In and Out of Work pilot evaluation: Findings from staff and customer research

Lorna Adams, Jen Kelly and Sarah Fish

A report of research carried out by IFF Research Ltd on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions
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In addition, we are grateful to the 652 customers who took part in the quantitative research.
The Authors

Lorna Adams is a board director at IFF and has over ten years experience of conducting research projects on public policy issues. Much of her work in recent years has focussed on the area of employment and benefits.

She was supported in the delivery of this project by Jen Kelly, Project Manager and Sarah Fish, Research Executive.
## Glossary of terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AACT</td>
<td>Average Actual Clearance Times</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDC</td>
<td>Benefit Delivery Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPC</td>
<td>Claims Preparation Checklist</td>
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<td>CTB</td>
<td>Council Tax Benefit</td>
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<td>CTC</td>
<td>Child Tax Credit</td>
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<tr>
<td>DASO</td>
<td>Diary Administration Support Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>Financial Assessor</td>
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<tr>
<td>FA ADMIN</td>
<td>Financial Assessor Administration</td>
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<td>FAM</td>
<td>Financial Assessor Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCO</td>
<td>First Contact Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>FTA</td>
<td>Fail to Attend (rate)</td>
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<td>HB</td>
<td>Housing Benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBC</td>
<td>Housing Benefit Checklist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBRO</td>
<td>Housing Benefit Run-On</td>
</tr>
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<td>HBRR</td>
<td>Housing Benefit Rapid Reclaim</td>
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<td>HMRC</td>
<td>HM Revenue and Customs</td>
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<td>IB</td>
<td>Incapacity Benefit</td>
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<td>IS</td>
<td>Income Support</td>
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<td>IWS</td>
<td>Into Work Statement</td>
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<td>JCM</td>
<td>Jobcentre Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCP</td>
<td>Jobcentre Plus</td>
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<td>JSA</td>
<td>Jobseeker’s Allowance</td>
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<td>LA</td>
<td>Local authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>Lone Parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>LPA</td>
<td>Lone Parent Adviser</td>
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<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Personal Adviser</td>
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<td>PAM</td>
<td>Personal Adviser Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCO</td>
<td>Tax Credit Office</td>
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<td>WFI</td>
<td>Work Focused Interview</td>
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<td>WTC</td>
<td>Working Tax Credit</td>
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Summary

Background and introduction

In September 2007, the In and Out of Work process was introduced across six local authority (LA) districts. The process relies on closer working relationships and the sharing of information across the organisations involved in delivering benefits to individuals as they move in and out of work (Jobcentre Plus, the Tax Credit Office and local authorities).

Some of the key elements of this pilot process are:

• booking customers in for the first available Work Focused Interview (WFI);

• completing a Claims Preparation Checklist (CPC) when a claim is initiated. This details all the information that customers should bring with them to start a Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit claim as well as a Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA)/Income Support (IS) claim;

• previewing of the information contained on this CPC by either staff at the Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC) or Jobcentre (depending on the nature of the claim);

• where there is Tax Credit Interest, First Contact Officers (FCOs) contacting HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) staff to amend/initiate the customers Tax Credit claim;

• verification of evidence required for a Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit in the Jobcentre and then passing this to LAs for processing;

• encouraging customers to complete an Into Work Statement (IWS) when they find work. The information on this form is then communicated to LA and HMRC staff;

• sending of notification of Working Tax Credit (WTC) awards direct to LAs.

Two phases of research were commissioned to report on the operation of these pilots from a staff and customer perspective as part of an overall evaluation of the pilot. The overall aims of this pilot evaluation were to assess whether the In and Out of Work pilots succeeded in:
• improving the level of customer service;
• providing a more efficient process with improved clearance time, accuracy and reduced reworking;
• improving staff experience by providing a process which is transparent, user friendly and makes more sense to those who deliver it.

The research programme involved qualitative research among staff at the Contact Centres, Jobcentres, BDC, HMRC and LAs in each of the six pilot districts as well as quantitative research with customers who had experienced the pilot process.

The Out of Work process

Despite initial concerns about incorporating elements of the pilot process (particularly accommodating the jobsearch and tax credit elements), both FCOs and Team Leaders at the Contact Centres were very positive about the pilot process. The positive reactions of customers that they had encountered had resulted in improved job satisfaction. They found that customers reacted particularly positively to the fact that they were available to book WFIs very quickly – giving them a sense of momentum. The only area of concern was the time taken to complete the CPC at the end of a call and the impact that this would have on call targets if the pilot process were to be rolled out. Staff also acknowledged that there had been problems with the accuracy with which the CPC had been filled in.

Of all the organisations involved in the delivery of the In and Out of Work pilots, the BDCs were the most negative about the implementation of the pilot process. The main difficulty with the process from the BDC perspective was accommodating the previewing process (involving processors reviewing the information collected by Contact Centre staff and the information that customers have been asked to bring to their WFI). By the second phase of research, staff had developed strategies to cope with resourcing case previews and as a result were slightly more comfortable with the process. They had also started to see positive outcomes in terms of the number of processable cases that they were receiving and in terms of clearance times. That said, resourcing continued to be an issue and BDC staff were unhappy with accommodating previews – both from the perspective of not finding the task itself satisfying and because of the impact on their personal workloads.

Jobcentre staff were positive about the impact of the pilot process on the level of customer service provided. They felt that customers appreciated the fact that they were forwarding evidence for other benefits and that offering a more joined-up service made sense. However, some found accommodating the copying and verifying evidence for Housing Benefit (HB)/Council Tax Benefit (CTB) to be very demanding of resources. Even by the second phase of research, staff still estimated that handling evidence for HB/CTB claims increased the length of these interviews by around ten minutes and the extent to which this was a problem depended on the overall volume of cases with HB/CTB interest. Some experienced Financial
Assessors (FAs) were uncomfortable with not conducting case previews themselves and felt that this meant they entered interviews blind, which then resulted in a longer interview and poorer customer service.

Again LA staff were positive about the pilot process. They felt that processing times had reduced for HB claims, although in some cases this was felt to be a result of some prioritisation of pilot cases. The improvement in processing time was largely thought to be a result of earlier WFls and notification of award of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) benefit payments rather than an improvement in the amount of evidence supplied by customers.

The Into Work process

Jobcentre staff felt that the pilot process for those moving into work offered clear benefits for customers and many believed it could combat customer concerns about organising benefits when moving into work. The main advantage of the Into Work process was the impact on the time taken for tax credit claims to be resolved. Securing Housing Benefit Run On more easily was also a positive. However, most Jobcentres found that only a very small proportion of their customers returned their IWSs. Even with low returns, Jobcentres were finding handling IWS difficult to resource because they could not control when customers chose to bring these into the office. As a result, frontline staff in a variety of roles were handling IWS and the amount of time devoted to each customer varied considerably according to the number of other demands on their time.

Lone Parent Personal Advisers were most likely to be positive about the Into Work process for their IS customers. This was because they tended to see these customers face-to-face when they found work (enabling them to fit processing the IWS into normal procedures more easily). These customers were also more likely to want to make a Tax Credit claim.

The Into Work process had little impact on resourcing for HMRC. The volume of pilot cases received was low – an average of 70 in total per week – so at an operational level, just one member of staff has been required throughout the pilot to process pilot cases. Staff were very positive about the pilot process and believe that it has significantly improved customer service. They felt that the key contributory factor in reduced processing time for claims is the receipt of new claims/change of circumstances electronically.

Local authority staff viewed the IWSs as useful, and thought the information they contained should help them to shorten processing times. Even though they had only received a small number of ‘into work’ pilot cases, they had found that the electronic notification of a new WTC claim direct from HMRC had speeded up claims. It was generally accepted that receiving the IWS was ensuring that those customers who were entitled to HB Run On were accessing it more quickly. Local authorities believed that the pilot process had the potential for greater impact for those going back to work than had been achieved.
Customer views

The majority of customers stated the process of organising their benefits was relatively straightforward (53 per cent) with a fifth (21 per cent) finding it very quick, easy and without problems. A quarter described the process as long-winded and complicated.

Customers who had been through the pilot process but had also made a previous experience of making a claim for benefits, were asked to compare their experiences. Without any form of ‘control group’ to compare the experiences of pilot customers against, data from this line of questioning gives the best indication of how the pilot performs compared to standard procedures. The results are generally positive with customers considerably more likely to feel that their most recent experience was better than their previous one. Just under half of customers with prior experience (48 per cent) stated that the speed with which their benefits were sorted out was better on this occasion (and only 15 per cent that the processing time was worse) and two-fifths (39 per cent) stated that the number of different individuals or organisations that they had to deal with was better (compared with 12 per cent stating that it was worse). Two-fifths agreed that the amount of duplication involved was better under the pilot process (with only 11 per cent finding it worse) and the same proportion felt that the overall ease of getting their benefits sorted on this occasion was better (and only 17 per cent found it worse).

Those customers who had returned the IWS were asked about their preferred channel for returning it. Only a third stated that they would prefer to return it in person rather than provide the information by post, phone or e-mail. A third (35 per cent) stated that they would prefer to return the IWS online and a quarter (25 per cent) expressed a preference for returning the information by phone. Bearing in mind that these figures are based on those who actually returned the IWS to the Jobcentre (and hence, may exclude a good number of customers for whom this channel was inconvenient), this would seem to indicate that it is worth giving some consideration to other methods of returning the IWS (particularly when coupled with the difficulties faced by Jobcentre staff in accommodating the return of IWS).

Issues for further consideration

If the decision is taken to roll-out the pilot process nationally, the findings from this research indicate that it may be worth giving consideration to the following:

- Investigating whether suspicions that BDC and Jobcentre staff have about the need for more benefit training for Contact Centre staff to enable them to provide more accurate information on the CPC, are justified.

- Reviewing the BDC role in conducting previews on the basis of the unwillingness of processors to be involved in this task and their perceived lack of value that BDC staff attribute to this process.
• Clarifying the way in which Jobcentres are expected to handle customers who do return IWSs, i.e. clearly laying out expectations for the amount of advice/assistance these customers should receive about any other benefits that they may need to apply for or end claims for. It may also be worth considering (re-)introducing a member of LA staff on-site to assist with HB/CTB applications for those moving into work.

• Investigating alternative options for resourcing the return of IWSs. A very low proportion of pilot customers were returning these and the flexible approach taken to allowing Jobcentres to resource the administration of these appeared to lead to a relatively ‘hit and miss’ service for customers.

• Combining the IWS with the ES40 card to help to increase the proportion of customers who return it.

• Introducing an IT solution which enables Jobcentre staff to monitor the status of customers’ Tax Credit and HB/CTB claims. The fact that Jobcentre staff are helping customers to make these claims inevitably positions them as a channel for obtaining information about this claim. The system would appear more ‘joined-up’ to customers if it were possible for all staff in all relevant organisations to be able to provide them with a simple update on the progress of their claim.
1 Introduction and methodology

1.1 Background and introduction

In June 2006, a DWP/HMRC Joint Working team was appointed to improve the service to customers through improved processes for sharing information between Jobcentre Plus, the Tax Credits Office (TCO) and LAs.

This paved the way for the development of the ‘In and Out of Work’ pilot process which attempts to streamline the journey that customers go through to make or amend benefit claims as they move into and out of work. As far as possible this process aims to ensure that information required by the three organisations only has to be submitted by the customer once, in many cases meaning that LAs and HMRC receive information earlier, enabling them to make decisions about benefit awards more quickly and improving clearance times. As well as providing an improved service to customers, the pilot aims to reduce the amount of handling involved in cases across the benefit delivery system as a whole and lead to administrative savings. It is also hoped that streamlining this process will remove one of the barriers to customers taking up employment opportunities (and in particular those that are only guaranteed for relatively short periods of time).

Some of the key elements of the pilot process are:

- customers are booked into the first available WFI. This can be the same day that they call the Contact Centre;

- a CPC is completed (and communicated to customers) by FCOs when a claim is initiated. This details all the information that customers should bring with them to start a HB/CTB claim as well as a JSA/IS claim. This Checklist is checked by staff at the BDC and if any additional information is required, this is communicated to customers (and at the same time they are reminded of the appointment date and time for their first WFI). Customers do not receive written confirmation of their appointment and required documentation;

- where there is Tax Credit interest, FCOs contact HMRC staff to amend/initiate the customers Tax Credit claim;
• any evidence required for an HB claim that is brought into the Jobcentre by customers is validated in the Jobcentre. Jobcentre Plus staff complete an HB checklist (marking any missing information) and send this and any copies of documentation presented to the LA for processing;

• on finding work, customers are encouraged to complete and bring in an IWS. The information on this form is then communicated to LA and HMRC staff;

• when customers move in to work, LAs are informed as soon as WTC is awarded so adjustments to HB and CTB status can be made automatically.

Flowcharts 1 and 2 summarise the In and Out of Work pilot processes.
Flowchart 1: Out of Work process

**Contact Centre**
- **Initial telephone call**
  - Collect information required for JSA/IS claim as normal
  - Establish whether any tax credit interest
  - Establish whether any HB/CTB interest
  - If tax credit interest
    - Phone TCO helpline to report change of circumstances
  - Book first available WFI and tell customer they will receive a reminder call
  - Inform customers of all evidence that they are required to bring to WFI (including for HB/CTB claim if eligible)
  - If Rapid Reclaim – send out Rapid Reclaim pack if WFI more than three days away, otherwise advise customer to turn up early for WFI

**Benefit Delivery Centre**
- BDC receive CPC in shared mail box
  - If Checklist is in order and no additional documentation is required then complete checklist and e-mail to Jobcentre
  - If evidence required that has not been mentioned to customer, call customer and notify them and remind them of WFI appointment
  - Checklist e-mailed to Jobcentre

**Jobcentre office**
- Pick up CPC
  - Customers not contacted by the BDC and ‘no preview cases’ will be contacted to remind them of WFI appointment
  - Customer attends WFI
    - Check customer has provided all necessary evidence (including for HB/CTB)
    - Copy and stamp any evidence (copying twice if required by LA and BDC)
    - Complete HB/CTB evidence checklist
    - Copy checklist for any missing HB/CTB evidence and give copy to customer, stressing importance of returning to LA quickly
    - If private tenant and landlord is not a registered social landlord and customer has no proof of liability of rent, issue landlord declaration form which customer sends direct to LA
    - If Rapid Reclaim – issue HB Rapid Reclaim form to customers and advise them to complete in Jobcentre
  - WFI conducted and IWS issued
    - Transfer case from CMS on day of WFI where possible
    - LA input document, copied evidence and HB/CTB checklist (attached to front) sent to LA (by courier)
    - Complete CPC, attach to the front of customer statement and input document and send to BDC with any evidence provided by the customer.

