Review of the Adviser Achievement Tool

Alex Nunn and Sarah Kelsey

A report of research carried out by the Policy Research Institute at Leeds Metropolitan University on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions
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## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAT</td>
<td>Adviser Achievement Tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIP</td>
<td>Adviser Improvement Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASM</td>
<td>Advisory Services Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOC</td>
<td>Better Off Calculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CETL</td>
<td>Customer Engagement Team Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DASO</td>
<td>Diary and Administrative Support Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEA</td>
<td>Disability Employment Adviser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTA</td>
<td>Failed To Attend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>Incapacity Benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JET</td>
<td>Job Entry Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOT</td>
<td>Job Outcome Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSA</td>
<td>Jobseeker’s Allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSAg</td>
<td>Jobseeker’s Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMS</td>
<td>Labour Market System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>Lone parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI</td>
<td>Management Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAO</td>
<td>National Audit Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>New Deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAR</td>
<td>Officer Activity Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>Policy Research Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QAF</td>
<td>Quality Assurance Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAG</td>
<td>Red Amber Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFI</td>
<td>Work Focused Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTE</td>
<td>Whole Time Equivalent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Introduction and background

In April 2006 Jobcentre Plus introduced a new tool to ensure all Advisers contribute effectively to Jobcentre Plus aims and to identify those Advisers who may need more help and support. The Adviser Achievement Tool (AAT) is a mandatory tool designed to help Advisory Services Managers (ASMs) to regularly monitor individual Advisers’ achievements against national standards. After concerns were raised about the design and operation of this tool, the Job Outcome Target (JOT) Key Performance Group commissioned the Policy Research Institute at Leeds Metropolitan University to undertake an independent review of the AAT and its operation. This report presents the findings from this review and some recommendations for the JOT Key Performance Group to consider in revising the tool.

Methodology

The key research objectives of the review were to:

- examine and determine if the AAT is working as intended, including examining if it is an effective tool for gauging/monitoring/managing and improving performance;
- investigate how the tool is actually used;
- determine what behaviours the AAT drives, by both Managers and Advisers;
- determine how the Management Information (MI) from AAT is used;
- highlight lessons of good practice;
- provide suggested workable operational solutions to address key issues identified.

In order to address these questions, interviews were undertaken with a range of Jobcentre Plus staff in 11 Jobcentre Plus districts. Districts were selected to represent a range in terms of performance variation and geographic region. Interviews were
undertaken with at least ten staff in each district, split between two different offices, including District Managers, Operations Managers, ASMs and a range of different specialist Advisers. Additionally, interviews were undertaken with Regional Performance Managers, Jobcentre Plus Directors and Trade Union representatives. All interviews were undertaken using a semi-structured topic guide.

Key findings

The following key findings emerge from the review of the AAT:

**The introduction of the AAT**

- AAT was introduced at a time of major organisational changes in Jobcentre Plus. Key changes which happened at a similar time included the introduction of the JOT and a new band of ASMs with key responsibility for the management of frontline service delivery.

- In this context most respondents, at both management and Adviser levels, reported that they acknowledged the requirement for input and productivity measurement, even if they were critical of the AAT as a mechanism to achieve this.

- There were widespread, if not universal, concerns about the communication and guidance underpinning the introduction of the AAT. In particular, respondents suggested that more could have been done to improve the understanding and awareness of the functioning of the tool as well as the rationale underpinning it and the expectations about Adviser behaviour.

**The design of the AAT**

- Despite the acceptance of the need for input measurement, many respondents were critical of specific aspects of the AAT, particularly its rigidity in treating all Advisers in the same way and differences in the way it is implemented.

- While some management respondents were positive about the impact of the AAT’s interviews benchmark on productivity, Advisers and other management respondents reported concerns about the flexibility available to discount certain activities from interviewing time. A specific concern related to the impact of the AAT on the ability of Advisers to take advantage of flexible working arrangements.

- Respondents were clear that submissions remained a core part of the organisation’s role and therefore, felt that it was appropriate that they were featured in the process of input measurement. However, there was widespread concern that the AAT does not reflect genuine differences between Advisers dealing with different customer types and their capacity to submit their customers to jobs.
• There is currently inconsistency between the submissions benchmark definition and the data collected under this. While the definition states that the data to be measured is the number of interviews resulting in a submission, the data is actually simply an aggregate comparison of numbers of interviews and numbers of submissions undertaken.

• There was also widespread concern reported about the inclusion of Better Off Calculations (BOCs) within the AAT scoring framework. Specific concerns related to constraints upon Advisers’ own professional judgement of when a BOC is appropriate and necessary and Advisers’ confidence and ability in undertaking BOCs. However, in several districts targets were being set for Advisers which far exceeded AAT benchmark levels, and respondents’ critical comments in this regard often related to these very high expectations rather than the AAT benchmark.

• A large number of Advisers reported a desire for the AAT to incorporate referrals to provision within the scoring framework.

• Most respondents welcomed the qualitative element of the AAT which includes checking a small selection of each Adviser’s interviews for their quality. However, some concerns were raised about the consistency and quality of these checks and whether the sample size of four interviews a month for each Adviser is sufficient.

• The separate AAT for Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) was widely welcomed. The reduced benchmark expectations were thought to be appropriate, though there were some complaints that benchmarks had not been reduced enough.

**Management of the AAT**

• The impact of the AAT on management capacity was complex. While the AAT may offer ASMs an indication of performance to be investigated further using other sources of information, it might also have distracted ASMs from using these wider sources of information. A key issue in this regard is the confidence and capacity of some ASMs to manage the performance of Advisers, particularly with regard to undertaking qualitative observations or using other information to interpret and contextualise AAT data. While confidence is a particular challenge for some ASMs without a recent advisory services background, time was reported as limited for most ASMs.

• One major concern about the use of the AAT related to whether ASMs do balance information received through the AAT with other more qualitative information derived from observations of Adviser performance in particular. Where there was evidence that this was not currently happening to the required level, the explanation tended to be related to a lack of time, capacity or confidence on the part of ASMs.
- Respondents reported widely varying approaches to offering feedback to Advisers on their performance against the AAT, with some offered regular and effective monthly feedback while others reported receiving very little feedback at all.

