failed outbound calls were reduced. Contact Centre staff believed that the single call process was quicker for the customer because there was no time wasted waiting for a call-back, which enabled WFI to take place sooner. This was also found in the North Lincolnshire pilot, where the single call was felt to help customers start their claim more quickly.

‘Much more improved. We know what we are doing now for a start but also they are getting a quicker service. It is much more simplified, it is not disjointed where people are having to make sure they are in. Once you’ve got them on the phone that’s it. To ask them to stay in, particularly say if it is a single mother and she is going to have to do a school run to stay in between one and six for a call-back just never really went well.’

(Contact Centre staff)

‘You’ve got this relationship with the customer they say I’ve had one job in the last six months, you approach the whole thing with a lot more knowledge and if you’re ringing somebody back cold you’re going to have a certain amount of information but you’re never quite sure what the picture was and things can turn up that you weren’t expecting so I think you’ve got a lot better control of the call and the customer knows that, can’t say one thing on the inbound and then change his mind on the outbound which can happen, for whatever reason and they give a partner one minute, the next minute they haven’t got a partner they’ve suddenly realised that if they’ve got a partner they’re not going to get any benefits. That’s just one small example but the main benefit is that you have got overall control and hopefully, if you get it right there should be less problems completing the call.’

(Contact Centre staff)
Longer Language Line calls were felt to be the drawback of the single call. The increased length of this already complicated call made single calls with support from Language Line more stressful for the FCO. Single calls with support from Language Line tended to be much longer than those without. FCOs reported that these calls lasted between one and a half and two hours on average and could, in exceptional circumstances, take up to three hours. FCOs found the length of such calls stressful and reported that the calls could, in exceptional cases, make both the customer and interpreter agitated.

‘I did one the other day, well I don’t know if it was the person or the Language Line but I was nearly suicidal. We were on there for the best part of two hours…I have to say that doesn’t seem to have changed at all but then you’ve got me asking you, asking them, coming back to you so you’ve got that long windedness anyway.’

(Contact Centre staff)

Team Leaders had recently noticed that FCOs had again started to book more call-backs. Team Leaders suspected that this happened particularly in the case of Language Line calls, as they perceived that staff did not want to deal with a long Language Line call themselves.

There were a number of instances when two calls were used to handle a new or repeat claim for benefit at Pembroke Dock Contact Centre under the pilot. These included when:

- FCOs were involved in a lengthy call and nearing the end of their shift (with the approval of their Team Leader);
- the volume of customer calls to the pilot team was high and customers were waiting for their calls to be answered (‘queuing’) to start a new or repeat claim;
- customers asked for a call-back because they were calling from a mobile phone;
- customers were using warm phones in a Jobcentre and FCOs could not book them onto a dedicated phone for a single call; and
- some customers said that it was not a convenient time to have a single call.

At the beginning of the pilot some FCOs were calling customers back to ensure all information was collected. As the pilot was embedded staff were encouraged to adhere to the single call process, as discussed in Section 2.4.1.

When outbound calls were booked, FCOs reported that failed calls continued to occur for the same reasons as before the pilot – because customers were not available or mobile phones were switched off. Some FCOs reported that failed call-backs occurred after mini-breaks were used under the pilot. Overall, however, FCOs and Team Leaders felt that the volume of failed call-backs reduced under the pilot.
5.2.1 Customers’ ability to provide the required information

FCOs at Pembroke Dock Contact Centre were routinely concerned about the extent to which customers would be able to provide all the necessary information for a single call when they phoned to initiate their claim. They were also unsure about what they were expected to do when customers were unable to provide all the necessary information. Some staff suggested that a list might be used to indicate the minimum information needed to complete First Contact in a single call and to send out customer statements. Others questioned the reasoning of such an approach because they felt incomplete data gathering would undermine their role in the claiming process and put their jobs at risk.

‘Because what they’re saying is, you do it [the call] and at what point do you say ‘Hang on, you haven’t got enough information’? From what I gather you just carry on and if there are chunks that you have to leave out there are chunks that you leave out. Well, we’ve got no definitive line as to ‘you’ve got to have this, that and that.’

(Contact Centre staff)

‘If we are hardly collecting any information at all are we kind of doing ourselves out of a job because there’s, you know, if on some cases we haven’t collected very much, then, you know, what are we here for type thing, begins to creep into their minds.’

(Contact Centre staff)

In contrast, management staff thought that the single call would dramatically reduce the level of missing information as customers would only phone the Contact Centre when they were ready and had the necessary information for the call.

Overall, staff concerns about the level of information that customers were able to provide under the single call were not met under the pilot. They felt that customers were able to provide the information in a single call and did not believe that the pilot affected the level of missing information collected at First Contact. They perceived that the level of information customers were able to provide was similar to before the pilot. This was also found in the North Lincolnshire pilot. Only one FCO reported that customers did not have any information when they started a new or repeat claim under the pilot. In an isolated case, an FCO reported that customers were not able to provide the information if they were calling from a Jobcentre.

However, staff reported that customers consistently found it difficult to provide certain types information. This was not specific to the pilot but also occurred under the old process, and included:

- details of studies (vocational training schemes, courses);
- staff or payroll number;
- final pay details;
• gross and net wage;
• employers details, such as address or name;
• bank details;
• Council Tax or Housing Benefit (HB) if claimed a long time ago;
• first day of illness, especially in the case of long-term illness;
• tenancy agreement and address of their landlord;
• dates of previous claims; and
• details of Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit numbers, especially if paid directly to a customer’s bank.

When information was missing, staff reported that claims were progressed regardless. They explained that they were instructed to gather as much information as they could, but to progress the claim and not to delay it, even if information was missing. Both Team Leaders and FCOs felt that the focus of First Contact was to get the claims out of the door more quickly. This contrasts to the pre-pilot situation, where gathering as much information as possible was perceived to be the priority.

‘Before we were re-booking calls because we were trying to cut down on the questions that the Jobcentre would have to finish off because obviously we were aware that the FA only had 20 minutes to do all their work before the pilot and that they didn’t have the time to go over all of this and I think feedback from London as well and through our manager is that we needed to make sure that FCOs were gathering everything and then all of a sudden we are in this pilot now where we are pushing them through and the focus isn’t on that anymore, the focus is on getting them out of the way today.’

(Contact Centre staff)

‘We have been encouraged and told to gather as much as possible but not to delay the claims.’

(Contact Centre staff)

Some staff felt that there was a lack of clear guidance on the level of information needed to progress a claim. This may be why one FCO reported that initially staff were arranging call-backs to collect further information. The FCO reported that management then took steps to encourage FCOs to adhere to the single call process. In isolated cases, FCOs mentioned that emphasising the importance of information and its effects on the success of the claim improved customers’ motivation to find the information.

Staff recognised that missing information could delay the payment of the claim and also impact on the workload of the BDC. However, FCOs implied that under the new process, the level of information gathered did not matter. Moreover, it was perceived that it was not the role of the FCO to worry about this, as chasing missing information was now the responsibility of the BDC.
‘We’ve been told now that there is this team that’s going to chase up any of the information that’s missing so that is part and parcel of the SOM pilot as I understand it, if that’s wrong well then sorry, but that’s what I understand it to be, not to hold up or delay claims or book call-backs, if there’s any small piece of information missing try and get it through on that first initial call and let the team in Glasgow pick up any missing pieces.’

(Contact Centre staff)

‘I think it causes a problem in the Jobcentre and probably obviously if it causes a problem there whether it causes a problem in Glasgow I don’t know to be honest. I would presume it probably would but I presume that is why Glasgow would be chasing up all these missing pieces.’

(Contact Centre staff)

‘Well it doesn’t matter, because you send it on anyway. You take what information you can and off it goes.’

(Contact Centre staff)

5.2.2 CMS script and desk aids

Both before and after the pilot was implemented, management and frontline staff complained about the style, relevance and phrasing of the CMS script used for First Contact. FCOs routinely commented that parts of the script were irrelevant for some customers and did not always follow a logical order. In some instances, FCOs perceived that the introductory script was too long. FCOs felt that the introduction wasted their time as they read out the greeting only to find out that the customer was not a Rapid Reclaim. In these cases, Contact Centre staff felt that it would be more efficient to confirm whether or not the customer was a Rapid Reclaim at the start of the call.

Some FCOs anticipated that the pilot would increase the need for new and different desk aids so that staff were able to deliver the revised process for First Contact with the existing script on CMS. FCOs routinely anticipated that finding information in desk aids appropriate for different types of customers would be difficult. In practice, some FCOs and Admin staff perceived that the increased use of desk aids under the pilot increased errors. This was because it took time for FCOs to get used to the new desk aids. FCOs also found it difficult to search for information in different paper-based aids during the call to a customer. Admin staff reported that FCOs reportedly confused the desk aids for the previous process and the pilot. Some staff felt that these aids were not in a user-friendly format.

5.2.3 The use of mini-breaks

Before the pilot, staff were either unaware or unclear about the mini-breaks and how they would be used, and so did not know how they would work under the pilot. When the pilot was in operation, staff routinely reported that they did not use mini-
breaks or only used them in exceptional circumstances. Findings from the North Lincolnshire pilot were similar. FCOs appeared reluctant to use a mini-break, as staff perceived that they would struggle to get hold of customers because they were no longer available or were already on the telephone to someone else. Contact Centre staff felt that they were more likely to use a mini-break if the customer was at home or where a substantial amount of information was missing.

Both FCOs and Team Leaders explained that the natural break between the inbound and the outbound screens, when FCOs used a ‘workaround’ to set up the next part of the call, was used as a kind of a mini-break. In these instances FCOs asked customers to go and find the missing or required information, whilst staying on the line. This was generally done when customers were calling from home. Staff felt that this provided customers with two to three minutes to gather any information they did not already have to hand. Team Leaders perceived that the practice worked particularly well, and customers nearly always could find the information. Since being thought up by one FCO, the practice was widely used.

5.2.4 Length of First Contact

Before the SPR pilot, staff in Pembroke reported that the combined inbound and outbound call process lasted around an hour: 15-20 minutes on average for inbound calls; and 40-45 minutes for outbound calls. Staff reported that calls involving assistance from Language Line tended to be longer, with outbounds ranging from an hour to an hour and three-quarters in total. In exceptional cases, outbound calls with Language Line support could last up to two and a half hours.

As mentioned earlier, staff expressed concern about the potential length of single calls under the pilot. FCOs were particularly concerned about the potential length of calls with customers who needed assistance from Language Line. Staff explained that these calls were already challenging and, on occasion, physically uncomfortable even when they were split over the inbound and outbound call process. This experience prompted some FCOs to suggest that call-backs would still be needed under the pilot, particularly for calls using Language Line.

In general, staff working at Pembroke Dock Contact Centre believed that the pilot saved time at First Contact, supporting experience already reported from North Lincolnshire Contact Centre staff felt that the single call generally took less time than the combined inbound/outbound process used before the pilot. FCOs reported that straightforward single calls took 35-45 minutes. Calls involving Language Line continued to be longer. FCOs reported that these generally lasted between one and a half and two hours, although an exceptional case of three hours was also reported. The analysis of MI data on the pilot shows that Central London had an average single call length of 50 minutes, eight minutes longer than that of North Lincolnshire (Section 9.4.1). This suggests that the calls involving Language Line may be increasing the Central London average. FCOs felt that the single call saved time by removing the need to reconfirm a customer’s details as well as concluding and starting the process twice.
5.2.5 Call flow

Before the pilot, management expressed concern about scheduling and managing lunch breaks and shifts under the revised process. Under the pilot, Team Leaders managed lunch breaks. Management were concerned about how these decisions were made, primarily because they thought it would be more difficult to ascertain the length of calls coming as they were more likely to vary under the pilot. Management staff also raised concerns about staff running into their lunch breaks if they were on a longer single call. If FCOs went on their breaks at the same time, queues might build up, with customers waiting for their calls to be answered.

Management staff were also concerned that FCOs would revert to the inbound and outbound process 40 minutes before the end of their shift. They were conscious that this approach might impact on the business the following day because there would be higher percentage of outbound calls to make, which would have implications for staff resources.

At the start of the pilot, there was no historical data available on which forecasts could be based to inform decisions about the number of staff assigned to the pilot at different times of the day or week. This was further complicated by the timing of the pilot’s launch, just before the May Bank Holiday, and by disruptions to the running of CMS. As a result, management staff found that it was difficult to accurately anticipate the number of calls coming into the Contact Centre and plan the staff resources needed to meet this demand.

In practice, the Contact Centre coped well under the pilot. This may have been as a result of the early over-resourcing of staff working on the pilot. Management staff reported that scheduling and managing lunch breaks worked well. In contrast, the Admin. Team was under-resourced to deal with the additional work taken on as part of the pilot. Some FCOs were therefore allocated to the Admin. Team on a daily basis to help deal with the backlog of work (see Section 5.8.4 for further information).

Management reported that call volume had not risen. Although queues were described as low overall, management reported that abandonment rates were higher in the weeks before the research team visited, particularly between 4-6pm. At the time of the research (early June 2006), the Contact Centre had not met the 90 per cent service level agreement target the previous day. Management also raised that customers were waiting on the line for up to nine minutes. The Contact Centre reported that they reverted to the previous dual call process for an afternoon, when the pilot was experiencing queues. Management raised that it was more difficult to respond to queues by reverting to the dual process under the pilot. The variable length of single calls meant that by the time FCOs were ready to revert to the dual process, the queue may have disappeared.

5.2.6 Child Support Agency interest

Staff routinely questioned the logic of the revised process to be followed under the pilot for customers with a Child Support Agency (CSA) interest. FCOs were expected
to complete the single call and, at the end, book a call-back for the next day during which the core CSA questions were covered and a WFI was booked. If no information was requested by the CSA, the FCO still needed to call the customer back to book a WFI. Contact Centre staff raised two difficulties with this process. First, they were concerned that the CSA would not respond to the case in time for the outbound call. Second, FCOs were worried that customers would not be available when they called and so the outbound call would fail, which wasted staff time. Some staff felt that it would be better to use the previous dual call process for these customers, and complete the whole outbound the following day.

‘Wouldn’t it be better to just do the whole of the call-back the next day when you know what the answer is from CSA. You have to phone them anyway, you would be better to do the whole outbound in one go.’

(Contact Centre staff)

‘To me that’s pointless, why do such a long call and then book another outbound? Why don’t we just do it like we are now? It gives the person time to think about what they’re doing, get the information together, they might not have, they might not be able to have information about an absent parent to hand, they might have to think about that, maybe get in touch with a parent or something.’

(Contact Centre staff)

5.2.7 Booking Work Focused Interviews

Staff believed that it was relatively easy and straightforward to book WFIs before the pilot was launched. FCOs reported that the availability of appointments for WFIs tended to vary across the different Central London Jobcentres but that they were generally able to book appointments to take place within four working days from the customer’s Initial Date of Claim (IDOC). These views differ from those held by Jobcentre staff, who perceived that FCOs often booked appointments too far in advance and were too accommodating to customer preferences for appointment times.

During the SPR pilot, the views of Team Leaders and FCOs diverged with regards to issues with booking WFIs to occur within four days. FCOs generally reported no problems in booking WFIs to take place four days from IDOC, except in isolated cases when diaries were open at inappropriate times. However, meetings with specific types of advisers, such lone parents, could take as long as seven days. In particular, WFIs for joint claims were mentioned as a difficult WFI to book due to complications in getting consecutive appointments for each partner with the same adviser.

In contrast, a Team Leader noted that getting used to booking WFIs for the fourth day had taken time. The team leader reported that FCOs made some mistakes with the booking of WFIs. They suspected that some of these mistakes were due to the simultaneous delivery of the pilot and the previous SOM for new and repeat claims.
to customers from other areas. FCOs confused the two models of booking WFIs, as under the previous process it was possible to book the earliest available appointment. The analysis of MI data on the pilot confirms the Team Leaders’ perception. It shows that 52 per cent of customers requiring a WFI had one booked within four days of IDOC, compared to 85 per cent for the North Lincolnshire pilot. Similarly to the North Lincolnshire pilot, the WFI booking target had been affected by the introduction of the single call. The bar chart below shows that customers dealt with in a single call were much more likely to have a WFI booked earlier: 59 per cent of those dealt with in a single call had their WFI booked within four days of IDOC, compared to only 27 per cent of WFIs booked in a call-back.

Figure 5.1  Length of time between Initial Date of Claim and a Work Focused Interview booking by single call or callback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WFI booking delay by Single call or Callback</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of all WFIs booked</td>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<td>35</td>
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5.3 Rapid Reclams

Before the pilot, staff routinely complained about the illogical order of questions on the CMS script to establish whether or not a customer was a Rapid Reclaim. FCOs felt strongly that the question identifying a Rapid Reclaim should have been in the beginning of the script, instead of the end. They complained that they could spend ten minutes going through scripted questions before identifying that a claim was a Rapid Reclaim, which was perceived to be a waste of staff time. FCOs would occasionally modify the script to ask customers a question at the start of the inbound call to establish whether or not they were a Rapid Reclaim.
‘Then you get the question, have you claimed within the last 12 weeks? I think it’s a bit backwards. I think we should be doing that at the beginning. We should identify like what we’re being told we need to be doing in SOM, that works, that is very good. We should be identifying at the beginning so that I’m not wasting ten minutes going through questions on CMS that aren’t even going to be printed off and recorded anywhere.’

(Contact Centre staff)

The SPR pilot’s new process for Rapid Reclaims was almost uniformly expected to make the process quicker and more efficient for both staff and customers. Speed would be improved and less time wasted as Rapid Reclaims would be identified at the beginning of the call, rather than at the end of CMS script as previously.

Some FCOs were concerned about whether or not customers, specifically those with English language problems, would correctly self-identify themselves as Rapid Reclaim customers. Staff doubted that customers would know their last date of claim and so would not correctly identify themselves as a Rapid Reclaim.

At the start of the SPR pilot, Pembroke Dock allocated three dedicated teams to deal with Rapid Reclaim calls. Management reported that this did not work well, as it was hard to forecast Rapid Reclaims for a specific team because of the flow of calls, as the length of calls within the pilot was more variable, and calls could be short or longer inbounds or longer inbounds with a mini break. Team Leaders reported that the designated teams did not work well as customers would end up queuing on the Rapid Reclaims even though there was free resource on the new claims team or vice versa. The Contact Centre then tried a second option. Teams on new claims took Rapid Reclaim calls when teams taking Rapid Reclaim calls as a first priority were busy. This did not work any better. As a result, all FCOs working on the SPR pilot were put on both Rapid Reclaims and new claims, so that as long as an operator was free the call would get through. One FCO thought that management overestimated the resource needed for Rapid Reclaims, and customers were pressing the Rapid Reclaim option when they were normal claims anyway.

Contact Centre staff believed that the new Rapid Reclaim process implemented under the SPR pilot was an improvement on the previous process. They felt that it was simpler and quicker. Staff liked the fact that there was no need to go into CMS, and that the FCO only had to check the clerical toolkit, along with whether the customer’s circumstances had changed. FCOs also felt that the new process saved time. Before the pilot, Rapid Reclaim calls were reported to take as long as 20 minutes. Under the pilot, FCOs reported that First Contact took between ten to 12 minutes for these customers. Evidence from observations of First Contact showed that Rapid Reclaim calls could take as little as three minutes. Some FCOs felt that customers reacted better to the new process as it was quicker for them. In some cases, FCOs felt that the new Rapid Reclaim process did not speed up the overall claiming process for customers because they still had to wait four days before having a WFI.
Despite the increased speed with which Rapid Reclaims were handled, some FCOs still thought that the script, especially the introduction, was too long. This was seen to be a waste of time as after two minutes of reading the script it could transpire that the customer was not a Rapid Reclaim. To address this, staff asked customers immediately whether they had correctly understood what a Rapid Reclaim was.

Staff reported that a large number of customers were incorrectly selecting the Rapid Reclaim option on the IVR. FCOs perceived that this occurred due to language problems or customers thinking that they would be dealt with more quickly. In some instances, staff felt that customers chose the Rapid Reclaim option erroneously as the IVR explanation of a Rapid Reclaim was unclear. Management perceived that customers did not often understand how long 12 weeks was, and therefore self-identified incorrectly as a Rapid Reclaim.

‘Lots of customers press the Rapid Reclaim option because they think their claim is going to be set up overnight. Our choice of Rapid Reclaim and what it says on the IVR system maybe isn’t helping us either. Maybe we need to find a better way of explaining what a Rapid Reclaim is.’

(Contact Centre staff)

‘I think that saying to somebody if you have made a claim to benefit in the last 12 weeks, press this. We talk benefit speak, if we don’t talk benefit speak, some of that could be quite complicated for people, they are not quite sure, it was 12 weeks, how long is 12 weeks. I think there are some complexities around that. I think if people are always going to get it wrong, but it is better because it does filter some people to being dealt with by Rapid Reclaim.’

(Contact Centre staff)

As covered in Section 5.1.1, FCOs did not feel that customers who incorrectly selected the Rapid Reclaim option caused difficulties as the same FCO took the details for the new claim. However, if such calls were answered close to the end of a shift, FCOs could overrun their work shifts. In an isolated case, one FCO explained that when receiving a Rapid Reclaim, they had already mentally prepared themselves to speak to a Rapid Reclaim customer and were anticipating to ask certain types of questions. Incorrectly self-identified Rapid Reclaims could therefore throw the FCO for seconds. The same FCO identified that as incorrectly self-identified Rapid Reclaim calls that were new claims were not directed to a different line, the call logger would erroneously record the call as a Rapid Reclaim. This incorrect information was then used to inform benchmarks for calls and the allocations for staffing, resources and budgets.

‘In order to provide a service on new claims we need to know how many new claims are coming through and that is based on the IVR what they press…we have to have the right resources in the right places as near as can be done but if we are allowing customers to come through on any line then we are making a mess of our work schedules, our ability to cope with workloads and stuff like that so there is an issue there.’

(Contact Centre Staff)
5.4 Job searches

Before the pilot, Contact Centre staff strongly believed that job searches should not be carried out by FCOs on the inbound call. They felt that the search slowed down the call and so reduced the number of other calls an FCO could take. Staff also perceived that Jobseeker Direct had better experience, knowledge and skills to carry out a job search.

Under the pilot, staff routinely felt that the removal of job searches was an improvement for FCOs. FCOs felt that they were more able to concentrate on the FCO role, gathering the full and accurate information from the customer to progress their claim with fewer interruptions to the call.

‘I think that’s much more professional because previously I thought we were jack of all trades, master of none, let’s just concentrate on doing our role and doing it properly and there are people who do job searches day in and day out and that’s their job and they’re better, in a better position than somebody who does perhaps eight calls a day and you’ll do eight job searches, you’re not as proficient, you can’t be, you’ve not got the experience so I’m much happier referring somebody.’

(Contact Centre staff)

FCOs reported that customers did not routinely take up the offer of a Jobseeker Direct call-back. Some FCOs suggested that customers who did take up this option tended to know what type of a job they wanted. FCOs perceived that customers were generally uninterested in a job search as their primary focus was getting their benefit sorted out.

5.5 Sending out customer statements

Before the pilot, the Contact Centre aimed to send customer statements out in the post on the same day that the outbound call was completed. Although WFls were targeted to take place within four working days of this outbound call, some FCOs booked the earliest possible appointment – in some cases, a day after First Contact. When this occurred, Admin. staff reported that it was difficult to get statements to customers before their appointment at a Jobcentre and so the printed statements were thrown away rather than sent out. They hoped that the pilot would reduce the extent to which this occurred.

Under the SPR pilot, statements were due to be sent out on the same day that First Contact was completed. The Admin. Team took on additional responsibilities under the pilot, however, and so struggled to routinely send out statements on the same day. Instead, the team were working through a slight back log of statements and reported that they were about two days behind. To manage this situation, Admin staff reported that JSA claims with a WFI were prioritised, so that customers could receive their statements in the post before their appointment at a Jobcentre. Some statements were still thrown away, however, when it was clear that they would not
reach the customer before their WFI appointment. Staff were also conscious that this approach affected customers whose WFI was waived or deferred, as their statements were posted out two to three days after First Contact.

Admin. staff felt that the Contact Centre’s plans to book the WFI to take place on the fourth working day after the outbound call would be better for customers as they would receive their customer statements in time. Some staff were concerned, however, that there was still insufficient time for customers to look over their statements, verify the recorded information and complete unanswered questions. They felt that this was particularly problematic for customers with English language problems, who they perceived needed more time to familiarise themselves with the statements.

‘How much importance do they put on getting stuff to the customer? This is where we think they don’t pay any attention to admin until push comes to shove. – stops and starts at the phone call stage so the figures look good. Does anyone know that matters how many things we put in the bin? Nobody does, nobody cares. Until someone kicks up a fuss and says we haven’t received our paperwork on time then. If I was unemployed and I’d received my stuff the day after WFI or last post the day before, I’d be far from pleased especially dealing with London boroughs and I’d say 70 per cent of the people I wouldn’t say English is their first language so you’re giving them a foreign document anyway and they need someone to help them through it.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

Admin. staff recognised that sending out statements late or throwing them away would affect all subsequent parts of the benefit process: WFIs would take longer if customers turned up without their paperwork, which could in turn delay the claim.

‘The implications on us failing to post is that we have more repeat calls from customers chasing their paperwork, customers turning up at the Jobcentre without their paper work which takes longer, so it has an effect on the front line on the phones and in the Jobcentres as well.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

5.6 Staff experience

5.6.1 Preparation for the pilot

Feelings about preparedness and adequacy of the training differed between groups of staff. FCOs reported that they received a walkthrough and two of days training, covering the process changes, online resources and toolkits, listening to voice recording and having some practice on the computer. FCOs generally felt that the training was good, clear and concise. They cited the opportunity for group discussion and questions as particularly useful.
'I found the training quite useful especially to be able to talk it all over anything we didn’t understand, we had the opportunity to ask and the trainers were very good, they did their best to answer, anything that they couldn’t answer they would find somebody with an answer and tell us that they would come back to us.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

In an isolated case, an FCO stated that the four hours consolidation time in which staff could use the legacy systems was particularly useful as this was not something that they were familiar with using.

Staff routinely felt that more practical training would have been beneficial, such as the opportunity to shadow trainers and practice calls and work through the information provided.

‘I can read and I know what I’m reading but unless I try to do it, I can’t always identify problems.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

‘Basically we’ve just been told what the process is going to be…I wouldn’t mind having a bit of training on what we’re going to do out there. Instead of being told it, trying to have a go, like so once you’ve done this you go into this, you know, that’s why I think once we get into it, get the hang of it. But I was thinking it would be a good idea if you could, at the moment for trainees they sit in with people. So I thought why can’t we sit in, you know, two heads are better than one, so why couldn’t we have two people trying to crack the one – just for maybe the first day, so you can get to grips with it all!’