**Benefit Delivery Centre**
- Receive CPC and CMS outputs or claim form from Jobcentre Plus office and process claim
Contact Centre

- Customer rings to notify they are starting work
- Establish whether any tax credit interest
- Establish whether any HB/CTB interest

IF either tax credit or HB/CTB interest
- Advise to take IWS to Jobcentre

IF no tax credit or HB/CTB interest
- Follow normal claims closure process

Jobcentre Office

- Customer notifies Jobcentre they are starting work and gives Jobcentre their Into Work Statement
- Complete e-IWK2 and send to BDC

IF there is a tax credit interest

IF already in receipt of child tax credits
- Call TCO helpline to file change of circumstances.
- Complete and send e-IWK1 to TCO

IF not already in receipt of child tax credits
- Complete and send TC600 and e-IWK1 to TCO Preston via iWorks

IF there is HB claim
- Forward original IWS to LA
- Issue new HB claim pack to claim HB after HBRO ended, and advise customer to send direct to LA
- Remind customer of evidence required to HB/CTB claim – give checklist from reverse of IWS to customer
- Advise customer to send both evidence and HB claim direct to LA

Benefit Delivery Centre

- Receive e-IWK2 from Jobcentre
- As normal assess entitlement to HB Run On, log on system. This triggers electronic notification of closure date for LA
Six districts were selected to trial the In and Out of Work process (Lambeth, Liverpool, West Lothian, Sedgemoor, Merthyr Tydfil and West Somerset) and the Jobcentre Plus, BDC, LA and HMRC sites serving these districts began using the pilot process from September 2007.

IFF were commissioned to undertake research among both staff and customers to understand how these pilot schemes were operating as part of an overall evaluation of the pilot. The overall aims of this pilot evaluation were to assess whether the In and Out of Work pilots succeeded in:

- improving the level of customer service;
- providing a more efficient process with improved clearance time, accuracy, and reduced reworking;
- improving staff experience by providing a process which is transparent, user friendly and makes more sense to those who deliver it.

More specifically, the aims of the staff and customer research were to:

**Staff research**
- establish the way in which the In and Out of Work pilot was being delivered (and assess the extent to which it was being delivered as intended);
- review staff experience and views of the process;
- assess the impact of the pilot on service delivery, staff experience and job satisfaction;
- identify lessons learned and potential ‘quick wins’ for improved service delivery.

**Customer research**
- gain a detailed overview of the customer experience of the new process;
- assess how the new process compared against previous experiences before the pilot (if applicable);
- identify what impact the pilot had on the attitudes of customers to taking up short-term employment opportunities.

**1.2 Methodology**

Research was conducted in two phases – one phase that took place relatively early in the operation of the pilot in November/December 2007 and one later on in February 2008. The rationale behind conducting the work in two stages was to be able both to provide early feedback and to make it possible to distinguish between ‘teething problems’ and more fundamental difficulties with the operation of the pilot. Both phases included research among both staff and customers – we discuss the approach taken to each audience in turn.
Staff research
At each stage, the research conducted among staff was qualitative in nature and covered:
• Jobcentre staff;
• staff at BDCs;
• staff at Contact Centres;
• UB processing staff in LAs;
• tax credit processing staff at the HMRC site in Preston.

The approach taken to interviewing each of these staff groups is discussed below:

Jobcentre staff
Within each of the six pilot areas, interviews were conducted with staff in two different Jobcentres (to give us an indication of the commonality of experiences) and aimed to select a small and a large office. However, two of the pilot areas (West Somerset and Merthyr Tydfil) have only one Jobcentre and hence, each phase of research covered ten Jobcentres in total.

At each phase, a site visit was made to each Jobcentre and an attempt was made to speak to all staff involved in delivering the pilot. In most cases, this involved interviewing:
• the Jobcentre manager;
• the Financial Assessor Manager;
• FA(s);
• Lone Parent Personal Adviser(s);
• Diary/Administrative Support Officer(s) (DASOs);
• individuals responsible for administration of the IWSs.

In some cases paired interviews or mini-group discussions were held with some grades of staff (generally FAs or LPAs).

BDC staff
Within each pilot area, interviews were conducted with staff based at the BDC serving the Jobcentres selected to participate in the staff research.

At each BDC we spoke to processors who were involved with processing pilot claims and team leaders or managers who had an overview of how the pilot had been operating.

1 The individual taking responsibility for this element of the process varied between Jobcentres.
Contact Centre staff

Staff were interviewed at the two Contact Centres dealing with pilot cases (those based in Telford and Coventry). At each, interviews were held with FCOs alongside depth interviews with an FCO Manager and/or team leader.

HB/CTB processing staff

Within each pilot district, interviews were held with LA staff responsible for processing HB/CTB claims. Taking a similar approach to that for BDCs and Contact Centres, discussions were held with those responsible for processing HB/CTB claims as well as a depth interview with a manager who had an overview of how well the process was operating.

HMRC staff

Interviews were conducted with HMRC staff at the central Tax Credit processing site in Preston. All processing of tax credit cases as customers moved into work was conducted by a single processor (and the processing of out of work cases was distributed throughout the organisation in such a way that individuals would not be able to distinguish between pilot and non-pilot cases). Hence, it was only possible to interview this processor about experiences of the operation of the pilot. In addition, depth interviews were conducted with management staff.

Numbers of staff interviewed

The same groups of staff were interviewed for both phases of research. Phase 1 was a slightly larger exercise and all interviews were conducted face-to-face (including a number of small group discussions with operational staff). Due to time constraints at Phase 2, the majority of the interviews among staff in the Contact Centres, LAs, BDCs and at HMRC were conducted by telephone. Fewer operational staff in these organisations were interviewed at Phase 2 than at Phase 1. The approach taken to interviewing Jobcentre staff was the same at both Phases 1 and 2. Table 1.1 shows the numbers of staff interviewed at each stage split by organisation and by whether their job role had an operational or strategic focus.

Table 1.1  Numbers of staff interviews achieved

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<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
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<th>Phase 2</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Operational</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
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<td>Contact Centres</td>
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<td>Jobcentres</td>
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Customer research

A quantitative approach was taken to the research among customers.

For the Phase 1 research, a sample of customers who had moved into or out of work within the first month of operation of each of the pilots was drawn. Those moving out of work and experiencing the pilot process were sampled from the CPC data held by the BDCs. Those moving into work were sampled from the records kept of IWSs returned. Because each of the pilots started at slightly different times, this effectively meant that there were three different sampling periods involved:

- Lambeth and Sedgemoor: 5th September – 5th October;
- West Lothian and West Somerset: 12th September – 12th October;
- Liverpool and Merthyr Tydfil: 26th September – 26th October.

Because the sample was not drawn from centralised DWP records it contained limited information about individual customers and their claim details. As such, there was limited scope to structure the sample by customer characteristics. As a result of this (and the comparatively small number of records available) a census approach was taken whereby all eligible records were included in the sample for the study and interviews were achieved with as many as possible.

Prior to the start of fieldwork, all customers contained within the sample were sent a letter explaining the purposes of the research and giving them the opportunity to ‘opt out’.

A total of 652 customer interviews were achieved at Phase 1 of the research with a very high response rate of 73 per cent. These interviews split into 442 ‘out of work’ customers and 210 ‘into work’ customers. Interviews were conducted from IFF’s CATI centre and lasted just over ten minutes on average.

At Phase 2, it was not possible to draw a new sample of customers because of an embargo on the transfer of data outside the Department. However follow-up research was conducted with those participating at Phase 1 in order to obtain additional detail about some of their experiences of the pilot, to investigate any ‘new’ experiences of the pilot (in cases where customers who had been through the ‘into work’ process at Phase 1 had now moved ‘out of work’) and to explore their opinions on some possible changes to the pilot process. Table 1.2 shows the specific issues/topics that the Phase 2 research looked to explore and the groups of Phase 1 respondents that they were explored with.
Table 1.2   Issues explored at Phase 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Customer group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The reasons why some customers felt that the speed with which they</td>
<td>Customers that stated that the time taken for their core benefit to be paid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>received payment of their core benefit was slower than expected</td>
<td>was ‘a bit slower’ or ‘much slower’ than expected at Phase 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The reasons why some of those customers with previous experience of</td>
<td>Customers that stated that time taken for all benefits to be sorted out was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Out of Work process felt that the pilot was worse then expected</td>
<td>‘a bit worse’ or ‘much worse than expected’ at Phase 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Whether those customers who have been through the Into Work process</td>
<td>All customers who had been through the Into Work process at Phase 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would have preferred to use another channel to return the IWS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The service that has been experienced by those who have recently</td>
<td>All customers who went through the Out of Work process before the first wave of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>been through the Into Work process</td>
<td>research who have since been through the into work process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Whether those who have been through the Out of Work pilot process</td>
<td>All customers who had been through the Out of Work process at Phase 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have taken up short-term work or are more likely to do so</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All those interviewed at Phase 1 fell into one of the key groups outlined above and hence a census approach was also taken to the Phase 2 research (whereby all those interviewed at Phase 1 were approached for interview at Phase 2).

Again prior to the start of Phase 2 fieldwork, customers were sent an introductory letter and again given the opportunity to opt out of the research.

From the starting sample of 652 Phase 1 respondents, a total of 433 Phase 2 interviews were achieved (136 of those who went through the ‘into work’ process prior to the Phase 1 research and 297 of those who went through the ‘out of work’ process prior to Phase 1). Again, the response rate was very high at 88 per cent.

Interviews for this phase of research were also conducted by telephone and lasted just under ten minutes on average.

1.3 Report structure

The remainder of this report is divided into three key chapters of findings – the first looking at views on the operation of the ‘out of work’ process from a staff perspective, the second looking at the operation of the ‘into work’ process from a staff perspective and the third looking at the views of customers (Chapters 2 and 3). Chapter 5 then discusses the key conclusions that can be drawn from the research about the operation of the pilots, how they have been received by the various stakeholder organisations and the factors that should be taken into account in decisions about whether to roll the process out nationally.
2 The ‘out of work’ process: staff views

This chapter looks at the operation of the ‘out of work’ element of the pilot process. Following the broad chronological sequence with which organisations are involved in processing a customer’s claim, the chapter looks at the views and experiences of:

- Contact Centre staff;
- BDC staff;
- Jobcentre staff;
- HMRC staff;
- staff in LAs.

2.1 Contact Centre experiences

2.1.1 Overall reactions – first stage of research

Within each Contact Centre, one or two teams were trained to receive pilot calls. Initially these teams dealt with both pilot and non-pilot calls, but as the volume of pilot calls increased, staff started to deal with pilot calls for the duration of a shift.

Staff in the two Contact Centres were positive about the pilot at the time of the first phase of research. Some FCOs were concerned about the additional tasks that they would need to fulfil as part of the pilot – particularly regarding contacting HMRC in connection with tax credit claims but on the whole, staff were confident that the pilot would represent an improved service for customers.

There were several aspects of the pilot process that FCOs were required to implement:
• booking the first available WFI at the Jobcentre. The aim was to book this within 48 hours where possible;
• carrying out a job search on behalf of the customer;
• collecting the necessary information required to establish evidence requirements for an HB/CTB claim if the customer stated interest in these benefits;
• contacting HRMC if the customer wished to make a new tax credit claim or to report a change of circumstances;
• completing the CPC, or ‘Tracker’ and sending this to either the Jobcentre or BDC prior to the customers’ WFI.

2.1.2 Overall reactions – second stage of research
Both FCOs and team leaders had become increasingly positive about the pilot by the second stage of research. Staff felt more confident and the positive reactions of customers that they had encountered had resulted in improved job satisfaction. The majority of staff stated that they now prefer to conduct pilot calls.

‘I mean from a personal point of view from actually taking the calls, I’m quite happy with it, I’d be quite happy to do it all the time.’

(First Contact Officer (Stage 2))

2.1.3 Booking WFIs
Staff were very positive about booking earlier WFIs under the pilot. FCOs stated that their ability to book the WFI quickly creates momentum, helping the customer to feel like they are making progress, and also saves time and resources. At Stage 1, FCOs felt that they were able to book ‘most’ WFIs within 48 hours of the phone call but by Stage 2 this had increased further to an estimated 90 per cent.

‘Customers seem surprised that they get a WFI for the next day, especially customers that have claimed in the past, and have been really pleased about that.’

(First Contact Officer (Stage 2))

2.1.4 Jobsearch
FCOs reported at the time of the Stage 1 research that they enjoyed conducting job searches but found that customers were often not receptive to this. They found that customers told them that they had already conducted a job search themselves or would wait until their WFI. By the second stage of research, staff reported that instead of ‘offering’ to conduct a job search, they were now presenting this to customers as a stage of the process.
2.1.5 Collecting information for HB/CTB claims

Before the start of the pilot, Contact Centre staff were concerned that customers would resent the collection of additional evidence during their initial call. However, these concerns seem to have been unfounded and staff reported that customers were happy to provide additional information.

That said, at the time of the Stage 1 research, staff felt that they lacked the necessary knowledge about LA benefits to carry out this additional evidence collection effectively. FCOs stated that they lacked knowledge about why certain information was collected and how it was used by other organisations, particularly at the BDCs.

By the time of the second phase of research, staff reported they felt more confident in this area as a result of clarification by management and/or additional training.