- While some Advisers have reacted positively to the AAT and find it a motivating influence, others reported that the impact of being set benchmarks that they felt unfair or unachievable was to demoralise them.

- Most Advisers reported that they monitored their performance against the AAT and even where they rejected the legitimacy of benchmark levels they at least attempted to modify their behaviour in interviews to meet expected performance levels.

- The AAT was thought to be of some, but limited, use in identifying and supporting poor performers. It was thought to be inappropriate to use the AAT alone to identify poor performers and that a wider range of information needed to be used to assess Adviser performance, though there were concerns that the AAT may be over-used in this regard to the exclusion of other information.

**Behavioural impacts**

- The AAT did encourage Advisers to maintain productivity (in terms of interview numbers) and to ensure that interviews result in specific outcomes.

- However, there were concerns that the AAT may lead to a check-list rather than qualitative approach to interviewing.

- In particular, respondents were concerned that the AAT may drive some aspects of inappropriate behaviour such as inappropriate submissions, picking ‘easy’ customers provide with BOCs or to generate ‘ghost interviews’ where interview records on the Labour Market System (LMS) were completed without a customer being present.

**Conclusions**

The findings from this review suggest there is a need for some form of measurement of Adviser activity and performance. While this is possible using other sources of information, derived from the Officer Activity Report (OAR) in conjunction with qualitative information derived from checking of interviews and observations, there is value to having a tool which provides an analytical structure to this information.

However, the current AAT does not perform this function effectively. This is partly the product of the design of the current AAT and partly the result of inconsistencies in the ways in which the AAT is implemented. It is also crucial that any measure of Adviser activity is seen as credible and legitimate by those most connected with it; ASMs and Advisers. In particular there are widespread and seemingly well founded concerns about the rigidity of the current tool and its lack of flexibility.
to cope with the different challenges facing different Adviser groups. There are also apparently valid concerns about the capacity of some ASMs to appropriately contextualise and balance the information provided by the AAT. In addition, there are some perceived weaknesses and technical loopholes in the AAT which mean that the tool may be the subject of manipulation and may drive inappropriate behaviour.

Collectively these factors mean that the AAT should be maintained but in a revised form. The next section sets out some recommendations for how this might be achieved.

Recommendations

These recommendations are a product of this independent review. They are intended to inform discussions within the JOT Key Performance Group about how to take forward the results of the review. More detailed recommendations are provided in Chapter 12. This review suggests that the JOT Key Performance Group should consider:

• reinforcing JOT messages about appropriate behaviours;
• reinforcing the message to Managers and Advisers that AAT is just one of a suite of performance management tools available which should not be taken in isolation or overly-relied upon;
• improving transparency in the way that the tool is managed by issuing more detailed guidance on how to flexibly but effectively manage performance using the AAT;
• varying the benchmarks for different Advisers;
• exploring how the AAT might better accommodate Advisers’ flexible working arrangements;
• reconciling the differences between the wording of the submissions benchmark definition and the data measured under this benchmark;
• incorporating referrals into the AAT;
• clarifying the rationale and issue guidance on the rationale and use of BOCs;
• standardising benchmark levels for BOCs, by ensuring that there is less variation in the levels of BOCs expected in some regions and districts over and above the AAT benchmark;
• reissuing national guidance based on procedures for sampling and checking;
• the number of interviews to be sampled and checked each month as part of the AAT.
1 Introduction and background

The AAT was introduced to assist Adviser Managers and Advisers when the JOT was introduced in April 2006. The transition to JOT implied a huge cultural transformation for Jobcentre Plus and particularly for Advisers and Adviser Managers who had previously relied heavily on timely outcome performance data which was disaggregated to individual level. As the evaluation of the JOT pilots put it:

‘Whereas the immediacy and transparency of individual Job Entry Target (JET) performance figures had allowed Adviser and business managers to isolate good and bad performance easily, JOT made this a more challenging task, relying on ‘softer’ social and qualitative skills. Analytically, it challenged these staff groups to look at alternative input, process and output-related data to interpret individual performance.’

(Johnson and Nunn, 2005:41)

The evaluation also reported that managers working in JOT pilots were concerned that they lacked the new types of information that were now needed to manage in the revised environment. The evaluation reported the demands of these managers:

‘To bolster existing information, suggested measures included the number of interviews resulting in specific outputs such as referrals to provision (of different types), submission to jobs and other less tangible outputs that could measure the distance travelled toward the labour market.’

(Johnson and Nunn, 2005:47)

AAT was introduced in part to fulfil these demands. However, research undertaken with the pilot districts after 18 months of operation suggested that the AAT was widely unpopular. The guidance which accompanied the introduction of the AAT stressed that the AAT should be used as one among many tools to manage Adviser performance. However, the research suggested that the AAT may be being used as the main means of managing Adviser performance and that the benchmarks for
submissions in particular were being interpreted by some as a target for Adviser performance, potentially resulting in the reintroduction of perverse incentives, which JOT had been intended to remove (Johnson, Nunn and Bickerstaffe, 2007:27). Comments provided by Advisers through the Speak Up system appear to triangulate with emerging findings from the current national evaluation of JOT that the benchmarks for submissions and BOCs are too rigid and unrealistic for many specialist Advisers.
2 Methodology

The key research objectives of the review were to:

- examine and determine if the AAT is working as intended, including examining if it is an effective tool for gauging/monitoring/managing and improving performance;
- investigate how the tool is actually used;
- determine what behaviours the AAT drives from both Managers and Advisers;
- determine how the Management Information (MI) from AAT is used;
- highlight lessons of good practice;
- provide suggested workable operational solutions to address key issues identified.

In order to address these questions, interviews were undertaken with a range of Jobcentre Plus staff in 11 districts (see Table 2.1). Districts were selected to represent a range in terms of performance variation and region. Interviews were undertaken with at least ten staff in each district, split between two different offices, including District Managers, Operations Managers, Advisory Services Managers and a range of different specialist Advisers. Additionally, interviews were undertaken with Regional Performance Managers, Jobcentre Plus Directors and Trade Union representatives.
Table 2.1  Districts selected for fieldwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>Derbyshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Anglia</td>
<td>Norfolk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>City and East London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>South Tyne and Wear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>Cheshire and Warrington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>Kent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>Gloucestershire, Wiltshire &amp; Swindon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>South Wales Valleys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>Birmingham and Solihull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humberside</td>
<td>North East Yorkshire &amp; the Humber</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Policy Research Institute’s (PRI’s) in-house Survey Research Centre contacted the relevant district representatives to arrange the two-day visit by a member of the research team. Interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis where possible, although interviews with regional respondents were conducted over the telephone. All district case studies were visited once for a period of at least two days which included visits to two offices.