(Contact Centre Staff)

Some Contact Centre staff felt that the practical aspects of training, such as the need to use Information Technology (IT) equipment, were overlooked. As a result, FCOs practised at their desks but found this difficult given the noise levels in the Contact Centre. Some staff also felt that the desk aids were not easy to navigate. In some instances, FCOs did not feel that the preparation time had been adequate and had to familiarise themselves with the paperwork in their own time.

In contrast, Admin. staff complained about the cancellation of administration-specific training. These members of staff received toolkits and attended a presentation for FCOs, which they found difficult to understand because they felt that it focused on the role and needs of FCOs rather than their (revised) jobs. Admin. staff were also unaware of the use of new and specific desk aids for the pilot and so were not prepared for the changes that these required.

‘Admin do tend to get forgotten, but that’s not just pilot that tends to be a lot of stuff, the impact on Admin tends to be [negative], it’s very focused towards the [FCOs] and I can understand that because that’s where the customers first come through. As I say, it was just that preparation was pretty poor.’

(Contact Centre Staff)
Generally, FCOs felt reasonably happy and confident about the changes implemented by the SPR pilot. Staff were less well prepared when they felt that they received inadequate guidance on how to deal with different scenarios, such as what to do if customers with mobile phones were not prepared to bear the cost of the call. Other reasons were problems in finding information in the toolkits and the lack of possibility to try out the process in practice.

‘Because the biggest problem with this job is finding information. And if they can organise the information it’s much easier, but if you’re fiddling through bits of paper while you’ve got a customer on the line it doesn’t help matters. Because the more interruptions while you’re talking to a customer, the less customer services you’re providing.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

As outlined in Sections 5.2.2, and 5.5, Admin staff felt unprepared and confused about the new responsibilities and processes, mainly because they delivered both the pilot and previous process for new and repeat claims alongside one another.

‘It’s just very unsettling for all of us that we didn’t feel we were prepared at all, we just felt like it was more like ‘suck it and see’ rather than preparing you for it, that was one of the major fall downs in the initial set up.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

5.6.2 Job satisfaction

Generally, job satisfaction had improved slightly after the pilot. Staff reported feeling a greater sense of achievement dealing with customers from start to finish in a single call. Before the pilot, Contact Centre staff generally described their job satisfaction as ‘alright’. They highlighted that they enjoyed working with the variety of customers, helping people, as well as the discrete tasks in their role. In exceptional instances, some FCOs felt that their role lacked job satisfaction. Some FCOs also reported that they preferred face-to-face contact with people. In an isolated case, one FCO felt that the CMS script and working on the phone lessened their job satisfaction.

‘How do you achieve job satisfaction in a job like this where as you’re told what to say, you know, you’re scripted what to say more or less...I don’t know how you actually achieve it in this sort of work environment I don’t know. I mean the way we were working before it was different, you were face to face, it was different, somebody would come in exactly the same as what we’ve been saying now, you’d see them through the benefit process, you’d do their claim forms perhaps sometimes with them.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

As explained in Section 5.2, staff routinely expressed frustration with their call targets. Team Leaders felt that these targets were key in reducing FCOs’ job satisfaction and so they felt that staff were overwhelmingly pleased about the lack of call targets under the pilot.
Staff views about the pilot’s impact on job satisfaction were varied. These views also strongly differed between FCOs and Admin staff at the Contact Centre.

In general, FCOs perceived that the new process implemented by the pilot was an improvement, with staff reporting that they felt a sense of achievement about having done something from start to finish. In an isolated instance, one FCO described feeling more engaged in the process.

‘As an operator you’ve actually achieved something…Coming here I was just a battery hen I didn’t feel part of any system, I didn’t feel involved enough to make a difference to a person’s situation. Now instead of just taking the initial bit and handing it on to somebody else and never knowing whether that person got the call, now I do the whole thing, I know, I take the initial enquiry, I book your Jobcentre interview, you have either collected the statement or sent it out whichever option is best for the customer at the time and I know you have got an interview date…I am more engaged in the process now as single call than I was ever before and I’m actually feeling more in tune with the system again.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

Management and Team Leaders also reported that staff liked the new system and felt greater satisfaction from carrying out all of the stages of First Contact. They believed that the new system enabled FCOs to get to know the customer better, and so were more able to conduct an effective First Contact. Some staff also reported that the new system was more flexible than previously, with more opportunities for FCOs to use their own discretion.

‘It was very rigid before, the system. ‘You will have all this information otherwise you’re going to have to rebook the call’ or whatever. Now they can use a bit more of their own discretion…So and again they like the fact that they can not get to know the customer but they build up some kind of rapport and that helps them get the job done and I think they feel a greater satisfaction at the end of it because they know they’ve managed to do the whole thing and the customer’s happy with that.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

Contact Centre Management staff did not perceive that the pilot affected FCO absence or sickness. Team Leaders perceived that the lack of targets helped to reduce pressure on FCOs, and therefore increase job satisfaction. This was not an issue generally identified by FCOs.

Under the pilot, the Admin. Team’s job satisfaction was very different to that expressed by FCOs because they delivered both the pilot and previous process for new and repeat claims simultaneously which caused confusion. The Admin. Team struggled to support the effective delivery of the SPR pilot at Pembroke Dock Contact Centre. This occurred for a number of reasons. First, Admin. staff were unclear how the pilot would affect their job. Specific training for the Admin. Team was cancelled before the pilot. Staff did attend other training sessions, but felt that...
these were more geared towards the needs of FCOs and so did not cover what the Admin. Team needed to know before the pilot started. Second, the Admin. Team took on additional tasks under the pilot that were not previously their responsibility. These tasks included: printing and posting Rapid Reclaim letters (which were previously produced by FCOs and picked up by Admin. officers from FCOs’ trays); printing and posting failed outbound letters to customers; and generating letters to go with clerical pilot forms. These additional tasks added to the length of time taken to process each statement, which increased the Admin. Team’s workload and reduced the number of statements they could handle in a day. Finally, the team dealt with claims that were handled through the SPR pilot and through the previous SOM process used to take new and repeat claims for benefit at the Contact Centre. Swapping between the two processes confused staff and resulted in errors.

Staff anticipated that the increased workload, backlogs of work and shortage of staff would impact on staff sickness and absence in the long-term.

‘After day one there were three baskets of work and it hadn’t looked like that since early last year when we had really low staffing levels and it just keep building up and building up, the machines were printing off and we couldn’t [keep on top of it] especially in the first week or so because you were constantly referring to desk aid and you were thinking it took ages to process one statement and in that time it might have printed six or seven, that’s early days it’s to be expected, we have got quicker but as you can see there is still a lot of work there.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

Some of the issues affecting FCO job satisfaction under the previous process remained under the pilot. There were still frustrations with CMS, some inappropriate calls and long Language Line calls. In an exceptional case, an FCO described working on the phone and asking repetitive questions as stressful, and drew a direct link between this, staff turnover and sickness absence.

Some staff felt that delivering the pilot process and the previous SOM process for new and repeat claims alongside each other reduced staff job satisfaction, and led to tiredness, confusion and mistakes. This was particularly the case for FCOs and Admin. staff. FCOs routinely reported that switching between the two systems on the same day was confusing and tiring, because of the need to remember to switch printers, desk aids and auxiliary forms. This also affected the work of the Admin. Team, who reported that the statements from the two processes were routinely mixed up and felt confused about which parts to amend on statements.

The simultaneous delivery of two models (the SPR pilot and the previous SOM process for new and repeat claims) also caused difficulties for other staff at the Contact Centre. Management and frontline delivery staff felt that it was confusing for the same team to deliver both models and believed that it could lead to an increase in the mistakes made. This was particularly the case for FCOs and Admin. staff. Team Leaders reported that FCOs who handled both types of calls on the same
day routinely booked incorrect WFI dates, before or after the four day target. Admin.
staff reported that FCOs also confused desk aids used for each model, noting down
incorrect desk aid numbers in the notes instructing which sections Admin. staff
should manually change on statements. Incorrect desk aid numbers complicated the
work of Admin. staff, who were unsure which parts of statements FCOs were asking
them to amend.

‘For example my day yesterday, I started off doing non-SOM outbound calls. I
then did some single claims, an inbound call, some other queries, went back to
doing non-SOM outbound calls in the afternoon, then ended up going back
onto SOM process inbound calls as well. And on each occasion I’m swapping
all of my paperwork, and I would say get confused.’

(Contact Centre staff)

5.7 Staff perception of customer service

Before the pilot, staff perceptions of customer satisfaction and service were
generally positive. Staff said that they received positive customer feedback about
the process speeding up since the previous year and a low volume of complaints. The
complaints that were received tended to focus on service received at the Jobcentre,
not being paid, or missing statements. Complaints regarding the Contact Centre
itself were about not receiving call-backs and spelling mistakes on statements.

Staff perceptions of issues for customers in the benefit process varied. Some staff
perceived that a key issue for customers was the timescale between making a claim
and receiving payment. Some FCOs wondered if the different roles of various parts
of Jobcentre Plus were confusing for customers, and if they knew who to contact in
case of a query. Management staff felt that some of the information given to
customers by different parts of Jobcentre Plus was inconsistent, and could make it
difficult for customers to find out what was happening with their claim.

‘In terms of what stage down the Claims Process they are at because we are
just the start, and then off it goes, and it’s difficult to tell, like, with the
Customer Statement, because it goes to the Jobcentre now, whether it has
gone amiss in the Jobcentre or whether it has gone amiss in processing
because what the customer often finds is that we are saying one thing and
processing is saying something else and that’s very, well it’s just not good
customer service and it’s very confusing, but it’s very confusing for us as well.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

Under the SPR pilot, staff felt that the process was clearer, simpler and more
consistent for the customer. The risk of the FCOs taking the inbound and the
outbound calls giving customers different information was minimised under the
single call process.
'It is consistent because you know you don’t get the case where somebody told them one thing on the inbound and somebody on the outbound is telling them something else even though we shouldn’t be doing that anyway, we are all singing from the same hymn sheet.’

(Contact Centre Staff)

5.8 Delivering an efficient service

5.8.1 Speed

Overall, staff believed that the revised process for new and repeat claims at First Contact was quicker for customers. They felt that customers benefited from time saving as their claim was handled in a single call and no time was wasted waiting for a call-back. The length of the single call was also reported to be shorter than the previous combined split call. Staff felt that the Rapid Reclaim process was quicker for the customer, although customers still had to wait four days before attending their WFI.

Admin. staff reported that the pilot reduced the speed at which statements were processed, as the tasks carried out by the team had increased. While there is no robust evidence to show the impact of delivering the SPR pilot alongside the previous process for new and repeat claims, Admin. staff suggested that this caused errors and confusion and may have added to the time of processing claims.

Staff also reported mixed views about the speed with which customers were progressed through the process after First Contact. In some instances, staff felt that it was better to book the WFI to take place within four working days as allowed before the pilot. Under the pilot, staff reported that customers had to wait until or after the fourth day to attend a WFI, even if appointments were available before. Booking WFIs after four days in theory enabled all statements to be posted to customers, and statements were supposed to leave the Contact Centre on the same day that First Contact was completed. However, Admin. staff reported that this was not routinely possible because of the large volume of work they received. In some cases, statements were thrown away statements because there was insufficient time to post them to the customer to arrive before the day of the WFI appointment.

5.8.2 Duplication

Staff perceived that the pilot process reduced duplication compared to their experience of delivering First Contact before the pilot was introduced. With the single call, FCOs no longer had to end and start the call twice or reconfirm a customer’s details. With Rapid Reclaims, the question identifying whether a customer was a repeat claimant was asked in the beginning of the call, reducing the risk of gathering information again.
5.8.3 Accuracy

Under the pilot, staff did not generally have a consistent view as to how the pilot affected the overall accuracy of information collected at First Contact. In some cases, FCOs reported that with the inbound/outbound process removed, the problems of inaccurate and incomplete case notes had also been eliminated. In other instances, FCOs suggested that the single call increased FCO control of the call, which meant that customers could not contradict themselves or provide inconsistent information over the course of a call. These findings suggest that the accuracy of the information gathered may have improved under the pilot. Unfortunately no robust evidence is available to confirm or refute whether or not accuracy was affected by the pilot. This warrants further investigation.

In isolated cases, staff also expressed that they would not know if information provided was accurate, as there was no way of verifying what customers told FCOs. Management did not report feedback about missing information from Jobcentres or the BDC.

Some staff suggested that running the two models simultaneously had not improved accuracy overall in the Contact Centre, and attributed errors to this approach. This was particularly the case for FCOs and Admin. staff. FCOs routinely reported that switching between the two systems on the same day was confusing and tiring, because of the need to remember to switch printers, desk aids and auxiliary forms for the two models. Management staff also reported that FCOs booked wrong WFI dates, either before or beyond the fourth day, possibly because of the confusion operating the different models. Admin. staff reported that FCOs did not routinely print to the designated printers.

5.8.4 Resources

Staff reported that time savings were associated with the pilot, as a result of:

- the reduced length of Rapid Reclaims;
- reduced volume of failed call-backs; and
- removing the need to start and end calls twice as a result of the single call.

Contact Centre resources for the SPR pilot were generous at the beginning. There was some spare capacity in the team and so some staff were reassigned to handling calls from areas not covered by the pilot (using the dual call process). This was possible because the pilot received less calls than expected. The spare capacity was also moved to assist the Admin. Team, to help with the backlog of work.

Management staff stressed, however, that it was still too early to say where the savings or impacts were exactly, except the time saved by the single call.

The SPR pilot had a significant impact on resources allocated to the Admin. Team. Staff at the Contact Centre agreed the Admin. Team was under-resourced at the start of the pilot. While the team’s workload increased under the revised processes,
no additional resources were designated to the team. Around a third of staff at the Contact Centre were intended to be allocated to the pilot, but Management staff believed that the pilot accounted for more than a third of the Admin. Team’s workload. The team itself supported this, and believed that the SPR pilot accounted for more than half of their workload.

5.9 Summary

First contact partly met the following pilot objectives: fewer contacts, easier access, improved staff experience and greater efficiencies. In relation to these, findings discussed here suggest that:

- the new IVR system, reduced the volume of inappropriate calls received;
- the new process Rapid Reclaims, reduced the amount of information collected;
- removing job searches from First Contact, reduced call length and enabled FCOs to deal with more customer claims.
- the single call was shorter than the combined time for inbound and outbound calls used previously.
6 Findings from Jobcentres in Central London

This chapter outlines the delivery and impact of the Standard Operating Model (SOM) Process Review (SPR) pilot within Jobcentres. It provides detailed findings on the pilot covering offices in Central London, and draws comparisons against experience found in North Lincolnshire. The findings are based on qualitative research conducted before and after the pilot’s implementation, and an analysis of Management Information (MI).

Key findings

- Many of the issues and bottlenecks identified before the pilot were addressed by its implementation, including:
  - unmanageable Financial Assessor (FA) workload;
  - inefficient handovers between FAs and Personal Adviser (PAs);
  - weak management of the Brought Forward (BF) system;
  - unnecessary length of customers’ time in the Jobcentre;
  - poor management of FA and PA diaries;
  - time wasted collecting unnecessary information for Rapid Reclaim customers; and
  - unmanageable levels of footfall in Jobcentres;
- Though the pilot successfully speeded up aspects of the claiming process carried out in the Jobcentre, staff were concerned that the delays were transferred to the Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC).
Findings from Jobcentres in Central London

- A number of residual issues remained that the pilot either was not successful in addressing or had not sought to address, such as:
  - placing greater responsibility on customers for gathering and sending evidence, as they continued to use the Jobcentre as a resource to send evidence from;
  - customer information going missing in transit or on arrival at the BDC;
  - the accuracy of customer statements;
  - ensuring that PA interviews are work focused; and
  - developing Customer Management System (CMS) so that it was better able to support the process.

- Recommendations for further enhancement of the SOM pilot include:
  - improving the communication between Jobcentres and the BDC;
  - ensuring that Claim Service Team Officers (CSTOs) understand the remit of their meetings.

The rest of this chapter presents the detailed findings from Jobcentres.

### 6.1 Delivery of the SPR pilot in Central London Jobcentres

The pilot was implemented within six London Jobcentres: Barnsbury, Finsbury Park, Highgate, Kentish Town, Marylebone, and Westminster.

All the London offices were large in terms of number of Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) registrations. Before the pilot, the SOM for new and repeat claims had been adapted differently across the sites. These variations were implemented in response to the different circumstances faced by individual offices; for example some offices were already operating ‘on-demand’ services to help manage customer flow where there was a high level of staff absence. As a result, Jobcentre staff had mixed expectations and experiences of the pilot. This was not only dependent on the way the process for new and repeat claims operated before the pilot but also their job role within it.

FAs hoped that the new process would address a number of key issues experienced before the pilot, in particular improving their ability to manage their workload, and providing a more effective hand over of claims to the BDC. PAs expected the pilot to have little impact on their role but hoped that the customer handover from the Claim Service Team (CST) would be better managed under the new system with fewer customers arriving late to the Work Focused Interview (WFI).

After the pilot was implemented, staff reported that the pilot met some of their expectations and addressed some of their prior concerns. They believed that:
• CSTOs had fewer competing tasks to manage;
• the development of an ‘on-demand’ CST made the service more flexible and better able to accommodate customers who arrived late or Fail To Attend (FTA);
• the removal of FA diaries reduced the amount of time spent having to manage appointments;
• customers were more likely to arrive at the PA for the WFI on time; and
• customers with waived and deferred claims received a better service.

Staff also identified a range of factors that were separate to the pilot’s revised process but affected their ability to deliver quick and efficient services. These factors included:
• CMS unnecessarily increased the time taken to update customer records. This was because it was running slow and staff reported that it regularly crashed.
• Jobcentre staff used the same telephone number as customers when they contacted the BDC. They reported that the line was often busy, which wasted time and slowed down the speed with which they were able to get information on how a claim was progressing.

Some staff were not clear about their job roles under the pilot. More specifically, CSTOs were not clear about where their responsibility for gathering evidence and checking the accuracy of the customer statement finished and the role of the BDC began.

6.2 Booking appointments for meetings within the Jobcentre

Before the pilot, Jobcentre staff speculated that Contact Centre staff were not fully aware of the impact that booking inappropriate WFI appointments had on the rest of the process and the time taken to deliver benefit payments. Jobcentre staff said that First Contact Officers (FCOs) sometimes booked appointments too soon after the outbound call, which meant that the customer had not received their customer statement before they visited the Jobcentre. When this occurred, the FA had to print a new statement, which wasted time. Staff believed that customers were also less likely to bring in the evidence needed, as they had not received the list of required documentation that accompanies the statement.

Staff felt that the way that appointments were booked by the Contact Centre improved under the pilot but were not clear what had caused these improvements. Jobcentre staff reported that there were fewer gaps in PA diaries and FCOs were more likely to book WFI about four days after the date of claim, which supported the findings from the Contact Centre. This allowed customers to receive their statement reminding them of the required evidence without delaying the processing of their claim. Staff perception of improvements in the booking of WFI is supported
Findings from Jobcentres in Central London

by analysis of the MI. The percentage of WFI s booked within the four day target is increasing with 62 per cent of booked WFI s were within four days of the Initial Date of Claim (IDOC).

6.3 Diary management

Before the pilot, PA diaries were made available to the Contact Centre to book WFI times with customers. A daily diary was sent to FA and PA managers showing the allocation of interviews for the following day. Staff expected that removing the need for diary management from Financial Assessor Managers (FAMs) would reduce their workload and free them up to concentrate on other activities.

Some staff were concerned that removing the FA diaries would mean that CSTOs would not be able to prepare for their working day.

’I think it’s [the FA diary] good in a way because everybody knows what they have to do, what to expect for that day. It’s good to know what you’re going to have in store for that day. When this system [on-demand CSTOs] comes in, you don’t know who you’re going to be seeing, ten customers, one customer or whatever. Whereas with the diary it’s easy to maintain you know what appointments you have.’

(Jobcentre staff)

The impact that the removal of the diary management had on CSTO managers varied. Whilst some appreciated that a time consuming task had been removed from their workload others noticed little change because they had not been using diaries for specific staff before the pilot, usually due to high level of sickness absence amongst staff.

Diary systems changed under the pilot so that PA appointments became staggered, with one starting every five minutes. This meant that appointments for different PAs no longer started at the same time. The motivation behind this change was to even out the flow of customers for CSTOs, who were now ‘on-demand’ rather than meeting customers at set appointment times.

Under the pilot, PAs stated that using staggered appointments gave them more flexibility to manage their workload. They felt that it was easier to accommodate staff shortages caused by unplanned sickness absence as customers were not all arriving at the same time.

’I feel if you’ve got staggered hours, not only can I manage the diaries a lot more effectively, I can manage it efficiently. It works better for me and my advisors.’

(Jobcentre staff)

The positive feedback from staff about the staggered appointments was in contrast to the experience in North Lincolnshire. Jobcentre staff in North Lincolnshire believed that it was easier to manage the flow of customers with limited resources
when they arrived at the same time. This difference of opinion may have been because some of the London offices used a type of ‘on demand’ system before the pilot was introduced.

6.4 Change in role from FA to CSTO

6.4.1 Redirecting Incapacity Benefit, Income Support and Rapid Reclaims to the Benefit Delivery Centre

Before the pilot, FAs’ workloads were largely dictated by diarised face-to-face appointments with customers. Staff reported that this could result in other aspects of their job not getting the required attention. Handling complex waived or deferred claims such as Incapacity Benefit (IB) and clearing the BF system were two such tasks that could be neglected. Some staff believed that customers whose WFI was either deferred or waived did not receive parity of service compared with those who claimed JSA. Similar views were expressed by North Lincolnshire staff.

Before the introduction of the pilot, FAs also found it difficult to accommodate customers who had waived or deferred WFIs when they did attend the Jobcentre to follow-up their claim. These customers arrived at the Jobcentre without prior notice, which impacted on FAs’ ability to complete non-diarised tasks such as working on the BF system or updating CMS.

“We arranged the diaries specifically so that the FAs had from about quarter past three in the afternoon onwards with no appointments so they had time to make the amendments on the CMS system, push all their outstanding claims, call up BFs and do previews. But when you’ve got the deferrals coming in, I mean we had some people coming in to see us at half past four yesterday and that’s not unusual and it’s difficult because you try and sort of allocate a time to do certain things but they’ve still got the customers coming in because they don’t have an appointment base.”

(Jobcentre staff)

Prior to the pilot, staff reported that Rapid Reclams were also not dealt with as efficiently as possible. Staff explained that these customers were expected to go through the entire process for a new or repeat claim even though their situation was unchanged from their last claim. FAs felt that meeting with Rapid Reclaim customers was a waste of their time, as customers’ details required very little amendment.

The pilot sought to address these issues by asking IB, some Income Support (IS), and Rapid Reclaim customers to send their customer statements direct to the BDC to avoid the potential bottleneck of the BF system. Some staff reported this approach reduced their workload by removing a task that was previously difficult to accommodate within the old FA role. Staff did not know, however, if redirecting statements straight to the BDC reduced the end-to-end processing time for their customers or simply transferred the bottleneck from the Jobcentre to the BDC. Other staff reported that they still had to respond to customers with waived or
deferred claims under the pilot because they continued to use the Jobcentre to send information and to follow up their claim. These ad hoc customer visits to the Jobcentre continued to hinder work planning and were resource intensive.

6.4.2 Responsibility for the BF system transferred to BDCs

Before the pilot, some staff stated that the BF system was difficult to manage because of the competing demands of the role. They found that it was: hard to keep on top of the claims requiring outstanding evidence; too time consuming to chase information; and on occasion, customers handed information to a range of different Jobcentre staff which was not always documented and resulted in staff being unaware of information that was provided.

Staff in other offices felt that the previous system worked well and the BF system was well managed as staff regularly checked which claims were within it and chased the required evidence. Some staff expected that the transfer of the BF system would reduce the workload on the CSTOs, compared to the FA role, and for the administrators who kept the records for the BF system up to date.

Some staff felt that the pilot implemented a better process because they believed that the BDC could dedicate more time to evidence gathering and avoid the distractions experienced by FAs. Staff who worked in offices where the BF system was reported to be well managed believed that transferring the BF system to the BDC did not address the inefficiency of the process, as there were still two sites involved in gathering evidence. One member of staff stated that the process would be more efficient if all interviews and processing was done within the Jobcentre as this would remove the risk of complications occurring between different sites, such as information going missing.

6.5 Previewing and pre-calls

Under the pilot, CST staff were no longer responsible for conducting previews and making blanket pre-calls to all customers. The CST manager was still responsible for ensuring that customers’ access requirements were identified and met.

Staff had mixed expectations about the pilot’s plans to reduce preparation activity before customers arrive at the Jobcentre. Some were concerned that it would mean increased numbers of people would fail to attend meetings and/or would not bring the correct information. CSTOs were concerned that they would not know any detail about the person that they would see next, which would mean time might be wasted during the meeting as the CSTO established key facts about the individual that was pertinent to their particular case. Staff believed that effective previewing shortened the length of FA meetings.

‘[Previews are important] in getting the customer seen quickly, getting the claim done in a more efficient manner’.

(Jobcentre staff)
Other staff questioned if the preparation activity was effective and felt that its removal/reduction maximised their time and ability to deliver the core CSTO role. In offices where pre-calling did not routinely occur, for example, staff reported that it had no impact on encouraging people to attend and simply duplicated the messages that the customer received from the Contact Centre and the customer statement.

Before the pilot, staff were also concerned that the removal of FA previewing would mean that the needs of customers would not be picked up and catered for at Jobcentre appointments by, for example, providing an interpreter for someone who did not speak English. At the time of writing, there was no evidence to suggest an increase in the number of customers whose access needs were not met.

At the time of the research, staff were confused about when pre-calls should and should not be delivered under the pilot. There were examples of Jobcentres that continued to conduct them for all customers and others that did not call customers at all. Staff did not refer to the targeted calls that were intended to occur under the pilot. The level of pre-calling tended to depend on each Jobcentre's experience of preparation activity before the pilot. In offices where staff perceived that pre-calls had increased past attendance rates, they continued to contact as many customers as possible.

In some Jobcentres, staff appeared reluctant to stop conducting pre-calls. These staff stated that the number of customers who failed to attend their interviews declined and more customers produced the right documentation at their appointments when the pre-calls were conducted. Others stated that pre-calls were particularly useful because the information given to customers by the Contact Centre about what evidence was required to process their claim was inadequate.

- There is no clear evidence to show if the pilot affected FTA rates in London. The Performance Measurement and Analysis Division (PMAD) of Jobcentre Plus reported that there was no evidence that the pilot had impacted on FTA rates in Central London Jobcentres, although the FTA rates have improved slightly over the course of the pilot. In particular there is no evidence that Central London, using 100 per cent pre-WFI calls, had less failure to attend than North Lincolnshire.