2.1.6 Contacting HMRC

There was some reluctance among Contact Centre staff around dealing with Tax Credit claims. Staff felt ill-equipped to deal with Tax Credit claims and there was a belief that incorporating this into their call meant they were taking on work for HMRC. There was also some concern about the additional length that handling tax credit claims added to a call. This was estimated to be around 20 minutes (although staff acknowledged that only a very small number of claims involved a tax credit claim).

By Stage 2 there was evidence of a greater acceptance that this was a valid part of the Contact Centre role but it was still an area that some staff stated that they felt ill-equipped to deal with. As a result, some staff admitted that they continued to advise customers to contact HMRC direct rather than assisting with handling their claim. A few staff had had negative experiences where they had contacted HMRC on behalf of a customer but the member of HMRC staff had been unaware of the pilot procedures and had not processed the application correctly.

‘I claim tax credits and if it was me I would rather be [phoning the TCO helpline] myself.’

(First Contact Officer (Stage 2))

2.1.7 Mini breaks

As a result of the fact that pilot calls covered more ground, staff reported that they were making increased use of ‘mini-breaks’ in pilot calls. Mini-breaks are small, five minute breaks in phone calls, used when customers need to try and obtain information before the call can be continued. At the first phase of research, staff reported that there had been some operational difficulties around the handling of mini breaks. On occasions, staff would go on a break or finish a shift during a mini break, meaning another member of staff would be required to call the customer back. Sometimes the fact that another member of staff would call them back was not communicated to the customer and the resultant lack of continuity resulted
in the call taking longer. By the time of the second phase of research, most staff reported that mini breaks are now scarcely used.

At Phase 1, staff also reported that the use of mini breaks had caused some complications in the compiling of call length statistics, with calls involving mini-breaks appearing in the statistics as two shorter calls rather than one long one (and resulting in making pilot calls appear shorter than they were). This issue was resolved relatively early on in the pilot.

2.1.8 Call length

At the time of the Phase 1 research, Contact Centre staff reported that, on average, the handling of pilot cases was taking slightly longer than non-pilot cases.

However, by Phase 2, the time taken to handle cases had become shorter, putting them on a par with non-pilot cases. To some extent this was felt to be a function of staff becoming increasingly familiar with the process. It was also the case that, despite the fact that FCOs were required to gather more information for pilot cases, some time savings were made because they did not need to print off statements. Staff also reported that customers appeared to be becoming more familiar with this process and that customers who had already been through the pilot process were making their first contact with the information needed to hand, reducing the need for mini-breaks or drawn-out phone calls.

2.1.9 The Claims Preparation Checklist

The completion of the Claims Preparation Checklist caused some difficulties for Contact Centre staff.

Completion of the CPC increased the amount of after-call processing which was required from staff (which is included in call timings for the purposes of compiling statistics). Staff reported in the first phase of research that the need to meet call targets (both length and number of calls taken) placed them under increased pressure to complete the CPC quickly (and there was some recognition that this could lead to inaccuracies). By Phase 2, staff reported that the removal of call targets for pilot calls had relieved this pressure and they felt that this had improved the accuracy of completion of the CPC.

One of the issues surrounding accuracy was the fact that at Phase 1, management staff recognised that FCOs were frequently failing to fill in the CPC’s title in the correct format, resulting in confusion for Jobcentre Plus and BDC staff. This was felt to have been resolved by Phase 2.

At the first phase of research, FCOs stated that they were often unsure in which cases the CPC should be sent directly to the Jobcentre and when it should be sent to the BDC to be previewed. By Phase 2 written guidance and training sessions on where to send the CPC had been provided and as a result, Contact Centre staff felt that the number of CPCs incorrectly completed and those that were sent to the wrong organisation, had steadily declined since the pilot began.
2.1.10 Dealing with issues

As a result of the pilot, management staff within the Contact Centres had developed better communications with other organisations. By Phase 2, a virtual ‘Pilot Issue Log’ had been established that was sent weekly to and from Jobcentre Plus and the BDCs. This had served to identify problems quickly and ensure they are dealt with by all organisations. However, it had also meant that frontline staff tended only to receive negative feedback, which some found to have a negative impact on their motivation.

‘It’s always negative feedback and I think that it can be quite demoralising for people.’

(First Contact Officer (Stage 2))

2.2 BDC experiences

2.2.1 Overall reactions – first stage of research

Of all the organisations involved in the delivery of the In and Out of Work pilots, the BDCs were the most negative about the implementation of the pilot process. While managers stated that they could see potential benefits of the process, processing staff felt that they were being asked to conduct a great deal of unnecessary work from which they could see little benefit. Processors reported no increase in the proportion of ‘processable’ cases that they were receiving under the pilot (compared to under normal procedures).

The main difficulty with the process from the BDC perspective was accommodating the previewing process (involving processors reviewing the information collected by Contact Centre staff and the information that customers have been asked to bring to their WfI). Conducting this process was unpopular with staff and resourcing it effectively was proving a challenge.

BDC staff also felt they were unable to trust their counterparts in other organisations to conduct their part of the process properly and as a result there was evidence of duplication of effort. This was evident in the fact that some processors were double-checking evidence that had already been verified in the Jobcentre. Some were also re-doing a lot of the work conducted at the preview stage when the case returned to the BDC for processing.

2.2.2 Overall reactions – second stage of research

By the second phase of research, staff had developed strategies to cope with resourcing case previews and as a result were slightly more comfortable with the process. They had also started to see positive outcomes in terms of the number of processable cases that they were receiving and in terms of clearance times. As a result processing staff were now convinced of the potential value of the pilot process for customers. That said, resourcing continued to be an issue and BDC staff were unhappy with accommodating previews – both from the perspective of
not finding the task itself satisfying and because of the impact on their personal workloads.

### 2.2.3 The Claims Preparation Checklist

When interviewed in November, BDC staff were quite negative about the usefulness of the CPC. This seemed to be largely related to the fact that they felt that it was poorly filled-in by Contact Centre staff (which they attributed to a lack of benefit knowledge among FCOs). BDC staff felt that they received CPCs from the Contact Centre which had a large number of ‘no answer’ responses to individual questions – they felt that this was unhelpful because they could not distinguish between questions that had not been asked of customers and those where customers had given a ‘don’t know’ response. Staff felt that this could then make them look unprofessional and ‘un-joined-up’ if they were unclear about the nature of previous discussions when talking to customers. This continued to be an issue at Phase 2 of the research.

BDC staff also stated that they felt that better guidance could be given to Contact Centre staff about the relative importance of the questions contained within their script and that this in turn would have an impact on the quality of data contained within the CPC. They felt that Contact Centre staff might be too readily accepting a ‘no’ or ‘don’t know’ answer to questions which then incorrectly routed them past a whole section of the script. The feeling of some BDC staff was if the importance of some particular questions for the correct processing of a case were explained, FCOs could perhaps double-check that they had got the correct responses to these questions. Again, this was an issue first raised during the research in November and it continued to be an issue in February/March when the second phase of research was conducted.

### 2.2.4 The previewing process

The previewing process caused a lot of resentment among BDC staff. In contrast to the situation for other organisations involved in the pilot, BDC staff felt they were being asked to accommodate an entirely new process into their job roles (as opposed to simply building on or adjusting an existing process).

Initially, staff also found the constant monitoring of the e-mail in-box to check for cases to preview to be problematic (simply from the perspective of ensuring that it was done regularly so that no cases were missed). By the time of the second wave of research, this had become less problematic as most BDCs had taken the approach of allocating a member of staff per day to monitor the in-box and distribute preview cases.

BDC staff felt that conducting previews was a time-consuming process. At the first phase of research, processors estimated that each preview was taking them around half an hour to conduct. By the second phase of research, staff found that previews were taking less time as they became familiar with the process but still estimated that each case was taking around 10-15 minutes to process.
Notwithstanding the reduction in time taken to conduct previews, the relatively tight window for conducting previews (as a result of customers being booked the first available WFI and previews needing to be conducted before this) caused some difficulties in terms of resourcing. That said, by the second phase of research most BDCs had settled into a pattern of handling previews (with small teams conducting previews working in rotation spending a day at a time previewing cases).

Staff were generally unhappy about conducting previews – they felt that it was a less skilled task than the one they were trained for and many stated that conducting previews full-time (or even spending part of their time conducting previews) for a prolonged period would have a very negative impact on their job satisfaction. This resentment was still evident by the second phase of research.

‘They [processors] hate it – they just see it as an additional job. They see themselves as processors. That is what they want to do. They want the FA to do that [the preview] and that is where all the resource now sits.’

(Manager, BDC (Phase 2))

As well as the fact that staff did not enjoy conducting previews, most processors felt that the process had little value because they felt that it did not improve the speed or quality of case processing. In part, this was because they did not have confidence in the data that they were basing their preview on (because of the issues mentioned about BDC views on the quality of completion of the CPC by Contact Centre staff).

‘We know what they are meant to be doing for us – I think we are fully aware, but what they deliver is a different thing. The standard of what we get is questionable – actually it is appalling at times – they (FCOs) do not collect the information.’

(Manager, BDC (Phase 1))

Processors also felt that the work involved in conducting a preview was wasted if they were unable to contact the customer in advance of their WFI. The number of occasions on which they were unable to successfully contact the customer to advise them to bring in additional evidence to their WFI was estimated at around half (most BDCs seemed only to be allowing staff to make one attempt to contact each customer before sending the CPC to the relevant Jobcentre). Some BDCs also flagged, at the first stage of research, that their impact on the evidence that customers brought to their WFI was also limited by the fact that they had no access to the Language Line and hence, were often unable to communicate with speakers of other languages. This issue appeared to have been resolved by the second phase of research.

Staff also considered the fact that cases that they had identified as requiring further evidence were returned to them for processing without this evidence as being a further indication of the fact that the previewing process added little value. This led them to conclude that FAs did not look at the results of the preview and
hence, did not ask customers for the required information. In part, this is because the CPC does not allow for FAs to record cases where they request information that the customer is unable to provide at the WFI.

BDC staff also reported that they were being sent a number of cases that did not require a preview (and hence, should have been sent direct to the relevant Jobcentre Plus office). In November, staff estimated that a third of the cases that they were sent by the Contact Centres did not require previewing. There did not seem to have been much change in this figure by the second phase of research indicating that this stems from more than teething issues.

### 2.2.5 Processing cases

At the initial stage of research, BDC staff reported that they had seen no increase in the proportion of processable cases that they received from Jobcentres (and the fact that they could see no discernable impact on the completeness of information received for processing compounded their negative views of the pilot process).

However, by the second phase of research, most BDCs reported an increase in the proportion of processable cases (estimates given ranged from around 60 per cent to 80 per cent of JSA cases and slightly higher for IS cases). Also by this stage, BDC staff had seen evidence of improvements in the service delivered to customers in that average actual clearance times (AACTs) had decreased. However, some staff concluded that this was a function of the way in which pilot cases were resourced (believing that because dedicated staff were dealing with pilot cases this led to an inevitable prioritisation of pilot cases) or simply of the fact that pilot customers were receiving earlier WFIs.

In theory the fact that a pilot case has been previewed should reduce the amount of time taken to process it when it is returned to the BDC by Jobcentre staff. However, at the first stage of the research it was evident that this time-saving was not being realised. This seemed to be largely because BDC staff were uncomfortable with simply accepting the outcomes of the preview and were instead double-checking the case ‘in-full’ themselves. In addition, some staff were also re-checking evidence that had been verified in the Jobcentre and hence, further duplicating work.

Some processors stated that they felt they had to re-do this work because they (as the member of staff responsible for processing the case) would ultimately be held accountable for the accuracy of processing. This non-compliance issue appeared to have been tackled, in part, by Phase 2 of the research. Some processors stated that they were no longer re-checking preview data (although they remained uncomfortable with this) but others were continuing to duplicate this work. Managers stated that they felt that a wider cultural shift (away from individualised cases) would be necessary to encourage all processors to comply with this process.
2.3 Jobcentre experiences

2.3.1 Overall reactions – first stage of research

At the first phase of research most Jobcentre staff were positive about the impact of the pilot process on the level of customer service provided. They felt that customers appreciated the fact that they were forwarding evidence for other benefits and that offering a more joined-up service made sense.

That said, most Jobcentre staff reported difficulties with some element of the process. Some found accommodating the copying and verifying evidence for HB/CTB to be very demanding on resources. At the first stage of research, there was also widespread concern over a lack of clear responsibility or a central point for the preview process. They felt that Contact Centre staff were forwarding cases direct to the Jobcentre which should have been sent to BDC and vice versa. FAs and FA Managers (FAM) at several sites felt that if Contact Centre staff are to fulfil the envisaged role they would need benefit training.

In Jobcentres with experienced FA teams, the FAs would prefer to be responsible for previews themselves. There was concern that if they do not conduct a preview they go into the interview blind, which then results in a longer interview, poorer customer service and a reduction in the number of cases they can ‘push’ electronically.

A few mentioned a decrease in job satisfaction, feeling that removal of the previewing task meant that their role had been ‘dumbed down’.

‘We understood that previewing would be the be all and end all...the BDC just tick the boxes. All they have to say is that they tried to contact the customer but there was no reply. This checklist clogs up the system unnecessarily because the DASOs have to contact them anyway...it is human nature just to tick the box and pass it onto someone else.’

(Financial Assessor, Jobcentre (Large))

‘I no longer get any satisfaction out of my job. I sat here yesterday and saw nineteen customers, but I didn’t have to think about anything all day long. It was just head down and get on with it...I feel that I’m not actually doing a job anymore. I’m just checking a list.’

(Financial Assessor, Jobcentre (Small))

Sites with less experienced FAs generally stated that they would prefer the BDC to be allowed more calls and have more time to conduct the preview so that it is more likely to be successful, rather than double-handling it.
2.3.2 Overall reactions – second stage of research

By the second stage of research, staff were generally more positive and engaged with the pilot as they had become accustomed to the new procedures.

The pilot process had had less impact on FA team resources than anticipated for most sites, with interview times now shorter compared to those when the pilot began. Most of the specific issues around the CPC had been resolved but some wider parts of the process were still proving problematic. Less experienced FAs, particularly, were more likely to be happier with process and CPC completion now, but more experienced FAs continued to be uncomfortable with their lack of involvement in the preview process.