The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were undertaken using a semi-structured discussion guide.

The discussion guide covered the following topics, to reflect the aims and objectives of the research:

• design of AAT;
• specific issues related to the new AAT for DEAs;
• communication and guidance issues;
• the use of AAT to manage performance;
• behavioural impacts of AAT;
• the use of resulting MI;
• suggestions for improving AAT.

Interviews were recorded (with the agreement of respondents) in order to provide back-up for interviewer notes and to enable the use of direct quotes in this report. Recordings were not passed to the client in order to maintain respondent anonymity.

All of the interviews described above were written up using structured templates in order to facilitate qualitative analysis. The resulting material was reviewed by senior members of the PRI team, all of whom have been involved in previous studies of JOT and other Jobcentre Plus target and performance issues.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent type</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisers</td>
<td>DEA</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NDLP</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Restart</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IB</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Claims</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NJI</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JSA</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 week</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>CETL</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASM</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Operations Manager</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District Manager</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District Performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RPM</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Jobcentre Plus Director</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trade Union representatives</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AAT Administrator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>118</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 The Adviser Achievement Tool

3.1 The purpose of the AAT

The purpose of the tool is to ensure all Advisers contribute effectively to Jobcentre Plus aims and to identify those Advisers who may need more help and support. The AAT is a mandatory tool designed to help ASMs to regularly monitor individual Advisers’ achievements against national standards, which are set at the minimum an Adviser is expected to achieve. Advisers who do not meet the national standards should agree an Adviser Improvement Plan (AIP) with their line manager which is tailored to their individual needs.

According to national guidelines, the AAT is not expected to deliver performance improvements in isolation, other activities, such as the mandatory observations for the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), one-to-ones and case conferencing are equally important and must also be undertaken on a regular basis.

3.2 The AAT

There are two parts to the AAT:
- numerical information on key activities;
- regular LMS sampling of advisory interviews conducted.

Each part has an equal weighting, though it is adjusted to ensure that Advisers must undertake a balance of activities in order to achieve the higher scores. For example, if an Adviser is achieving a high level of submissions from a low number of interviews conducted, the final scoring will be adjusted to reflect this.
The key activities are:

• interviews conducted;
• job submissions (including speculative submissions);
• BOCs (in-work benefit calculations); and
• referrals to contracted and non-contracted provision, (consisting of a volume count on referrals to contracted and non-contracted provision. A benchmark for referrals has not been considered appropriate at this stage and referrals are not scored within the tool).

The AAT calculates the number of days that an Adviser is available for interviewing during the period. It:

• calculates how many interviews the Adviser should achieve during this period, taking into account the Adviser’s working pattern, experience and role. For Advisers who have completed their training between three and six months ago this is 50%. For those having completed training more than six months ago this is 100%;
• provides a facility to convert normal time into a Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) day, so that non-interviewing hours can be discounted;
• calculates the number of job submissions and BOCs that should be achieved from the interviews actually conducted (seven interviews a day, 60% of interviews should result in a submission and 20% of interviews should result in a BOC);
• awards a score for the number of job submissions and BOCs that are achieved;
• awards a score based on the results of a sample check of the interviews carried out;
• gives an overall score.

In addition, it includes volumes of referrals to contracted and non-contracted provision. This is not included in the scoring but is an indicator for the Adviser Manager to determine whether sufficient referrals are being made.

Adviser managers randomly select a representative sample of four interviews per Adviser for the reporting period. Adviser managers should review copies of Jobseekers Agreements (JSAgs) and Action Plans to ensure they are tailored to the individual customer and reflect appropriate action they will take to move back in to work. As part of the check, the Adviser manager should consider whether it was appropriate to carry out specific actions on each of the interviews selected.

Once the spreadsheet is completed, an overall score will be calculated for each Adviser according to their achievements that month. Numerical band widths are used to indicate where improvement action may be required. The scoring bands are set out in Table 3.1.
Table 3.1  Scoring categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Performance category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85-100</td>
<td>Minimum standard achieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-84</td>
<td>Some improvement action needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59 or less</td>
<td>Significant improvement action needed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Advisers in lower scoring categories, Adviser managers need to explore with each Adviser the barriers that prevent them achieving the required standard and agree the steps to be taken to improve future achievement. This is recorded on the AIP.

Table 3.2  AAT activity scorecard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews conducted</td>
<td>This field calculates whether or not the minimum number of interviews has been achieved and makes a proportional adjustment to the score awarded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>30 points maximum.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job submissions</td>
<td>This field calculates whether or not the minimum number of job submissions has been achieved. A proportional adjustment will be made to the score awarded where the minimum has not been met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>10 points maximum.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Off Calculations</td>
<td>This field calculates whether or not the minimum number of BOCs has been achieved. A proportional adjustment will be made to the score awarded where the minimum has not been met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>10 points maximum.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section total</td>
<td>This is the sum of the scores achieved in the fields above. To ensure that a balance of activities is undertaken, this score will be adjusted downwards to ensure the higher scores cannot be achieved if the Adviser:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• meets or exceeds the minimum number of job submissions and BOCs; but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• fails to meet the minimum number of interviews.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3  Sampling section scoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section total</td>
<td>This field calculates the proportion of satisfactory checks against the unsatisfactory and awards the relevant score.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>50 points maximum.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The section totals from the numerical and sampling sections are added together to arrive at the final overall score. The overall scoring is given a numerical value out of 100; 50 marks each for the numerical and sampling sections. The maximum score possible is 100 as it is not possible to exceed 50 marks in either section.
3.3 DEA AAT

There is a separate AAT for DEAs which has been in operation for about two months. The expected figures for DEAs are five to six interviews a day, 40% submissions and 15% BOCs.