6.6 Meeting customers ‘on-demand’

Before the pilot, staff said that customers regularly waited for FA appointments. If a staff member was presented with a particularly complex case, FAs found it difficult to complete their pre-booked list of appointments. Staff also explained that late arrivals and FTA customers could result in a staff member having gaps in their working time.

Staff expectations of the ‘on-demand’ service varied. Staff in some Jobcentres said that being ‘on-demand’ meant that they would have no prior knowledge of the customer and therefore it would not be possible to prepare focused and appropriate
questions. Staff in other Jobcentres stated that the impact would be minimal as they already operated an ‘on demand’ system for FAs.

In general, staff felt that the pilot increased their ability to do their job and deliver customer service. CSTOs no longer had specific appointments with customers and they felt that the ‘on demand’ service allowed them to better accommodate people who were early for their appointments and also adapt to those who were late or FTA. They were also able to use the flexible appointment system to cover each other when a member of the team needed more time with a customer. Staff believed that waiting times for appointments decreased under the pilot and the overall time that customers spent in the Jobcentre also reduced.

‘I think it [on-demand CSTOs] is more flexible that way for us and it’s easier to get the people through that way.’

(Jobcentre staff)

6.7 Accuracy and completeness of customer statements

As with the North Lincolnshire research, FAs reported that customer statements were routinely inaccurate and incomplete. The reasons for inaccurate and incomplete statements included: inaccurate information from the customer; a mistake made when inputting information into CMS; and a glitch in CMS which meant that printed statements did not show all the answers that had been gathered by the FCO.

Under the pilot, some staff did not know if the accuracy and completeness of statements had changed. Some staff, however, believed that the quicker process for Rapid Reclaims led to more claims that were inappropriately defined as Rapid Reclaim at the Contact Centre stage of the claiming process.

Overall, Jobcentre staff, as before the pilot, continued to believe that some of the inaccuracies within customer statements occurred because Contact Centre staff did not have adequate benefits knowledge. Jobcentre staff perceived that FCOs did not always know which benefit customers were entitled to, what evidence was required to process the claim, and they did not gather the detailed information required to process the claim. Jobcentre staff did not appear to be aware of the glitch with CMS that resulted in answers inputted by the FCO not printing onto customer statements. Jobcentre staff noted missing information could include: customer’s savings, the customer’s partner’s details, and previous employment information.

Other staff reported that inaccurate statements were less common and that the problem was improving before the pilot was implemented. Contact Centre staff were perceived to be more experienced and there also appeared to be less staff turnover within the team than previously.
‘Generally the majority of it is done correctly but I’ve had certain claims where I had to go through and practically change nearly everything but that happens very, very seldomly.’

(Jobcentre staff)

‘Sometimes the forms, they have errors in them, they always have at least one or two errors in them. But the majority of the time it’s only slight mistakes, little things that have been missed out, and answers you can run through in a few minutes.’

(Jobcentre staff)

6.8 Reduced claim check

Prior to the pilot, there was concern that the FA team needed to be substantially resourced to allow a thorough claim check. The process also created duplication of responsibility as claims were looked at in detail by both FAs and staff working in the BDC.

The pilot reduced the scope of CSTO meetings so that they were more focused and more manageable with the available resource. Staff could see the positive impact that this could have in improving their ability to manage a large range of tasks. Others, however, believed that the reduced role would have a negative impact on their job satisfaction as the role would be constrained to completing repetitive tasks.

‘Reducing the level of activity by the FA is positive on one side, they are not being over stressed or stretched, negative on the other, is that it is downgrading the role.’

(Jobcentre staff)

Jobcentre staff also expected that the reduced claim check would mean that a claim was checked in detail once, by the BDC, and therefore reworking would be minimised. FAs were concerned that the reduced claim check would lead to poorer customer service. FAs stated that the BDC would not pick up problems or complexities with a customer’s claim until later in the process, and this could increase customer delays.

Under the pilot, CSTOs were asked to verify identification and only check the customer statement by asking very limited questions to the customer. At the time of the research, customers were asked to arrive 20 minutes before WFIs rather than the 15 minutes that was originally planned. This increase in time was implemented to allow enough time for the customer to arrive at the Jobcentre, be shown to the CSTO and conduct the initial information check and evidence gather. CSTOs, however, appeared unclear about this extended time period and some interpreted it as a return to conducting more thorough checks, which they welcomed. This led to confusion about what they were and were not expected to cover in the meeting and where their job ended and that of the BDC started. As a result, some staff believed that there was duplication in the roles of the CST and the BDC.
‘[regarding the initial 15 minute CSTO meeting]…sometimes you’d know when things were wrong, but you weren’t able to say anything, because under the SOM you weren’t supposed to check it’.

(Jobcentre staff)

‘…well at the beginning with the SOM when we were first introduced to it we were told just to literally take the form, make sure it was signed, get the evidence and ID, and send it over to the PA. But now we’ve been told to check the form better, which I think is better customer service…now we’ve been allocated I think 20 minutes. So it gives us a chance to ask a few more questions.’

(Jobcentre staff)

Observations of FA and CSTO meetings established that there was a reduction in the length of the CSTO meetings when compared to the FA meetings and they tended to be conducted within the anticipated 15 minutes. CSTO meetings were focused on checking identification, gathering and photocopying evidence and briefly asking customers about the need to change or add information. The lack of clarity about the reduced CSTO meeting does not appear to be reflected in practice and this may suggest a reluctance to acknowledge the change in their role and the reduced check.

6.9 Amending the customer statement and updating CMS

Before the pilot, staff updated the records held on CMS during the meetings with customers and routinely reported that this took a considerable amount of time. They complained that CMS was often slow, would ‘crash’, and required information to be completed that they felt was unnecessary for the purpose of the claim, such as dates of the courses attended by customers. Staff were particularly aware that customers could become frustrated watching the data being inputted onto the system at the end of their FA appointment.

The pilot introduced the A10 form to record amendments that were required to customer statements. The customer then signed the form and the information was inputted onto CMS as a ‘backroom’ function by a CSTO who was not seeing customers. Staff hoped that moving the CMS update to a backroom role would help the CSTO meeting run to time.

When the pilot went live in London, CSTOs were asked to use the A10 form to record all amendments. This was changed to enable amendments to be made straight onto the customer statement and led to some staff believing that the A10 form was no longer used at all. Observations of CSTO meetings with customers showed that staff were still using the A10 form when necessary.
'Well, since the pilot started, they’ve looked at it and then made a few changes, because at the beginning, we used to have to get the customers to actually amend the statement and then also transfer everything onto this A10. And the customers were really getting irate about that, because they’ve amended it on the statement, why should they also have to transfer it onto another statement to say they’ve agreed to [it]. So, [now we] just let them amend it and sign it and date it on the statement…A10 has gone.’

(Jobcentre staff)

CSTOs felt that it was unnecessary to use the A10 form for all amendments and this was also the experience of the staff working in Lincolnshire. Staff said that once the A10 form was only used in limited instances, when statements required substantial changes, rather than for recording all amendments, the revised process was more efficient. Staff said that performing the CMS update as a ‘backroom’ function allowed the CSTO meeting to finish within the 15 minutes that was allocated. CSTOs also found it easier to complete the CMS update when customer appointments and queries did not interrupt the person responsible for the updating. Some CSTOs felt that service delivery improved because customers no longer had to watch someone update their record and so spent less time with the CSTO. This was supported by observational evidence, in which CSTOs were recorded to take less time than the previous FA appointments.

6.10 Length of CSTO meeting and PA handover

Under the pilot, staff said that CSTO meetings were more likely to run to time as a direct result of the reduced remit of the meeting and the removal of the need to update CMS during the meeting. Staff also reported that, for most customers, all aspects of the reduced meeting could be covered within the 15 minute appointment. PAs said that they were less likely to need to return customers to the CSTO to complete the check and initial information gather.

Despite the improvements to the process, CSTOs acknowledged that more complicated customer claims still took longer than the 15 minutes available. This occurred when:

• the claim was a complex IB claim;
• customers were from a different country; and
• a Habitual Residence Test (HRT) was needed.

In these exceptional cases, the start time of the WFI was delayed and/or a shorter interview was conducted. In some cases, staff reported that there were knock on delays to subsequent customer appointment times.

Under the pilot, the hand over from the CST to the PA was no longer conducted on a face-to-face basis. Customers were allocated to CSTOs on arrival and PAs did not immediately know which CSTO saw the customer. As a result, PAs needed to find...
the relevant CSTO to answer any benefit queries raised by the customer that the PA could not answer. To prevent PAs wasting time searching for the right CSTO some offices put the CSTO’s name at the top of the cover sheet that accompanied the customer statement before it was passed on to the PA.

6.11 Work Focused Interviews

Before the pilot, staff were concerned that the reduced CSTO meeting would mean that customers would arrive at the WFI with more unanswered questions about their benefit. After the pilot was implemented, staff routinely reported the nature of WFIs had not changed. Some PAs believed that they were now asked more questions about their benefit entitlement, which made the meeting less work focused, but others felt that there was no change.

6.12 Sending information to BDC

Before the pilot staff reported that information sent to the BDC in Glasgow was often lost in transit. Despite notes on customer files that stated claim forms and accompanying evidence had been forwarded, the BDC was reported to regularly inform FAs that they had not received the information. When this happened, statements and evidence had to be resent, delaying the process and frustrating the customer.

‘On average out of every ten claims I send, about six will probably make it to Glasgow and four of them are getting lost in the post...And then from there you’re getting people coming back to you...that’s where all the beginning of the frustration will start for the customer, being sent back and forth.’

(Jobcentre staff)

Staff hoped that by transferring responsibility for data gathering and the BF system to the BDC there would be less chance for information to go missing between the teams under the pilot.

After the pilot was introduced, the claim was collected from the CST and couriered to the BDC. Claims that were in the BF system for 30 days with outstanding evidence were also sent to the BDC. This collection occurs every afternoon. The Jobcentres aim to send the majority of customer statements on the same day as the WFI. Where this was not possible claims were sent the following day. MI shows that 82 per cent of claims arrive at the BDC one to two days after the WFI (see Section 9.3.3). While this was not as quick as in Lincolnshire (94 per cent within two days) it does reflect the distance between London and Glasgow, which slows down the transit time of claims. This issue is explored further in Chapter 7.

Some staff reported that they continued to encounter instances where information sent from the Jobcentre went missing. This resulted in delays to the process as the missing information had to be acknowledged either by the Jobcentre or the BDC and then had to be recollected and sent to Glasgow.
‘To be quite honest, I’d say 3.5 times out of ten a form goes missing.’

(Jobcentre staff)

Staff said that the hand over between the CST and the BDC was not helped by the difficulty in getting through to the BDC. Jobcentre staff became frustrated when they were unable to quickly follow-up on outstanding issues with a claim once it had left the office. Staff said that if they had a contact number for the BDC that was different to the one used by the public they would be better able to inform customers about the progress of their claim and follow up their own staff queries.

Before the pilot, FAs found it difficult to update CMS with the level of detail required to ‘push’ the claim to the legacy system. They explained that this was because CMS did not interact well with Legacy and contained glitches, which meant that even when information was input into CMS it was not always recorded. Some Jobcentre staff were relieved that responsibility for the final push had moved to the BDC under the pilot.

‘I think CMS3, its not working as well as it should, because we’ve gone through all that is required. We’ve followed all the instructions given and still the full process [to transfer is] not functioning.’

(Jobcentre staff)

Others believed that moving the ‘push’ to the BDC meant that their knowledge of CMS and ways to get around its glitches was wasted. MI data shows that under the pilot and since the responsibility for the ‘push’ has been transferred to BDC, ‘push’ rates in London have increased (see Section 9.6.2).

6.13 Footfall

Before the pilot, staff felt that the level of footfall in Jobcentres was high. Staff said that footfall was too high because people arrived for unplanned reasons, for example:

• chasing up their claim;
• bringing in information/evidence to enable their claim to be processed; and
• requesting a crisis loan due to delays in the processing of their claim.

Post pilot staff within some offices believed that footfall had declined in their Jobcentre since the introduction of the pilot. They believed that fewer people were visiting the office due to the Freephone number. As a result, customers were reported to be seen more promptly by the CSTO and this reduced the number of people in the office who were waiting for appointments.

‘The only improvement I’ve seen [with the pilot SOM] is that we have less people in the office. Yes. The flow of people in the office seems to be going quicker’.

(Jobcentre staff)
‘I mean the direct effect of that [the Freephone number] is the reduction in footfall, so not as many people coming into the office. So basically instead of allowing people in the building to use the office phones, the customer could actually go home because it’s Freephone. So that has actually made the whole environment calmer.’

(Jobcentre staff)

Some staff believed that the number of customers in the Jobcentre at any one time was still too high and the pilot made little difference. One member of staff reported that on any given day there could be between ‘400 and 500 people who are ad hoc callers’, those without an appointment.

In offices where the footfall was still perceived to be too high, some staff believed that it was too soon for the impact of the pilot to be realised. Staff said that it would take time for footfall to decline, as customers preferred face-to-face interaction with Jobcentre staff and perceived a risk in sending important documents themselves. Staff believed that once customers better understood the process footfall would decline further.

Other staff were less optimistic and thought that the pilot put an additional strain on resources, particularly for Floorwalkers and Receptionists. Customers continued to ask Jobcentre staff to photocopy and send their evidence. The pilot expected customers to send evidence direct to the BDC and so did not allocate adequate staff time to deliver these functions.

‘…they’re relying on a customer to send valuable documents through the post. I wouldn’t send a valuable document, I mean would you send your passport to Glasgow? So what happens is that the customers bring the documents to us and we’ve got to then spend time photocopying things on behalf of the customer.

(Jobcentre staff)

Staff routinely reported that customers regularly visited the Jobcentre to chase up their claim and complain about the overall processing time. They also said that customers continued to come to the Jobcentre to ask for crisis loans because of the delayed service.

‘In essence, the reason why people come in these days is because their claim hasn’t been processed, and they either need to find out when that will be, or whether they want to apply for an interim payment from their benefit, or for a crisis loan. That’s generally why they come in these days.’

(Jobcentre staff)

Unlike North Lincolnshire, staff working in Central London Jobcentres did not perceive that the number of requests for crisis loans and emergency payments had increased under the pilot.
Staff said that when customers had enquiries about their claim they were unable to get adequate responses from the BDC. Instead Jobcentre staff perceived that the BDC encouraged customers to visit the Jobcentre rather than answering questions about the processing of the customers claim. Staff felt that customers who came to the Jobcentre to chase up their claim did not understand that Jobcentre staff had to use the same number for contacting the BCD as customers. This frustrated both staff and customers, as it was often difficult to get through and find out how close a claim was to being processed.

‘...we’ve had issues with the benefit centre in terms of their ability to resolve enquires...customers [are] redirected to the Jobcentre when in actual fact some of the enquiries ought to and could have been dealt with directly over the phone with the customer.’

(Jobcentre staff)

6.14 Staff experience

6.14.1 Preparation for the pilot

Walkthroughs were a key aspect of the training received by Jobcentre staff and most had taken part in at least one. Typically, staff said that this was a useful way of receiving information about the pilot and some stated that they were happy to ask for additional information from line managers. This positive response from the preparatory walkthroughs was similar to the feedback received in North Lincolnshire. In Central London, however, (despite the perceived success of the walkthroughs) there was confusion about changes to people’s roles and their responsibilities, particularly amongst the CST.

Some CSTOs believed that they were misinformed about the pilot in the walkthroughs and were not clearly told about the job that they would be doing. Staff stated that this was particularly the case for the intended content of the CSTO meetings and the amount that they were expected to use CMS. In both instances, staff said that they were expected to do more than they had been led to believe.

‘Prior to the pilot and at the beginning of the pilot we were told of the new process that we were supposed to do, which is just take the statement off the customer, have they read it and signed it? And then take it from them, not looking at it at all, but we’ve just discovered that they told us the wrong thing. They misinformed us.’

(Jobcentre staff)

Others felt that they should have been listened to during the planning of the pilot, which would have reduced the need for amendments post implementation.
‘We should’ve been looking through the statements, which we said in the beginning that we should have been looking at, what’s the point of us being there if we’re not going to look through the statement? Then they identified that that was wrong.’

(Jobcentre staff)

6.14.2 Overall view of the pilot

Staff had mixed views about whether the pilot addressed the problems identified before it was launched. Like North Lincolnshire, staff’s overall experience of the pilot varied depending on the Jobcentre in which they worked and their role. In offices that reported that they were successfully managing new and repeat claims and the BF system, staff routinely thought that the changes were unnecessary and questioned if the pilot system improved customer service.

In offices which were not on top of their BF system and had a back log of outstanding claims staff perceived that the pilot improved their ability to do their job and made it was easier to manage their workload.

6.14.3 Change in role from FA to CSTO

CST staff had mixed views about their different role. Some were pleased with the restricted workload but others said that the new role was repetitive and the lack of variety was not motivating.

When staff were made aware of their restricted role and the need to reflect this change with a reduction of team members, staff became concerned about their job security. Managers did state in interviews that wherever possible people were transferred to similar positions and they used the process to bolster other areas of the office.

‘…we used it more as an opportunity to do some training and up-skilling in various functions of the office.’

(Jobcentre staff)

CST staff routinely equated the changes to cost cutting measures rather than making improvements to customer service and some staff wished that the rationale for the pilot was made more transparent to them. Others felt their reduced role did not make the best use of their skills. CSTOs stated that under the pilot their knowledge of different benefits and expertise in using CMS was not maximised.

When referring to changes to workload, some staff appreciated that the pilot removed two of the more time intensive aspects of their job: inputting large amounts of information onto CMS; and gathering evidence for and managing the BF system.
'I think that the benefit side of things sits better with the benefit processing and the Benefit Delivery Centres...they've got the experience there. And it frees up a little bit in some ways to concentrate on what we're really about, helping people back into work. So I am actually pleased'.

(Jobcentre staff)

Whilst some CSTOs did feel that the removal of some areas of responsibility alleviated stress caused by a heavy workload, others stated that the need to accommodate more interviews in a smaller team meant that just the variety had changed rather than the amount of work. Other staff acknowledged that the new and repeat claims SOM only worked before the pilot because the FA function was over-resourced and recognised that change was necessary.

Staff routinely stated that they were pleased that the pilot placed more emphasis on customers to collect and forward the required evidence to the BDC. Some staff felt that it would take time to educate customers to accept this responsibility.

6.14.4 Personal Advisers

The main change reported by PAs was that the system for booking appointments improved under the pilot. Staff felt that the Contact Centre provided a more efficient service for booking appointments and believed that they now reflected the operational needs of the Jobcentre rather than compromising the efficiency of the process by booking WFIs based on the wants of customers.

PAs from both London and North Lincolnshire reported that the reduced remit of CSTO meetings meant that customers were more likely to arrive on time. This more punctual hand over also improved the relationship between the two teams.

Some staff expressed concerns that they experienced more customers asking questions about their benefit during the WFI since the reduced CSTO role was introduced as part of the pilot.

One member of staff suggested that the reduced CSTO meeting could be incorporated into longer PA appointments, as PAs were already answering more customer queries about their benefit in WFIs. This would provide a more efficient process because a hand over between two teams would be removed.

‘...what I would see as an ideal would be just one person to do the whole lot in 60 minutes because having two separate people, it just doesn’t necessarily build up a good rapport because the person feels, like I would if I went into the bank and I was seeing someone and I was talking to them for 20 minutes and then you move from that person to the other person, you will be doing a bit of recapping.’

(Jobcentre staff)
6.14.5 Other staff

Other staff throughout the office and in particular Floorwalkers and Administrators believed that footfall had reduced under the pilot and the flow of people moving around the office was better managed. In an isolated case, one member of staff felt this provided a less stressful working environment.

Other staff were unsure about the impact of the pilot on their role and were confused about which elements of their job were affected. Some staff believed that such changes were implemented because of the pilot while others said that it was a response to other issues such as abusive customers’.

6.15 Staff perception of customer service

Jobcentre staff felt that a customer’s main concern was receiving their benefit payment as quickly as possible. Staff did not tend to know whether the end-to-end time for processing a claim improved under the pilot and felt that this was the main judgement for improved customer service.

Within the Jobcentre, staff were not sure that customers were always given adequate information about the processing of their claim. This was because Jobcentre staff did not always know about the other aspects of the process. Staff routinely stated that at the end of CSTO and PA meetings they informed the customer that the claim would be processed in about ten days. Staff stated that they did not know if this was the case in reality.

Staff believed that customers found it confusing to deal with three geographically different sites to process their claim. They thought this was particularly frustrating for customers when information went missing between different sites. This frustration was not helped by difficulties with contacting the BDC.

Staff felt that the biggest improvements for the customer were at the front end of the overall process. Staff believed that the Freephone number was better for customers and the booking processes for Jobcentre appointments had improved in the pilot. Staff also believed that customers waited less time for their appointments in the Jobcentre.

CSTO staff in particular stated that affordability had driven the pilot rather than good customer service. Staff reported that customers continued to prefer the face-to-face services that they could get from the Jobcentre, which they felt the pilot aimed to reduce. Staff still photocopied and sent details for customers and some reported chasing up claims held by the BDC for the customer, despite not being resourced to do so.

Staff said that they would like to receive more information and feedback about the service that they offer and the level of customer satisfaction.
‘…we do all these stats, we don’t know…what happens to these stats…they
[Jobcentre Plus Head Office] don’t tell us how long it takes a customer to get a
claim form processed, is this system working, is it getting processed faster?’
(Jobcentre staff)

6.16 Delivery of efficient services

6.16.1 Speed

As already stated, Jobcentre staff did not know whether the pilot affected the end-
to-end processing time of a new or repeat claim. One manager pointed to the fact
that it was too soon to make a clear judgement about the speed of the new pilot until
all the outstanding claims had been processed. Only after this occurred did they feel
a true picture of clearance times would be available.

Some staff perceived that the speed of the process in the Contact Centre and
Jobcentre had improved under the pilot but suspected that the previous bottlenecks
were transferred from the Jobcentre to Glasgow.

Staff reported that it was difficult to gauge the speed of different elements of the
process that were undertaken in the Jobcentre as meeting times could be skewed
according to the daily circumstances within the office. Staff stated, for example, that
if customers failed to attend then they were more likely to spend more time with
customers who did attend their appointment, as more time was available. Staff
reported that this meant those customers got better customer service as the CSTO
was able to be more thorough in checking the customer statement and reduced the
time required to process the claim when forwarded to the BDC. One manager was
concerned that such practice would show that CSTO meetings were lasting too long
when actually this was only the case when additional CSTO time was available.

Some staff stated that moving all the processing functions to a single site had
provided a more efficient system as the BDC could concentrate on gathering
evidence away from the face-to-face interruptions from customers. Other staff
thought that if processing was performed within Jobcentres, delivery would speed
up further and would also lessen the chance of information going missing between
the different sites.

6.16.2 Resourcing

There was mixed opinion about whether the CST and PA team were adequately
resourced. The reduced remit of the CSTO meeting, information gather and role in
general was reflected in a smaller team size. Some former FAs became CSTOs and
others were transferred to different duties within the Jobcentre. Management
envisioned that CSTs in the pilot required about half the resource of the FAs. Staff
acknowledged that the CSTO role had reduced but some questioned whether the
smaller CST enabled them to cover the increased number of interviews that were
expected.
The new on-demand CST placed more emphasis on the CST Administrator/Receptionist to ensure that resources were fairly distributed. Different customers required different amounts of time, for example a JSA customer who does not speak English could take far longer to see than a person who is a Rapid Reclaim customer.

‘I just find out who’s available. I’m marking down, checking who’s actually done the amount of checks already, so it’s always obviously making it a bit balanced and fair. They [CSTOs/FAs] will actually come and check anyway, if there’s anyone waiting, so I can do it by first come first served, and then basically it’s just finding out how the flow’s going, who’s been made a bit busier, and just basically checking who’s actually available to take somebody.’

(Jobcentre staff)

In a number of offices, staff stated that they had to accommodate high levels of sickness absence which put a great strain on their resources and affected the way that the pilot was implemented, for example providing an ‘on-demand’ PA appointment system. This was not specific to the pilot, however, but had been the case for a long time. FAs who were not redeployed into the new CST reported that they were now called upon to support CSTOs when the team was short-staffed. This approach increased the flexibility of Jobcentre resources as more people were trained to cover different posts.

### 6.16.3 Duplication

Due to the confusion about the purpose of the CSTO meeting, staff stated that the CSTO customer statement check resulted in the claim being looked over by both the CST and the BDC in order to verify the same information. CSTOs in some offices were not clear about where their claim check should finish and when it became the responsibility of the BDC. This was particularly the case when CSTOs had more time available to spend with customers and resulted in staff going into more detail than intended during this phase of the process.

‘Now I think there’s too many hands [people involved] in the form... first of all there’s the person at the front interviewing the customer and going through the forms and helping the customer make amendments. Then there’s me going into the system, making changes and verifying ID. Then it goes up to Glasgow where they go into the form and verify all the information again. So I don’t see why I should be verifying the ID when they can verify the ID if it’s printed out already.’

(Jobcentre staff)

Whilst some staff valued the role of pre-calling customers, others stated that this resulted in giving customers the same information on three separate occasions, by the Contact Centre, on the claim statement and by the CST during a pre-call. This duplication was particularly highlighted in offices that continued to conduct pre-calls to all customers.
Staff were pleased that they no longer had to make all amendments on the A10 form and were able to make changes straight onto the customer statement. They felt that this cut down on duplication of information, especially if a customer had already amended the statement prior to the appointment.

6.16.4 Accuracy

Some staff said that the levels of accuracy could have dropped due to the reduced remit of the CSTO interview. Staff stated that even when they identified areas that required further questions they refrained from getting the answers as they perceived that this was the role of the BDC.

Staff reported that inaccurate or incomplete customer statements were still sent to customers. Customers also continued to arrive at the CSTO meeting without the necessary evidence. Staff questioned if the Contact Centre was telling customers what they needed to bring to the appointment.

‘Pembroke need to stress the importance of having the relevant documents. They say to the customer bring two ID. Two ID, you could bring me [any] two bits of paper. [FCOs need to say]…you must bring your passport, you must bring your payslip, you must bring your P45, you must bring your mortgage details.’

(Jobcentre staff)

In some cases concern was raised as to whether Contact Centre staff had the benefits knowledge to be as thorough as they should be. For example, interviewees stated that Contact Centre staff regularly tried to push customers through as Rapid Reclaim when this was not the case and informed customers that they were entitled to the wrong benefits.