Staff are now even more likely to believe the pilot offers better customer service (except at one site which had previously had a member of the LA staff on site), with feedback from and interaction with the LA being key.

By the second phase of research it was clear that those sites with better relationships with the LA were more likely to believe the extra work they were taking on was worthwhile, as they had been given evidence of improvements in payment times for LA benefits.

In areas where the LA and Jobcentre did not work closely, there was doubt whether the LA was able to speed up payment. In areas with little interaction between Jobcentre, LA and BDC, a lack of feedback left FA teams and DASOs unsure of the value of their extra work.

2.3.3 Receiving the Claims Preparation Checklist

During the initial stage of research DASOs identified several issues with the CPCs sent to the Jobcentre in-box. Some reported instances of the CPC being sent late or to the wrong Jobcentre, meaning that they did not receive it before the WFI.

There were also cases were no CPC was received at all for customers. A possible explanation is that the Contact Centre postcode detector did not identify the postcode as part of the pilot, either because it was set up incorrectly or because the customer did not speak clearly enough to detect the post code. However, the majority of Jobcentre staff did not seem to be aware that this was a possibility and this led them to question the rigour with which Contact Centre staff were following the pilot process.

Finding the correct emails with checklists attached was a time-consuming process and thought to be made more difficult by Contact Centre staff filling in subject lines incorrectly. DASOs identified their customers by searching and sorting the in-box using these subject lines and hence, a mistake or change of order (e.g. putting first name and surname in different places) could easily result in a checklist not being found.
When DASOs found checklists to be incomplete, they were unsure what evidence had previously been requested (if any). If those questions with considerable impact upon a customer’s claim were unanswered it left Jobcentre staff unclear about the customer’s circumstances.

Staff frequently found it difficult to identify which cases they should be previewing and which had already been previewed by the BDC, claiming that the correct boxes were not always completed by the Contact Centre and/or the BDC. Most felt that a good proportion of cases were either sent straight to them when the BDC needed to preview them or came via the BDC but with no obvious indication that the BDC had taken any action, leading DASOs to assume the case should have come directly to the Jobcentre.

Although some improvements were reported by the second phase of research, the WAM emails continued to cause confusion. Staff reported that mistakes were less frequent (one Jobcentre reported that now 80 per cent of CPCs from the Contact Centre were correctly filled out, compared to 50 per cent during the early stages of the pilot), and certainly fewer blank checklists were received but DASOs continued to find that Contact Centres were still omitting important details such as National Insurance numbers, as well as putting names the wrong way round. The process for DASOs to identify relevant cases was still found to be time-consuming.

Poorly completed CPC and unsuccessful reminder calls lead FA teams and DASOs to question value of input from Contact Centre and BDC staff.

### 2.3.4 Conducting reminder calls

Several management staff mentioned that they felt dividing previews between the BDC and Jobcentre had simply added a handover into a process designed to reduce them.

Due to the number of incomplete CPCs received, some offices reported that they had to preview a large number of cases. Whilst some DASOs said they ask customers to bring in all the information on the list (without knowing whether or not they were interested in claiming HB/CTB), others would simply ask customers for the essential identification documents.

Therefore, some Jobcentres felt that the preview task is (or should be) conducted by an FA Administrator (FA Admin) as the amount of benefit knowledge required when CPCs are not completed is beyond that of most DASOs.

The desk aid introduced for DASOs during the second stage of research was certainly thought to be helping. DASOs at sites which had started to use this reported they were now clearer about the evidence requirements, and using the prompts made them more confident in ascertaining whether customers were eligible for HB or CTB.

However, there remained ongoing problems with the CPC not being filled in properly by the BDC or as far as Jobcentre staff can tell no ‘full’ preview being
conducted, leaving DASOs or FA Admin staff to conduct a preview instead. This continued to lead to doubt/distrust around the engagement of Contact Centre and BDC staff with the pilot process.

The reminder call

The majority of staff thought reminder calls had had a positive impact on Failure to Attend rates by the first stage of research (with the remainder reporting no change). However, they expressed concern that when the reminder call was unsuccessful, many customers were receiving no reminder of any sort.

When successful, phone calls were thought to be more effective than letters, as customers were able to ask questions and ensure they had the correct evidence. However, this part of the preview resulted in some Jobcentres deciding that an FA Admin (with a higher level of benefit knowledge) was needed to both decide what evidence was needed and to deal with customer queries.

DASOs reported that as some BDCs were only allowed to make a single call when trying to contact the customer, the majority of customers do not receive a reminder call from the BDC, leaving them to call nearly all customers, regardless of which organisation has conducted the preview.

Several sites had previously been contacting all customers and continued this practice, with staff pointing out that the amount of time taken to locate the customer’s checklist in the in-box meant they felt they may as well continue and contact the customer. However, this runs against the agreed pilot process whereby Jobcentre Plus staff are only meant to contact those customers who have not received a reminder call from the BDC.

During the second phase of research, DASOs confirmed they are continuing to call all customers, including those who had been previewed by BDC at most sites. To some extent this seems to be because the process of identifying customer details (via the in-box) is so laborious that once they have printed out copies of the diaries, attempted to match the customer names and appointments to the CPCs they feel they may as well call and complete the process.

Even at this stage in the pilot, it remained the case that the BDC was rarely able to conduct reminder calls and the number of cases that Jobcentre staff were dealing with where this was the case led staff to continue to have concerns about the amount of effort being put into previews by BDC staff.

Some sites reported they believe that even if the BDC is successful in contacting the customer they are only reminding them of the evidence required, and not the time of their WFI.

WFI attendance

Jobcentre staff generally felt that the pilot had had a positive impact on FTA rates. Many cited earlier WFIs as one of the main positive outcomes of the pilot process.
Management feel that earlier WFIIs enabled them to make best use of the resources available to them. DASOs reported less time was required for diary maintenance with pilot cases.

There were a few issues with Contact Centre staff booking some interviews for the next day, leaving no chance for a preview to be undertaken.

Some sites also stated that the ‘wait’ for the first available WFI can be longer for lone parents (in Jobcentres with only small numbers of Lone Parent Personal Advisers).

For smaller sites, as the pilot continued, accommodating the ‘next available’ or at least ‘+3’ target has generated a lot of pressure. In some of these Jobcentres there are only two or three staff who handle WFIIs and hence, periods of sickness or leave can present them with difficulties in handling WFIIs within a short timeframe. These sites reported that they were sometimes having to divert resources from other areas of the business to meet WFI targets but were keen to point out that these options (including managers conducting FA interviews) are not sustainable in the longer term.

2.3.5 Interview process and timing

The general consensus from FA managers and staff was that although the pilot processes have had a considerable impact on interview time and workload for HB/CTB cases, the incidence of these makes the overall impact on workload and interview times manageable in smaller Jobcentres.

However, some larger Jobcentres reported that average interview times had increased dramatically, with staff finding the copying of evidence for HB or CTB applications very time consuming. At these sites it was estimated that this increased the length of the FA interview by around 50 per cent (and often much more).

By the second stage of research it was generally accepted that interview times had reduced compared to those at the early stages of the pilot. Most sites estimated that cases involving a HB or CTC took 30 minutes on average. The extent to which this was considered manageable depended on the frequency with which Jobcentres were dealing with these cases.

As part of the pilot, FAs were instructed to run through the Customer Statement with their customers on-screen rather than printing this off. At the first stage of the research, opinions on the feasibility of checking Customer Statements on-screen rather than printed statements was split. In most areas FAs felt customers are comfortable using the screen version and this caused no delays.

However, in one pilot area, FAs found that this process was adding to the length of interviews to such a degree that they had reverted to printing off hardcopy statements for customers to review. This particular site had found that even if customers had approved information on-screen, they were still keen to read through the printed version carefully before being prepared to sign it. This meant
that the FA had to wait while they re-read the statement before the interview could be continued. This site was asking customers to arrive 20 minutes before their interview, printing their statement for them and asking them to check it in advance of the FA interview. At the beginning of the FA interview, any amends marked on the hardcopy were made on screen and the customer was asked to initial changes on the hard copy (a second version of the Statement is not printed). Staff stated that the fact that their customer base tended to have lower average levels of literacy and higher numbers of speakers of other languages might explain the fact that they encountered more problems with reviewing the statement on-screen than others.

By the second phase of research, all other sites stated they have become accustomed to working through the Statement on the screen and even those who were more negative during the initial phase of research, stated that they now preferred this method. Staff at a couple of sites did point out some health and safety concerns though, as their desks and monitor are not set up to share the screen they find the angle is causing injuries and that customers sit in their exit route making them feel vulnerable.

2.3.6 Evidence brought to the Jobcentre

At the first phase of research, FAs felt that only a small proportion of customers were bringing in all the required information for their Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit claim. Generally FAs did not think that the introduction of the pilot had had an impact on the likelihood of customers to bring all the required information for their core claim with them.

However, as a result of earlier WFls, Jobcentre staff did think that the pilot increased the speed of paying core benefits.

In terms of providing evidence for a JSA or IS claim, during the first stage of research the majority of FAs felt there had been little improvement. If the customer was successfully contacted and underwent the preview process as envisaged, FAs did believe the customer would be more likely to bring in everything that was requested, compared to those outside the pilot process. However, many customers were still arriving without sufficient evidence. FAs were unsure whether this was caused by customers simply forgetting or not having time to gather the information or whether the Contact Centre staff and the reminder call did not emphasise requirements enough. Either way, FAs perceived only a very small proportion of customers were bringing in all required evidence.

There was also concern that the limit of one attempt for the BDC to contact the customer was insufficient, leaving many customers with no reminder call and no indication of the further evidence they should bring.
‘If they have been phoned, they will bring it in, but if they have not been called, they are less likely than before the pilot ... because they will not have received the customer statement.’

(FAM, Jobcentre (Large))

By the second phase of research, staff felt that there had been an increase in the number of customers providing all information required for their core benefit. Staff felt that this could be a result of both Contact Centres and DASOs now giving clearer instructions about evidence requirements.

However, staff still felt that the proportion of cases where all evidence required for an HB/CTB claim was brought in remained small. Whilst some sites continued to blame the preview process for this, others felt that this could simply be because customers forget to bring everything in. The most likely missing evidence requirements were tenancy agreements, bank statements, proof of capital and non-dependants’ income. As these do not prevent the core claim being processed, some staff thought they are perhaps not stressed urgently enough by those conducting previews.

**Use of the CPC**

FAs did not initially find the CPC particularly user-friendly because it was formatted like a paper form (they have to go down columns of questions on the screen and then back to the top making it easy to miss things).

Changes made to the structure of the document during the life of the pilot had improved it. Adding a ‘requested date’ field against all the evidence requirements was felt to improve the usefulness of the document.

However, even at the second phase of research, FAs reported that the quality of information completed on the CPC was still mixed and that CPCs were often missing, late or incomplete. They felt that the fact that the CPC allowed limited scope for each organisation to update the evidence requested/provided made it difficult to track the history of the claim and to identify where any mistakes had been made.

FAs continued to report that vital relevant questions were not always asked, and full answers were not always recorded by the Contact Centres. In cases where an HB/CTB claim had not been recorded by the Contact Centre but FA staff feel that a customer would qualify, FAs were unsure whether they should suggest this to customers. There was also uncertainty around the process if the customer has an existing HB claim running.

**Rapid reclaims**

Throughout the pilot FA staff have found it easy to accommodate dealing with Rapid Reclaims, in most cases, packs are issued there and then, with an FA taking only minutes to assist the customer in completing the form.
2.4 HMRC experiences

HMRC staff were unable to comment on the impact of the out of work process on their organisation. Calls from Contact Centre staff regarding new claims or change of circumstances for Tax Credits were channelled through the normal TCO call centres and hence, any issues regarding these calls were impossible to distinguish from standard calls.

2.5 Local authority experiences

2.5.1 Overall reactions– first stage of research

On the whole, LAs were very positive about the pilot during the first stage of research and were in favour of the overall objectives.

Processing times were thought to have reduced for HB claims, although in some cases this was felt to be a result of some prioritisation of pilot cases.

LAs reported they had been able to reduce the number of times they contacted customers and felt they are offering better customer service.

The implementation had been straightforward for LA staff, with little change for processors.

However, staff had found that few out of work (new claim) cases arrived from Jobcentre Plus with all the necessary evidence to allow the LA to finalise an HB/CTB claim. There were also a number of problems experienced with the completeness of evidence supplied by the Jobcentre.

2.5.2 Overall reactions – second stage of research

By the second phase of research, all sites reported that the process was now operating more smoothly and that, in general, the quality of evidence received had improved.

A better service for customers was thought to have emerged from the pilot process, with minimal impact on resources (for LAs).

At Phase 2, some further improvement in processing times was reported, although it was thought that earlier WFIs and notification of award of DWP benefit payments accounted for this rather than an improvement in the amount of evidence supplied by customers at their WFI, or a reduction in the amount of work required to process a payment.

2.5.3 Receiving evidence

Although most LA staff believed they were likely to receive more evidence from customers under the pilot process, during the first phase of research they stated that it was common for out of work/new claims cases for HB or CTB to arrive from the Jobcentre without all the necessary evidence attached.
Figures varied between each LA but it was generally estimated that around a third of cases were thought to arrive without sufficient detail or evidence. Tenancy agreements and details of non-dependants’ income were most commonly not provided.

Problems were encountered with documents being provided ‘in part’ but not in full, e.g. insufficient number of bank statements or evidence was copied but not verified (so that LA staff needed to request it from customers again). Processors also mentioned that they were receiving evidence that they didn’t actually need (including proof of ID or tenancy agreements for those in LA housing) and there was a general sense that staff at the Jobcentre were unclear about LA requirements.

Local authorities found it difficult to identify whether these problems arose from Contact Centre staff not requesting the correct evidence or FAs being unclear about the exact requirements or if customers were simply not bringing in all the evidence requested of them.

Local authorities reported an improvement by the second stage of the research. The amount (and quality) of evidence they received had improved, although staff did not think that this was in a large enough number of cases to impact greatly on processing times. Tenancy agreements are still most likely to be missing.