3.4 Performance Management Support Boards

Adviser Managers are required to regularly attend Performance Management Support Boards where they discuss the performance of Advisers. The boards have been developed to support operational managers in achieving sustained performance improvements for individuals. The main purpose of the boards is to:

- allow managers to discuss methods of improving individual performance within a specific job role;
- share experiences and best practice that will enable managers to support individuals to improve their performance;
- create a positive and supportive environment – individuals will not be named or called to account for their performance.
4 The need for an Adviser Achievement Tool

4.1 Context for the introduction of the AAT

The AAT was introduced in the context of rapid changes to the organisation of Jobcentre Plus over recent years. The introduction of the Channels Strategy has placed increasing emphasis on concentrating Adviser time on customers who need the most help while referring other customers who are more able to help themselves to self-help channels. In addition, the JOT was introduced in April 2006 to support the Channels Strategy, as well as to encourage more effective use of resources. The introduction of JOT, in particular, implied a major cultural change on the part of Jobcentre Plus staff. The previous performance management regime (the Job Entry Target (JET)) had encouraged Advisers and their managers to focus on numerical job entry data which was available on a daily basis and could be allocated to individual Advisers. The loss of this daily outcome performance information challenged Jobcentre Plus staff, particularly Adviser Managers, to rely on more qualitative forms of performance information:

‘Whereas the immediacy and transparency of individual Job Entry Target (JET) performance figures had allowed Adviser and business managers to isolate good and bad performance easily, JOT made this a more challenging task, relying on ‘softer’ social and qualitative skills. Analytically, it challenged these staff groups to look at alternative input, process and output-related data to interpret individual performance.’

(Johnson and Nunn, 2005:41)

In addition to this, the introduction of JOT was accompanied by major changes in the organisational and staffing structure of Jobcentre Plus such as the introduction of a new band of ASMs, many of whom did not have a recent Adviser background (Johnson, Nunn and Bickerstaffe, 2007:19).

A further part of the context for the introduction of JOT is underlined by concerns over productivity. Jobcentre Plus has been tasked over recent years with delivering
efficiency savings as part of the Government’s overall programme of efficiency savings. In addition, there were concerns that the introduction of JOT and the removal of individualised accountability for performance might lead to a decline in Adviser productivity. As part of its review of Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers, the National Audit Office found that the productivity (in terms of time spent with customers) of Jobcentre Plus Advisers compares unfavourably with that of Advisers in comparable private sector organisations (NAO, 2006:20; Van Stolk et al., 2006).

These changes set the scene for the introduction of the AAT, which was intended to give structure to performance management in the context of uncertainties about the nature of performance information available in the context of the introduction of JOT. Indeed, the qualitative evaluation of the JOT pilots noted that several of the Pilot districts had introduced input benchmarking tools covering aspects of Adviser behaviour such as contact time, failed to attends (FTAs), BOCs, caselodging practices and measures of the quality of JSAgs (Johnson and Nunn, 2005:28-29).

4.2 The need for input measurement

There is a general acceptance, particularly among managers, but also Advisers themselves, of the need to have some form of input/output measurement in the context of the loss of up-to-date outcome performance data. Responses were more mixed on the subject of whether the current AAT was the appropriate means of pursuing such input measurement. In this regard, Jobcentre Plus staff varied between those who were adamant that the AAT was the wrong approach and those that identified means by which the tool might be amended to make it acceptable.

Those who rejected the AAT outright identified a number of concerns. These included weaknesses in the alignment of the AAT with the tasks undertaken by Advisers:

‘I don’t [like] AAT at all. There are most aspects of the AAT that’s quite unfair and unjustifiable to be honest…the way it measures someone’s work carried out through the day – it doesn’t capture everything. It only captures a few things that they need, to show that we are meeting our minimum benchmark, but other work that you do outside your benchmark isn’t covered at all.’

(Adviser)

Perhaps the most widely reported criticism related to the lack of flexibility in the tool to reflect the different challenges faced by different Adviser types. Other criticisms revolved around the pressure placed upon staff by the AAT and, in particular, the pressure placed on them to undertake volumes of interviews and to ensure specific outputs result from interviews (these issues are covered in detail in the next chapter). In places, respondents noted the potential tensions between the types of behaviour encouraged by the JOT outcome performance regime and
the input/output regime of the AAT:

‘...so we march them up the hill one day and we march them back down again the next without telling them why they went up there in the first place, because things are not explained properly.’

(Operations Manager)

These respondents also noted technical weaknesses in the AAT such as loopholes and inconsistencies in measurement and scoring, suggesting that these undermined the credibility of the tool. Finally, there was some questioning of the need for the AAT which merely summarises and repackages information available elsewhere, for instance in the OAR.

A larger group of respondents, however, despite often being very critical indeed of the current AAT, made comments and criticisms which suggested that their main concerns were either related to specific elements of the AAT’s design or were related to the way in which the tool is implemented rather than the tool itself:

‘A lot of it depends on the person that’s actually controlling the AAT – what they’re willing to take into account…what they deem to be external factors that are affecting it. You’re certainly not going to get that across a district, let alone nationally.’

(NJI Adviser)

Again, however, the most significant criticisms in this regard were about the rigidity of the tool and whether it was useful in assessing the performance of all Advisers. Negative comments also suggested that there is a need to balance the numerical information that comes from the AAT with more qualitative information from the checking and sampling element as well as other sources of information, but that this is not always being consistently used to augment the AAT.

Among this larger group of respondents, is a subset that identified some very positive aspects of the AAT. Where this was the case, ASMs and Business Managers often identified the role of the AAT in maintaining productivity in the context of the introduction of JOT. Where Advisers reported positive views about the AAT these often revolved around their sense of control of the aspects of their behaviour that they are scored on. Here the contrast was drawn with the previous JET performance management system where individual performance was assessed on levels of job entries which depended not only on their own behaviour but also the willingness and success of customers in seeking work. By contrast, the AAT scores Advisers on their productivity and the interventions that they make in interviews, which are, for the most part, within their control.