6.17 Summary

Jobcentres partly met the following pilot objectives; easier access, improved staff experience and improved efficiency in dealing with the claim. In relation to these, findings discussed here suggest that:

- on-demand CSTOs allow staff more flexibility and customers were more likely to arrive for their WFI on time;
- moving the BF system to the BDC, speeded up the front-end of the claims process and gave CSTOs more time to concentrate on their customer-facing role; and
- reduced the workload pressure, previously experienced by FAs.
7 Claims preparation and benefit processing for Central London

This chapter outlines the delivery and impact of the Standard Operating Model (SOM) Process Review (SPR) pilot for claims preparation and benefit processing in the Glasgow Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC) covering Central London offices. It provides detailed findings on the pilot serving offices in the Central London area, and draws comparisons with North Lincolnshire. The findings are based on qualitative research with BDC staff before and after the pilot’s implementation and an analysis of Management Information (MI). Staff interviewed for the research included: BDC Managers; Change Implementation Managers; Team Leaders; Claims Preparation and Benefit Processing staff; the Tele-team; and Administration Assistants.

Key findings

Some of the issues and bottlenecks identified before the pilot were addressed by its implementation, including:

- delays in BDC receiving the claim from the Jobcentre;
- the bottleneck created by writing to customers informing them of their date of claim; and
- duplication of claim preparation work.

The pilot was successful in speeding up the front end of the process but the BDC experienced bottlenecks in gathering evidence and processing the claim for payment.

There were also a number of residual issues that the pilot was not successful in addressing, including:
• some Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Income Support (IS) claims remained in the Brought Forward (BF) for too long, despite that the BF system was transferred from Jobcentres to the BDC;
• the Customer Management System (CMS) ‘push’ rate was still low; and
• BDC continued to receive incomplete and inaccurate claims.

Some new issues emerged as a result of the pilot. These included:
• delays occurred due to the inefficient distribution of claims to relevant teams within the BDC;
• duplication of preparation and processing work for IS/IB claims as they were worked on by two separate officers; and
• difficulties with managing the high volume of customer calls.

Recommendations that would further improve the SOM pilot included:
• improved use of existing systems used by BDC, that are available to Jobcentre staff so they can find out directly about a customers claim without calling the BDC to find out where the claim has got to; and
• better process for labelling claims arriving from the Jobcentre so that they can be easily distributed and tracked within the BDC.

The rest of this chapter presents the detailed findings on the delivery of claims preparation and benefit processing under the SPR pilot.

7.1 Delivery of the pilot serving offices in the Central London area

Claims preparation and benefit processing were organised into three specialist teams at Glasgow BDC, with each team focusing on a separate benefit: Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA); IS; and IB. Staff completed both claims preparation and benefit processing tasks, in a combined Claims Preparation Team (CPT)/Benefit Processing Team (BPT) role. This enabled the same CPT/BPT Officer to complete the claims preparation tasks transferred to the BDC from Jobcentres, and also process the claim for payment. CPT/BPT staff felt that they were able to take ownership of a claim and convey to the customer more quickly the information they would need to process their claim. This approach aimed to improve efficiencies in the process by ensuring that all information needed to process a claim was requested from customers at the claims preparation stage.

Staff felt relatively well prepared for the SPR pilot. All staff were briefed on the new process through ‘walkthroughs’ which explained the overall process and the role of each staff grade within the overall process. Staff hoped the pilot would deliver a more efficient service to customers by speeding up the end-to-end process. They
hoped, for example, that the introduction of the Tele-team would free up CPT/BPT time to process more claims, and so reduce the overall time customers were waiting for payment. These expectations were partly met.

CPT/BPT staff reported fewer interruptions since the introduction of the Tele-team, allowing them more time to process claims. However, this did not result in customers receiving payment more quickly as CPT/BPT staff found it took longer to prepare and process individual claims under the SPR pilot compared with when they just provided the processing role. Staff reported that additional time was required to complete the tasks introduced through the SPR pilot, such as making outbound calls to customers for missing information required to process their claim (such as P45s and medical certificates), and updating CMS. At the time of research, staff were adjusting to their new roles so were unable to demonstrate great in-roads into speeding up the overall process.

However, Glasgow BDC was able to demonstrate improved efficiency within some of its own processes since the pilot was introduced. Staff reported clearance times for benefit processing had improved on IS. Since the introduction of the SPR pilot, IS claims were being cleared in an average of 9.1 days, compared to the average of ten days before the pilot, and within the target of 11 days. It is possible that this is a result of CPT/BPT capitalising on the time saved by Jobcentres transferring claims more quickly to the Glasgow BDC. It may reflect how targets were set differently for each benefit as the IS target is set from the date customers supply all the evidence.

‘The IS one, we’re much more able to influence because of when the clock starts to tick. Because the actual number of days that are counted is not until the evidence is gathered, which is why the IS is usually more easily controlled by ourselves…but the JSA one, the clock starts ticking immediately the customer has notified of a claim. And the stages in that are much more disrupted…by the time all the things have happened. It’s not too bad. I think it’s about twelve [days] last month…Mind you they’re certainly missing the target…the front have held onto it too long.’

(BDC staff)

A number of issues that were not related to the SPR pilot affected Glasgow BDC’s ability to deliver the pilot, including:

- **Inheriting a backlog of claims**

  Glasgow BDC inherited a large backlog of incomplete claims from Jobcentres. This increased pressure on CPT/BPT staff to prepare and process large volumes of new claims and emergency requests from people whose claims were already outstanding. The backlog also increased the volume of customer complaints, as customers chased the status of their claim. To tackle this issue, Glasgow BDC CPT/BPT staff worked overtime one weekend to reduce the backlog of claims. Management felt this had limited impact as they felt CPT/BPT became less efficient during their normal working hours, and the backlog was too extensive to be significantly reduced by this measure.
• Requests for emergency payments

Glasgow BDC staff felt the Contact Centre did not understand the eligibility criteria for emergency payments, and transferred ineligible customers to Glasgow BDC unnecessarily. By transferring customers to Glasgow BDC, CPT/BPT staff felt customers were being given the impression that they would receive an emergency payment, which often was not the case.

‘The worst thing just now is emergency payments. And they’re just not getting what an emergency payment is. On Friday I was on the phone for an hour. A woman phones up Pembroke Dock for an emergency payment…and they offer her an emergency payment, say ‘we’ll put it through’ but all they’re doing is letting us know that the woman’s asked for an emergency payment and she’s on the phone to me saying ‘they said I would get it’. But I was trying to explain ‘they said they would ask, not that you’d get the money’.’

(BDC staff)

• Stretched resources

Sickness and annual leave created ongoing resourcing issues at Glasgow BDC. Staff felt that resources had been stretched with the deployment of some CPT/BPT capacity onto the Tele-teams. Staff were drafted in from other parts of the Glasgow BDC to provide sufficient capacity to enable the CPT/BPT to function at normal levels. This meant that there was no spare capacity to cover sickness and annual leave. According to Glasgow BDC’s JSA Team Leader, staff sickness and annual leave could therefore slow down the turnaround of received claims being prepared up to 72 hours, compared to a 24 to 48 hour turnaround when the full composite of staff were available.

7.2 Sending claims to the Benefit Delivery Centre

Before the pilot, all claims were sent to Glasgow BDC by the Jobcentre. Bottlenecks occurred because Jobcentres were holding onto claims until they received all the information Financial Assessors (FAs) requested from customers. Customer Statements and their supporting information were held in a BF system at Jobcentres until outstanding information was provided. Jobcentres held onto claims for up to 30 days waiting for further information under the BF system. As a result, there was an automatic delay in the speed with which some claims were progressed.

The SPR pilot aimed to address these bottlenecks in two ways:

• first, by transferring responsibility for claims preparation to Glasgow BDC so that claims for customers who attended a Work Focused Interview (WFI) were only in the Jobcentre for a day; and

• second, by asking customers whose WFI was deferred to send their completed and signed customer statements direct to the BDC.
Glasgow BDC staff felt that the pilot marked an improvement because it would enable CPT/BPT staff with detailed benefits knowledge to review claims more quickly than previously. BDC staff welcomed the opportunity to use their benefits knowledge to accurately advise customers about the information required to process their claim. Staff were optimistic that the pilot would speed up the process by transferring more control to the BDC:

‘Using CMS more and just…having more control as well because, I know I keep saying about the control of it but when you have to rely on other people…it takes a lot of work to set things up for other people to do and when you’ve got so much relying on other people it’s easier to go wrong.’

(BDC staff)

Under the pilot, staff believed that most claims and supporting documentation continued to be sent to Glasgow BDC via local Jobcentres. The BDC received most customer statements and supporting information from the courier service which transferred documents from Jobcentres to the BDC daily. Staff perceived that this was because customers did not want to send original documents, such as passports and wage slips, in the post to Glasgow BDC.

Each Jobcentre used a daily courier service to Glasgow BDC to collect claims and supporting information. All customer statements and supporting information that was labelled and submitted to the Jobcentre Administrative Assistant, including information on WFLs forwarded by PAs, was sent to Glasgow BDC each afternoon and should arrive the following afternoon. However sometimes it took two or three days, because the mail goes via a Royal Mail sorting office in Glasgow.

‘In JSA particularly, we monitor how long it’s been with the courier…the thing is, the front end may not have put it into the courier at the right time. Things as simple as their uplift might be two o’clock in the afternoon. And people might not actually clear their tray out until four o’clock. So, it will have missed a day. It won’t be picked up till the following day. So, although it’s supposed to be here within 24 hours, and the common understanding is forty-eight.’

(BDC staff)

Additional delays occurred once the post arrived at Glasgow BDC. Sorting and distribution time was extended due to poor labelling of information or because post contained miscellaneous information, such as a letter, wage slip or other evidence which was not accompanied by a customer statement. On some occasions, Jobcentre staff itemised a document on the tracking sheet that accompanied the mail, but the document was not contained in the mailbag. Some staff at Glasgow BDC reported that this discrepancy occurred about once a week.

This created additional work both for Administration Assistants, who tried to log and distribute claims to CPT/BPT as quickly as possible, and for CPT/BPT staff who found themselves making outbound calls to customers to chase or request information that they may have already submitted to the Jobcentre. Staff felt that
this was a contributory factor in the rise in customer complaints since the introduction of the SPR pilot.

Staff believed that this issue was a particular problem in the initial stages of the pilot, with the transfer of some functions from Jobcentres to Glasgow BDC. For example, the transfer of the updating of CMS and the BF system from Jobcentres to Glasgow BDC meant that Jobcentres transferred their backlog of information and BF folders to the Glasgow BDC. This increased the volume of post significantly over the initial weeks of the pilot. Glasgow BDC staff felt that the labelling and packaging of customer claims from Jobcentres improved as the SPR pilot became more established.

Whilst the revised processes for sending claims to the BDC generated some initial teething issues, staff felt that the speed with which claims progressed from the Jobcentre to the BDC improved overall. As the system became more established, claims were transferred to the Glasgow BDC more promptly. Staff working at Glasgow BDC felt that this enabled staff who were trained extensively in benefit knowledge to accurately identify the information required to process a claim more quickly.

7.3 Managing new and repeat claims on arrival at the Benefit Delivery Centre

Under the pilot, dedicated Admin. Team staff on each specialist benefit strand (JSA, IS, IB) received the claims at Glasgow BDC, logged them onto CMS, and distributed them via alphabetical splits (for example all those customers with surnames beginning A-E were contained in one split). Individual CPT/BPT staff only worked on claims from customers with surnames in a particular section of the alphabet and in date order.

The Admin. Team completed a number of tasks before distributing the post to the relevant CPT/BPT for processing. The IB team, for example, received post each afternoon, sorted it, photocopied the customer statements and passed the originals to the IS team. Staff then built the customer statements onto the Legacy system by ensuring that the customer’s name, address, and doctor’s details were correct on the system and generated a sheet generated showing core information such as the customer’s name and national insurance number. Copies of the customer statements and input documents were then distributed to the IB CTP/BPT for processing to begin the following morning.

Staff viewed the new processes affecting the management of claims on arrival positively. The Admin. Team no longer had to send letters to customers informing

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15 This system was the same on all benefit strands, except that IB and IS had some joint claims which required the transfer of original information from IB to IS as an additional stage in the administrative process.
them of the date of their claim because under the pilot the CPT/BPT informed customers that their claim had arrived and was being dealt with. This approach improved efficiencies in the overall process by helping to redistribute the workload between Administration Assistants and CPT/BPT. Admin. tasks were also reduced in relation to the level of claims checking, as staff were still able to enter a claim on Legacy if a date was missing. Some tasks increased under the SPR. The volume of photocopying, for example, increased with the new requirement to photocopy claims. Overall, staff felt the new Admin. role was manageable within the existing level of administrative resources, and they did not feel pressurised. Where necessary, Admin. Team staff from other sections helped out.

7.4 Preparing new and repeat claims for processing

Before the pilot, Glasgow BDC staff routinely reported that they received incomplete and inaccurate customer statements from Jobcentres, which were not ready for processing. IB staff, for example, reported that only 20 per cent of customer statements arrived fully completed. IB processors therefore routinely chased information such as medical certificates and employers’ evidence of statutory sick pay before they could process the claim. Glasgow BDC staff consistently received calls from customers before their information was received from Jobcentres, possibly because Jobcentres were incorrectly directing them there to check the status of their claim:

‘If you’ve got ten phone calls a day, it would be eight out of ten you didn’t have the claim.’

(BDC staff)

Glasgow BDC staff recognised that their information gathering role had increased under the pilot and welcomed this, as CPT/BPT felt well equipped with their level of benefit knowledge and experience to advise customers accurately. However, Glasgow BDC staff expected the customer statements to be more accurate and complete on arrival at the BDC. CPT/BPTs believed that many of the gaps and incorrect information contained on CMS and in customer statements should have been addressed by First Contact Officers (FCOs) and Claim Service Teams (CSTs) in Jobcentres at an earlier stage in the claiming process. The quality of customer statements was viewed as poor by Glasgow BDC when there appeared to be:

• Inaccurate information, such as contact numbers and address misspellings, and inconsistent details of previous employment.

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16 Such as the ‘load’ section who deal with customers with up and running claims.
17 BDC staff received extensive benefits training, with around three months classroom based tuition and study before working on live claims.
• **Missing evidence.** This difficulty was encountered by all the benefit strands. Missing evidence included: personal identification; P45; final wage slips; (particularly if customers received holiday pay or pay in lieu of notice); and mortgage information.

• **Unanswered questions.** This difficulty was encountered by all the benefit strands. Unanswered questions included: personal status (such as if the customer is/was a student and has a partner); prior circumstances; and previous employers’ details. Missing information on final earnings was the most common concern on JSA. In contrast, IB customers often did not enter the date of claim on their customer statement because they were unclear when this should be.

The poor quality of customer statements was attributed to a range of factors, including:

• CMS prompts used by Contact Centre staff do not collect all the relevant information needed to process a claim. CPT/BPTs felt that the overall process would be more effective if the script used by Contact Centre staff to complete CMS was enhanced to collect more of the information required, such as the amount of savings held by a person.

• The quality of checks performed on claims by CST Officers (CSTOs). Under the pilot, CSTOs in Jobcentres were only required to check the claim form for unanswered questions. CPT/BPT staff felt the overall process could be speeded up by Jobcentre staff performing some quick checks to help filter out inappropriate claims at an earlier stage in the process.

• The SPR pilot was designed with the intention that CSTOs would no longer preview claims, and so would not know what information was required until the person was in front of them. Some CPT/BPTs were concerned that 15 minutes was not sufficient for CSTOs to thoroughly work through a claim, especially when the claim had not been previewed.

Under the SPR pilot, CPT/BPTs had to collect and verify additional information needed to prepare claims for processing. Staff viewed this additional task positively, despite the increased workload. They felt this would enable them to work more closely with customers to progress their claim more effectively by providing consistent requests for information and clear explanations for why this information was needed to process their claim.

In addition, CPT/BPTs had to gather information specific to Housing Benefit (HB), which was passed on to Local Authorities. Prior to the pilot, CPT/BPT did not deal with HB data, as this was all dealt with by the ‘load’ section at Glasgow BDC (which deals with HB, mortgages, and JSA). CPT/BPT only started to collect HB information under the SPR pilot because HB details must be entered onto CMS to enable the claim to be pushed onto Legacy for processing. CPT/BPT, therefore, required additional time under the SPR pilot to collect HB information through their new responsibilities for managing the BF system and entering the information onto CMS.
Verbal verification regarding HB is sufficient for CPT/BPT to complete a CMS push. Any outstanding documentation required by the HB Department is placed in the BF system and can be provided after the push to Legacy has taken place. However, in practice CPT/BPT experienced difficulties in obtaining verbal verification, as they were unable to reach customers by phone. The need to request and wait for written verification delayed claims processing. Once evidence was received, it was passed onto the relevant Local Authority. The collection of housing data created an additional delay for IB because the IS team were gathering HB information for the IB team on joint claims and customer statements could stay with the IS team for a while before being transferred to the IB team to enable them to prepare the claim.

Some staff at Glasgow BDC also felt the introduction of A10 forms added another step into the process, rather than improving efficiency. However, CPT/BPT did recognise that collecting customer information via the telephone was open to fraud. Management grades recognised the importance of customers signing any amendments and updates made to their customer statement using the A10 form, to guard against fraud and act as a security check. Further training for CPT/BPT in fraudulent possibilities and the importance of security might therefore be useful.

Staff were also concerned that the revised processes impacted negatively on targets for transferring claims to benefit processing. Targets varied between the two pilot areas and depended on the type of benefit. In North Lincolnshire, Claims Preparation Team Officers (CPTO) were expected to transfer between 10-15 finished claims a day to the BPT under the SPR pilot. Officers did not feel that this was realistic, especially if they were interrupted by requests for emergency payments and were handling customer statements for more complex claims, such as IB and/or IS or claims for people who were self-employed. One CPTO stated that six or seven claims could be cleared on a ‘good day’. Consequently, North Lincolnshire CPT struggled to transfer as many claims as expected and the backlog grew.

In contrast, new targets for preparing claims for processing had not been introduced in Glasgow BDC. Instead, the combined CPT/BPT role placed emphasis on clearance targets rather than claims preparation and processing. Transfer targets were suspended on some benefit strands whilst new systems were established. For example, no targets were in place on JSA or IS at the time of the research because the process was taking longer than first anticipated.

‘We’ve been told not to worry about the number of claims that we are processing, and just to do it properly. Because it’s a pilot we don’t actually know. So I don’t know what kind of targets have been set to be honest.’

(BDC staff)

Benchmarks were in place for preparing claims for processing, but these were used as a guide rather than an expectation at the time of the research.
‘Made perfectly clear to staff that if they don’t meet the benchmarks there’s very valid reasons for them not meeting the benchmarks, so not to worry. That they wouldn’t be penalised because they hadn’t met the benchmarks...And obviously I would be stunned if because of this new process anybody is meeting those benchmarks.’

(BDC staff)

Overall, staff felt that the SPR pilot demonstrated a positive impact on preparing new and repeat claims for processing, as claims were reaching the BDC more quickly. Before the pilot, Jobcentres were holding onto claims in the BF system. Since the pilot, some claims were received by Glasgow BDC that could be processed immediately.

‘I think it’s improved a lot because we are, the claims that are coming direct in that are processable straightaway we are getting them processed and they’re getting processed within two, three, four days whereas initially, normally it was seven to ten days was the lowest I had ever processed a claim in.’

(BDC staff)

7.5 Managing the Brought Forward system

Before the SPR pilot was introduced, staff routinely reported problems with the BF system. Staff at Glasgow BDC believed that Jobcentres often requested incorrect information from customers because they did not know all the evidence requirements for processing different benefits. To manage the flow of incomplete claims received at the BDC, an unofficial BF system was used. CPT/BPT staff kept boxes on their desks where they filed customer statements with outstanding information until customers supplied the information requested.

Under the SPR pilot, responsibility for managing the BF system was transferred from Jobcentres to BDCs. In Glasgow, all incoming claims were distributed by Administration Assistants according to alphabetic box-splits and the Initial Date of Claim (IDOC). Each CPT/BPT was allocated a number of claims within their section of the alphabet, and was responsible for managing these from claims preparation to processing. Administrative Assistants distributed incoming information amongst the CPT/BPT box-splits. The system of individual BF boxes for CPT/BPT was also introduced to reduce the time claims were kept in the system but not being worked on.

JSA staff reported that claims in their BF boxes were normally closed within two weeks. However, IS CPT/BPT found that claims could be in their BF folder for up to 28 days waiting for outstanding information before claims preparation could be completed. CPT/BPT across the benefit strands reported that claims were routinely held while awaiting additional information. CPT/BPT chased customers two or three times a week to gain outstanding information. Some staff had up to 20 claims in their BF folder. On average, four or five claims a week became defective because customers did not submit sufficient information within the 28 day timeframe.
Officers in the JSA Registration Team who were responsible for completing the ‘push’ on all JSA claims also managed their own BF systems. This was necessary because there were often outstanding actions on claims before the JSA Registration Team could complete the push. Not all claims were kept by CPT/BPT in their BF folder. For example, IB claims did not need customer verification of the date of claim because it will be followed up by the loads section. In this instance, the IB CPT/BPT noted the verbal confirmation of the date of claim over the telephone on CMS, and the customer letter verifying this would be sent directly to the load section.

However, IB CPT/BPT staff found that they routinely kept customer statements in their BF folders awaiting certain types of information, such as evidence of Statutory Sick Pay.

‘So if they’ve been employed within eight weeks and we’re unsure and they should be getting sick pay, we don’t give that to Load [team], we keep our BF. And there’s BFs for other things as well from medical testing, if they’re going for medicals as well so we’ve still got a big BF.’

(BDC staff)

Staff felt that the system whereby each CPT/BPT officer had their own BF system worked well at Glasgow BDC. Although some staff interviewed were cautious to assert that the system was more efficient than before pilot, most staff viewed the introduction of individual BF system for each CPT/BPT on their desks to be a definite improvement in the new processes. Having their own systems was also viewed as an improvement as it enabled CPT/BPT to monitor the information missing from customer statements more closely.

Staff did not identify any particular patterns in the way customers sent the information, or those more likely to send information in more quickly for claims outstanding in the BF folder. However, residual issues affected the efficiency of the BF system, particularly in relation to combined claims for IB and IS.

‘[But] the problems associated with [the BF]…you miss your targets for things that are out of your control. The evidence requirement for Income Support does not have medical certificates which are required for Incapacity Benefit claims. All the evidence for Income Support has been supplied, the only thing that’s holding that claim up to get it processed is the fact their IB hasn’t got a relevant claim or there’s gaps in the medical certificates and the customer is telling them they’ve sent them in. They’re telling us they’ve sent them in, they’ve handed them in, they’re in the mail, you’re checking round, we don’t have it, we don’t have it. So the next thing you know its six weeks go by.’

(BDC staff)

A separate system for combined claims for IS and IB was not included in the pilot design. The original pilot design had a joint IB and IS team – but in practice Glasgow BDC could not implement this because it would not have been cost effective to train a CBT/BPT officer in these benefits, which require specialised knowledge. Combined
IB and IS claims were therefore likely to take longer to process at the time of the research as the claim was dealt with by both the IB and IS teams separately.

7.6 Benefit enquiries

Before the pilot, CPT/BPT consistently reported that customers contacting the department by telephone interrupted their time spent processing claims. Some Glasgow BDC staff felt that the high volume of calls was because Contact Centre and Jobcentre staff did not manage customers’ expectations effectively. Glasgow BDC staff were apprehensive that the number of customer queries would increase markedly under the SPR pilot, with the transfer of claims preparation functions from Jobcentres to the BDC. Overall, however, staff felt that the new process would be an improvement because it would put customers in contact with Glasgow BDC more quickly, ensuring customers received accurate benefit advice as soon as possible.

The revised pilot established dedicated Tele-teams in each pilot area to handle the anticipated increase in benefit enquiries. In Glasgow, a dedicated Tele-team was set up, and Management was informed that the team should eventually constitute 25 per cent of overall resources. Staff expected this would help improve customer service, by freeing up processors’ time to take on the additional claims preparation tasks transferred to Glasgow BDC through the pilot, and by providing a dedicated resource to manage customer queries.

‘Customers or Jobcentres won’t get through to the claims preparation team or the benefit process team, they’ll go to this separate Tele-team that will deal with all JSA enquiries. That will take away a lot of telephone traffic, telephone traffic’s huge. That will be good, that’s going to be a positive thing.’

(BDC staff)

Some staff were concerned about the impact the Tele-team would have, because they did not all have previous benefit processing experience. The Tele-team was therefore expected to be:

‘Very functionalised, there’s people working on the telephone too who have never processed new claims. You won’t know what questions, what answers to give. So what they’ll do is they’ll just deflect it and, yes, tell the customer they will receive a call back.’

(BDC staff)

‘The telephone team will not take calls away from us. They may take the initial call but all we’ll get is these stencils saying ‘Call the customer back’, instead of getting an inbound call ourselves and dealing with it right there and then.’

(BDC staff)
Staff were also concerned that CPT/BPT resources were being rationalised through the pilot, as some staffing capacity was being transferred to the new Tele-team. This concerned Team Leaders, who felt that the reduced CPT/BPT capacity might hinder the processing of claims under the pilot.

The Tele-team was divided into three sub-teams, each specialising in a separate benefit. All in-coming calls were routed directly to the Tele-team, placed in a queue and sourced to the next available operator on the relevant benefit. The Tele-team worked flexible hours to staff the phone lines from 7am – 7pm. A minimum of five staff per benefit were required to answer incoming calls between 9am – 5pm. Staff answered about 90 calls a day on average. They answered customer queries directly where possible, and completed templates on specific customer queries that required searches on CMS and Legacy. These templates were emailed to the relevant benefit team. A gatekeeper on each benefit team monitored all incoming templates, and allocated them to staff. CPT/BPT staff were required to provide a response to each customer within three hours of receiving the query.

The introduction of the dedicated Tele-team in Glasgow did free up CPT/BPT officers’ time to enable them to focus on their caseload of claims as CPT/BPT officers were not taking any incoming calls. Most customers’ enquires were requesting information about when they would receive their benefit payment. Tele-team officers at Glasgow BDC found the role very taxing, as they received a high volume of abusive phone calls from customers. Some officers who were deployed from other claims and benefit processing duties felt that the Tele-team role was a demotion. This concern was also articulated by senior and middle management.

‘The downside of it is that a lot of people, it’s like people in a call centre now, and if they wanted to work in a call centre, they’d have applied to a call centre. But you can see the way it’s going. It does make a difference. The fear is, people might lose some of their benefit skills.’

(BDC staff)

To retain their benefit knowledge, Tele-team staff sometimes found it difficult not to get involved with the processing of claims.

‘Our staff are on the Tele-teams, are benefit processors…it means then that they might get more involved in stuff that they shouldn’t, which again is stopping the next call coming through, because they may have taken that enquiry further.’