Some LAs actually had closer involvement with Jobcentres prior to the pilot. In one case, this involved having a member of LA staff on-site in the Jobcentre to advise on HB/CTB claims. In another, it involved LA staff contacting customers prior to their WFI to discuss evidence requirements for HB/CTB claims. These districts believed that the pilot process had led to a reduction in the number of customers bringing in all the evidence required for their LA benefits claim.

### 2.5.4 Claims Preparation Checklist

Although some LAs liked the concise nature of the CPC others felt it did not cover their requirements in sufficient detail (and was generally poorly filled in during the earlier stages of the pilot).

Because the CPC did not specify exact types or quantities of evidence required, processors found that Jobcentre staff were wasting time by attaching unsuitable or incomplete documentation. Most frequently missing were tenancy agreements and details of non-dependants’ income. The CPC did not allow Jobcentre staff to note if documents were provided in part or fully – resulting in LA processors having to check rather than accept the evidence as verified.

Furthermore, LAs found that Jobcentre staff were not consistent in recording the provided evidence, leaving it unclear to the LA which documents had been requested.

Some staff suggested that the HB/CTB checklist was unnecessary, simply adding another piece of paper to be scanned. They suggested that additional questions should have been included on the LA input document instead.
A new version of the checklist had been introduced before the second stage of research was carried out. Local authorities felt that the new version set out their requirements better and displayed the evidence that had been requested by the Jobcentre more clearly. They found that the proportion of correctly filled in checklists had increased but still felt that there was some scope for a clearer indication of the evidence requested at each stage of the process to help them to understand how they can improve the likelihood of customers supplying all evidence.

At a local level some LAs and Jobcentres have organised visits and staff training which have further clarified requirements and strengthened working relationships. Most LA staff say they are now more likely to trust evidence supplied by the Jobcentre and not re-check.

However, LA staff stated that they were frustrated that they had been instructed only to write to customers to request documents that the evidence checklist suggested they had not already been asked to provide (by staff in the Jobcentre). Hence they were instructed not to re-ask for any information that was recorded on the HB checklist. In cases where they identified further evidence not mentioned on the HB checklist and wrote out to customers to request this evidence, they were concerned that this could lead customers to believe that the additional evidence that they were told by staff in the Jobcentre to send in was no longer required. LA staff were asked to wait 14 days from any information being requested before they ‘chased’ it. Staff felt that this slowed the process down unnecessarily.

This frustration was still present at the second stage of research. LAs generally found that most of their customers did not provide the extra evidence they require unless they remind them, so they believed having to wait 14 days to do this negated the advantage of receiving some evidence from the Jobcentre. It was suggested that publicising the new process may help reduce customer reliance on LA reminders.

### 2.5.5 Effect on claim processing

At the first phase of research, LA staff generally felt that processing times had reduced. However, some sites acknowledged that the internal procedures were no quicker under the pilot than previously and that pilot cases were prioritised (in some cases this was intentional to meet targets, in others an unintentional function of having a limited number of processors specialising in pilot cases).

Furthermore, some LAs attributed the speeding up of the process to simply receiving notification about JSA/IS award earlier (in part due to an earlier WFIs).

In the later research these feelings were reiterated. While LAs welcomed receiving notification earlier and acknowledged that receiving any evidence from the Jobcentre was an improvement, they pointed out that ultimately awards cannot be finalised until all the required evidence is present. They felt that having to wait 14 days before being able request information for a second time limited any potential reduction in reducing processing times.
2.6 Summary

Following both phases of research, it appears that staff in all stakeholder organisations had grown increasingly positive about the pilot. There was a general consensus that it had improved customer service, streamlined the process and improved clearance times. In spite of BDC staff being the least positive group about the pilot, they had begun to see positive outcomes, such as improved clearance times. However, minor problems (such as the inaccuracy of CPC completion) are yet to be resolved and there are concerns across the board about the potential impacts on resourcing, workloads and meeting targets if the pilot were to be rolled out nationally.
3 The ‘into work’ process – staff views

This chapter looks in detail at views on the operation of the ‘into work’ pilot process and covers the views and experiences of;

• Jobcentre staff;
• HMRC staff;
• LA staff.

3.1 Jobcentre Plus experiences

3.1.1 Overall reactions – initial stage of research

Jobcentre staff interviewed during the first stage of research were generally positive about the Into Work pilot process and were keen to make it work.

It was perceived as offering clear benefits for customers and many believed it could combat customer concerns about organising benefits when moving into work. As the process offers staff the chance to highlight to customers the options available once they move into work, advisers thought that it would lead to greater uptake of these benefits.

However, most Jobcentres found their customers were unlikely to return their IWS and had received far fewer than anticipated.

Handling IWSs was proving difficult to resource. In most Jobcentres frontline staff were dealing with IWS for JSA customers, resulting in an increased workload. This was proving particularly problematic for smaller Jobcentres (who have fewer floating staff or seasonal unemployment). The amount of time spent with customers returning IWS varied considerably between, and even within, Jobcentres depending on other demands on staff time.

The main advantage of the Into Work process was the impact on the time taken for tax credit claims to be resolved. Securing HBRO more easily was also a positive.
Lone Parent Personal Advisers were most likely to be positive about the Into Work process for their IS customers. This was because they tended to see these customers face-to-face when they found work (enabling them to fit processing the IWS into normal procedures more easily). These customers were also more likely to want to make a Tax Credit claim.

3.1.2 Overall reactions – second stage of research

The low return rate of IWS was still an issue in the second stage of the research. Staff still suggested that customers did not appreciate the benefits that could result from returning the IWS, as the pilot process has not been advertised. They also pointed out that there was little benefit in returning an IWS for those customers without HB/CTB or tax credit interest.

By this stage of the pilot, there was evidence of some staff losing faith in the value of the IWS and it transpired that a number of Jobcentres are only distributing IWSs to customers coming into the Jobcentre to close their claim if they had an interest in applying for HB/CTB or Tax Credits or if the customer was a lone parent. Other customers were told to return the ES40 card only.

Some thought the practice of distributing the IWS when a customer started their claim for JSA/IS was too early given that so many forms are issued at this point. Many staff mentioned that it would be preferable if the IWS could be combined with the ES40 card.

There was also a perception that despite any efficiencies resulting from the Jobcentre stage of the process, BDCs were not always closing claims as quickly as they could, leading to problems such as overpayment of benefit, leading to frustration for both staff and customers.

3.1.3 Receiving IWS

By the time of the first phase of research all Jobcentres reported very few IWSs being returned (often fewer than ten), certainly fewer than anticipated.

It appeared that some sites were promoting the return of IWSs more than others. Customer bases undoubtedly differed between sites and those that felt their customers were more likely to benefit (because they were more likely to have an HB/CTB or Tax Credit claim) were accordingly more likely to encourage them to return their IWS.

Most sites attributed the low rate of return of IWSs on the fact that customers are unlikely to come into the Jobcentre to ‘sign off’ or that they dislike being asked to return multiple forms.

Others thought customers simply perceived little benefit in returning the form (especially those who would not be eligible for other benefits or tax credits).

At this stage, some sites felt that the low return of IWSs could be related to a general reduction in clients signing-off benefits.
However, by the time of the second phase of research, there had been little change to the number of IWSs being received.

3.1.4 Handling IWS

Several offices stated that they were having difficulties providing resources to handle IWSs that were handed in at the Jobcentre because they could not plan for when they arrived.

At most sites floating members of the floor team had been asked to deal with IWSs, fitting it in around their other duties. This resulted in the time being spent with individual customers varying considerably depending on how busy the staff member was (so that on some occasions the information filled in on the form would simply be entered as quickly as possible where as on other occasions advice about applying for HB/CTB might be given).

Other sites were trying to arrange for customers to see an FA but were having trouble fitting this in to their diaries. Some were planning to train ‘first contact’ staff to identify cases that could have Tax Credit interest and then arranging for these customers to see an adviser so that a Better-Off Calculation can be conducted, although again, management staff reported difficulties making this work, as first contact staff required training from HMRC to undertake this work.

There was, therefore, little consistency, and no best practice solution to be offered to resolve the issue of dealing with IWSs. Solutions were relatively ‘ad hoc’ and the customer experience was likely to fluctuate depending on the availability of staff to speak to them when they arrive. With so many problems arising from a such a low proportion of returned forms, management staff questioned the scalability of this part of the process.

Resourcing was particularly problematic for smaller Jobcentres with fewer floating staff or seasonal unemployment. There were clear calls for a specific member of staff to deal with IWSs, and support for the idea that customers should make appointments to return IWSs (although there was also recognition that this would discourage returns).

By the later stage of research it seemed that the resourcing of IWS had became less of an issue. In some Jobcentres, single points of contact had been identified. However this process continued to be problematic for smaller Jobcentres. There was concern among management staff that some of those responsible for dealing with IWS were being asked to perform tasks above their grade (particularly in relation to handling Tax Credit claims).

3.1.5 The IWS form

The IWS asks for information that many customers do not know upon starting work (specific salary details, PAYE reference, etc) and this was reported as problematic during the earlier stage of research. Several Jobcentre advisers also mentioned that the early version of the IWS used ‘jargon’ such as the term ‘NINO’ that customers are unfamiliar with (and therefore, leave blank).
Generally, Jobcentre staff feel that the IWS requests more information than customers are usually able to give and that the ‘purpose’ of the document is not made clear to customers.

Before the second stage of research some changes had been made to the IWS, generally these were welcomed and subsequently most Jobcentre staff felt that the IWS is working effectively as a document.

However, some regarded the IWS as now more difficult to complete than previously, claiming that it asks for some unnecessary information (e.g. the customers’ name needs to be filled in twice on the front page).

Some staff feel that further amendments should be made, especially regarding the questions for HBRO and the Job Finder Grant which they feel imply all customers are eligible for these benefits.

3.1.6 Tax Credits

Speeding up Tax Credit claims was thought to be one the key advantages offered to customers through the pilot process. Jobcentre staff were very positive about this part of the pilot, especially LPAs whose clients were most likely to benefit.

However, a number of staff felt very strongly that the TC600 and iWorks\(^2\) were not user-friendly (particularly in comparison to the e-portal solution that they had access to prior to the pilot). At the first phase of research, staff mentioned that the fact that a claim form had to be copied out onto a desk top and then copied back in order to be submitted was long-winded (and staff were concerned that they could not open the attachment once it was attached just to ‘double-check’ that it was correct). They also stated that they would like some form of confirmation of sending/receipt.

At many sites a lack of training in Tax Credits was a problem and they were waiting for HMRC to provide this.

By the second stage of research, once more tax claims had been processed, the extra time being spent dealing with this was identified as a growing concern. Staff reported spending up to an hour extra per case.

Also, changes in security procedures at HMRC had started to cause problems for Jobcentre staff. They reported that on occasions they spent time processing a customer’s details (and encouraging customers to return these) then to go on and fail security checks, resulting in the customer having to contact HMRC themselves at a later date.

Some Jobcentre staff again stated that they would feel happier reassuring their customers that the information had gone through if HMRC could send a confirmation they had received and actioned it.

\(^2\) Electronic forms for staff to make/amend Tax Credit claims.
3.1.7 LA benefits

Lone Parent PAs stated that they felt the IWS was valuable in ensuring that clients receive HBRO (something their customers had experienced problems with in the past). Staff recognised that not having HBRO settled was a significant concern to many customers when they start work – particularly for lone parents. They also felt that it was an area where it was common for LAs to make mistakes.

Again, this had created support from staff for the pilot process for these customers, and as they could see the benefit for customers directly, they were less likely to feel negative about the extra work created.

3.2 HMRC experiences

3.2.1 Overall reactions

Resourcing for the pilot had very little impact on HMRC. For the most part, HMRC staff consider the Into Work process as ‘business as usual’. There were just two changes to normal procedures:

- the additional task of notifying the LA of the customers’ tax credit award; and
- TC600 and e-IWK1 are received electronically through the Indigo system, rather than by courier.

The volume of pilot cases received was low – an average of 70 in total per week – so at an operational level, just one member of staff has been required throughout the pilot to process pilot cases. Another member of staff has been trained to cover when the main member of staff is not in the office and their managers have been instructed on how to carry out the pilot-related management checks. As a result training requirements have been low in comparison to those at other organisations.

Within this context staff have been increasingly positive about the pilot as it has progressed. HMRC staff are confident that the pilot has improved customer service and they believe that levels of knowledge and understanding between the various organisation involved in delivering the pilot have improved.

‘To me compared to the past [the pilot is] like first class and [pre-pilot is like] second class.’

(HMRC Processor, Stage 2)

3.2.2 Receiving Tax Credit applications from Jobcentre

Receiving the TC600 and e-IWK1 electronically was regarded by HMRC staff as the key benefit of the pilot. This was credited as leading to a significant reduction in clearance times since the pilot was introduced. Pre-pilot, receiving clerical forms via courier could take up to five days, and at least seven days to process. Under the pilot process, receipt of referrals was instantaneous and staff reported that
payments could be processed within two and three days on average, sometimes in as little as 24 hours, with customers receiving their tax credits the next day. HMRC had received positive feedback from customers about the speed of this process.

‘[Jobcentre Plus are] getting positive feedback from their customers: “our money has come through, I can’t believe we got our money straightaway”.’

(HMRC Processor, Stage 2)

Under the pilot process, HMRC are required to contact Jobcentre Plus regarding any missing details on an application form (where as previously they would have approached the customer direct). At Phase 1, HMRC staff stated that they felt this had introduced considerable delays into the process because of difficulties contacting the member of staff responsible for filing the claim (because they are often with customers and sometimes work part-time). At Phase 1, HMRC staff reported that in up to 50 per cent of the change in circumstance referrals received, they needed to approach Jobcentre Plus for further information. On occasions, HMRC staff reported that they were resorting to contacting customers direct so as not to hold up claims.