The acceptance of the need for input/output measurement and the comments about the potential changes that might be made to remove the rigidity of the tool and to improve the consistency of its application suggest that there may be scope to improve the design and functioning of the AAT. The following section describes in detail the nature of the criticisms of the design of the AAT and its constituent elements.
5 Design of the Adviser Achievement Tool

Respondents were asked a series of detailed questions about the design of the AAT, particularly in relation to the numerical benchmarks on activity within interviews and the checking/sampling component. The findings regarding these are summarised in this chapter under the appropriate headings.

5.1 Appropriateness, consistency and fairness

While Advisers and ASMs were generally accepting of the need to undertake input measurement, there were concerns about the appropriateness of the current AAT for delivering this function. The most frequently reported concerns were about the ways in which the tool is implemented and used and the lack of specificity of the tool to different Adviser types. Some of the specifics of this are addressed in the subsequent sections on the different components of the AAT.

Respondents who were critical of AAT tended to see it as a crude and blunt tool with little emphasis put on the quality aspects of an Adviser’s role and with little capacity to measure the ‘distance travelled’ by customers towards the labour market. For Incapacity Benefit (IB) Advisers, and to a lesser extent Lone Parent (LP) Advisers, this was felt to be a key aspect of the Adviser role. Many respondents were critical of the ‘one size fits all’ approach of the AAT (although there was appreciation of the new DEA AAT tool) and felt it was not able to consistently measure the performance of Advisers across the various Adviser roles because of the rigidity of the tool.

Several respondents also felt that the tool contradicts the spirit of JOT by undermining the move towards helping harder to help customers. It was felt that the messages from the implementation of the Channels Strategy and the emphasis on quality were at risk of being confused by what some saw as a process-driven tool focused too much on the quantities of activities undertaken and compliance with procedures and not enough on the quality of interactions with customers.
Concerns related to the lack of flexibility of the AAT also impacted on perceptions of its fairness as a management tool, with some respondents reporting that it was unreasonable to expect all Advisers to achieve the same benchmark. There were Advisers who said they frequently failed to attain the required figures for various aspects of the AAT and that they would never be confident of achieving the specified benchmarks given their specific Adviser role and customer group.

The AAT was also widely felt to unfairly disadvantage Advisers as opposed to other staff, in relation to the accrual and use of flexible working leave, which is discussed in detail in the next section. Concerns regarding consistency and fairness were also raised in relation to the accuracy checks completed as part of the random sampling of interviews, where some thought that it would be desirable to have more developed guidance on what constitutes quality in terms of JSAs or Action Plans.

5.2 Interview benchmarks

Some respondents (especially management) reported that they thought it was appropriate to measure the number of interviews undertaken. The concern here was to measure general productivity and AAT was thought to be a useful means of identifying a drop in productivity of a particular Adviser. A number of management respondents also felt that productivity in relation to the number of interviews had increased as a result of the implementation of the AAT.

However, interview benchmarks were also one of the more contentious components of the AAT, especially among Advisers. Some Advisers (e.g. Restart or New Claims) found it relatively easy to complete the required number of interviews while for others this was more challenging. Advisers, and some ASMs, were especially concerned at the impact of FTAs which can affect the number of interviews possible and is often seen to be outside the Adviser’s control. FTAs were felt to be a particular problem for those Advisers dealing with a voluntary customer group such as lone parents and those claiming IB. Across the districts, various strategies had been put in place to reduce the impact of FTAs on the general productivity of offices and Advisers and to improve individual Adviser AAT scores. These included:

- ringing customers the day before their interview to remind them of the appointment;
- ringing customers to arrange initial appointments for a mutually convenient time instead of sending appointment letters at a time and date that had not previously been agreed with the customer;
- sending out invitation letters to the appointment on coloured paper to literally highlight the significance of the appointment;
- running interviews with voluntary customers at staggered start times to allow Advisers to pick up customers who arrived late for their appointment or who dropped into the jobcentre on the off chance of seeing an Adviser.
The pressure to meet the interview benchmark was also being attributed by some Advisers to the practice of overbooking or was viewed together, with the impact of calling in for interview large numbers of IB and LP customers, as contributing to the shorting of interview times in order to fit more appointments into the Advisers’ working day. It was not unheard of for Advisers to be undertaking upwards of 12 interviews a day with some Advisers reporting much higher levels of interviews undertaken.

Concerns regarding the interview benchmark were also raised in relation to what counted as deductible time during the month. A commonly cited complaint, particularly from Advisers but also from some ASMs, related to Advisers accruing and taking time off accrued through flexi-time. The level of interviewing time expected and the level of activity expected within each interview, means Advisers frequently need to accrue flexi-time to complete administration. However, when accrued flexi-time is taken as leave during ‘interviewing hours’ the time taken off isn’t deducted from the interview benchmark, instead, it reduces the amount of time available and hence, the number of possible interviews an Adviser can undertake. This frequently leaves them short of the interview benchmark for the month so they fail that element of the AAT or have to make up the number of interviews (with less time available) in order to meet the monthly interview benchmark.

Some Advisers also noted that they frequently undertook activity which neither counted as a customer interview nor as deductible time. Where this occurred it placed a challenging burden on them to record it. Examples were dealing with phone calls from customers, a particular concern for IB and LP Advisers and dispensing advice regarding debt, homelessness or health-related issues which all act as barriers to work. There were also some concerns amongst Advisers and Managers that this time was not being consistently deducted by Managers or Advisers which led some respondents to feel that the matter was not being dealt with fairly. According to one Regional Performance Manager it seemed that rules were being made up at local level and several districts were aware of this concern and had implemented guidelines and checklists to assist ASMs in managing this issue and to improve transparency in this area.

‘One of the issues was that Advisers would want to deduct time for legitimate Advisory work for example they would say “I was doing paperwork for half a day so I should deduct that”, when actually that is part of their job but it was quite difficult to be consistent about that so we did come up with some definitions of that at district level as part of the standards document.’

(Performance Manager)

There were also some respondents who were concerned that productive Advisers who were willing to take on additional work were penalised unfairly as they were then required to undertake additional interventions such as BOCs and Submissions to reflect the increased number of interviews. A small number of respondents felt this could undermine teamwork and deter Advisers from helping out colleagues who might need their assistance in seeing one of their customers.
Finally, there were fears that the expected number of interviews, coupled with weaknesses in the system of recording might lead to Advisers completing records of interviews where the customer was not even present and respondents’ understanding of what customer interactions could or should be classed as an interview, was varied across the Districts.