(BDC staff)

To improve efficiency within the Tele-team, and to encourage them to focus on only answering general queries that could be answered quickly, officers were on rotation, returning to benefit duties after six months, to ensure they do not lose their benefit knowledge.
Although the introduction of the Tele-team was viewed as having a positive impact on overall processes, the volume of calls resulted in some concerns about the quality of customer service. For example, the backlog in enquires meant that some customers requested an emergency payment once they learnt of the delays in processing their claim. This created additional, unplanned work for CPT/BPT staff.

The volume of unanswered incoming calls at Glasgow BDC was a cause for concern across all three business areas (Contact Centre, Jobcentres and Glasgow BDC). FCOs routinely reported that customers inappropriately called the Contact Centre in an attempt to speak to someone when they failed to get through to Glasgow BDC. This distorted the call MI and tied up FCO resource, reducing the percentage of calls from new customers that could be answered by the Contact Centre. This issue was regularly being discussed at the daily telekits with pilot colleagues across the business and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Additionally, staff in Glasgow felt that bottlenecks in other processes at the Glasgow BDC created delays and caused an increase in the number of benefit enquires made by customers. For example, a bottleneck was evident on JSA owing to the introduction of a dedicated Registration Team to complete the ‘push’, which added another stage into the process. (This issue is explored in more detail in Section 7.8.)

CPT/BPT staff in Glasgow felt that a Freephone number should be provided for the BDC, as was in place for the Contact Centre. Staff felt that this could help reduce footfall in Jobcentres by encouraging customers to initiate contact by phone at no cost to themselves.

7.7 ‘Pushing’ the claim

Before the pilot, only a proportion of claims were successfully ‘pushed’ by FAs from CMS to the Legacy systems. As a result, Benefit Processing staff at Glasgow BDC spent time manually inputting information from customer statements onto Legacy. However, there was a discrepancy between how many pushes Jobcentres and Glasgow BDC viewed as successful. This was because Jobcentres sometimes pushed claims they viewed as complete, yet from the Glasgow BDC perspective they were only partial pushes because insufficient information was provided for the BDC to process the claim. So CPT/BPT had to contact customers for additional information. Staff also attributed some discrepancies in the number of successful pushes before the pilot to CMS, which they felt did not generate accurate statistics on the flow or volume of claims in BF systems. This was because claims that failed to push onto Legacy were not recorded in the claims figures.

The overall aim of the revised ‘push’ processes within the SPR pilot was therefore to transfer this function from Jobcentres to BDCs. This was intended to increase the push rate from CMS to Legacy by more effectively entering the information onto CMS at the claims preparation stage that would be needed to enable the push to Legacy for benefit processing. Upon delivery of the pilot serving offices in the Central
London area, different systems were set up for each benefit to ensure that the push was made by officers who were not involved in processing the claim. DWP guidance stipulated that the push and processing had to be done by separate people for security reasons, as otherwise a member of staff could create a claim on CMS, push it through to Legacy and make a payment to themselves or other fraudulent recipient\textsuperscript{18}. Various models were trialled by different benefit strands at Glasgow BDC. JSA introduced a new Registration Team, consisting of two dedicated staff, who completed all ‘pushes’ for JSA claims, whilst IS adopted a more informal approach, with CPT/BPT passing their claims to colleagues to complete the ‘push’. The claim was then returned to the first CPT/BPT to process the claim. Guidance from DWP confirmed that IB was not included in these variations as an electronic push for IB was not possible, and therefore the claim was rebuilt every time by the processor (one member of staff doing claims preparation and another completing the clerical push and processing)\textsuperscript{19}. Claims for IB were never pushed successfully onto Legacy as it also used the Pensions Strategy Computer System (PSCS) to process claims.

The three models initially trialled at Glasgow BDC were as follows:

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{’Push’ models trialled at Glasgow BDC}
\begin{tabular}{lccc}
Model & Prepare claim & ‘Push’ claim & Process claim \\
\hline
Model A & 1# & 2# & 1# \\
Model B & 1# & 1# & 2# \\
Model C & 1# & Separate Registration Team & 1# or 2# \\
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

| Key: 1# denotes 1 CPT/BPT officer; 2# denotes another CPT/BPT officer. |

There were concerns about each model as follows:

- **Model A**: presented a higher risk of fraud as the push was done by a colleague situated close to the claims processor, within the same team, demonstrating the need for spot checks and Quality Assurance. In this model, claims were sometimes processed by a different person than the person who originally prepared claim, if the original CPT/BPT officer was on annual or sick leave.

- **Model B**: was only operational for a short period of time as it quickly became apparent that it was more effective for the same person to prepare and process a claim because it promoted staff ownership of individual claims and ensured each officer requested all the information they would need to process the claim at the claims preparation stage.

\textsuperscript{18} DWP guidance on variations to the standard SPR pilot model, July 2006.
\textsuperscript{19} DWP guidance on variations to the standard SPR pilot model, July 2006.
• **Model C**: caused bottlenecks as the transfer of the claim to a different section to be ‘pushed’ can cause a delay of 24-48 hours, before the claim is returned to be processed. This delay occurred because, at the time of the research, only two staff were employed in the dedicated Registration Team. In theory this should have been sufficient resources, because the push was meant to be a straightforward process.

In this model, claims were sometimes processed by a different person than the person who originally prepared the claim, if the original CPT/BPT officer was on annual or sick leave.

The following ‘push’ systems were adopted at Glasgow BDC:

• **Model C: JSA**

  JSA established a dedicated Registration Team of two staff members to do the push. Staff felt that the Registration Team lengthened the process and increased the risk of causing an additional bottleneck. In theory, two processors would provide sufficient capacity to complete JSA pushes, and when the system was working correctly the process took two minutes per claim. However, when JSA claims failed to transfer to Legacy, the JSA Registration Team registered claims manually on Legacy, and then printed off the ‘bid’ (or ‘input document’) to be passed onto Benefit Processors.

  The JSA Registration Team found it difficult to deal with the volume of pushes on JSA, and the increased time required to re-enter information manually onto Legacy. Claims could therefore be with the JSA Registration Team for two days before being returned to CPT/BPT to process the benefit, creating a bottleneck in benefit processing.

• **Model A: IS**

  CPT/BPT within the IS team passed the claim to another officer to push, who subsequently returned the claim to the original officer who had prepared the claim to complete the payment process. This meant that all CPT/BPT officers in the IS team at Glasgow ‘push’ claims from CMS to Legacy.

  The push rate from CMS to Legacy only improved in a minority of cases (see Section 9.6.2). As a result, officers routinely entered information onto both CMS and Legacy.

  At the time of the research (after the pilot was implemented), only full pushes were being recorded as successful in MI. Officers reported that they were under pressure to improve the ‘push’ rate and that changes were planned for what constituted a partial push. This was a real concern to CPT/BPT, as partial pushes would not enable them to complete the processing of more claims.
A couple of weeks ago they told us what they want to record them [partial pushes] as a successful push and we all had that look...shaking my head saying, ‘Well, a partial push is not a successful push because there’s things missing’...whatever reason we are now counting partial pushes which will obviously put the success rate up and make it look as if it’s more successful than it actually really is which is a concern.’

(BDC staff)

Some of the additional functions introduced as part of the push process under the SPR pilot therefore negatively impacted on the speed and efficiency in which claims were made ready for processing. The new requirement for Glasgow BDC to update CMS to enable the claim to push to Legacy for processing duplicated information and diverted CPT/BPT time from processing more claims. The CMS requirements resulted in CPT/BPT commonly having to duplicate tasks as only a minority of claims were successfully pushed from CMS to Legacy. This resulted in officers having to input information onto both CMS and Legacy manually and limited the speed with which claims were processed.

Glasgow BDC were committed to implementing the SPR model as effectively as possible, and so identified CMS Dialogue experts on each benefit strand. (This position was most commonly held by the Team Leader). The CMS Dialogue experts were tasked with helping to implement the new system and providing trouble-shooting support for CMS to help push more claims through to Legacy. However, resource constraints resulted in insufficient CMS support being available at Glasgow BDC.

‘[CMS expert], there should probably be someone full-time doing that role. At the moment, due to resource, we don’t have that person in a full-time role. Because what they would be able to identify is problems or errors that are occurring, and why they’re occurring. And then they would be able to...identify...a training need, and then be able to pass out handouts to start the training. ‘This is the reason why this is an error. Don’t do it like that.’ But unfortunately it’s a time-consuming job.’

(BDC staff)

The push process therefore represented one of the most challenging aspects of the pilot, and had yet to demonstrate an improvement on the overall process at the time of the research.

7.8 Benefit processing

Before the SPR pilot’s implementation, all claims preparation tasks were meant to be completed in Jobcentres, and claims only sent to Glasgow BDC when they were ready for processing. In practice, however, Glasgow BDC processors reported that they regularly completed claims preparation tasks, primarily because additional information was needed to process claims. Team Leaders on each benefit strand kept an issues log to record different types of missing information. For example, a
Jobcentre would clear a claim stating that the customers’ final work earnings had been verified, but Benefit Processors would subsequently find that the final wage slip was not verified and was a wage slip for two months ago. IB processors routinely found that insufficient information was collected on statutory sick pay and pension income to enable a claim to be processed.

Before the pilot, Benefit Processors found it difficult to meet targets for claims processing because of the delay in receiving claims. IB claims, for example, were not routinely received within the 18 day target, and could take up to 22 days to receive.

Under the SPR pilot, the Benefit Processor role was combined with the Claims Preparation role. Staff felt that this provided an opportunity to promote consistency by encouraging officers to take responsibility for claims throughout Glasgow BDC functions. Benefit Processors therefore took on additional responsibilities, including: verifying information on the customer statement; requesting additional information from customers required to prepare their claim for processing; updating CMS; and pushing the claim from CMS to Legacy for processing.

Staff at Glasgow BDC viewed the combined roles of CPT/BPT very positively because they felt this would improve continuity in the process and provide the opportunity for officers to take ownership and responsibility for claims. They felt that the model enabled CPT/BPT officers to request accurate and sufficient information from customers earlier in the process, to help process payments more efficiently.

The combined CPT/BPT role was also more efficient because all functions were based on one site. This meant that the main delays incurred between claims preparation and benefit processing were related to the push process. This is in contrast to delivery of the SPR pilot in North Lincolnshire, which incurred a delay in transferring the paper based hand-off (the ‘input document’) between the CPT and BPT because the teams were based in different locations.

CPT/BPT staff said that they were clear about their role in the SPR pilot. Their expectations about the additional tasks involved in preparing a claim for processing were mixed. Some staff were concerned that additional time would be required to gather sufficient accurate information from customers to process their claim, which may affect targets and clearance times.

Since the introduction of the pilot, the JSA and IB teams reported more difficulties in meeting their targets. The IB target for clearing claims was reduced from 22 to 18 days alongside the pilot, while the JSA clearance target did not change, and stood at 12 days from when the customer calls the Contact Centre. Staff reported that these targets were not met. Some staff attributed these difficulties to delays in receiving claims at the BDC. Others felt that delays occurred once claims arrived at Glasgow BDC, because the post room did not always distribute customer statements on the day they arrived. As a result, the time available for officers to prepare and process claims was reduced.
‘Ours is the kind of hardest one to meet… it’s a lot harder to meet that 12-day target. So we also keep our own target, as in when it reaches GBC [Glasgow BDC], when it reaches us in the Benefit Centre. It just protects ourselves, to say, ‘Well, if the claim is getting here within six days, then we can do it in another six days, no bother. But unfortunately it’s taking longer for it to be received here.’

(BDC staff)

Some CPT/BPT staff felt that they cleared fewer claims per day than before the pilot, because additional time was needed to request and chase missing information from customers.

‘The productivity has dropped, it’s now working out to like 2.9 claims on average per person whereas beforehand it was four or plus and…the benchmarks, you’re actually supposed to produce now eight claims a day.’

(BDC staff)

Officers routinely explained that they made more outbound calls to customers under the pilot to chase outstanding information in their BF boxes. CPTs/BPTs were encouraged to prioritise ‘quick wins’ in some cases, but also to help manage the increased volume of work since the pilot’s introduction. Some staff were off work due to ill-health, some of which was predicted sick leave. Annual leave also stretched resources. As a result, Team Leaders were faced with the difficult task of managing the preparation of the ongoing flow of new and repeat claims in a team with multiple absences. Management grades at Glasgow BDC were very concerned about resourcing issues.

‘We’re just having to fight fires all the time, because we’re having to pull on resources from other commands, we’re having to take out the easy claim forms, as in the clerical ones, the 1s and the 4s, that people know how to do. These are quick hits, quick claims: we can get them off the desk, and let the staff try to concentrate on the CMS claims.’

(BDC staff)

The SPR pilot also enhanced opportunities for ‘quick wins’ through the Clerical Claim Quick Win. This system enabled clerical claims to be returned directly to benefit processing sections rather than going through either Jobcentres or claims preparation at Glasgow BDC. The type of claims covered by the system included waived or deferred claims, and claims that were handled during contingency measures. Staff at Glasgow BDC anticipated that these quick wins would lead to a small improvement in Actual Average Clearance Time (AACT) as a percentage of non-JSA claims.
7.9 Staff experience

Before the pilot ‘went live’, staff received a walkthrough explaining the new SOM process for new and repeat claims and their role within it. Team Leaders participated in regular tele-kits with the Change Implementation Team at Glasgow BDC and Jobcentre Plus head office to explore emerging issues and concerns with the pilot, and to gain clarification on implementation models. Whilst information was viewed as consistent but inadequate in the Glasgow pilot, staff from North Lincolnshire suggested that team members received different information in the walkthroughs depending on which session they attended. For both pilot areas this led to some confusion about how the pilot would be delivered. Staff suggested that, in future, walkthroughs should be attended by the entire team to ensure that the information shared was consistent and to encourage a debate about the proposed changes.

The CPT/BPT felt that the lead-in time for the pilot was inadequate and did not give them a real opportunity to consider the implications of the revised processes before it was in place. Team Leaders believed that additional lead-in time would have allowed more thorough preparation and the development of appropriate systems for the pilot.

As anticipated, by Glasgow BDC staff, the introduction of a Tele-team alongside the pilot did free up CPT/BPT time to prepare and process claims. However, for many BDC staff their fears that their workload would increase, and that they would be expected to undertake the additional tasks with limited facilities and without additional resources were realised.

7.10 Staff perception of customer experience

CPT/BPT staff in Glasgow BDC felt that the most important aspect of customer service was the time that it took to process the claim end-to-end. Their overall opinion was that the pilot did not improve customer service as they had hoped. CPT/BPT officers felt that customer service was not good enough under the previous SOM for new and repeat claims and believed that it had not improved under the pilot. Indeed, in some cases officers were concerned that customer service worsened.

Staff identified several reasons for the reduced customer service. In Glasgow, the high level of unanswered calls to the Tele-team and the JSA Registration Team were perceived to cause bottlenecks and delays. Staff felt that both of these initiatives could improve customer service, but only if they were resourced sufficiently to work effectively. Staff from the BDC felt that delivery of the overall SPR pilot was too complicated to appear transparent to customers. The length of time taken by the overall process was also a concern.

Nevertheless, staff from Glasgow BDC felt that the combined CPT/BPT role helped to improve customer service. Staff at Glasgow BDC emphasised the value of continuity provided by the combined CPT/BPT role in giving officers ‘ownership’ of the claim.
Staff also believed that the pilot introduced improvements earlier in the process, such as the Freephone number for the Contact Centre and the single call process.

Whilst staff appreciated the additional focus that not being ‘front of house’ gave them, its impact did not appear to be maximised due to the constant interruptions caused by customer telephone enquiries transferred to CPT/BPT. This follow-up work diverted CPT/BPT from preparing and processing new and repeat claims. At the same time, CPTOs/Benefit Processing Team Officers (BPTOs) were concerned that all customer calls were being routed through the Tele-team during the SPR pilot. Customers were therefore unable to direct-dial an officer with their response to specific requests for information, which they had been able to before the SPR pilot.

Officers routinely perceived that customer expectations regarding the processing of their claim needed to be better managed. CPTO/BPTOs did not, however, clearly explain how they themselves could help to better inform customers about when their claim would be processed. Glasgow BDC staff were most concerned about the expectation for officers to contact customers when they received their claim. They believed that such calls diverted their time from preparing and processing claims, and were not helpful to customers as officers were unable to tell them when their claim would be processed.

7.11 Delivery of efficient services

7.11.1 Time

In general, CPTO/BPTOs at Glasgow BDC felt that the end-to-end processing time was not reduced by the pilot. Staff did feel that the process was quicker in the initial stages of the claiming process, and claims were transferred more quickly to the CPT/BPT. Officers and Management staff believed that the increase in CPT/BPT functions through the SPR pilot, such as managing the BF system and updating CMS to facilitate the ‘push’ to Legacy, increased the time taken to complete the claims process. Targets therefore became a concern and staff on both JSA and IB teams routinely reported difficulties in achieving these. Staff felt that difficulties were caused by the delays involved in collecting additional evidence. Whilst IS staff were able to achieve their targets, some staff suggested that this was helped by the date from which processing targets were set – from the date customers supply all the required evidence.

Glasgow BDC routinely drew on staffing from other parts of the business to help deliver the new processes and clear the workload. For example, change of circumstances staff commonly helped resource the Tele-team and provide processing and administrative support to help clear bottlenecks.
7.11.2 Resourcing

Staff at Glasgow BDC routinely reported insufficient capacity to manage the increased volume of work since the introduction of the SPR pilot. Resources were further stretched due to staff sickness and annual leave. Team Leaders were therefore faced with the difficult task of managing the preparation of the ongoing flow of new and repeat claims in a team with multiple absences. Management grades at Glasgow BDC were very concerned about stretched resources.

CMS Dialogue experts had also been introduced onto each benefit at Glasgow BDC, and provided trouble-shooting support for CMS. However, resource constraints resulted in insufficient CMS support being available at Glasgow BDC.

CPT/BPT staff in both pilot areas believed that it was important to ensure that staff throughout the system had enough benefits experience to enable them to improve efficiency. It was accepted that additional resources were not available to provide more in-depth benefits training for staff in some areas of the business. The BDC therefore felt that the process could be improved by re-working the scripts used by colleagues in other areas of the business. For example, the CMS prompts used by Contact Centre staff did not collect all the relevant information needed for Glasgow BDC to process a claim. CPT/BPTs felt that the overall process would work more effectively if the script was enhanced to collect additional data, such as the amount of savings held by a person. Similarly, staff believed that the script used by FCOs did not flag up some ineligibility criteria.

7.11.3 Duplication

Staff expressed concern about the amount of work that was duplicated in the SPR pilot. The duplication identified was the inputting of data onto CMS and Legacy when pushes failed or only partially completed. This additional work affected the speed at which claims were processed.

A further duplication identified by staff at Glasgow BDC was that combined IB/IS claims were dealt with by two CPT/BPTO rather than one. This was necessary because officers were only trained in one benefit and it was not felt to be cost effective to train them in both benefits.

Staff from Glasgow BDC however viewed the combined CPT/BPT role a key strength and improvement introduced by the pilot. They felt that the new role ensured a consistent approach between the claims preparation and processing functions, with one officer taking responsibility for each claim.

7.11.4 Accuracy

CPT/BPT staff at Glasgow BDC were concerned by the accuracy of the work conducted at the earlier stages of the process. Some officers reported a slight improvement in the level of information and accuracy of Customer Statements received from Jobcentres, but missing and inaccurate information remained a
common problem. Information commonly missing included: customers’ previous employment details; final wage details or the P45; medical information; and partner details. In contrast, officers felt that the accuracy of the claim preparation work improved under the SPR pilot.

7.12 Summary

BDCs partly met the following pilot objectives by improving staff experience and made some headway in delivering a speedier process in dealing with the claim. In relation to these, findings discussed here suggest that:

• moving the BF system to the BDC reduced re-working for CPTO/BPTO as they were able to collect the information they needed to process the claim;
• the combined CPT/BPT roles allowed for greater consistency and reduced duplication;
• the new Tele-team freed up CPT/BPT time to focus on processing claims without interruptions.
8 Views and experiences of customers in London

This chapter presents the findings of a survey carried out with 700 customers who started a claim under the pilot in Central London and 300 customers from West London, where the pilot was not operating. The survey took place in September 2006 and explored how customers experience and perceive the claims process. The chapter also draws on the quantitative and qualitative research carried out with customers in North Lincolnshire, reported in Chapter 3, to draw out similarities and differences between the two pilot areas.

**Key findings**

- The pilot was successful at improving customers’ experience of First Contact stage.
  - Respondents found the Interactive Voice Routing (IVR) clear and straightforward to use.
  - Almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of First Contact calls were completed in a single call.
- Customers tended to spend less time in Jobcentres under the pilot than in West London, with reduced average waiting times and reduced average interview times.
- In general, customers in the pilot felt they were provided with more information than their counterparts in the comparator area.
- Very few customers received a courtesy call from the Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC).
- A third of all customers indicated that they visited local Jobcentres to enquire about progress of their claim during the processing phase.

Continued
• There was no variation in levels of satisfaction with the overall claims process between the pilot and comparator areas.

• Levels of overall satisfaction declined significantly throughout the claim process from First Contact to receiving payment.

• Roughly a third of all customers were dissatisfied with the length of time between initial contact and payment.

The chapter presents the key findings for each stage of the claims process. Section 8.1 looks at First Contact; Section 8.2 considers ‘next steps’; Section 8.3 explores Jobcentre appointments; and Section 8.4 looks at the benefit processing stage.

8.1 First Contact

Roughly two-thirds of survey respondents in Central London (69 per cent) initiated their claim by phone. Only two in five of these (20 per cent) dialled the Freephone number (see Figure 8.1). This is in line with findings from North Lincolnshire (see Section 3.2.1). Contact Centre staff at Pembroke Dock, which serves the London area, pointed to a high number of calls from mobile phones, from which the 0800 number was not free. Customers phoning from mobiles may have dialled the old 0845 number because they thought there was no difference or simply did not recall dialling a Freephone number. Where customers from Central London did dial the 0800 number and accessed the IVR, the majority found it easy to use (81 of 95 respondents) and the options relevant to their enquiry (83 of 95 respondents).

Figure 8.1 Number dialled by respondents in pilot area

![Figure 8.1 Number dialled by respondents in pilot area](chart)

Base figure: All respondents in the London pilot area who initiated their claim by phone (418).
The findings from London suggest the pilot did not significantly impact on ease or speed of getting through to a First Contact Officer (FCO). Across both Central and West London, roughly three-quarters of customers who initiated their claim by phone got through on their first attempt (76 per cent in the pilot area). While around three-quarters (76 per cent) of these customers got through within ten minutes in both areas, slightly more customers appeared to get through within five minutes in the comparator area. This finding is not, however, statistically significant. The difference could be explained by the presence of the IVR in the pilot (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.1  Length of time to get through to operator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of time</th>
<th>Pilot (per cent)</th>
<th>Comparator (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than one minute</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 5 minutes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 10 minutes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 15 minutes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 15 minutes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/can’t remember</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 361 155

Base figure: all respondents in the London pilot and comparator areas who initiated their claim by phone and got through on the first attempt (515).

Respondents in pilot area were significantly more likely to say their claim was dealt with in a single call than in the comparator (63 per cent compared with 52 per cent). Qualitative interviews in North Lincolnshire revealed that customers generally indicated that they preferred single calls. So this finding suggests that the pilot improved customer service in Central London compared to experience in West London. As found in North Lincolnshire, claims for Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) were more likely to be handled in a single call (67 per cent) than those for Income Support (IS) or Incapacity Benefit (IB) (58 per cent and 56 per cent respectively).

8.1.1 Call content

Around four out of five respondents in the pilot area whose claim was dealt with in a single call (80 per cent) found it ‘very easy’ or ‘fairly easy’ to provide all the information required. Again, this varied according to the benefit customers claimed. Jobseekers were more likely to find it easy to provide the requested information (83 per cent) compared to IS and IB claimants (74 per cent and 77 per cent respectively). This finding supports feedback from staff who said that it was generally more difficult to achieve single calls across the more ‘complex’ IS and IB claims, which typically required more detailed evidence or Child Support Agency (CSA) gathers. Roughly one in eight (13 per cent) respondents in the pilot area who indicated they were called back said the call back was less than half an hour after the initial call, which implied a ‘mini-break’ rather than dual call. Figure 8.2 shows that half of call-backs in the pilot area (50 per cent) were at the advisers’ suggestion.
Call times did not vary significantly between the pilot and comparator areas in London (see Table 8.2). There was, however, a relatively low proportion of calls being completed within ten minutes in the pilot area (15 per cent in Central London compared with 33 per cent in West London). This finding could suggest a possible reduction in inappropriate calls.

Table 8.2 Length of time of telephone call for overall claims process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of time</th>
<th>Pilot (per cent)</th>
<th>Comparator (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 5 minutes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10 minutes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15 minutes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 20 minutes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 30 minutes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 45 minutes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 45 minutes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/can’t remember</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted base 481 202

Base figure: All respondents from the pilot and comparator areas who initiated their claim by phone [683].

Customers in Central London were as likely to be offered a job search as those in West London, and this picture was also reflected in North Lincolnshire. It is unclear why this was the case since the pilot was intended to remove job searches from First Contact and offer them through a dedicated call back. It is possible that customers
did not correctly distinguish between being ‘offered’ a job search and one being conducted at First Contact.

Other findings that emerged from the pilot area, although not necessarily relating to changes implemented under the pilot, were as follows:

- Around two in five customers who initiated their claim by phone said they asked the advisor questions about the claims process (44 per cent). Just over four out of five of these were ‘very’ or ‘fairly satisfied’ with the way the question was answered (81 per cent).

- Nearly three-quarters of customers (68 per cent) were referred for an interview with a personal adviser at the Jobcentre, and nine out of ten of these felt they understood the purpose of the interview (90 per cent).

- Just over a third of respondents (36 per cent) thought they were asked ‘too many’ questions, which was significantly higher than in the comparator area, where the corresponding figure was 15 per cent. It is unclear why this was the case, particularly given that the IVR actually reduced the amount of text from the FCOs script.