By the second phase of research, the completeness of information provided by Jobcentre Plus had improved. In part, HMRC felt that this was a result of work conducted to identify why problems were occurring and discussing these with Jobcentre staff to agree what information is essential (e.g. such as missing job details, which defined the majority of non-compliant cases) and agreement with them over what is not so important (such as the PAYE reference). By the second phase of research, a system had also been arrived at where Jobcentre Plus staff, other than those handling problem cases, could access information about these cases for HMRC, reducing delays considerably.

3.2.3 Notifying LAs

The task of notifying the Local Authority of a customers’ tax credit award has been a straightforward change for HMRC to incorporate, involving very little additional work. At Phase 1 of the research, staff reported that LAs had been receiving these notifications and had not reported any complaints with regard to when they have been received and the quality of information supplied.

By Phase 2, HMRC staff had visited LAs and received positive feedback on the usefulness of the notification of Tax Credit awards.

3.2.4 Processing times

Although staff reported that clearance times had significantly decreased, they reported a slight increase in the amount of time taken to process each case. At Phase 1, the time spent on each case was reported to have increased by approximately 30 per cent since the introduction of the pilot. However, this was mainly attributed to the fact that pilot details had to be entered into two separate databases (the existing, standard one and the Indigo system which is used for pilot
cases) – a procedure that would probably not be necessary if the pilot process were to become mainstream. However, by the second phase of research, the amount of time taken to process pilot cases had reduced to around 15-20 per cent longer than pre-pilot cases as staff became more familiar with the new system.

However, despite this positive impact on processing times, staff were keen to point out that this is, in part, a result of the fact that only one member of staff was allocated to these cases and the overall volume of them remains very low. They stated that if the pilot were operating nationally then it is likely that cases would not be processed as and when they reached HMRC but the Service Level Agreement (SLA) seven-day target would be worked to instead and clearance times would be likely to increase substantially.

3.3 Local authority experiences

3.3.1 Overall reactions – first stage of research

At the point when the first stage of research was undertaken most LAs had little experience of processing Into Work pilot claims, having received very few Into Work Statements (if any).

However, most agreed with the aims of the pilot, and thought that the process would work well in principle. The LAs viewed the Into Work Statements as useful, and thought the information they contained would help them to shorten processing times.

Even with so few claims staff were finding that it was very useful to receive notification of a new WTC claim direct from HMRC as this meant that they did not need to request proof of entitlement from customers (and hence speeding up the processing of claims).

3.3.2 Overall reactions – second stage of research

During the later research, most sites had received a greater volume of IWSs, although still in single figures for some.

It was generally accepted that receiving the IWS was ensuring that those customers who are entitled to HBRO are accessing it more quickly. Local authorities believed that the pilot process had the potential for greater impact for those going back to work than had been achieved.

3.3.3 Receiving IWS

During the first stage of research some sites reported they were waiting over a week for IWSs to arrive, negating their use. Local authority processors thought that Jobcentre staff may have been holding back the forms, waiting for the customer to provide further information before sending them on.
Sometimes this delay meant that LAs received notification of a Tax Credit award first and then had to spend some time matching this up with the relevant IWS. Sometimes they also received notification of the end of a customer’s claim from the BDC before receiving an IWS. Sometimes on these occasions, LA staff were unsure whether Jobcentre staff had followed the pilot process or not and often issued new HB claim forms in the post. This could lead to the customer receiving two sets of new claim forms and create confusion.

Delays were still occurring when the second stage of research was undertaken, although some (mainly smaller) sites were receiving all IWS the same day or day after the customer had visited the Jobcentre.

### 3.3.4 Housing Benefit Checklist

Local authority staff were generally positive about the Housing Benefit Checklist (HBC), however, some were not aware that a checklist was provided by the Jobcentre for customers moving into work.

There were suggestions that the form could be made more user-friendly for customers. It was thought that any additional information needed from the customer should be made clearer and the details more exact. It was thought that a checklist style would be more useful than an indication of what may be required.

Others were frustrated that Jobcentre Plus staff did not play an even more active role in collecting evidence for this stage of the process (and in fact some stated that they had a greater need for help collecting information at this stage than when a customer moves ‘out of work’).

They felt that very few HB forms that were issued at the Jobcentre were returned to them as Jobcentre staff were not explaining the importance of returning the form and any outstanding evidence to the LA, and in some cases thought that the Jobcentre staff were not explaining the process at all. One manager suggested that this would be best achieved by having a member of HB staff on-site in the Jobcentre.

During the second stage of research the HBC and the IWS had been updated, with the aim of making it clearer to LA staff what had happened at the Jobcentre. However, processors reported confusion about whether a new claim form had been given to the customer or not as they found the new ‘official use only’ section at the back is not always filled in. They thought that Jobcentre staff were perhaps resistant to undertaking this extra piece of work but pointed out that if filled in, this section saved them time checking customers’ circumstances.

Staff also found that the date work started was not always recorded, a key detail for them in being able to process a claim.

### 3.3.5 Customer service

Staff felt that they had reduced the number of times they needed to contact customers to chase evidence. Notification of Tax Credit was thought particularly
helpful as staff can avoid writing out to customers to request proof of award. However, staff said they still needed to contact the majority of customers at least once in order to process HB/CTB claims.

Some LA staff felt customers could benefit from even closer working between Jobcentres and LAs. Suggestions included providing more advice about evidence required for HB/CTB at Jobcentres than currently, by having a member of LA staff on site at the Jobcentre.

At the initial phase of research, some LA staff had concerns that Jobcentre staff were misleading customers by making the process of claiming run-on appear simpler than it actually is, by giving customers the impression that notification of a WTC award would be sufficient to enable the LA to award run-on rather than explaining that in some circumstances a new form has to be filled in because the extended payment is treated as a ‘new claim’.

These fears had abated during the later research, although there were still some concerns over high customer expectations and a lack of understanding of LA benefits at Jobcentres. Staff continued to highlight the need for Jobcentre staff to offer customers guidance and advice when issuing the HBC.

### 3.3.6 Effect on claim processing

During the first phase of research, staff were generally positive about the ‘head start’ that receiving the IWS offered in arranging HBRO. They stated that prior to the pilot they rarely heard that customers had found work until their JSA/IS claim ended, so when the customer had actually started work. (This ties in with the issues raised by JSA staff about customers frequently encountering problems with HBRO.)

It was generally accepted that the IWS was ensuring those that are entitled to HBRO are accessing it more quickly, albeit only for the small proportion of customers who return their IWS.

In one LA which has received a relatively large number of IWS, the LA have reduced HBRO processing times from an average of 12 to 15 days to three to five days, simply because of the additional information from Jobcentre Plus and HMRC that previously they would have had to obtain themselves (although they also state that there has been some prioritisation of pilot cases). By the second phase of research, most sites reported they were able to award run-on within a couple of days of receiving the IWS and Tax Credit notification.

The reduction in set up times was also reported to decrease the likelihood of overpayments.

However, others pointed out that in the majority of cases the IWS provides sufficient information for the LA to process a provisional new HB claim but because the award cannot be finalised until the LA receives verified evidence, it does not have an effect on processing times for final claims.
3.4 Summary

By the end of Phase 2 of research, staff in all stakeholder organisations felt that the pilot process offered clear benefits to the customer, such as quicker receipt of tax credits and LA benefits in particular. Although Jobcentre staff had been finding it difficult to resource the handling of the IWS and were concerned about the implications this could have for a pilot rollout, the views of all staff towards the pilot Into Work process were overwhelmingly positive.
4 Customer views

This chapter looks at customer views of both the out of work and into work processes. As with the staff research – research among customers was conducted in two phases.

The customer research conducted at Phase 1 was designed to understand:

- whether the pilot process was operating as intended;
- what customer views on the process were.

A total of 652 customers were interviewed at Phase 1 – 442 who had been through the ‘out of work’ process and 210 who had recently moved into work.

Some sub-groups of customers were then followed-up at Stage 2 to collect their opinions on specific aspects of the process.

4.1 ‘Out of work’ process

This section looks at customer experiences of the ‘out of work’ process. A total of 442 customers who had been through this part of the process were interviewed at Phase 1.

4.1.1 Contact Centre process

A key difference for customers undergoing the pilot process is that they are asked about their interest in applying for other benefits (i.e. HB, CTB and CTC) or closing a WTC claim at first contact with Jobcentre Plus. As Figure 4.1 demonstrates, three in five recalled being asked about their interest in applying for HB and just over half about their interest in applying for CTB. The proportions who recalled being asked about Tax Credits were smaller (38 per cent recalled being asked about CTC and 27 per cent about Working Tax Credits). Just over a quarter (29 per cent) stated that they were not asked about their interest in applying for any of these benefits. It is difficult to establish whether they were in fact not asked these questions or if they simply do not remember being asked.
Customer views

Figure 4.1 Recall of being asked about other benefit interest by FCOs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit Interest</th>
<th>Told Contact Centre that had interest</th>
<th>Recall being asked about interest by Contact Centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make a claim for HB</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a claim for CTB</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a claim for CTC</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End a claim for WTC</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base = All Out of Work/New Claims customers (442).

One in three customers told the FCO that dealt with their initial call that they were interested in making a claim for HB and a slightly smaller proportion that they had an interest in applying for CTB. Only a small minority of customers had an interest in making/changing a Tax Credits claim (four per cent stated that they needed to close a WTC claim and seven per cent that they wanted to make a CTC claim). Overall, 31 per cent of customers stated at their initial contact with Jobcentre Plus that they needed to make or change a claim for LA or HMRC benefits (and hence, fell into the key target group for the pilot).

Figure 4.2 shows the views of those customers who stated that they had an HB/CTB claim at this process on this element of the pilot process. Half of these customers (46 per cent) felt that this service was better than expected, with a quarter (25 per cent) stating that it was much better than expected. Only 19 per cent stated that this element of the service was worse than they expected while the remaining 35 per cent stated that their experience was in line with expectations.

The vast majority of these customers felt that the FCO made it clear to them what documents they would need to bring in to process this claim (84 per cent with 57 per cent stating that it was ‘very clear’). Only 12 per cent stated that they were left unclear about what they would need to bring in.

Customers were less positive about the impact that discussing their HB/CTB claim at this point had on the speed with which their claim was settled. A third (32 per cent) felt that their claim was settled more quickly as a result but a quarter (25 per cent) felt that their claim was settled more slowly (a third felt that it made no
difference to the processing of their claim and 13 per cent were unsure of the impact).

This would seem to indicate that while customers are generally either neutral or positive about the fact that they are asked about their HB/CTB claim at first contact and seem to be able to handle being given instructions about the evidence required for their HB/CTB claim at this process, the majority remain unconvinced that this serves to speed up their claim.

**Figure 4.2 Views on being asked for HB/CTB information at first contact**

![Chart showing views on being asked for HB/CTB information at first contact]

- **Better**: 46% (19% Worse)
- **Faster**: 32% (25% Slower)
- **Clear**: 84% (12% Unclear)

Service level offered compared to expectation
Impact on speed with which claim settled
Clarity of instructions on documents to bring

Base = All Out of Work/New Claims customers expressing interest in HB/CTB application at first contact (126).

Of the small number who stated that they needed to make or change a Tax Credit claim, two-thirds stated that the FCO recorded the information required to process their Tax Credit case at this initial call. Where the customer was aware that details were taken, two-thirds stated that this was a better level of service than they had expected. Just under half believed that the fact that information was taken at this stage meant that their case was processed more quickly (most of the rest believed that it made no difference rather than having a negative effect). However, half of these customers stated that they would have preferred to contact the TCO themselves rather than the FCO doing so on their behalf.

Three-fifths of customers (60 per cent) recalled being asked if they would like the FCO to conduct a jobsearch process for them. Hence, two in five do not believe they were given this option. Of those who recall being offered a jobsearch, nearly
all (88 per cent) agreed for this to take place and of these, four-fifths (79 per cent) found this to be helpful.

Nearly all customers (82 per cent) stated that they were given a WFI appointment during their initial call. Small numbers stated that they were called back with this information (five per cent), that they had to call the Contact Centre back for the information (three per cent) or that they only received written notification (three per cent). Given that customers should have been booked into the first available WFI, some customers reported considerable delays between their initial call and the date of their WFI. The figure below shows the proportion of customers who received their WFI within each time period. Note that the figures are cumulative. Hence, only two-fifths of customers (41 per cent) stated that they were given a date for their WFI within three working days. Almost three-quarters (72 per cent) received a date within four to five working days. These time lags may reflect some initial difficulties in accessing the diaries of Jobcentre Plus staff to accommodate earlier WFIs. The results show some variation in the timing of WFIs by pilot site indicating that these problems were more acute for some Jobcentres than others.

Figure 4.3 Date of WFI

Base = All Out of Work/New Claims customers (442).

4.1.2 Jobcentre Plus process

All pilot customers should have received a call prior to their WFI to remind them both of the date/time and the evidence that they were required to bring with them. Only 16 per cent of customers claimed that they received this reminder call indicating that this part of the process was not working well at the time
of the Phase 1 research (November 2007). This may have been a result of poor communication between the BDCs and the Jobcentres about which customers had or hadn’t been contacted.

As mentioned above, 31 per cent of customers expressed interest in making or amending an HB/CTB or Tax Credit claim during their initial conversation with Contact Centre staff. Customers who had not mentioned interest in other benefits at this stage were then asked whether they expressed an interest in any of these areas when it came to their WFI. Only seven per cent of customers stated that they registered HB/CTB or Tax Credit interest at this stage that they had not mentioned before (three per cent who had not mentioned interest in any additional benefits during their conversation with the Contact Centre) indicating that the process of screening for interest in other benefits at first contact was working reasonably effectively.

All customers were asked whether they brought in all the documents required for their JSA/IS claim when they attended their WFI. In addition, those who had expressed an interest in applying for HB or CTB were asked whether they brought in all the documentation required for these benefits. The results of these questions are shown in the figure below:

Figure 4.4 Bringing documentary evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brought all documents for JSA/IS claim</th>
<th>Brought all documents for HB claim</th>
<th>Brought all documents for CTB claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base = All Out of Work/New Claims customers (442).
Base = All Out of Work customers with HB interest (132).
Base = All Out of Work customers with CTB interest (116).