5.3 Submissions benchmarks

Some respondents thought that submissions should be in the AAT to reflect the core purpose of the organisation as being about placing people in employment. However, there were some concerns that setting firm and inflexible benchmarks risked sending a confused message regarding submissions and specifically undermining the JOT focus on the quality of submissions.

Interestingly, the level of concern regarding the submissions benchmarks was significantly lower than in JOT pilot areas (used for the follow-on study of the JOT Option 1 Pilots). This may be because of the effect of introducing AAT after a sustained period of adherence to a ‘pure JOT’ message being followed by a reinforcement of the importance of maintaining some level of submissions volumes. That said concerns regarding the contradiction between having a submissions benchmark and JOT were raised in a number of places.

Where concerns about the submissions levels were voiced, these tended to be related to the demands placed on different Adviser types and in different areas where varying labour market contexts shaped ideas about what acceptable levels of submissions activity were. Typically, there were concerns that while a 60% benchmark for New Deal or Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) Advisers was achievable; this was considerably more challenging for IB Advisers and in this latter case may drive either demoralisation or inappropriate behaviour. Some respondents felt it might seem rational to an Adviser with a submissions target to keep ‘easier’ customers on their caseload (those who look likely to get a job in the near future), rather than filling caseloads with harder to help customers or to over-rely on caseload customers in order to submit the necessary amount of customers to jobs to meet the submissions benchmark. It was noted by a number of respondents that there was little way of measuring the quality of a submission unless it was picked up through one of the four monthly random checks.

There were also some concerns that what is measured against the submissions benchmark is not in line with the wording of the benchmark itself. The benchmark for submissions and BOCs is the number of interviews resulting in these actions. However, the data that is actually measured against this benchmark is a simple comparison of achieved numbers of interviews and submissions with a mean average completed. Clearly, there is a discrepancy here and it is, therefore, possible for an Adviser to submit only a small number of customers to jobs, but where this is the case, to ensure that these customers are submitted to large numbers of jobs. While it may be desirable that the integrity of the benchmark is maintained, some respondents suggested that the production of such data through the OAR would be difficult.
5.4 Better-Off-Calculations

BOCs proved to be one of the most frequently cited complaints regarding the AAT, especially by Advisers. In many districts there was clearly a push to increase the number of BOCs conducted within interviews but this was not necessarily as a result of pressure to meet the associated benchmark of the AAT. Instead it could be attributed to a district or regional drive to increase the number of BOCs. Some districts are asking that Advisers exceed the BOC benchmark, in one case asking that 100% of interviews result in a BOC. Similarly, in another district LP Advisers carrying out initial Work Focused Interview (WFI) were required to carry out a BOC in every interview.

A range of concerns were reported with regards to BOCs:

- Some Advisers lack the training or confidence to undertake BOCs accurately. In an extreme case an Adviser reported that he sought not to undertake BOCs as a result of a fear that this might persuade a customer to leave the register who would subsequently be worse off as a result of being in employment. In at least three districts, training programmes to improve the competence and confidence of Advisers in undertaking BOCs had recently taken place.

- Concern was raised about the amount of time taken to undertake a BOC and that this was difficult given other things that had to be done within the scope of an interview and the time constraints posed by expected productivity levels, including the interview benchmark in the AAT.

- Considerable unease was present among Advisers about the appropriateness of BOCs to different client groups at different stages. For instance, New Claims Advisers were often sceptical of the benefits of undertaking BOCs for customers who are claiming benefits after leaving well paid jobs and who are well aware already of the financial incentives for being in work. In the case of some Lone Parents, Advisers reported that it is often difficult to undertake a BOC with customers who understand the financial incentives but face insurmountable childcare barriers. IB Advisers reported that many of their customers are ‘not ready’ to consider the financial incentives of employment as the result of physical or mental illness.

- The research also found that the decision not to undertake a BOC was required to be recorded on LMS in some districts but not in others.

- There was also a fear from Advisers with caseload customers that the BOC might need to be completed a number of times. Although there was understanding that a refreshed BOC would sometimes be useful, there was also concern that there were certain to be instances where such repeat calculations would not be appropriate.

- There is some evidence that these factors combined are leading some Advisers to pick out customers for whom undertaking a BOC is ‘easy’, such as the under-25s living at home with their parents and without any children, despite this being one of the groups for whom a BOC is least relevant.
• In one district, New Claims Advisers were not doing BOCs so were automatically losing ten points on their AAT score.

Interpretations of the appropriate time and the necessity to complete BOC calculations varied across the Districts and the challenges posed by meeting BOC benchmarks were clearly recognized in several districts. In one, LP Advisers had been allowed to use ‘Generic’ BOC examples as a replacement for a full BOC and this was accepted as appropriate for AAT scoring purposes. In other cases BOCs were completed without customers being present and were simply posted out at a later date.

5.5 Referrals indicators

Referrals were less of a contentious issue than the other components of the AAT. Where comment was made about referrals it was almost universally to suggest that if AAT is to be maintained in anything resembling its current form, referrals should also be benchmarked and they should attract a similar weighting in the scoring framework to submissions or BOCs. IB and New Deal Advisers emphasised the key part that referrals play in their role and one suggested that a shared benchmark with submissions might be more appropriate than separate benchmarks. Another suggestion was that the benchmark might measure the number of starts on provision, rather than merely referrals, or the different types of provision that Advisers use.

However, some management level respondents were wary of including referrals benchmarks for fear that this would incentivise ‘off-loading’ customers even where Advisers were capable of helping them.

5.6 Sampling and checking

Most respondents liked the random sampling element of the AAT. In particular, the balance that this offered with the more numerical aspects of the AAT was welcomed. However, some respondents suggested that the numbers of checks (four per month) was too small and could result in an inaccurate picture of the quality of an Adviser’s work.