### 8.1.2 Overall satisfaction with First Contact

Nearly three-quarters of customers in the pilot area (74 per cent) thought service at First Contact was ‘good’ or ‘very good’, compared with only around three in five (63 per cent) in the comparator area (see Figure 8.3). This implies that the pilot was successful at improving customer service at the front end of the claims process. This was underlined by the fact that nearly half (46 per cent) of respondents in the pilot area thought their experience at First Contact was better than a previous claim, compared with only a third (34 per cent) in the comparator area.
Figure 8.3  How customers rate overall level of service at the call centre

8.2 Next steps

Data demonstrates that many customers were not clear about the next steps following First Contact, with a disparity between what people expected to happen and what actually happened (see Figure 8.4). The relatively low proportion of people ‘expecting’ in each category may imply that the different steps in the claims process were not always clearly explained or absorbed at First Contact. In particular, the difference between the proportion of customers who expected to receive a customer statement and those who did receive a statement was surprising since explaining this is part of the FCOs’ mandatory script. These findings may reflect customers’ poor recall of the content of telephone conversations held some time before the research took place.
8.2.1 Customer statements

Customers were more likely to receive the customer statement under the pilot than in the comparator (62 per cent compared with 46 per cent) (see Figure 8.4). This was a positive trend, since staff interviewed routinely raised concerns about customer statements not arriving in time for customers’ Jobcentre appointments.

Significantly fewer customers who received the customer statement in Central London felt that the document accurately reflected the information they gave over the phone, compared with West London (77 per cent compared with 95 per cent). This raises a potential concern that changes introduced under the pilot affected FCOs’ ability to collect all information accurately.

8.3 Jobcentre visit

Fewer than three-quarters of survey respondents in the pilot area reported attending an interview in a Jobcentre (69 per cent), although this was higher amongst JSA

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20 The base figure in the comparator area relating to this is 94.
claimants (80 per cent)\textsuperscript{21}. Roughly a quarter of all those attending an interview in Central London (28 per cent) said they received a reminder call, the vast majority of who found the call useful (91 per cent).

8.3.1 Waiting times

Customers in Central London tended to spend less time waiting to see Jobcentre staff and in appointments than those in West London. This suggests that changes introduced under the pilot, including the new ‘on-demand’ system for Claim Service Team (CST), meant staff were able see customers promptly and reduce the time spent in the Jobcentre. This trend was not evident in North Lincolnshire.

Waiting times and lengths of meetings were significantly lower in the pilot area, as illustrated below:

- In Central London, a third of customers (31 per cent) saw a Claims Service Team Officers (CSTO) within five minutes. The equivalent figure for West London was 19 per cent.

- Just less than a quarter of customers (23 per cent) in Central London waited up to five minutes to see a Personal Adviser (PA) and a further third (34 per cent) waited between six and ten minutes. In West London, the figures were 13 per cent and 16 per cent respectively.

- Around half of customers (54 per cent) in Central London completed their CSTO meeting within ten minutes, compared with only 42 per cent (completing Financial Assessor (FA) meetings) in West London.

- Just under two-thirds of customers (65 per cent) in Central London completed their PA meetings within 20 minutes, compared to only 57 per cent in West London. The reasons for this result are unclear and suggest that PAs did not spend the full 40 minutes with new or repeat claimants.

8.3.2 Number of contacts

More than half of all respondents in both Central and West London who attended an appointment at a Jobcentre said they had to repeat the same information to more than one staff member (56 per cent and 49 per cent respectively). The difference between the two areas is not significant, implying that the pilot did not lead to ‘fewer contacts’ for customers within Jobcentres. The vast majority of customers who attended a Jobcentre appointment (91 per cent) said they brought all necessary evidence and this did not vary significantly between Central and West London. It was also roughly in line with figures for North Lincolnshire (86 per cent).

\textsuperscript{21} Figures relating to results by benefit type are all unweighted.
8.3.3 Overall satisfaction with the Jobcentre

Respondents from the pilot area were more likely to think that the overall service at the Jobcentre was ‘good’ or ‘very good’ than customers from West London (63 per cent and 56 per cent). This finding also suggests that the SPR pilot was successful in improving customer experiences within the Jobcentre (see Figure 8.5). Respondents claiming IB were more likely to think services at the Jobcentre were ‘good’ than JSA claimants (69 per cent compared with 60 per cent of JSA claimants).

Figure 8.5 How customers rated overall level of service at the Jobcentre

![Bar chart showing percentage of respondents rating service as very good, good, average, poor, very poor, and don’t know/can’t remember.]

Base figure: All customers in the London pilot and comparator areas who attended an appointment at the Jobcentre (700).

Customers in the Central London pilot area were more likely to be told that their claim was being passed to benefit processing and more likely to be given a contact number for future enquiries than those from West London (see Figure 8.6). These patterns suggest that, to some extent, customers in the pilot area felt more informed following their visit to a Jobcentre about the overall claims process than those in the comparator area. However, only just over half of customers were told how long the claim would take (58 per cent in the pilot area and 55 per cent in the comparator).
Figure 8.6 Information customers were given by Jobcentre staff

8.4 After Jobcentre interview

Only one in eight (14 per cent) of respondents in the pilot area indicated that they were contacted by someone in benefit processing to discuss their claim’s progress. This figure did not vary significantly between Central and West London, suggesting Claims Preparation Team (CPT)/Benefit Processing Teams (BPTs) were not regularly making the courtesy calls introduced by the Standard Process Review (SPR) pilot. This supports findings from the staff research, in which CPTOs/BPTOs reported that they did not routinely make courtesy calls. More than three-quarters of customers who did receive a courtesy calls in Central London (77 out of 95) found them useful, which underlines their potential benefit. Over a third of respondents (36 per cent) in the Central London pilot area said they felt ‘not very’ or ‘not at all informed’ whilst their claim was being processed.

To find out about their claim, customers of the Central London pilot were significantly more likely to call the BDC than customers from West London (39 per cent compared with 26 per cent in comparator) (see Figure 8.7). This may reflect the increased emphasis in the pilot to provide relevant contact details for further enquiries.
Around a third of survey respondents in Central London visited their local Jobcentre (Figure 8.7) to chase their claim. Any footfall generated as a result would be exacerbated by the fact that over half of customers who visited local Jobcentres to enquire about their claim did so more than once. These findings suggest that keeping customers informed about their claim by phone may help reduce footfall at local Jobcentres.

**Figure 8.7**  Action taken by customers waiting to hear about their claim

![Bar chart showing action taken by customers waiting to hear about their claim](chart.png)

Base figure: All respondents in the London pilot and comparator areas (1,000).

### 8.4.1 Payment

Over three-quarters of respondents (78 per cent) in both pilot and comparator areas had received payment at the time of the survey. There was no significant difference in the average length of time between initial contact and payment between the two areas (see Figure 8.8).
8.4.2 Overall satisfaction during claim processing

On balance, respondents in the pilot area were generally satisfied with the service received during claims processing. Just over half thought the service during processing was ‘good’ or ‘very good’ (53 per cent), while around a fifth (19 per cent) thought it was ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ (see Figure 8.9). The corresponding figures for the comparator area are 45 per cent and 17 per cent. Overall perceptions of service during this end stage were not necessarily linked to customers’ views on the length of time to process claims. Over a quarter of respondents in Central London (29 per cent) were dissatisfied with the length of time taken to receive their benefit, and this is in line with findings from North Lincolnshire.
Figure 8.9  How customers’ rated overall service during processing

In both pilot areas (North Lincolnshire and Central London), survey respondents were much more likely to believe that any delay was caused by benefit processing (82 per cent) rather than the Jobcentre (28 per cent) or Contact Centre (18 per cent).

8.5 Overall satisfaction with the claims process

Around two-thirds of survey respondents in Central London (61 per cent) were ‘satisfied’ with the overall end-to-end claims process, which was not significantly different in the comparator area. In terms of benefit types, IB claimants in the pilot area were least likely to be satisfied with the overall process (56 per cent, compared with 62 per cent of IS claimants and JSA claimants).

As in North Lincolnshire, the proportion of respondents reporting a ‘good’ service in the pilot area dropped markedly through each stage of the claims process, falling from 74 per cent at First Contact to 63 per cent at the Jobcentre visit, to 53 per cent at processing (Figure 8.10). However, the pilot figures do compare favourably with those for the comparator area at each stage (63 per cent at First Contact, 56 per cent at Jobcentre and 45 per cent at processing).
The data in Figure 8.10 shows that a lower proportion of respondents were satisfied with First Contact and the processing stages of claiming in Central London than in North Lincolnshire. This is in line with ‘overall satisfaction’ figures (61 per cent in Central London were satisfied compared to 73 per cent in North East Lincolnshire). It is likely to reflect a range of customer service issues that are enhanced within London, such as a relatively high proportion of customers who speak English as a second language or not at all, and people with no fixed abode.

As in North Lincolnshire, relatively few survey respondents in Central London indicated that they actually made a complaint (ten per cent).

8.6 Summary

The pilot’s specific customer satisfaction objectives were to achieve fewer contacts, and provide easier access and quicker decision making. In relation to these, findings discussed here suggest that:

- The IVR was generally received positively. Its introduction led to an increased proportion of single calls and reduced overall call time, which implies easier access for customers at the front end of the claims process.

- Customers in the pilot area were being seen at a Jobcentre more quickly.

- In terms of accuracy, customers in the Central London pilot area were less likely to feel that their customer statement was correct.
• The pilot did not appear to lead to a reduced number of contacts per customer, either through the process overall or in local Jobcentre offices specifically.

• Customers in the pilot area did not appear to experience easier access during the processing stage of the claims process.

• The pilot did not lead to speedier decision making over the end-to-end process.
Part III
Findings from impact and Management Information analysis
9 Impact and Management Information analysis

This chapter summarises the findings from the impact and Management Information (MI) analysis completed by the Performance Measurement and Analysis Division (PMAD) of Jobcentre Plus.

Key findings

New/repeat claims Actual Average Clearance Time and other Jobcentre Plus targets

- There is evidence of an adverse impact on Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) Actual Average Clearance Time (AACT) for both pilot sites beginning around the time of pilot implementation. North Lincolnshire has shown some signs of a recovery but has still not returned to pre-pilot performance levels. There is little evidence to suggest that performance is likely to return to pre-pilot levels soon in Central London.

- Several factors have been identified which are likely to have affected performance in the months after the pilot rolled out, these include inheriting backlogs of claims from Jobcentres, resource issues in Claims Preparation Teams (CPTs), and the inevitable disruption caused by implementing and adhering to a new process. These problems mean that the effect of the actual process and the way it was implemented may have been slightly confounded, but overall the results do imply that the process needs to be further refined in order to improve AACT performance.

- There has been no observed change in performance for Income Support (IS) AACT since the pilot began.

Continued
Both pilot sites have improved Incapacity Benefit (IB) AACT since the start of the pilot. The impact analysis could not attribute this directly to the new process, but the pilots have effectively shown that good IB AACT performance is possible under the Standard Operating Model (SOM) Process Review (SPR) pilot.

End-to-End times breakdown

• There is definite evidence that the front end of the process is running efficiently, customers have had to wait an average 3.9 days for a Work Focused Interview (WFI) in North Lincolnshire and 4.7 days in Central London although in September the figure for Central London had improved to within four days.

• Removing the Brought Forward (BF) system from Jobcentres has resulted in the majority of claims being passed on the same day as the WFI, with 99 per cent handed to the CPT by the end of the next day.

• The most time consuming part of the process was the CPT in North Lincolnshire where JSA claims took an average of 10.9 days to process over the period studied. Thirty-five per cent of claims were received by the Benefit Processing Team (BPT) on the day the CPT finished with a claim but 24 per cent and 29 per cent of claims took one and two days respectively, 12 per cent took longer than this. The BPT quickly processed the majority of claims although there was a minority which took a long time at this stage. The average time taken by the BPT was 3.2 days for JSA.

• In Central London, the average time from receipt in the CPT to benefit clearance was 8.2 days for JSA, 8.6 days for IS and 7.1 days for IB, which made this the most time consuming part of the process.

• If improvements are to be made to clearance times, the MI shows that the biggest gains would be made by addressing delays at the back end of the process, in particular the CPT.

Contact Centres

• Seventy-seven per cent of the customers who would otherwise have had a dual call were dealt with in a single call in Grimsby Contact Centre. The corresponding figure for Pembroke Dock Contact Centre was 70 per cent.

• The standard single call process has taken on average 42 minutes in Grimsby and 50 minutes in Pembroke Dock. Rapid reclams took a quarter of the time of a standard single call.

• Customers who had a WFI booked in the single call had their WFI on average 0.7 days before those booked in a call back in North Lincolnshire. In Central London the difference was even more marked at 1.7 days.

Continued
While staff reported that the Interactive Voice Routing (IVR) system helped to eliminate inappropriate calls, they still appear to be a problem for Pembroke Dock where 18 per cent of inbound calls were classed as inappropriate.

**Jobcentres**

There is no evidence that the pilot has had any adverse impact on Fail To Attend (FTA) rates for initial WFLs, although the FTA rates have improved slightly over the course of the pilot. In particular there is no evidence that Central London, using 100 per cent pre-WFI calls in most Jobcentres, had less failure to attend than North Lincolnshire.

**Claims Preparation and Benefit Processing teams**

North Lincolnshire put a large amount of claims (40-50 per cent) into BF and some claims only remained in the system for a very short time. In Central London, less claims (around 20 per cent) went to BF but they were in the system for longer. The reasons for the difference may be unclear but may be associated with the differing levels of benefit processing experience of the CPTs in the two areas. The differences in BF management, and also the management of ready to process claims between the pilot sites implies that there is more work to be done to improve the flow of claims through the CPT.

The number of claims outstanding in the benefit processing sites was found to increase dramatically in the first weeks of both pilots backing up findings from the staff research that large backlogs were inherited from Jobcentres during this period. These backlogs are likely to have contributed to poor clearance time performance.

Customer Management System (CMS) push rates have not been adversely affected by the pilot processes. In fact there was a slight improvement in push rates over the course of the pilot but these were in line with national trends, and hence the improvement cannot be attributed directly to new processes.

The rest of this chapter presents the approach taken and the detailed findings from the impact and MI analysis of the SPR pilot.

### 9.1 Overview of MI analysis approach

Key areas addressed by the analysis were as follows:

**Impact of the pilot on new/repeat claim clearance times.** This analysis aims to isolate the effect that the pilot has had on clearance times by comparing the pilot sites to control groups that are similar in all other aspects that affect performance. This is done by means of a Difference-in-Difference (DiD) analysis; the method is described later in the overview.
- **Breakdowns of the end-to-end times.** The time from initial contact to benefit clearance is broken down for each different part of the process to identify bottlenecks using a ‘claim tracker’ dataset which is populated from clerical stencils filled in by staff in the pilot sites. The claim tracker is also used to provide other contextual information.

- **Telephony information.** Analysis of the volumes and durations of calls made and received in Grimsby and Pembroke Dock contact centres.

- **FTA rates and CMS push rates.** FTA rates for initial WFIs and CMS push rates are analysed to try and detect any impact from the new pilot processes.

### 9.1.1 Data sources

Various data sources are used in this chapter. They fall broadly into the following categories:

- **Centrally reported MI.** This consists of MI recorded directly from Jobcentre Plus computer systems and reported in a consistent manner for all parts of the Jobcentre Plus network. In this report we make use of New/repeat Claims AACT, FTA rates for initial WFIs and CMS push rates.

- **Claim tracker data.** This is a tactical MI solution for the pilot which involves a clerical template being completed to track the progress of each claim through the whole process with key handoff dates and significant actions etc. This data is used mainly as contextual information, as comparable pre-pilot or control group data does not exist. Data that is used ranges from late April to early October for Central London, and from mid-March to mid-September for North Lincolnshire. In the middle of September, North Lincolnshire moved to an online MI tool and it has not been possible to link this to our existing dataset to provide more recent data.

- **Telephony MI.** Information on volumes and durations of calls made and received in both pilot Contact Centres is recorded, and aggregated data is produced weekly. Again the information that this provides is largely contextual as no comparable pre-pilot or control group data exists. Data used ranges from Mid-March to early October for Grimsby Contact Centre and from Late May to early October for Pembroke Dock Contact Centre. Pembroke Dock data collection begun approximately one month after the pilot began.

### 9.1.2 Description of method used in analysis

When there are both pre-pilot and control group data for a performance measure, the impact of the pilot can be isolated using the method of DiD.

DiD analysis is a powerful technique for assessing the impact of an event on time series data. It is used to isolate the effect of one particular change to a variable which is influenced by many external factors. In this case the effect of the new SOM process on AACT needed to be isolated, so external factors that can affect AACT such as policy changes, modernisation and national improvements are accounted for.
Figures 9.1 to 9.4 show how DiD analysis is performed in this report:

- Firstly a control group must be found that is similar to the study area in all factors that are known to affect performance, so that the effect of the SPR pilot in the study area can be isolated. The JSA AACT data for an example study and control group are shown to the right.

**Figure 9.1  Example of DiD analyses – step 1**

- Next, the data is smoothed in order to reduce the importance of short-term random effects and, where necessary, to de-seasonalise the data. In this case each month's data point is taken to be the average of itself and the two preceding months (three month rolling average). In this case it was not necessary to de-seasonalise as AACT is not strongly seasonal.
Now the data series are indexed so that each data point is expressed as a percentage of the first data point. This shows whether the performance of the pilot area or the control area at any point in time is better (<100 per cent) or worse (>100 per cent) than it was at the start of the data series.
Finally the pilot area’s performance is expressed as a percentage of the control area’s performance. The plot now shows the control area as a straight line. In the case of AACT, if the pilot area’s performance is >100 per cent then its performance is worse relative to the control area than it was at the start of the series. The opposite is true if the line is <100 per cent.

**Figure 9.4 Example of DiD analyses – step 4**

Using DiD analysis it is possible to detect whether a measure of performance has improved or declined since the start of the pilot if any changes in the final DiD chart after pilot ‘go-live’ are larger in magnitude than any random variation that has occurred beforehand. For this reason, control groups are chosen so that the pre-pilot variation is as small as possible. In the context of the SOM pilot, it is also necessary that any changes are sustained over a period of time so that they can be attributed to the new processes rather than random variation or disruption caused by implementation.

### 9.1.3 Measuring impact on new/repeat claims AACT performance

Finding out whether the pilots had an adverse effect on AACT performance was one of the main objectives of the evaluation. In this section a DiD analysis is carried out to determine what the effect of the pilot has been on new/repeat claims AACT.

New Claims AACT is measured differently for each of the three main benefits. The definitions of start and end dates for each benefit can be found in the annex. JSA AACT is the only measure for which the clock starts at the initial date of contact. For this reason the changes to the new SOM will affect it in a slightly different way to IB.
and IS AACTs. Some changes that have been made to the SOM which could conceivably affect clearance times are:

- introduction of a single call to speed up the front-end of the process;
- introduction of CPTs to manage BF system and collect outstanding evidence;
- claims where no WFI required go straight to benefit processing.

Any increase in speed at the contact centre will only affect JSA AACT directly, however knock on effects will be felt further down the process if there has been any improvement or deterioration in the completeness of customer statements being bought to Jobcentres or sent to Benefit Processing, this would affect the other two measures. In this sense JSA AACT is the purest indicator of whether the time from customers making a claim to receiving their benefit has changed.

9.1.4 Choice of control groups for AACT analysis

To isolate the effect of the pilot on clearance times, an analysis of the factors which affect AACT was carried out. Control districts were chosen (using 2005/06 districts) by choosing districts which were similar in terms of the following factors that were found to affect performance:

- **Historical AACT performance.** Historical performance levels are a good predictor of future performance. Districts were ranked based on a score which showed how similar their historical performance in all three AACT measures was to the pilot areas. Weightings were applied to place more importance on recent performance and also to relate the importance of a benefit to the number of new claimants for that benefit (e.g. JSA has more weighting than IS etc.).

- **Integrated office and CMS rollout status.** Another criteria for a good control group was that the majority of offices in the district were modernised and had been for a sufficient period of time for performance to have stabilised. Both of the pilot areas underwent rollout in mid-2004. There were to be no disruptive rollouts or office closures in the potential controls in the pilot period as this may affect performance and be confounded with the pilot effect.

- **Historical performance on other measures.** Several other measures will be analysed using DiD analysis as well as AACT. In particular WFI FTA rates. The historical performance on these measures was analysed to judge what magnitude of pilot impact might be detectable.

- **Changes in benefit on-flows and outstanding claims.** It is known that changes in these measures can affect AACT. Although these are not considered in the matching analysis they were monitored over the duration of the pilot, as changes in these measures may have signalled changes to the control groups which would otherwise not have been picked up.
Three control groups were chosen for each of the pilot areas, this was to allow for any changes to a particular control group that may happen during the pilot which might affect performance and be confounded with the pilot effect. The control groups chosen for each of the pilot sites are shown in Table 9.1:

Table 9.1  Control groups for impact analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North Lincolnshire</th>
<th>Central London</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Tees Valley</td>
<td>1) West London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Sheffield</td>
<td>2) Liverpool &amp; Wirral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Greater Mersey</td>
<td>3) Greater Mersey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that these are 2005/06 districts, West London district merged with Brent, Harrow and Hillingdon in April 2006 to form a new, larger West London district. In this report, any reference to West London is taken to mean the 2005/06 West London district.

9.2 Performance against AACT targets

The pilots’ performance against their respective AACT targets is examined before looking in depth at the impact that the pilot has had on clearance times. The following charts show how performance has varied over time.

In Figure 9.5 the beginning of the pilot periods are marked with vertical dashed lines, this convention will be used in other similar charts throughout the report.

Since the pilot began, North Lincolnshire has been outside the target for JSA. It began the pilot outside of the IB target time but has since moved within the target in the past three months. IS AACT has been consistently just under the target time of 11 days. Central London has comfortably met the IS and IB target times, however JSA AACT has risen since the pilot began and is now significantly above the 12 day target time.

A feature to note from both charts is that, while it might be possible to pick out trends in the data, the inherent noise makes it very difficult to determine whether they are real or just random effects.

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22 The AACT targets are cumulative targets to be achieved by the operational year end. In the charts, horizontal lines show the average in-month performance that is required to meet the target.
North Lincolnshire’s AACT data for JSA only runs up until September, as in October the Information Technology (IT) systems were updated to attribute all claims processed in North Lincolnshire to Hull Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC) for MI reporting purposes. This was in preparation for the centralisation of Benefit Processing in Hull BDC scheduled to take place in 2007. All other data is valid until October.
9.2.1 JSA AACT impact analysis

Figure 9.6 shows the JSA AACT impact analysis for the three sites against their respective control groups.

Before making an assessment on the impact of the pilot it is important to briefly discuss the pre-pilot variation. In the data for North Lincolnshire versus Sheffield and Greater Mersey, and to a lesser extent against Tees Valley, there is a large ‘hump’ in the data beginning in the middle of 2004 and ending in the middle of 2005. The rising portion of the hump corresponds to the period when the offices in North Lincolnshire were undergoing modernisation, and hence their AACT began to increase (this can be seen in the raw data).

At the start of 2005, Sheffield and Greater Mersey began to undergo modernisation and their AACT also began to rise. This had the effect of making the relative AACT measure decrease. By the middle of 2005 the relative performance had levelled off as both districts, similarly to North Lincolnshire stabilised at a level of performance slightly worse than pre-modernisation levels. As all post pilot variation must take into account the size of ‘random’ fluctuations which preceded the introduction of the pilot, we ignore this period as there is a very good explanation for the change in performance and we know it will not be repeated.

North Lincolnshire showed an increase in AACT relative to all control groups beginning around the time of pilot implementation up until May/June. This was probably due to the effect of implementing new methods and re-allocating work. Performance has slowly improved since the worst performance in May but it has not yet returned to pre-pilot levels and performance in September again deteriorated slightly.

Central London has shown a gradual deterioration in AACT against its three control groups. The decline in performance was particularly large when compared to Liverpool & Wirral and Greater Mersey, against which Central London has seen relative increases in AACT much greater than pre-pilot variation. Against West London, the increase in Central London’s AACT is still apparent, but less marked and in fact there has been a slight improvement over the last two months, some of which is due to a deterioration in West London’s AACT. This may be an indicator that there are other factors affecting AACT performance in Glasgow BDC (which processes claims for both Central and West London) which are not specifically pilot related. Even if this is the case though, performance has yet to return to pre-pilot levels, after the initial implementation effect, and this remains a key challenge for the future.
9.2.2 IS and IB AACT impact analysis

Figure 9.7 shows the impact that the pilot has had on IS and IB AACT:
Figure 9.7  Impact of the pilot on IB and IS AACT

a) North Lincolnshire IS impact

b) Central London IS impact

Continued
Figure 9.7  Continued

c) North Lincolnshire IB impact

- v Tees Valley
- v Greater Mersey
- v Sheffield
- Control

d) Central London IB impact

- v West London
- v Greater Mersey
- v Liverpool & Wirral
- Control
Figure 9.7 (a) shows little change in North Lincolnshire’s IS AACT compared to the control groups. In the past three months there has been an increase compared to Greater Mersey and Sheffield, but this increase is only of the same magnitude as fluctuations seen before the pilot (ignoring the ‘hump’ caused by the rollout effect).

Figure 9.7 (b) is also inconclusive, with Central London’s IS AACT showing little change against Greater Mersey and West London but an increase against Liverpool & Wirral. Bearing in mind the results for North Lincolnshire and Central London, it is possible to say that there has been no adverse impact, but it cannot be said that there has been an improvement.

The raw IB AACT data shows that both North Lincolnshire and Central London have dramatically improved their IB AACT since the pilot began. When the data are compared to the control groups (Figures 9.7 (c) and (d), the improvement is less marked. In fact, when the changes are taken in the context of pre-pilot noise it is impossible to detect an impact. There are two reasons for the impact not being detected. Firstly, there have been improvements to most other district’s AACT since April this year which lessen the relative improvement. Secondly, the match between the pilot areas and the control groups was not good for IB AACT due to high levels of pre-pilot variation, hence even large changes to AACT may not be detected using this method.

With these considerations, it is impossible to determine whether the IB AACT improvements can be attributed to the SOM pilot or to national improvements in AACT. However, North Lincolnshire is currently meeting the target for the first time since late 2004 and Central London is performing better than it ever has done in the last three years. This shows that the piloted SOM process is no barrier to good IB AACT performance.

9.2.3 Discussion of AACT results

For JSA, the impact analysis which is based on six months of post pilot implementation data shows definite signs of an immediate impact caused by implementation. North Lincolnshire has since shown some improvement but not returned to pre-pilot levels. Central London has yet to show any change compared to Liverpool & Wirral and Greater Mersey, but there has been a slight improvement compared with West London. There is some uncertainty as to the magnitude of the impact in Central London, as West London which shared benefit processing resources has seen similar trends in recent months indicating that the decline in performance may not be entirely pilot related.

An important consideration when assessing the impact on performance is making allowances for the implementation effect. Adopting new working practices is likely to cause disruptions to performance as staff take time to adapt to new methods and may be less productive initially whilst being asked to deal with a similar workload as before. The implementation effect is likely to explain the increase in AACT in the months immediately after the pilot went live, but it is unlikely that this can explain
why performance has not returned to pre-pilot levels after six months. This implies that some areas of the process need refining in order to improve AACT performance.