Nearly all customers (90 per cent) believed that they had brought in all the evidence required for their core benefit (i.e. JSA or IS). For HB and CTB claims, this proportion stood at around three-quarters. These proportions are much higher
than the estimates made by Jobcentre staff which would seem to indicate that some of those customers who fail to bring in all the evidence required to process their claim do not leave their WFI understanding that this is the case (which in turn is likely to lead to disappointment if this then impacts on the processing of their claim).

The proportions of customers who stated that they were told at their WFI that they need to provide evidence which had not been mentioned to them before were relatively low (two per cent in connection to JSA/IS claims, ten per cent in connection with HB claims and five per cent in connection with CTB claims). This could be seen to indicate that the combination of the discussion with FCOs and the reminder call from the BDC/Jobcentre\(^3\) are ensuring that customers are fully aware of evidence requirements in most cases. However, it could also be a function of customers not being made aware at the WFI that they have not provided all the evidence that they need to. The views of Jobcentre, BDC and LA staff on the number of ‘complete’ claims would seem to indicate that the latter is the case.

Of the 23 per cent of customers with HB interest who stated that they did not bring in all the evidence required for their HB claim, just under half recalled being given the HBC that detailed the remaining evidence that they needed to supply.

Of those customers who had documents relating to their HB or CTB claims verified in the Jobcentre, 38 per cent stated that the level of service offered in this area was better than they had expected (compared with 14 per cent who stated that it was worse). A third (31 per cent) stated that they felt that this process increased the speed with which their HB/CTB claim was resolved (compared to 16 per cent who stated that they felt it made the process slower).

### 4.1.3 Customer experience of receiving payment

Customers taking part in the Phase 1 research were asked about the time that it took to receive payment of their core benefit (JSA or IS), HB, CTB and Tax Credits (Figure 4.5).

Of those customers who had been through the ‘out of work’ pilot process, 13 per cent were still awaiting either payment of their core benefit or notification of their entitlement to receive it (on average customers were interviewed around two months after their initial call to the Contact Centre). Of those who had received payment, a fifth (20 per cent) had received payment within five working days of their initial contact and a further third (32 per cent) received payment around six to ten working days after registering their claim. Just over three-quarters had received payment of their core benefit by 15 working days.

\(^3\) Although the impact of these reminder calls is relatively limited for these customers since only 16 per cent of customers stated that they received a call.
Of ‘out of work’ customers who made an HB or CTB claim, a third were still awaiting either payment or notification of entitlement by the time of interview. In addition, a considerable proportion stated that they were simply unsure of the status of their claim (17 per cent of those who had made an HB claim and 15 per cent of those who had made a CTB claim). Where payment had been received, the amount of time taken to receive the first payment varied considerably. In the case of both benefits, just under half had received payment with ten working days while, at the other end of the spectrum, a quarter of those with an HB claim and 14 per cent of those with a CTB claim had waited at least 16 working days for payment.

Figure 4.5  Time taken to receive payment of benefits: Out of Work customers

- Don’t know
- 31 working days or more
- 26 to 30 working days
- 21 to 25 working days
- 16 to 20 working days
- 11 to 15 working days
- 6 to 10 working days
- 5 working days or fewer

Core benefit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>HB (70)</th>
<th>CTB (61)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31 working days or more</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 30 working days</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 25 working days</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 20 working days</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15 working days</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10 working days</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 working days or fewer</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base = All Out of Work customers who had received payment (364).

Base = All customers who had received payment (70).

Base = All customers who had received payment (61).

NB: Based just on Out of Work customers.
Those customers who had received payment of each benefit were also asked how the time taken to receive payments compared with their expectations (Figure 4.6). In the case of JSA/IS payments, customers were more likely to say that payment had been slower than expected than they were to say that it had been faster than expected (38 per cent compared with 21 per cent). The majority stated that the speed of processing was in line with their expectations.

Of those who had received payment for HB and CTB, the proportions stating that the speed with which they received payment was faster than expected and the proportions stating that it was slower than expected were approximately equal. It is worth bearing in mind that in the case of HB and CTB, the proportions of customers whose claims were still outstanding at the time of interview were not asked these questions and hence their views are not included in these figures. Only a small proportion of Out of Work customers had made a claim for CTC (35 customers in total) and around half of these were unsure about the status of their claim. However, of the ten customers who had received payment, seven had done so within five working days and nine within ten working days.

These findings are perhaps disappointing given that ultimately, the pilot aims to speed up the processing of claims. It is, however, difficult to understand how positive or negative these findings are without the ability to compare findings with similar responses from customers who had experienced a more ‘standard’ service. It is possible that customers enter the process of claiming benefits with unrealistic expectations of how quickly their claim can be processed (and perhaps underestimating the evidence that they will need to provide in order for their claim to be completed).

At Phase 2, some of those customers who had said that the claim for their core benefit took longer to be processed than they had expected were followed up to ask about their perceptions of why this was the case. Figure 4.7 shows the actual time taken for these individuals to receive payment of their core benefit against the length of time that these customers had expected it to take. As the figure demonstrated, only six per cent of these customers expected it to take. As the figure demonstrated, only six per cent of these customers received payment within five working days of their initial call to the Contact Centre but 40 per cent expected their claim to be settled within this time. Over eight in ten of these customers anticipated that their claim would be settled within ten working days (while in practice this was the case for only a quarter of their claims). This would seem to indicate that to a large extent disappointment over the speed with which claims were processed is based on unrealistic expectations as much as on poor service.
Figure 4.6  Payment times compared with expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faster</th>
<th>21%</th>
<th>26%</th>
<th>21%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slower</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

JS/AVS: Base = All Out of Work customers who had received payment (364).
HB: Base = All customers who had received payment (70).
CTB: Base = All customers who had received payment (61).

Figure 4.7  Expected and actual payment times for core benefit

Findings from Phase 1: Processing of core benefit compared to expectations was...

- Faster: 21%
- Slower: 38%

Stated actual timing of payment compared with expectations:
- Faster:
  - 5% (31 working days or more)
  - 8% (26 to 30 working days)
  - 19% (21 to 25 working days)
  - 34% (16 to 20 working days)
  - 19% (11 to 15 working days)
  - 43% (6 to 10 working days)
  - 6% (5 working days or fewer)

- Slower:
  - 13% (31 working days or more)
  - 40% (26 to 30 working days)
  - 34% (21 to 25 working days)
  - 19% (16 to 20 working days)
  - 6% (11 to 15 working days)
  - 4% (6 to 10 working days)
  - 2% (5 working days or fewer)

- Don't know: 2%
When asked during Phase 2 interviews what their expectations were based on, these customers mentioned their own previous experience (31 per cent), information from Jobcentre staff (22 per cent), experiences of friends of relatives (12 per cent) or simply a personal judgement of what would seem reasonable (11 per cent). Of those who stated that payment of their core benefit was slower than expected, only a fifth (19 per cent) attributed the cause of this to issues related specifically to the Jobcentre Plus process (for example, paperwork being lost or mixed-up, having to deal with a number of different departments or organisations or offices being short-staffed). One in seven (14 per cent) stated that issues at their own end had slowed the process down (for example, because more documents were required, their circumstances changed, they missed appointments, etc.). The majority stated that they did not know why the process had taken longer than they had expected it to.

Reflecting this, only a minority felt there was anything that Jobcentre staff could have done differently to speed up their claim (37 per cent stated that nothing could be done and 28 per cent were unsure). The improvements that were suggested were:

- staff could be more helpful and informative;
- staff could take more care to ensure that data is recorded correctly;
- staff could make more effort to ‘chase’ claims;
- staff could do more to keep customers informed of how their cases are progressing;
- staff could give customers more realistic estimates of processing time.

Overall, the findings from the follow-up work conducted at Phase 2 would seem to indicate that it is not any particular aspect of the pilot process that has led customers to believe that payment of their core benefit took longer than expected. There is perhaps an indication though that more could be done to manage customer expectations about the length of time taken to process claims. Around two-thirds of those who said that it took longer to receive payment of their core benefit than they expected, stated that this delay had caused them problems (47 per cent reported that it left them with a lack of money for household essentials, 13 per cent that they had to borrow money, ten per cent that they ran into problems paying bills and three per cent that a lack of money meant they were unable to fund their search for work).

### 4.2 ‘Into Work’ process

This section focuses on the views of customers who had returned IWSs by the time of the first phase of research. A total of 207 of these customers were interviewed.

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Most of the remainder stated that they were unsure what they had based their expectations on.
at Phase 1. Some of these were then re-contacted at Phase 2 to ask their views on some additional issues.

### 4.2.1 Returning Into Work Statements

Of the customers interviewed who had been through the ‘out of work’ process, three-fifths (60 per cent) recalled being issued with an IWS at their WFI. Of these individuals, almost all (93 per cent) stated that they would be very or quite likely to return the IWS when they found work. Four in five (79 per cent) of those who received an IWS stated that the member of staff who issued it to them explained that it could help to ensure that they received the correct benefits quickly once they found work. However, the experiences of staff would seem to suggest that only a relatively small proportion of customers actually remember to return the IWS when they enter work.

Even among those interviewed at Phase 1 who had completed an IWS, only two fifths had actually completed a statement that they had been given previously (27 per cent took their completed statement into the Jobcentre and 12 per cent posted their statement in). A third (33 per cent) had completed a statement in the Jobcentre when they had gone in to ‘sign-off’ (i.e. they had been reissued with an IWS). Most of the remainder were unsure about how they completed the IWS or stated that they did not do so (this may be a result of difficulties distinguishing between the different forms that are completed when a customer moves into work, particularly in cases where they are helped through this process by a member of staff)\(^5\). The balance between customers who had taken in a completed statement to the Jobcentre and those who completed the IWS on-site varied considerably between the pilot sites, reflecting the variation in ‘effort’ made to encourage customers who walked into the Jobcentre to ‘sign-off’ to complete an IWS.

Those who either took a completed IWS into the Jobcentre or filled in an IWS on-site were followed-up at Phase 2 to ask about their views on delivering the information contained in the IWS face-to-face. Generally, customers felt that this was relatively convenient (51 per cent of this group stated that it was very convenient and 45 per cent that it was fairly convenient). The reasons given for finding it convenient to visit the Jobcentre were that it was close to home, that the staff were helpful and informative, that it helps to speed up processing or that they were visiting anyway.

Half of those who had provided IWS information face-to-face in the Jobcentre stated that they had received some degree of assistance from Jobcentre staff when they returned or completed the IWS. These customers represent around a third of all those returning IWSs. The types of help mentioned included help in completing the form, provision of information about other entitlements and explanation of the process for closing a claim.

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\(^5\) An IWS would have to have been filled in on behalf of all customers interviewed since the sample was drawn from the list of IWS returns.
Despite the relatively favourable views on returning the statement in person, when customers were asked specifically about their preference for returning the IWS, only a third stated that they would rather take this approach then provide the information by post, phone or e-mail (Figure 4.8). A third (35 per cent) stated that they would prefer to return the IWS online and a quarter (25 per cent) expressed a preference for returning the information by phone. It is worth noting that these figures are based only on those who actually returned an IWS (which staff had found to be a relatively small proportion of all pilot customers). Since the only available channel for returning the IWS was in person or by post, these customers could perhaps be more likely to favour delivering/completing the IWS in the Jobcentre than customers as a whole. The fact that even these customers are more likely to express a preference for an online submission of the IWS would seem to indicate that this could be a popular channel for the return of the IWS and making it available may increase the proportion of customers returning statements.

Figure 4.8 Channel preference for returning IWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most convenient ways of returning information contained in IWS (prompted)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking completed form to Jobcentre Plus</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing form in Jobcentre Plus</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base = All Phase 2 Into Work customers (136).

4.2.2 Claims for other benefits

Of those customers who had been through the Into Work process in October/November 2007, a third (33 per cent) recalled being asked whether they were interested in making an application for HB, CTB or Tax Credits (with some variation between pilot sites reflecting the amount of assistance offered to those returning IWS). A quarter (23 per cent) had told Jobcentre Plus staff that they wished to make applications for at least one of other benefits (three-quarters of those who were asked about their interest).
A total of 17 per cent of Into Work customers had stated that they wished to make an HB/CTB application. In the majority of these cases, customers stated that Jobcentre Plus staff explained what evidence would need to be sent to the LA and almost three-quarters of these customers received the HBC which was generally seen as helpful. The majority of these customers were happy with the ability of staff to answer any questions that they had about making an HB/CTB application.

Similarly, 17 per cent of Into Work customers stated that they wanted to make an application for Tax Credits. In half of these cases, customers stated that Jobcentre Plus staff contacted the TCO on their behalf. (In theory staff should be able to do this for all customers – the fact that this did not happen for all customers may reflect either resourcing issues in the Jobcentre or customers not having all the required information to hand when they returned their IWS.) All of those who wanted to make a Tax Credit application were very or fairly satisfied with the ability of Jobcentre staff to answer any questions that they had about Tax Credits.

4.2.3 Comparisons between Phase 1 and Phase 2 experiences

When the follow-up research was conducted at Phase 2, those customers who had been through the ‘out of work’ process at Phase 1 but had since moved into work were asked about their views on the ‘into work’ process. This provided some scope to explore the extent to which the customer experience of the process in the early days of the pilot compared with experiences later on when pilot processes could reasonably be expected to have ‘bedded in’.

In the event, there was relatively little difference in the perceived ease of the ‘into work’ process between Phase 1 and Phase 2 respondents (Figure 4.9). The proportion of customers stating that they were asked about their interest in apply for other benefits is also broadly similar (even if the proportion taking this up was lower among the Phase 2 respondents). To some extent this appears consistent with the reports of staff that relatively few changes were made to the ‘into work’ element of the pilot over this timeframe.
4.3 Overall experiences

Customers who had been through the Into and Out of Work process were asked whether they would describe the process as ‘longwinded and complicated’, ‘relatively straightforward’ or ‘very quick, easy and without problems’ (Figure 4.10). The majority stated that they found the process relatively straightforward (53 per cent), while a fifth (21 per cent) described it as ‘very quick, easy and without problems’ and a quarter felt it was ‘longwinded and complicated’. The responses given were very similar for customers who had been through the Into and Out of Work processes.
Table 4.1 shows responses to additional questions relating to overall attitudes towards the process.