Managers were appreciative of the MI which was generated as a result of the checks and found this to be useful in terms of addressing individual and collective behaviour and working practices. A number of respondents also commented on how the checks where useful in supporting Advisers who were new in post, although there was acceptance that it was right that they should not be expected to achieve the benchmarks until they had been in post six months. In some districts the sampling process was undertaken by the Customer Engagement Team Leader (CETL) but in others the checks were completed by the ASM. A number of ASMs commented on the amount of time that the checks take to conduct, although they predominantly felt it was time worth spending.
There were concerns regarding a lack of clarity about the sampling and checking procedure. For instance, many Advisers were unaware of how interviews were selected and there was evidence that the approach to making Advisers aware of this was consciously designed to be different in different districts. Some Advisers were concerned as to how random the selected sample was and whether the ASM could manipulate the sample to either reflect well or badly on a given individual or team. Some districts appeared to be striving to make the process as transparent as possible so that Advisers could see how they were being scored, while in others there were suspicions that checks were viewed as a test and something which might be used to ‘pull people up’. In one office there was considerable concern at the interpretation of appropriate JSAs or Action Plans, with tension caused by differences of opinion between Advisers and the ASM.

Some respondents, including some Advisers, were appreciative of the fact that the checks instilled good housekeeping behaviour in terms of recording information on LMS and in taking a more organised and structured approach to interviewing. However, there were a number of Advisers who were critical of the ‘nitpicking’ behaviour that the checks drove from managers and the adoption of a ‘checklist’ approach to interviews. A number of respondents felt that losing points on minor details such as disagreeing with the ASM in their interpretation of what Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code a customer job goal should be classified as, or forgetting to record the same information in various places on the LMS system was unfair. However, in some cases checking interview quality in this way had led to the identification of office-wide training needs, which it was felt, might not have otherwise been easily detected. In addition, some districts had also issued guidelines to improve consistency within the checking procedure.

### 5.7 Differentiation between Adviser groups

Respondents were specifically asked to comment on whether it was desirable that the AAT benchmarks and scoring framework be differentiated according to Adviser type. Many respondents commented spontaneously that this was desirable and that it was appropriate for the AAT to be modelled around the key work objectives of different Advisers and for the tool to recognise that they work with different customer groups with particular needs and barriers to work. A common response here is that benchmark levels (particularly interviews and submissions) should be lower for LP and IB Advisers generally. In addition, there was a feeling that expectations regarding BOCs at New Claims may be lower than for other customer groups and that where there is frequent contact between Advisers and customers (such as with New Deal Advisers) BOCs should not be expected to be repeated on a fortnightly basis. There were also a small number of respondents who felt that BOCs could be increased for LPs, as they are the customer group for which they are often most appropriate. For New Deal and JSA Advisers, some respondents thought that expectations regarding submissions and referrals should be higher.
However, alternative views were also expressed. These suggested that this may prove challenging where officers and offices are multi-functioning. In cases where Advisers split their role evenly or in some other predictable and stable way between different customer groups, this problem was thought to be easier to overcome. However, in small offices where staff are expected to perform multiple roles this was thought to be more difficult to achieve.

### 5.8 Weighting of the Adviser Achievement Tool

Respondents were asked to specifically comment on the current weighting of the AAT. Some respondents were unclear as to how this is currently calculated so were unable to answer; others who were more informed also had little to say. Those respondents that did offer their thoughts generally felt that the weighting of the sampling and checking should be increased to emphasise the quality aspects of the Adviser role.

### 5.9 Additional aspects that might be included in the scoring matrix

Respondents were also asked if they felt that there were any other aspects of the Adviser role that might be measured or included in the scoring matrix for the AAT. Most felt that the current tool encompassed all the important elements, with the exception of referrals which many felt should be included in some way. However, there were a couple of additional suggestions for inclusion. These included looking at the turnover of Adviser caseload and looking more closely at cases where Decision Making and Appeals actions may have been appropriate.
6 Communications

6.1 Awareness and understanding

Awareness and understanding of the AAT was variable between and within districts. In a small number of the case study districts, Advisers reported good overall awareness of the AAT. However, in a wider number of the districts visited Advisers either self-reported low or very low levels of awareness and understanding of the AAT or it was apparent that their understanding largely revolved around the functional workings of the AAT rather than the behavioural expectations which underpin it.

Generally, ASMs tended to be more aware of the AAT and how it works than Advisers. Where awareness and understanding were low, specific aspects of the AAT were reported to be particularly poorly understood by Advisers. These included details of the scoring and weighting framework as well as the means by which interviews are selected for checking and the process by which checking is undertaken, including the aspects of interviews which might lead to points being deducted. Other areas where awareness and understanding were low related to Performance Management Support Boards and AIPs. However, lack of awareness and understanding was not limited to these specific details. Some respondents reported that they were either only vaguely aware of the AAT before the research interview took place or that they were fully unaware of the existence of the AAT prior to some brief preparation undertaken immediately before the interview.

Even where Advisers did report a strong understanding of the mechanics of the AAT, it was not always clear that they understood the behaviour implications of the tool or how it was intended to encourage them to change their behaviour. Some Advisers simply reported that they saw the tool as a means of checking-up on them but had not considered how they might respond to this in terms of how they conduct interviews with customers. Worryingly, several respondents reported that they were unsure of how the AAT was intended to support the behaviour changes driven by the introduction of JOT, or that they were equally unsure of what these were. Others reported that they felt that the AAT may lie in tension with the behavioural changes heralded by JOT, particularly with the emphasis on lower volume but higher quality submissions.
There was also a lack of awareness of any learning and development provision related to the AAT, other than a general awareness of the Adviser Routeway course.

6.2 Communication and guidance on the Adviser Achievement Tool

Respondents were asked a series of questions about how the AAT was communicated to them at its introduction, as well as their views on the quality of this communication and guidance.

The means by which the AAT was introduced to staff varied widely between districts and offices. Many Advisers reported that they could not remember how the AAT was communicated to them. Others reported a variety of different means of communication. Typically, these included team meetings, other meetings with the ASM, attending district-wide meetings, distribution of guidance and other information by email and even viewing a training video. Some others reported that they were aware of the existence of guidance on the intranet. However, several of these respondents suggested that this was hard to locate:

‘...all the guidance can be improved – it’s a nightmare trying to find anything on the Intranet. Every time it’s changed or ‘improved’ ... it just seems to make everything more difficult to find.’