There were several other issues known to staff working on the pilot which have probably contributed to the decline in performance and are possibly not directly associated with the revised SOM process, but more due to issues with the implementation. Staff research showed that staff in the CPT in both North Lincolnshire and Glasgow reported inheriting a large backlog of claims from Jobcentres that were transferred when the BF system was moved into the CPT. This was supported by analysis on the number of outstanding claims in Section 9.6.2. Also both sites reported resource issues as the workload in benefit processing sites increased under the pilot but the number of staff available was insufficient to meet demand.

IS AACT seems to have been largely unaffected by the pilot but IB AACT has shown a big improvement in the raw data. The DiD analysis could not attribute this improvement to the pilot, but we can say with confidence that the revised process had no adverse impact on IB performance. A possible reason for the observed improvement may be the decision to make customers who weren’t due a WFI post their customer statements directly to the CPT. This affected the majority of IB claimants but only a proportion of IS claimants, and no JSA claimants. This may explain why improvements have only been realised for IB AACT.

9.3 End-to-End times for New Claims

This section of the report uses data from the ‘Claim Tracker’ to provide insight into how long claims take in each part of the business under the new SOM process. It does not aim to provide an impact analysis, but rather some contextual background to supplement the AACT analysis. All times are given in working days as opposed to calendar days so that no non-working days are included biasing the results. Bank holidays are also excluded.

In this section, and in later sections of the report, the ‘Claim tracker’ data is used to analyse different stages of the pilot process. There are some caveats which need to be pointed out in advance so that the results from the analysis of this data are not misinterpreted:

- The data is clerically recorded, and as such is subject to some unavoidable keying errors, and missing data in certain fields.

- For North Lincolnshire there are four different datasets one for each of the Contact Centres, Jobcentre, CPT and Benefit Processing Centre (BPC) respectively. For Central London the CPT and BDC information is aggregated hence these two stages cannot be separated.
• In order to calculate some of the statistics in this report, individuals’ records are linked between two or more of the datasets. This matching can sometimes be imperfect and very often there are not records for individuals in all of the datasets, also incorrect matches are occasionally returned although there is some data-cleaning to ensure that the risk of this is minimised.

Because of these considerations, the data is not being used to break down the AACT into its individual components and produce accurate estimates of the time taken at each stage of the process, as the errors would mean that the estimates would give misleading results in some cases. Instead, the data is used only to get a representative idea of the time taken at each stage of the process.

9.3.1 Initial contact to date of first booked WFI

All JSA claimants and a proportion of IS claimants must attend a WFI before they are eligible for benefit. The following bar graphs show how long customers have to wait between initial contact and the date of their first booked WFI. There was found to be little difference in the timeliness of WFI booking for different customer groups so IS and JSA customers are analysed together.

A range of three-five days has been identified as the optimum time between Initial Date of Claim (IDOC) and the first WFI, as it is a compromise between leaving enough time for a customer to gather all the required evidence to bring to the WFI, and making the WFI early to manage AACT and avoid failures to attend.

Both pilot areas booked the majority of WFIs in three-five days. Eighty-one per cent in North Lincolnshire, and 78 per cent in Central London. In North Lincolnshire the majority of other customers had their WFIs booked earlier than this compared to Central London where most who did not have WFIs in three-five days had to wait six days or longer. This reflects the fact that Grimsby Contact Centre booked WFIs into the first available slot in the Personal Adviser (PA) diary, whereas Pembroke Dock had an agreement with Central London to book WFIs no earlier than three days after IDOC for the reasons outlined above.

Over the whole duration of the pilot, the average time from IDOC to first WFI was 3.9 days in North Lincolnshire and 4.7 days in Central London. The average time taken in Central London improved dramatically over the course of the pilot however, and in September was below four days. Nationally, in this operational year to date, around 40 per cent of WFIs have been booked within four days. The corresponding figures for the SOM pilots are 88 per cent in North Lincolnshire and 62 per cent in Central London which compare very favourably to the national figure.
Figure 9.8  Time from IDOC to initial WFI

(a) North Lincolnshire

(b) Central London
9.3.2 WFI attendance to Jobcentre action complete

A major perceived benefit of the revised SOM process was that claims should passed quickly to the CPT from Jobcentres giving more control over the processing of new claims to the CPT. This is because the BF system was relocated to the CPT, eliminating the need for Jobcentres to hold on to claims after a WFI had been attended. The results below show that claims now pass through Jobcentres with few delays. In North Lincolnshire, 63 per cent of all jobcentre action was completed on the day of the WFI and 99 per cent had been completed by the end of the following day. In Central London 84 per cent were completed on the day of the WFI and 99 per cent by the end of the following day. There was little difference in the speed of processing between different benefit types. This does not tell the whole story however. The staff research in both London and North Lincolnshire found that the backlogs in the CPT had increased under the pilot, largely due to re-allocating work from Jobcentres, these findings are backed up by data shown later on in this Chapter.

9.3.3 Transit time from Jobcentres to CPT

Although not specifically a pilot issue, but important when trying to understand clearance time performance, the staff research in Central London and Glasgow found the transit time from Jobcentres to the Benefit Processing Centre could sometimes lead to significant delays in the processing of claims due to the distance the forms had to travel.

The following chart shows a comparison of the number of days it took claim forms to be received in the CPT after the Jobcentres had finished all of their actions between North Lincolnshire which is geographically compact, and Central London where the CPT is remote from the Jobcentres.

The differences are apparent immediately. Almost all claims in North Lincolnshire arrived in the CPT on the day of the WFI or the day after, whereas for Central London most took one or two days to get to the CPT and a significant number took longer than this.
9.3.4 Customers not requiring WFIs

All customers for whom the initial WFI was waived, deferred or re-scheduled were asked to post their forms directly to the CPT under the revised process. This comprises most IB customers and a large proportion of IS customers. In North Lincolnshire the CPT received the claim form on average seven days after initial contact had been made. In Central London the corresponding figure was ten days. Again, this is probably indicative of the longer postal delays encountered for claims travelling from London to Glasgow.

It should be noted that this time is not included in IB or IS AACT as the AACT clock starts when a completed claim form is received for IB and when the evidence requirement is met for IS.

9.3.5 Time taken in benefit processing (CPT and BPT)

Detailed earlier in this report are the key differences in the organisation of Benefit Processing Operations in the two pilot sites (see Table 4.1). The major difference between the sites was that the CPT and BPT teams have been combined in Glasgow. Several different claims processing models were tried there but the one eventually adopted saw the same member of staff carrying out both the CPT and BPT roles with a handful of dedicated staff performing the CMS push in between for security reasons. Because of these differences, the recorded MI differs between the two pilot sites and it is impossible to disaggregate the CPT and BPT roles in Glasgow BDC’s data.
Central London BDC

Figure 9.10 shows the distribution of the number of days that claims took to process in Glasgow BDC. This figure shows JSA claims only, as it is purely for illustrative purposes and the shape of the distribution is qualitatively the same for IB and IS claims.

Figure 9.10  Time taken in Glasgow BDC

In the case of JSA, it can be noted that Rapid Reclaims were processed very quickly, in fact the average was 3.6 days after receipt in Glasgow BDC. The average time taken for all other types of JSA claim was 9.7 days with the overall average being 8.2 days. Seventy-five per cent of claims were cleared within nine days of receipt, however there is a long ‘tail’ of claims which took longer than this. These are mostly comprised of claims which went into BF. See the section on BF management later in this chapter.

For IS claims the average time taken was 8.6 days and the average time for an IB claim was 7.1 days. Note that joint IB and IS claims are split between the IB and IS teams at Glasgow BDC so each claim of this type contributes to both averages. There was not a great deal of difference in the processing times for different types of claims in Glasgow BDC, the average durations ranged from 7.1 days for IB to 9.7 days for JSA.

Benefit processing in North Lincolnshire

In North Lincolnshire, benefit processing duties were split more obviously into the CPT and BPT roles. Figure 9.11 shows the time taken by claims in the CPT and the
BPT. Again attention is restricted to JSA in these charts as the IB and IS charts share a similar qualitative shape.

**Figure 9.11  Time taken in CPT and BPT**

*a) Time in CPT*

*b) Time in BPT*
The most time-consuming stage of the process was the CPT. On average, claims took 10.9 days here. Claims then took an average 3.2 days in benefit processing, although the vast majority were processed on the day of receipt or the day after. There is a long ‘tail’ to the distribution of claims that took longer to process.

The handoff between the CPT and BPT also caused delays in some cases. 35 per cent of claims arrived in the BPT on the day that the CPT finished their actions, 24 per cent and 29 per cent of claims arrived in the BPT one or two days after the CPT had finished with them and 12 per cent took longer than this. This handoff time is an important consideration, especially for areas such as North Lincolnshire where it was not possible to co-locate the CPT and BPT. Data from Glasgow BDC does not record the handoff time from the BPT to the CMS expert and back to the BPT so it has been impossible to analyse any delays that the different model used in Glasgow may have caused. Interviews with staff however, indicated that it could cause bottlenecks (see Section 7.7).

In North Lincolnshire, a decision was taken to pass rapid reclaims straight from Jobcentres to BPTs, bypassing the CPT stage of the process as these claims are usually ready for processing immediately (see Section 2.4.3). Around 20 per cent of all claims are Rapid Reclaims. For this reason it is important not to simply add together the CPT and BPT times to find the average time taken over the two stages combined. A best estimate for the total CPT and BPT time including both normal claims and Rapid Reclaims for JSA is 13.3 days.

There was little difference in the times taken for IB and IS claims. IB claims took on average 11.8 days in the CPT compared with 10.3 days for IS and 11.2 days for joint IB and IS claims. Once claims arrived at the BPT, IB claims took an average of 5.5 days while IS claims took 2.8 days and IB & IS 4.3 days.

9.3.6 Discussion of end-to-end times

Based on the information presented here, the front end of the process is working efficiently, with WFi bookings being made in a timely manner. Central London had some problems with WFi booking early in the pilot but these now seem to have been resolved.

There are no longer backlogs in the Jobcentres, with the majority of claims passed on to the CPT on the day of the WFi, and 99 per cent passed on by the end of the next day.

It appears that moving the BF system to the CPT has not provided the immediate fix that was hoped for. Claims spend most time in BDCs and there is a wide variability in the length of time claims take to process at this stage. Staff research, and also MI analysis later in the report show that there are still improvements to be made in terms of managing the BF system, problems here were exacerbated by backlogs of claims inherited from Jobcentres (see Section 7.3 and Sections 9.6.1 and 9.6.2). MI analysis later in this report also implies there may also be improvements to make in the management of claims which are ready for processing with all evidence available.
There is a small but not insignificant delay in claims passing from the CPTs in North Lincolnshire to the Benefit Processing Site (BPS). It is unclear whether the handoff of a claim to a CMS push expert in the Glasgow BDC model produced similar delays as the data does not record it.

In North Lincolnshire there is evidence of small delays in the BPT, this can be seen by the fact that most claims are processed by the BPT very quickly but there are a small number of claims which take much longer. Staff research uncovered the probable reason for this which was incomplete claims being passed from CPT to BPT resulting in the BPT setting up their own makeshift ‘BF’ system to collect outstanding evidence (see Section 2.4.4)

9.4 Contact Centre

The following statistics have been calculated using ‘Call Logger’ clerical statistics from Grimsby and Pembroke Dock Contact Centres. They represent a breakdown of the volume of all inbound calls into the different recorded categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9.2</th>
<th>Breakdown of inbound calls for Grimsby Contact Centre (17 April – 13 October)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of inbound calls of which: 15,775</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New claim made</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed single call</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General enquiry</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of inbound new claims of which: 12,269</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard single call</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid reclaim</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-break</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inbound/outbound</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA inbound/outbound</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9.3  Breakdown of inbound calls for Pembroke Dock Contact Centre (30 May – 13 October)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of inbound calls of which: 28,364</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New claim made</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed single call</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General enquiry</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of inbound new claims of which: 16,262</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard single call</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid reclaim</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-break</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In/outbound</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA in/outbound</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of all inbound calls, 78 per cent in North Lincolnshire and 57 per cent in Central London resulted in a new claim. The discrepancy is largely due to the fact that Central London have had a much larger volume of inappropriate calls and general enquiries than North Lincolnshire Staff in Pembroke Dock believe that the pilot has gone some way to reducing the number of inappropriate calls (see Section 5.1.1) but the evidence presented here shows that levels are still relatively high. Analysis of the trends over time show that since the pilot began, the proportion of inappropriate calls has remained relatively consistent. Some analysis of the reasons given for inappropriate calls can be found later in this section.

Both Contact Centres are dealing with the majority of customers in one of the three different types of single call (standard Single Call, Rapid Reclaim or Mini-break). North Lincolnshire has consistently dealt with around 80 per cent of customers in a single call over the course of the pilot whereas Pembroke Dock began with a much lower percentage of around 65 per cent until August when there was an improvement. Currently Pembroke Dock is dealing with over 70 per cent of new claims in a single call.

It is worth noting that Rapid Reclaim customers would have used a single call anyway. The number of customers who would otherwise have used a dual call, but under the pilot used a single call were 77 per cent and 70 per cent in North Lincolnshire and Central London respectively.

Another notable difference between the two Contact Centres is the number of customers who use a mini-break. Less than one per cent in North Lincolnshire used this option compared with six per cent in Central London. Reasons for this difference are unclear, further analysis of the recorded reason for mini-breaks would be useful.
9.4.1 Call durations

Table 9.4 shows the average durations for each of the three types of new call, as well as for inappropriate calls and general enquiries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Call Type</th>
<th>North Lincolnshire</th>
<th>Central London</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard single call</td>
<td>42 minutes</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid reclaim</td>
<td>11 minutes</td>
<td>14 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-break</td>
<td>32 minutes</td>
<td>53 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average of three call types</td>
<td>34 minutes</td>
<td>44 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General enquiries</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>8 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate calls</td>
<td>4 minutes</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A weighted average of the three types of single call shows that Grimsby Contact Centre has taken on average 34 minutes compared with 44 minutes in Pembroke Dock. Unfortunately there is no directly comparable pre-pilot data to estimate how much call handling time has actually been saved by the new processes. Also it is misleading to compare these figures to the claims which used the inbound/outbound model in the pilot as there are some customers, such as 16/17 year old handoff calls, who are still required to use this type of call. This would bias any comparison as this type of call in particular is shorter than a typical new claim call.

In both contact centres Rapid Reclaim calls take roughly one-quarter of the time of a standard process single call.

The reasons for calls taking longer in Pembroke Dock than they do in Grimsby are unclear, although possible reasons include the more diverse client base in Central London, including a large number of people who have language barriers.

9.4.2 Effect of the single call on WFI booking

The single call has made a large improvement to the ability of the contact centres to book WFIs efficiently. In Pembroke Dock Contact Centre 85 per cent of WFIs booked in the single call were within the optimum three-five days compared to only 52 per cent of those booked in a call-back. However, in North Lincolnshire there was no real difference in the numbers of WFIs booked within three-five days.

The largest impact of the single call was in terms of speed. In Central London WFIs booked in the single call were on average 4.3 days after IDOC, this was 1.7 days faster than for those booked in a call back. In North Lincolnshire WFIs booked in a single call were 3.4 days on average after IDOC; this was 0.7 days faster than those booked in a call back.

There is no comparable pre-pilot data available so it is impossible to say exactly how much faster the front end of the process is under the new SOM compared to the previous one, however the results shown above imply that there has been a significant improvement. JSA AACT, the only official measure which includes the
time from IDOC to WFI, has not shown any improvement under the new SOM. It is difficult to determine whether improvements in speed in taking new and repeat claims may be at the expense of accuracy and cause delays further down the line. However as discussed in 10.4.1 (Accuracy and integrity of the benefit system) the quality of customer statements is an ongoing and complex issue, many of which were not specific to the pilot.

9.4.3 Inappropriate calls

The following pie charts show the breakdowns of inappropriate calls into different categories for the two pilot call centres.

The three main categories for inappropriate calls were ‘Other’, ‘Enquiry on existing claim’ and ‘Jobcentre related enquiry’. Unfortunately it is not clear what type of calls fall into the ‘Other’ category. Enquiries on existing claims accounted for 20 per cent and 33 per cent of all inappropriate calls in Grimsby and Pembroke Dock respectively, which is consistent with the findings from staff research, particularly in Pembroke Dock, staff identified difficulties getting through to the BDC as one of reasons for the continued high volume of inappropriate calls during the pilot (Section 5.1.1)
9.5  Jobcentres

9.5.1  FTA rates

The analysis shown here investigates whether the pilot has had any impact on the number of people who fail to attend their initial WFI. The data used is centrally reported MI and relates to all JSA – New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs) and most types of IS initial WFI.
In North Lincolnshire there were targeted pre-WFI calls for customers whose WFI is four days or more after IDOC, or when the FTA rate rises above 17 per cent. In Central London, a different method of 100 per cent pre-WFI calls was used to help control FTA rates.

The Figure 9.13 shows how the FTA rates for the pilot areas have changed over time, a four week trailing average has been applied to smooth the data.

**Figure 9.13  FTA rates for Central London and North Lincolnshire**

Looking at this figure in isolation it is very difficult to determine what the impact of the pilot has been on FTA rates. Central London’s FTA rate had been steadily increasing up to a peak of over ten per cent in early June, but this has since begun to decrease and is now at around eight per cent. North Lincolnshire’ FTA rate increased slightly before the pilot, but in July there was a large decrease to levels similar to those that were achieved in autumn last year.

Below is a DiD analysis for the two pilot sites against the control groups that were used for the AACT analysis. This aims to control for external factors that might have affected FTA rates.
Figure 9.14  DiD analysis for FTA rates

a) North Lincolnshire

b) Central London
The DiD analysis tells the same story as the raw data. Both sites have seen improvements to FTA rates which began approximately two months after the pilot began.

The initial underperformance of the pilots cannot be attributed directly to the introduction of new processes as Central London merely showed a continuation of a long term increasing trend, and the largest increase to North Lincolnshire. FTA rate came a month before the pilot began. There is no evidence that the pilot has improved FTA rates due to the pre-pilot variability, however there has been no negative impact and encouragingly the FTA rates have dropped compared to the control groups in the past two months. There is no direct evidence here that the 100 per cent pre-WFI calls trialled in Central London has improved FTA rates more than the North Lincolnshire model.

9.6 CPT and BPT teams

9.6.1 The Brought Forward system

Under the revised process the BF system, previously in Jobcentres, was moved into the newly created CPT role. The table below shows how many claims of each type went into the BF system in the two pilot sites:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of claims to BF</th>
<th>JSA %</th>
<th>IB %</th>
<th>IS %</th>
<th>IB and IS %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Lincolnshire</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the proportion of claims going into BF was around twice as much in North Lincolnshire as in Central London. The following charts show how going into BF affected the time taken for JSA claims over the CPT and BPT stages. Rapid Reclaims are not included in the figures for technical reasons so that there can be a direct comparison between the sites. This means that the length of time claims spent over these two stages may appear longer than expected as Rapid Reclaims were processed very quickly by both areas and would hence push down the average durations. These figures are not comparable to those quoted in the end-to-end times section.

24 There is no data for joint IB and IS claims for Glasgow, as in these cases the customer statements were photocopied and the components of the claim processed independently by the IS and IB teams. IB and IS claims in Glasgow therefore contribute to both IB and IS figures.
Figure 9.15  Period of time from CPT to BPT for BF and non-BF claims

a) North Lincolnshire

b) Glasgow Benefit Centre
In Glasgow, virtually all of the claims that took a long time to process had been in the BF system. The average time taken for those that had gone into BF was 20 days compared to seven days for claims which had not been in BF. In North Lincolnshire the comparable figures were 19 days for claims which went to BF and 15 days for non-BF claims. The actual time that claims spent in BF was 16 days in Glasgow, and eight days in North Lincolnshire. A possible reason for difference in processing times for the BF and non-BF claims being so small is the fact that a ‘Work Pending’ system was put in place in North Lincolnshire. This was a system in which claims were processed in the order that they arrived at the CPT. It was put in place to avoid discrimination against complex cases, but it had the knock-on effect of making some straightforward cases take longer to process, particularly those with all evidence available which were ready for processing (see Section 2.5.1).

Another possible reason is that cases were sometimes put into BF unnecessarily resulting in a large number coming out of BF very quickly, although this wasn’t specifically identified in the staff research. This could possibly be due to differing levels of benefit processing experience as in North Lincolnshire the CPT was staffed largely by FAs whereas in Glasgow it was staffed by benefit processors who have a more detailed knowledge of what evidence is required to process a benefit claim. However no direct evidence emerged from staff research to suggest that this was the case. This would also explain the much larger number of claims which went into BF in North Lincolnshire.

9.6.2 Levels of outstanding work

Staff research in North Lincolnshire and Glasgow found that there were problems handling the flow of claims, in particular there were reports of large backlogs of claims inherited from Jobcentres at the start of the pilot. The amount of outstanding work is known to be closely related to AACT performance and understanding how the levels have changed can help to explain the observed AACT performance. Figure 9.16 show time series of the number of claims cleared in each week, and the number of claims outstanding at the end of each week. Outstanding in this case means all claims in the BPC, both in the BF system and ready to process awaiting action. Note that the statistics for North Lincolnshire only relate to the CPT but are for all three benefits combined whereas those for Glasgow relate to the combined CPT and BDC teams, but for JSA only. These differences are due to the way that data was collected in the two sites. For this reason the statistics for North Lincolnshire and Glasgow cannot be compared.
Figure 9.16 shows that the number of claims outstanding in North Lincolnshire was roughly twice the number of claims that could be processed in a week for the majority of the pilot, with peaks in numbers in April and September. Over September and into October the levels dropped dramatically, indicating that the problems managing backlogs may now have been resolved. However the precedent of an improvement in April followed by subsequent deterioration in May indicates that there is still a possibility that the situation may get worse in the future and therefore improved AACT performance is not guaranteed.

Figure 9.17 shows the number of JSA claims outstanding in Glasgow has also been approximately twice the number of claims that can be cleared in a week. However, unlike North Lincolnshire, the number of claims outstanding has been steadily growing over the course of the pilot, despite an increasing trend in the number of claims processed per week. This is consistent with the observed increases in clearance times over the duration of the pilot.

The statistics from both sites show sharp rises in the number of outstanding claims in the weeks immediately after the introduction of the pilot, the increase was particularly sharp in North Lincolnshire. This is consistent with findings from staff research that inherited backlogs from Jobcentres at the start of the pilot had contributed to the difficulties handling the flow of work.
9.6.3 CMS push rate

In the piloted SOM the responsibility for the ‘push’ from CMS to Legacy was moved from the previous Financial Assessor role to the newly created CPT role. In the past there have been problems with many claims not transferring successfully between systems. It was hoped that transferring the role to staff with more experience in benefit processing, and in particular with the Legacy systems, would improve the number of claims which are successfully pushed. It should be noted however that in North Lincolnshire a large number of the CPT were FAs with limited knowledge of benefit processing.

Two measures are used when considering CMS push rates. Firstly, the proportion of successful CMS pushes from all cases where an electronic push was attempted. Secondly, the proportion of successful electronic pushes as a proportion of all clerical and attempted electronic transfers. A ‘successful’ transfer constitutes a push that has completed 100 per cent successfully and does not include partial pushes. Both of these measures are used because, for example, the first measure may increase if staff are becoming increasingly able to spot claims which will not push and simply attempting a clerical transfer instead. This would give a false impression of an increasing CMS push rate, however the second measure would not show the increase and so it can be put into context.

Figure 9.18 shows how the number of successful pushes has changed since the pilots began. It should be noted that the data for North Lincolnshire was only available up to the beginning of September, however Central London data is valid to
week ending 22 October 2006. This is because of an, as yet, unresolved issue with the MI reporting.

Figure 9.18  CMS push rates (four week trailing average)

![Graph showing CMS push rates for North Lincolnshire and Central London with data from March 2005 to September 2006. The graphs display the percentage of electronic and clerical and electronic push rates.](chart.png)
The percentage of electronic CMS push rate for Central London was fairly static until late July when it began to improve, eventually levelling off at around 50 per cent, ten per cent above the previous level. The clerical and electronic percentage improved at the start of the pilot and has been relatively stable at just above 20 per cent.

For North Lincolnshire the percentage of electronic CMS push rate has been very erratic, but broadly at the same level as before the pilot. The clerical and electronic percentage showed a small initial decrease but since increased to just over 20 per cent.

A DiD analysis has been investigated but is not enlightening. National data however has shown very similar increases to both push rate measures in the past few months, so it is difficult to rule out the possibility that the improved push rates were not just part of a national improvement.

9.7 Conclusions

9.7.1 New/repeat claims AACT

The analysis in this report has shown that there is evidence of an increase to JSA AACT which begun around the time of pilot implementation. There have since been some signs of improvement to North Lincolnshire’ AACT although September’s data showed another slight increase. There has not yet been any evidence of an improvement to Central London’s performance. Neither area is performing as well as it was before the pilot began.

The implementation effect is likely to explain the increases in AACT in the months immediately after the pilot began, but is unlikely to explain why has performance has not returned to pre-pilot levels after six months. This implies that there are still refinements to be made to the process if AACT is to be managed effectively.

Issues were raised by staff which have probably contributed to the decline in performance. These issues are related to the way in which the pilot was implemented, rather than the new processes themselves. They included large backlogs inherited from Jobcentres at the start of the pilot and insufficient staff resource to deal with the increased workload under the new SOM. It is important to bear these issues in mind as the problems managing AACT have probably not been entirely due to the new process. It remains a challenge for the pilots to see whether their JSA AACT can now be improved to pre-pilot levels.

There was no obvious impact on IS AACT but the raw data for IB pointed to an improvement in performance. The DiD analysis was unable to identify whether these improvements were related to the pilot, as IB AACT has historically been very variable and there has also been a small national improvement in the past few months. The data shows clearly though that good IB AACT performance is possible under the new SOM.
9.7.2 End-to-End times breakdown

In both pilot sites the front end of the process now appears to be running efficiently with timely WFI booking and no delays in claims being passed on from Jobcentres to the CPT. There were some initial teething problems in Pembroke Dock with timely WFI booking, but this now seems to have been resolved with the average wait for a WFI in September down to under four days which is comparable with Grimsby Contact Centre.

The transit time for claims to pass from the Jobcentre to Claims Preparation causes delays in processing, although to some extent this is unavoidable and not a pilot issue, the variation seen is an important consideration for clearance time performance. Delays are greater for claims from the Central London offices as they have further to travel to the CPTs.

The most time consuming part of the process is Claims Preparation. The inherited backlogs and lack of an improvement in JSA clearance times are evidence that relocating BF management from Jobcentres may have simply moved the problems to the CPT. Data from North Lincolnshire shows that once claims are received in the BPT, they are processed very quickly, however there are a small number of claims which take a long time at this stage.