A key benefit of the pilot process should be limiting the amount of duplication in the information that customers are asked to provide in order for their benefits to be processed. Customers who had been through the pilot process were reasonably evenly split between those who agreed that they had had to give the same information out several times and those who disagreed that this was the case (49 per cent compared with 42 per cent). That said, customers who had HB/CTB or Tax Credit interest tended to be positive about the way in which the different organisations had worked together on their case. Of those who had HB or CTB interest, 58 per cent felt that the way in which Jobcentre Plus and their LA had worked together had been very or fairly good while 76 per cent of those who had a Tax Credit application agreed that Jobcentre Plus and the TCO had worked together in a way that they felt was very or fairly good.

Also encouragingly, two-thirds of customers agreed that having been through the pilot process, they would be very or fairly confident that their benefits would be sorted out smoothly.
Table 4.1  Overall customer views on the Out of Work process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I had to give the same information several times</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to get all my benefits sorted out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base: All experiencing out of work process (652)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very confident</th>
<th>Fairly confident</th>
<th>Not very confident</th>
<th>Not at all confident</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence that benefits would be sorted out</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smoothly if move in or out of work again in the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>future</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base: All experiencing out of work process (652)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Fairly good</th>
<th>Neither good nor poor</th>
<th>Fairly poor</th>
<th>Very poor</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating of way in which Jobcentre Plus and LA</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worked together to process benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base: All out of work customers with HB or CTB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interest (180)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Fairly good</th>
<th>Neither good nor poor</th>
<th>Fairly poor</th>
<th>Very poor</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating of way in which Jobcentre Plus and TCO</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worked together to process benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base: All out of work customers with tax credit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interest (81)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.1 Customers with previous experience

Where possible, customers who had previous experience of the process of sorting out benefits when they moved in and out of work were asked to compare the pilot process with their most recent experience.

Customers who had been through the out of work process but also had also made another benefit claim within the previous 12 months were asked to compare their experience of the pilot process with their other most recent experience of claiming benefits.

Customers who had been through the into work process were asked to compare their experience of organising their benefits when they found work with their experience when they started their claim.

Figure 4.11 combines the findings from both of these groups.
Without any form of ‘control group’ to compare the experiences of pilot customers against, data from this line of questioning gives the best indication of how the pilot performs compared to standard procedures. The results are generally positive, with customers considerably more likely to feel that their most recent experience was better than their previous one.

Just under half of customers with prior experience (48 per cent) stated that the speed with which their benefits were sorted out was better on this occasion (and only 15 per cent that the processing time was worse) and two-fifths (39 per cent) stated that the number of different individuals or organisations that they had to deal with was better (compared with 12 per cent stating that it was worse). A third agreed that the amount of duplication involved was better under the pilot process (with only 11 per cent finding it worse) and two-fifths felt that the overall ease of getting their benefits sorted on this occasion was better (and only 17 per cent found it worse).

The relatively small number of customers who stated that the processing time was worse under the pilot compared with their previous experience were followed up at Phase 2 to find out why this was the case. Generally, these customers found that processing their core benefit took between one and three weeks longer than their previous experience. There were a number of reasons given for this including mistakes made by staff, a greater evidence requirement under the pilot and also the postal strike that took place in the last quarter of 2007. Customers were approximately evenly split between those who felt that the service they received...
under the pilot was particularly poor and those who felt that they received a particularly good service last time (indicating that for a number of customers it is not any failing of the pilot that meant they received a slower service).

4.3.2 Impact on likelihood of Out of Work customers taking up short-term work

One of the overall aims of reducing processing times for benefits is that customers will feel more comfortable about taking up work opportunities even if they are only guaranteed for a relatively short amount of time.

Half of customers agreed that having been through the out of work process they would be more likely to take up short-term work in the future (56 per cent). Half (55 per cent) stated that they would be very or fairly likely to take an offer of work if it was only guaranteed for two weeks (assuming that the pay and conditions were reasonable). This figure rose to two-thirds if work were guaranteed for four weeks and four in five (81 per cent) if work were guaranteed for eight weeks.

When Out of Work customers were followed up in phase 2, a total of 28 per cent had done some work since taking part in phase 1. Ten per cent of customers had worked or were working on a contract that they considered to be ‘short-term’ (although only in half of these cases was the job guaranteed for eight weeks or fewer). Of these, the majority stated that they were confident that their benefits would be sorted out smoothly when their contract ended. These customers were reasonably evenly split between those who agreed and disagreed that ‘the ease of getting benefits sorted out previously made them more likely to take up this short-term job.’

However, of those who had not worked between the Phase 1 and Phase 2 research, only 40 per cent stated at Phase 2 that they were considering jobs guaranteed for eight weeks or fewer (compared with 81 per cent stating that they would be willing to consider this at Phase 1). This would seem to indicate that positive attitudes towards short-term work immediately after having had a benefit claim resolved can dissipate relatively quickly if the individual remains unemployed.
5 Conclusions

Whilst most staff were positive about the aims of the pilot throughout both phases of the research, during Phase 2 it was demonstrated that on the whole staff in stakeholder organisations had become much more positive about the actual pilot process for customers moving out of work as it progressed. This can be partly attributed to increased familiarity with the pilot procedures and improved relationships between stakeholder organisations. Furthermore, modifications to improve the pilot process were made throughout the pilot’s duration, which subsequently addressed some of the problem issues raised in Phase 1 of research. However, staff in most stakeholder organisations remained doubtful of the value of the pilot for the majority of customers moving into work.

5.1 Situation at Phase 1

Even at the Phase 1 research conducted very early in the life of the pilots, it was clear that there was buy-in to the overall aim of the pilot among staff in all stakeholder organisations. All staff were convinced that closer working should ultimately lead to a better service for customers. Views of staff in all organisations were mixed about the impact of pilot processes on their own job satisfaction with the exception of Contact Centre staff who reported a positive impact on their satisfaction with their job role.

There was consensus at this stage that the pilot processes had led to reductions in Failure to Attend rates and also had led to improvements in Tax Credit processing times (particularly when customers were moving into work). Staff also believed that there had been slight improvements in the processing times for HB/CTB claims. The research among customers on the whole was encouraging – those with previous experience of making benefit claims were considerably more likely to view their recent experience of the pilot as better than their previous experience than they were to feel it compared negatively.

Among the more negative developments at this early stage were the reactions of some FAs who felt that the fact they were no longer conducting any form of ‘preview’ of their cases meant that their role was being de-skilled and that they were delivering a lower quality service to their customers. At the same time, the
majority of BDC processing staff were unhappy about incorporating case previews into their job role. BDCs were finding this task difficult to resource and some considered the previews to be of limited value to the overall operation of the pilot.

It also seemed to be the case that a large number of pilot customers were waiting quite a long time for their WFI despite the fact that they should have been booked in for the first available appointment.

Some of the areas where the scope for small-scale improvements or ‘quick wins’ were identified following the Phase 1 research were:

• offering guidance to Contact Centre staff on the ‘key’ questions within their script which can impact on the evidence that customers are required to produce so that they could make particular efforts to ensure that these questions are answered correctly;

• stressing the importance of the accurate completion of the CPC to First Contact Officers (and ensuring that they were given sufficient time to do this at the end of calls);

• amending the CPC to allow staff to record that evidence has been ‘partially provided’ and also to enable staff to distinguish between cases where particular questions have not been asked and cases where the customer has been unable to provide an answer;

• allowing LA staff to make reference to evidence that had been requested by Jobcentre Plus staff in letters sent out to customers to request additional information (as opposed to only being able to make reference to these new information requests);

• recommending to Jobcentre Plus offices that they had a central collection point for IWSs to ensure that these were sent to LA offices as quickly as possible;

• modifying the iWorks system to allow Jobcentre Plus staff to record cases where the information required for a Tax Credit was not available (i.e. flagging to HMRC staff that this information has not been omitted in error and hence, that there was no need to chase Jobcentre staff for this data).

5.2 Situation at Phase 2

By Phase 2, opinions of the Out of Work pilot process were more positive in all stakeholder organisations although frontline staff in both BDCs and Local Authorities remained less convinced of the success of the process.

However, there was little change in opinions of the Into Work process. Staff remained positive about the aims of this part of the pilot but were unconvinced that it could make much of a difference in its current form. This was particularly the case for Jobcentre Plus staff as they were unable to see the value of the process without a considerable increase in the number of customers returning
Conclusions

statements (and they could not envisage how this could be made to happen). The exception to this was Lone Parent Personal advisers who could see clear benefits in terms of both Tax Credit and HBRO processing (and who tended to have closer relationships with their customers that meant a greater proportion notified them at the point that they found work).

A few improvements in the operation of the pilot process were evident at this stage (largely as a result of staff becoming more familiar with the process). These included:

• a reduction in the length of pilot calls to the Contact Centres (bringing the call length for pilot calls in line with that for non-pilot calls);
• a slight reduction in the amount of ‘additional’ time required in FA interviews for customers with HB or CTB interest;
• closer working relationships between HMRC staff and Jobcentre/Contact Centre staff;
• a reduction in the number of cases for which the CPC was arriving with missing data at either the BDC or the Jobcentre;
• an increase in the number of cases where customers were bringing in all the evidence required for their core benefit to their WFI (perhaps as a result of Contact Centre staff/DASOs giving clearer instructions).

In addition, the following changes had been made to the operation of the pilot which were all well-received:

• changes to the CPC to make it easier to ascertain what evidence customers have been asked to provide and by whom;
• a desk aid for DASOs to help them understand what evidence to ask customers to bring in when conducting the calls to remind them of their WFI.

There remained some ongoing compliance issues at Phase 2, namely:

• one district continued to find the process of working through the customer statement on-screen in the FA interview impossible to accommodate because of the increase in the length of the interview that they felt this caused;
• some DASOs were still calling all customers to remind them of their WFI regardless of whether or not the BDC had already made this call. To some extent this appeared to be related to the difficulty in pulling details for ‘their’ customers from the pilot in-box. DASOs tended to feel that once they had been through the long-winded process of ‘finding’ the customers due to attend a WFI, they might as well give them a reminder call;
• some BDC processors stated that they were still duplicating some of the work conducted elsewhere by rechecking the accuracy of the preview and also rechecking evidence that had been validated by FAs.
• some LAs reported considerable time-lags between customers returning an IWS to their Jobcentre and receiving the statement for processing.

However, processors in LAs no longer appeared to be rechecking verified evidence by Phase 2.

5.3 Issues for a roll-out of the In and Out of Work pilots

If the decision is taken to roll-out the pilot process nationally, the findings from this research indicate that it may be worth giving consideration to:

• investigating whether suspicions that BDC and Jobcentre staff have about the need for more benefit training for Contact Centre staff to enable them to provide more accurate information on the CPC, are justified;

• reviewing the BDC role in conducting previews on the basis of the unwillingness of processors to be involved in this task and the perceived lack of value that BDC staff attribute to this process (given the number of customers that they are able to successfully contact prior to their WFI);

• clarifying the way in which Jobcentres are expected to handle customers who do return IWSs, i.e. clearly laying out expectations for the amount of advice/assistance these customers should receive about any other benefits that they may need to apply for or end claims for. It may also be worth considering (re-)introducing a member of LA staff on-site to assist with HB/CTB applications for those moving into work, to reduce the burden that providing this advice currently places on (mostly administrative) staff in Jobcentres and also to increase the speed with which this information reaches LAs;

• investigating alternative options for resourcing the return of Into Work Statements. A very low proportion of pilot customers were returning these and the flexible approach taken to allowing Jobcentres to resource the administration of these appeared to lead to a relatively ‘hit and miss’ service for customers. A relatively large proportion of customers appear to be open to the idea of providing this information, either by phone or over the internet;

• combining the IWS with the ES40 card to help to increase the proportion of customers who return it;

• introducing an IT solution which enables Jobcentre staff to monitor the status of customers’ Tax Credit and HB/CTB claims. The fact that Jobcentre staff are helping customers to make these claims inevitably positions them as a channel for obtaining information about this claim. The system would appear more ‘joined-up’ to customers if it were possible for all staff in all relevant organisations to be able to provide them with a simple update on the progress of their claim.
On top of these issues, all organisations are concerned about the resource implications of rolling the pilot out nationally. As is often the case with pilot exercises, it seemed that in some organisations the pilot was being made to ‘work’ through activities that would be unsustainable on a larger scale. To some extent this was a function of an unconscious prioritisation of pilot cases through allocating dedicated individuals to handle pilot cases. Some Jobcentres also reported that they were accommodating the desire for earlier WFs by taking staff from other areas of the business (including managers) to conduct these interviews on days when the diaries of staff that would normally handle these were full. In the majority of Jobcentres, there was no clear resourcing strategy for handling of the return of IWSs and these were being dealt with on a ‘whoever is available’ basis.

None of the stakeholder organisations envisaged that there would be resource savings if the pilot were to be rolled-out nationally. Staff at the Contact Centres, HMRC and LAs anticipated that they would not require any additional resource, while Jobcentre staff anticipated a slight increase in resourcing and the BDCs anticipated a considerable increase in resource requirements (i.e. a team to conduct previews within each site).

The additional resource that organisations felt that they would require if the pilot were to be rolled out nationally are summarised in Figure 5.1.
Figure 5.1 Envisaged resource implications of a national roll-out

Not perceived to have any additional resourcing implications

- Slightly more time inputting case data (but this is largely due to requirements of pilot monitoring)

Not perceived to have any additional resourcing implications (but don’t seem to see any savings either)

Biggest impact in terms of resourcing

- Anticipate requiring separate previewing teams
- Also believe that there would be a requirement for ‘sifting cases’ (reverting to ‘old’ structures)

Some resource implications

- Districts dealing with large number of HB/CTB claims may need additional FA resource
- Strategy for handling IWS required if customers are to be given any advice/support at point of return