Evidence from staff research suggests that this may be due to incomplete claims being received from the CPT. Data also shows that introducing a new handoff, from the CPT to BPT has added a new delay into the process. There was no data available to investigate whether there was a similar delay in Glasgow benefit processing centre as claims were passed to a CMS expert to perform the push to Legacy, and then back again to the original processor.

There was little variation in the time that it takes to process different types of benefit claim once they reach the CPT. This was true of both North Lincolnshire and Glasgow BDCs although they both operated different models. North Lincolnshire used a ‘work pending’ system to allow claims to be processed in the order the were received and hence not introduce any bias towards simple (usually JSA) claims. Glasgow CPT had different teams dealing with each different benefit type.

9.7.3 Contact Centres

The data shows that the contact centres have been operating well under the pilot process. Seventy per cent and 77 per cent of calls in Grimsby and Pembroke Dock respectively which would have otherwise been dual calls, were dealt with in a single call. The single call was shown to significantly improve the speed with which customers could attend WFIs.

There were some problems identified which have persisted under the pilot. Inappropriate calls, whilst staff believe the volume has been reduced by the introduction of the IVR, are still common in Pembroke Dock. Eighteen per cent of all calls fall into this category. The analysis of MI has been unable to verify whether this was an improvement on pre-pilot levels.
9.7.4 Jobcentres

The analysis of FTA rates did not show any direct impact of the new processes on FTA rates for initial WFIs. There were small improvements to both pilot sites’ FTA rates over the duration of the pilot so it is safe to conclude that there will be no adverse impact on FTA rates under the new SOM.

9.7.5 Claims preparation and Benefit Processing Teams

Further analysis of the BF system showed that there were significant differences in how this had been operated in North Lincolnshire and Glasgow. In North Lincolnshire a large number of claims went into the BF system but many claims did not stay in the system for very long. In Glasgow BDC, the number that went into BF was much lower but they all stayed in the system for a relatively long time. A possible reason for the differences between the two sites was that the claims prep team in North Lincolnshire was staffed largely by FAs who the staff research found to struggle in their new role. There may have been an over cautious approach taken, with too many claims unnecessarily placed in BF although this was not identified in the staff research. The results from this section also pointed to the fact that many claims which did not go into the BF system in North Lincolnshire actually took longer to process than some which did.

Analysis of the number of outstanding claims in the benefit processing sites showed that there was a large increase in the number of outstanding claims in both North Lincolnshire and Glasgow in the few weeks immediately after the beginning of the pilot. This reinforces the findings from Staff research that a large backlog of claims was inherited from Jobcentres during this period.

These results all point to the fact that there is work still to be done in refining the operation of the BF system and improving the flow of claims through the CPT.

Analysis of the CMS push rates showed a slight increase in the proportion of claims successfully transferred from CMS to Legacy electronically over the course of the pilot. There have however been national improvements recently so the improvement can not be directly attributed to the pilot, although the analysis has shown no adverse effect from the new processes.
Part IV
Conclusions from North Lincolnshire and Central London research and Management Information analysis
10 Conclusions

This chapter draws together the conclusions of the evaluation. It begins with an overview of the extent to which the pilot addressed key bottlenecks and issues in the previous Standard Operating Model (SOM) and highlights residual issues. It then assesses the extent to which the pilot in North Lincolnshire and Central London delivered improvements in customer service, staff experience and efficiency. The chapter concludes with key lessons learnt from North Lincolnshire and Central London.

10.1 The end-to-end business process

The processes introduced through the SOM Process Review (SPR) pilot successfully addressed many of the pre-existing issues and bottlenecks, including:

- lengthy calls;
- delays between inbound and outbound calls;
- failed outbound calls;
- time wasted collecting unnecessary information for Rapid Reclaim customers;
- inappropriate calls to the Contact Centre;
- the over-stretched role of Financial Assessors (FAs); and
- delays in receiving claims at Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC) from Jobcentres.

More specifically, the pilot was successful at speeding up the front-end of the claiming process, allowing claims to be passed onto benefit processing more quickly than before the pilot. Time was saved through:

- the new Interactive Voice Routing (IVR) system, which reduced the volume of inappropriate calls received and handled by the Contact Centre;
- the introduction of a new process Rapid Reclaims, reducing the amount of information collected;
• removing job searches from First Contact, which reduced call length and enabled First Contact Officers (FCOs) to deal with more customer claims;

• the single call, where delays between inbound and outbound calls (including failed outbounds) were reduced and calls were shorter than the combined time for inbound and outbound calls used previously;

• moving the Brought Forward (BF) system to the BDC, which speeded up the front-end of the claims process and gave Claim Service Team Officers (CSTOs) more time to concentrate on their customer-facing role;

• transferring claim preparation work to the BDC, which reduced the length of time it took for a claim to be received at the BDC; and

• the use of Tele-teams, which reduced the volume of inbound calls received by claims preparation/benefit processors and freed up their time to concentrate on claim processing work.

There remain issues for attention however. Notably, significant drawbacks in the pilot emerged at the back-end, in claims processing, where bottlenecks developed in the BDC. In part this was the result of the introduction of an extra stage in the process to safeguard against fraud. Additionally, with the level of resources available, the BDC struggled to handle the flow of claims and found the BF system difficult to manage. This resulted in a reduction in the numbers of claims processed and an increase in both the number of calls ‘not answered’ (on account of the Tele-team lacking capacity) and customer complaints.

A range of other issues and bottlenecks existed across the process:

**Table 10.1 Outstanding issues and bottlenecks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of mobile phones</td>
<td>Customers with mobile phones were unhappy that they still had to pay for the cost of their call, which was lengthy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating complete customer statements</td>
<td>Incomplete customer statements were reportedly due to customers not knowing the answer or the question not being applicable. Customer Management System (CMS) is not currently designed to enter ‘not applicable’ or screen out inappropriate questions e.g. an 18 year old being asked whether they are a war veteran.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct identification/selection of the Rapid Reclaim system by customers</td>
<td>The Rapid Reclaim system relied on the customer to correctly self-identify and select the Rapid Reclaim option through the IVR. If Rapid Reclaim customers incorrectly went through as a new claim, they were not identified until towards the end of the script for the previous inbound call.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Table 10.1 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customers’ ability to answer questions on personal finances and children/partners</td>
<td>Some customers revealed that they struggled to answer questions around personal finances and children/partners. This was supported by interviews with FCOs, who reported that customers also struggled to answer detailed questions on: previous employer’s contact details; employee number at previous job; and/or date last received Housing Benefit (HB).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings in Jobcentres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of footfall to Jobcentres</td>
<td>Footfall to Jobcentres persisted as customers visited to initiate their new or repeat claim for benefit, to deliver documentation to support their claim, and to find out what was happening with their claim and when they could expect to be paid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing customer flow</td>
<td>Problems occurred around managing customer flow when customers were too early or late for appointments, returned to see the CSTO after their Personal Adviser (PA) meeting, and when there were staff shortages due to sickness, absence or leave. These instances impacted on the CSTOs’ ability to see customers on time and so customers were asked to wait.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability of CSTOs to achieve the target of 15-20 customers met a day</td>
<td>CSTOs met around ten customers a day but struggled to meet the pilot’s target of 15-20 customers. Claim Service Team (CST) staff thought that the pilot failed to take into account additional time needed around the 15-minute customer meeting, such as extra time spent going to and on the photocopier, and occasions when customers had to re-visit the CSTO after a Work Focused Interview (WFI) with a PA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit Claims and Processing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete and inaccurate customer statements</td>
<td>Incomplete and inaccurate customer statements were a key source of difficulties, and required more staff time than expected in both Jobcentres and BDCs to complete them sufficiently to process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficiency of resources to perform the combined claim preparation/benefit processing role</td>
<td>While it proved to be effective for one person to be performing both the claim preparation and benefit processing, sufficient resources is essential to handle the volume of claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting through to the BPC</td>
<td>Tele-teams freed up time for Benefit Processors to process claims, but customers and Jobcentre staff experienced difficulties getting through to the BDC because the Tele-team was insufficiently resourced to meet demand. Jobcentre staff and customers used the same number to reach the BDC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing information about a claim</td>
<td>Customers routinely reported that they encountered difficulties in finding out what was happening with their claim. They asserted that no one could tell them any specific information about their claim when they called the contact numbers they were given. Some customers said that they appeared to be passed around between different departments and were often unsure who they were actually speaking to.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10.2 Delivering customer service

One of the main aims of the SPR was to improve the level of customer service through:

- fewer contacts;
- easier access; and
- speedier decision making.

Overall the pilot was successful in improving customer service at the front end of the new and repeat claim process. However there were other aspects of the process where customer service did not improve or did not meet customer requirements. For example, whilst it was easier to access the Contact Centre using the Freephone number, and to use the IVR system, getting through to the BDC was difficult. It is too early to say whether the pilot made decision making speedier. Bottlenecks in the BDC created some delays in payment of benefits, and sometimes inadequate information was provided to customers explaining the cause of delays.

10.2.1 Fewer contacts

The SPR pilot reduced the number of staff in contact with a customer or handling their claim at the very start of the claiming process. Staff believed the single call introduced represented better customer service because customers only spoke with one person and knew they were dealing with their claim. Customers generally preferred to be dealt with in a single call rather than the dual inbound-outbound system, but still found that there were too many contact points in the process where they were required to give the same information.

There was no change in the number of staff handling customers in Jobcentres. The new Claims Preparation Team (CPT)/Benefit Processing Team (BPT) did introduce another team handling customer statements and contacting customers about missing information or evidence. Jobcentre and CPT/BPT staff were justifiably concerned that this approach was confusing for customers. Customers routinely expressed that they felt they were being passed around from ‘department to department’ and would have liked one person to be responsible for their claim and that they could contact right the way through the service.

10.2.2 Easier access

Contact Centres were able to take new claims and complete them in a single call. PAs and CSTOs were able to meet with customers within four days of their initial call to the Contact Centre and quickly move the claim to the BDC.

In peak or high call volume both pilot Contact Centres on occasion instances reverted to the dual inbound-outbound call system, forecasting staff resources is critical to managing the call flow and abandonment rate.
The introduction of the IVR, Freephone number and single call – was making access to First Contact quicker and easier. At the other end of the process, access appeared much more difficult. Customers reported:

- being unclear about where to address queries to;
- frequently finding it difficult to get through to preparation and processing teams; and
- that they were not given accurate or detailed information when they did.

Jobcentre Staff dealing with customer queries also noted these concerns. At the time of the research, the Glasgow BDC Tele-team was under-resourced; both customers and staff expressed that they had difficulty in getting through to the BDC.

10.2.3 Speedier decision making

A key aim of the pilot was to speed up decision making and therefore benefit payment. It is not possible to draw any definite conclusions from the quantitative survey data as to whether customers were – on average – receiving payment more quickly in the pilot area than in the comparator. There were still a significant proportion of customers in both North Lincolnshire and Central London who were dissatisfied with the overall length of time taken to process claims. More generally, both quantitative and qualitative research data point to continuing backlogs and delays at the processing end. Qualitative interviews in particular indicate that specific claims were held up because of problems that were fairly straightforward to resolve – such as outstanding or missing evidence. However, it is unclear to customers why it takes so long for these issues to be identified.

The SPR pilot placed an increased emphasis on keeping customers informed about the progress of their claim. More specifically, the pilot introduced courtesy calls on arrival of the claim at the BDC and when the team held their claim for four days or more so that customers knew where their claim was in the process and when they could expect payment.

Courtesy calls were not routinely made. Typically, officers only contacted customers for further information. Customers reflected that they would like to have received a ‘courtesy call’, particularly those who initiated calls themselves to enquire about their claims, experiencing long delays or ongoing issues with their claim.

10.3 Staff experience

The SPR pilot aimed to improve staff experience by providing a process that was:

- transparent;
- user friendly; and
- makes more sense to those who deliver it.
Overall, the SPR pilot made sense to most staff and the majority felt they understood their new job roles and key changes of the pilot. Given the nature of pilot implementation, staff across offices took time to adjust to the changes and some were initially confused about the remit of their role, particularly over the level of information gathering required by FCOs and CSTOs and how much is left for the BDC to gather.

Generally the pilot improved staff experience in the Contact Centre. The single call allowed FCOs to feel greater ownership of each claim and therefore improved satisfaction in carrying out First Contact. Broadly, the pilot had no apparent impact on FCO absence or sickness. However, it was consistently viewed that the Admin. Team resources and training for the Pembroke Dock was overlooked. Staff anticipated that the increased workload, backlogs and shortage of Admin. staff would impact on staff sickness and absence in the long-term.

Staff job satisfaction was similarly mixed in the Jobcentres. Some CSTOs felt that the change in their role enabled them to focus on a smaller number of tasks that were achievable in the working day. Consequently, they reported that their job was much less stressful than the previous FA role before the pilot. Other CSTOs were disappointed that they no longer used their benefit knowledge and experience in their job.

The initial reduction of the CSTO role and redeployment of staff, particularly in London where FAs were not redeployed as CPT Officers (CPTOs), caused some staff to become concerned about their job security and the detrimental impact to customer service. In these instances, staff wished the rationale for the pilot was more transparent to them.

The combined CPT/BPT role trialled in the extended pilot was very successful. This and the introduction of the Tele-team meant that the CPT/BPT in the Glasgow BDC did not experience low morale and low job satisfaction as found within CPTs in North Lincolnshire. The combined role of preparation and processing allowed for greater consistency and staff anticipated that it would speed up the claims process.

Nearly all Glasgow BDC staff felt it made logical sense for the claims preparation role to sit within the BDC as it was perceived that they had the most benefit knowledge and experience. Moreover, a large amount of claims under the previous SOM were prepared by Glasgow BDC staff anyway. In contrast, while the Tele-team role made sense to staff as it freed up CPTOs/ Benefit Processing Team Officers (BPTOs) time to process claims, staff morale and job satisfaction was at risk of becoming very low within the Tele-teams due to high call volume and limited resources.

In general there was a lack of cohesion across the entire end-to-end business process. Officers’ understanding and awareness of the roles and responsibilities of teams in other parts of the business process was poor. The SPR pilot was not the root cause of the lack of cohesion across the end to end process, but nor did it address it either. In general, the clear distinctions between teams made it easy for staff across...
the process to apportion blame for inaccurate, incomplete or inappropriate customer statements to other teams.

10.4 Delivering efficiency

The third aim of the pilot was to provide a more efficient, affordable new claim process without having an adverse impact on performance. In terms of efficiency the following was considered:

- improved clearance times;
- accuracy; and
- reduced reworking.

There are some positive signs in terms of efficiency gains. In particular, the pilot improved the efficiency of First Contact for new and repeat claims and alleviated pressures on staff in Jobcentres. This reduced waiting times for customers and made it possible to offer a more flexible booking system for new appointments. It is not clear yet whether the level of accuracy improved under the SPR pilot. There were consistent complaints by both Jobcentre and BDC staff that a high proportion of customer statements were inaccurate and incomplete. The improvements to the handling of claims at the customer-facing end were achieved in part through a shift in workload onwards to the BDC, where bottlenecks developed. This is a major constraint on efficiency.

10.4.1 Speed and clearance times

The pilot did not deliver clear improvements in the Actual Average Clearance Time (AACT) for all three main benefits. While there is some evidence that it contributed to specific improvements for individual benefits, particularly Incapacity Benefit (IB), the pilot process would benefit from further refinement to improve AACT performance. There was however clear evidence that the pilot was successful in speeding up the front-end of the claiming process. The single call at First Contact was shorter and removed the delay previously built in between inbound and outbound calls. It was not clear whether the increased workload for Admin. staff increased the time it took to process statements.

Staff working in Jobcentres tended to meet customers on the day of their appointment, checked their statement, conducted the WFI, and forwarded the claim to the BDC on the same day. In the extended pilot, it generally took one to two days for Glasgow BDC to receive the claim.

In both pilot areas, the increase in CPT/BPT functions, such as the BF system and updating CMS to facilitate the ‘push’ to Legacy, increased the time taken to complete claims preparation and processing in the BDC.
Some reasons for bottlenecks were unrelated to the pilot, and included:

- a large backlog of claims inherited at the very start of the pilot;
- multiple staff absences from the teams; and
- disruptive interruptions by requests for emergency payments.

It should be noted that the pilots reported to be operating in a relatively quiet period for Jobcentre Plus with additional resource available in both Contact Centres. While the SPR pilot appeared to speed up the early stages of the process, it was not fully tested by high customer demand.

10.4.2 Accuracy and integrity of the benefit system

Staff working at the early stages of the claims process appeared to place an emphasis on the speed with which new and repeat claims were taken, checked and progressed to the CPT/BPT. While this helped to reduce the time taken at the front-end of the business, it may be at the expense of accuracy. Staff in Jobcentres and CPT/BPT generally perceived that the Contact Centre was responsible for incorrect information or unanswered questions, however, there were more complex issues involved, many of which were not specific to the pilot. The table below provides a summary of the different issues encountered that affected the accuracy and completeness of customer statements.

Table 10.2 Issues affecting the accuracy and completeness of new and repeat claims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Issues affecting the accuracy and completeness of new and repeat claims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact Centre</td>
<td>FCOs reported leaving some CMS questions unanswered at First Contact but they also routinely told customers to address these when they received their statement and before their appointment at a Jobcentre. There was no clear evidence to show that FCOs left more or less unanswered questions as a result of the pilot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In observations of First Contact, FCOs did not routinely check uncertain answers given by customers to some questions – such as the date their last employment ended. As a result, there was a risk that the information provided was inaccurate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FCOs were not always aware of the consequences of incorrect information and unanswered questions on the work required at later stages of the claim process or the implications for customers receiving their benefit payment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administration staff in the extended pilot reported that operating the previous SOM and SOM pilot caused confusion as they needed to remember to switch printers, desk aids and auxiliary forms, which increased the risk of mistakes being made, particularly with amending statements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Table 10.2  Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Issues affecting the accuracy and completeness of new and repeat claims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hand-off between the Contact Centre and Jobcentres</td>
<td>Jobcentre staff reported that customers did not always receive their statements before attending the Jobcentres for their PA appointment, particularly when customers’ WFIs were booked to occur one or two days after date of claim. As a result, customers were not able to read, check and amend their statement before seeing a CSTO. The Contact Centre in the extended pilot implemented a minimum of four day WFI booking to ensure that customers received their statements in the post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claim Service Team</td>
<td>Staff did not feel that 15 minutes was sufficient to check complex claims, such as claims by lone parents, for IB or IS, for people with more than two children, or those who required a Habitual Residue Test (HRT). In these instances, CSTOs struggled to fully check the claim or make sure that it was complete. Some staff stated that even when they identified areas that required further questions they refrained from getting the answers as they perceived that this was the role of the BDC. Consequently, there was a risk that such claims were not as complete as they were before the pilot when FA meetings lasted 20 minutes or longer (when they ran into PA appointment times).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers</td>
<td>Even when customers received their statement, either before attending the Jobcentres or in a meeting with a CSTO, staff reported that they did not routinely read and check their Statement. Some staff perceived that there was a need to educate customers to check their statement before arriving at the office. Customers did not routinely bring evidence to support their claim to the Jobcentre. In these cases, CSTOs were not able to verify basic details and so this needed to be picked up later by the CPT/BPT.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.4.3  Duplication of work

The SPR pilot reduced the amount work and duplication of work at the front-end of the overall claiming process, as follows:

- the IVR system was felt to redirect inappropriate calls away from the Contact Centre;
- the IVR covered some of the text previously read by FCOs to customers and so reduced the time officers spent taking new and repeat claims;
- the specific routing of Rapid Reclaim customers avoided the collection of unnecessary information;
- the single call for new claims removed the repetition of questions about customers’ personal details;
- the reduced data gather for customers’ previous employment details (reduced from 12 months of information to just six months) reduced the time needed to collect information for new claims;
• the removal of job searches from First Contact also reduced the time and work needed to take new claims; and

• time and work was saved on failed outbound calls and subsequent inbound calls to rearrange the outbound call.

Duplication was also reduced in the Jobcentres as follows:

• the removal of routine previewing of customers reduced the volume of work conducted before customers attended the Jobcentre;

• the transfer of claim preparation to a dedicated team allowed CSTOs to focus on delivering face-to-face services for customers;

• the time spent managing diaries for the previous FAs was reduced; and

• being able to make amendments straight onto the customer statement instead of an A10 form cut down on duplicating information, especially if a customer had already amended the statement prior to the appointment.

10.5 Recommendations

The following key recommendations were identified by all staff across the end to end process that would further improve the SOM Pilot:

• **Rectifying the bottlenecks at the back-end of the process.** Further review of the management of claim preparation between benefit processing teams, particularly between IS and IB.

• **Effective planning of resources.** Staff routinely emphasised the need for effective planning to manage call and customer flow. Managers and Team Leaders across offices felt that more work was needed to understand the different patterns of customer demand and the impact on available resources.

• **Quality Assessment Frameworks.** Quality procedures for all offices need to be adapted to fit with the pilot.

• **Staff training.** Further training and a detailed walk-through diagram were requested.

• **Greater emphasis on educating customers.** Each role within the process should be clearly outlined to the customer and placing the onus on customers to provide accurate and timely evidence to process the claim.

• **Further MI evidence** from the pilot on clearance times and accuracy should be undertaken to support and improve the national roll-out of the pilot.
Recommendations for the Contact Centre included:

• the previous SOM and the SOM pilot should be operated by different members of staff;
• review resources for the Admin. Team;
• all FCOs should take both new claims and rapid reclaim calls;
• specific Admin. Team training and preparation should be delivered before the pilot;
• training for FCOs should incorporate practical elements, such as practice calls and the opportunity to shadow trainers. IT equipment should be available to FCOs in a quiet designated space for the training;
• improving FCO awareness of ‘Benefit critical’ questions within CMS; and
• greater clarification on the level of information required to progress a claim should be provided.

Recommendations for the Jobcentre included:

• training for Floor Walkers and security staff on the procedure for handling evidence brought into Jobcentres by customers;
• improving the communication between Jobcentres and the BDC;
• ensuring that CSTOs understand the remit of their meetings;
• for CSTOs and PAs to provide clearer explanation about their roles to reduce the amount of customers that ask PAs benefit related questions – freeing up PA time to focus on work discussions;
• explanation of the CSTO and PA roles and the approximate length of time of each meeting should be clearly specified in the appointment letter received prior to visiting the Jobcentre;
• greater clarification regarding the overlap in responsibilities between the CST and BPT; and
• placing greater responsibility on customers for gathering and sending evidence, as they continued to use the Jobcentre as a resource to send evidence from.

Recommendations for the BDC:

• reviewing contractual agreements with courier services;
• combine the BPT/CPT role to improve efficiency and reduce delays;
• review resources available for staffing the Tele-team;
• review staffing needed on the JSA Registration Team;
• review cost of training BDC staff to perform joint IS and IB claims preparation and benefit processing;

• improve the use of existing systems used by BDC, that are available to Jobcentre staff so they can find out directly about a customers claim without calling the BDC to find out where the claim has got to;

• improve the process for labelling claims arriving from the Jobcentre so that they can be easily distributed and tracked within the BDC;

• re-visit the blanket courtesy call;

• improve the technical capability of the Tele-team (introduced in Glasgow at the same time as the pilot);

• consider improving access to the BDC to customers by making it a free phone number; and

• improve telephone access to the BDC for Jobcentre staff, possibly setting up either a caller identification, IVR option or provide direct dial numbers to BDC staff.
Appendix A
Technical note on presentation of Customer Survey data

Throughout the report, all percentage figures are rounded to the nearest whole number, which means figures may not always sum to 100 per cent. An asterisk (*) indicates values of less than 0.5 per cent. Where figures are reported for ‘Good’ or ‘Satisfied’ this combines scores for ‘very’ and ‘fairly’ good/satisfied.

Differences in results between the pilot and comparator areas have only been highlighted where the variation is statistically significant. In brief, a difference between two parts of the sample must be of at least a certain size to be considered statistically significant, and the difference required depends on the sample size. The table below sets out the guide that has been used throughout this report to determine whether differences are statistically significant. It is sourced from MORI.
Table A.1  Differences required for significance at or near these percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of sample on which survey result is based</th>
<th>10% or 90%</th>
<th>30% or 70%</th>
<th>50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 and 100</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 and 200</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 and 300</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 and 400</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 and 500</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 and 200</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 and 300</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>200 and 400</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 and 500</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 and 1,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MORI.
Appendix B
Management Information definitions

Table B.1 Definitions of AACT start and end dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Start date</th>
<th>End date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JSA</td>
<td>Whichever is later out of the customer’s initial date of contact (IDOC) or the first day of their unemployment.</td>
<td>The date on which the benefit is actually cleared for payment or the claim is withdrawn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>The date on which the evidence requirement is satisfied.</td>
<td>The date that notification about the claim is issued, the claim is withdrawn, or a pre-payment check is cleared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>The date on which a properly completed claim form is received at any location within Jobcentre Plus.</td>
<td>The date that a disallowance notice is issued, the claim is cleared for payment, or a death notification is received.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Telephony definitions

The definitions here have been condensed down from a more extensive list provided by Grimsby Contact Centre.
### Table B.2 Telephone definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inbound general enquiry</td>
<td>Any incoming calls, which are enquiries that the Contact Centres should/could handle. Customer confirming details from a previous inbound/outbound call. Inbound new claim that has stopped due to either customers or our fault. Cases where a WFI could not be booked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inbound new claim</td>
<td>Standard process inbound new claims. Clerical contingency inbound calls. 16/17 year old hand offs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inbound inappropriate</td>
<td>Any incoming calls which should not have come through to the Contact Centre/Jobseekers Direct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inbound CSA</td>
<td>Inbound single call that requires a call back to complete CSA details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inbound mini-break</td>
<td>Inbound single call that requires a mini-break before booking/waiving or deferring the WFI that do not include CSA details. If a mini-break longer than five minutes, call to end before break and remainder to be recorded as ‘Mini-break successful’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid Reclaims</td>
<td>Rapid reclaim inbound calls, including calls which are incorrectly identified through the IVR, but turn out to be a Rapid Reclaim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call back successful</td>
<td>Completed outbound calls or those stopped after a WFI has been booked/waived/deferred. Clerical contingency outbound calls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single call successful</td>
<td>Inbound single call where the WFI has been booked/deferred/waived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single call failed</td>
<td>Inbound single call that has stopped either customers or our fault/request before a WFI has been booked/deferred/waived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childs Support Agency call</td>
<td>Outbound call where CSA details were successfully gathered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>back successful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-break successful</td>
<td>Calls back to customer to gather missing information following a mini-break of longer than five minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inbound plus outbound</td>
<td>Total of call types ‘Call back successful’ and ‘Inbound new claim’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>