(NJI Adviser)

Several Advisers who were unaware of the communications related to the AAT suggested that this may have been provided by email but that they often did not read emails as a result of a lack of time.

Views on the quality of communication were again mixed. In several districts respondents’ views were generally positive. However, in several others respondents were more critical reporting that they felt it was rushed. Interestingly, in one district, management respondents reported that insufficient emphasis had been placed on explaining the rationale underpinning the AAT. These managers complained that the AAT should have been ‘sold’ to Advisers. In particular, they felt that this needed to overcome a lack of trust among Advisers which resulted from a general organisational culture of emphasis on numerical performance data and the specific impacts of the Red Amber Green (RAG) tool which predated the AAT and which was widely disliked by many Advisers.

6.3 Need for additional guidance

Advisers were also asked a number of questions about their needs for improvement to the communication and guidance available around the AAT. Generally, their responses suggest a number of areas that such improved and renewed communication and guidance should cover: both the detailed mechanics of the
AAT and also an explanation of the rationale underpinning the AAT.

Renewed guidance would need to specify how the AAT is to be implemented. It would need to cover issues such as expectations of how ASMs:

- should calculate deductible time, including the treatment of flexi-time, FTAs and administrative work;
- are to communicate and feedback to Advisers about their performance in relation to the AAT, including the treatment of explanations for ‘underachievement’ of benchmarks;
- are to select interviews for checking and the qualitative expectations of interviews such as JSAGs.

In relation to the mechanics of the AAT, renewed communication would need to include a clear explanation of the operation of the scoring and weighting framework. This would need to ensure that Advisers understood the ways in which meeting or missing the benchmarks influences their overall score. Second, it would need to include details of how interviews are selected and checked.

In relation to the rationale underpinning the AAT, communication will need to make the case for behavioural change, explaining the links between this, the AAT and JOT. In particular, answers across the range of questions suggest that there is a need to strengthen guidance and training around undertaking BOCs and submissions.
The Adviser Achievement Tool for Disability Employment Advisers

The AAT for DEAs has different benchmarks compared to the standard AAT for all other Advisers. Questions on the differentiated AAT for DEAs generated much less discussion. In the main, both DEAs themselves and their managers thought that the DEA tool was appropriate and that it was correct that DEA benchmarks had been set lower than is the case for other Advisers. DEAs appreciated the deductible time for employer engagement, though some had difficulties in protecting this time from being booked as interviews by their Diary and Administrative Support Officer (DASO) and whether this was sufficient to recognise all the additional jobs that DEAs perform, including work with customers and ex-customers to ensure job retention and wider support of customers and their carers.

While some respondents thought that the benchmarks, particularly with regard to BOCs or submissions, were sometimes difficult to achieve this did not generate as much controversy as for other Adviser groups. Despite this, in one district the DEA AAT was being used to produce league tables of DEAs.

Moreover, in one case a DEA respondent was apparently being managed using the standard AAT, and was aggrieved that employer engagement time was not being deducted from the numbers of interviews they were expected to undertake. Additionally, several respondents commented that they felt that IB Advisers should receive similar benchmark levels and alterations to deductible time as a result of facing very similar issues in relation to their client group as do DEAs. Indeed, some felt that IB customers are often further from the labour market than those faced by the DEAs.

Interestingly, discussions with some respondents suggested that DEAs actually had an easier client group than IB Advisers in some respects as many of DEA customers had already addressed their own personal barriers to employment, while this was not always the case for IB customers.
8 Management of the Adviser Achievement Tool

8.1 The Adviser Achievement Tool AAT and the capacity to manage

Management respondents (District Managers, Business and Operations Managers and ASMs) were asked a series of questions about the impact of the AAT on the capacity of ASMs to manage performance. Responses to these questions were mixed with some linking the AAT with a positive impact on ASM capacity and others reporting that the AAT has either a marginal or negative impact on ASM management capacity.

Positive responses about the impact of the AAT on ASM management capacity stressed a number of benefits: First, the AAT helps to provide a framework for the analysis of performance data. This was felt to be of assistance to individual Advisers as well as strengthening the capacity of ASMs as a management group by standardising the process of analysing available performance data and encouraging ASMs to consider this information where they might otherwise ignore it. The AAT was also recognised by some as a means of identifying trends or aspects of Adviser performance to be explored further through discussions with the Advisers or use of other qualitative information. For instance, one ASM noted that the AAT might provide a quick and easy means of identifying a sudden drop in Adviser performance which might be underpinned by personal or other problems. However, it is crucial to recognise that almost all positive responses about the impact of the AAT on ASM capacity also stressed the importance of using the AAT as one of a range of tools and approaches to manage performance. Respondents were almost universal in recognising that the AAT alone is an inappropriate and insufficient means of measuring Adviser performance. In places this had been explicitly recognised by the development of additional tools and quality checks to augment the AAT and ensure that the AAT was only one of many approaches used by ASMs.
The importance of the wider range of performance information and use of other management approaches led some respondents to argue that the AAT was almost marginal to the capacity of ASMs to manage performance. These respondents stressed the availability of information from other sources, such as the OAR and LMS and that AAT merely repackaged some of this information. As such, some of these respondents suggested that the AAT was insignificant in terms of ASM capacity.

However, other management respondents were more critical about the impact of the AAT on ASM capacity. The main concerns highlighted by these respondents were related to the role of the AAT in distracting ASMs from focusing on the wider range of information and management approaches available. The main concerns were that ASMs may focus overly on the AAT, and in particular on the numerical benchmarks, rather than other more qualitative forms of performance information, especially arising from structured observations of Adviser interviews using the QAF. Others felt that the AAT may drive ASMs and Advisers to adopt a ‘tick-box’ approach to the quality of the interaction with customers. ASMs themselves were concerned that the emphasis placed and time spent on the AAT detracted from their capacity to stress the quality aspects of Adviser interviews.

A key determinant of the impact of the AAT on ASM capacity revolves around issues of implementation. Where ASMs use AAT as one of many measures of Adviser performance it was seen as positive. Where ASMs were unable or unwilling to contextualise the AAT with this wider range of information the AAT was seen as a distraction from an holistic approach to Adviser performance. The introduction of the new ASM tier of management has had a crucial but complex and mixed impact on this. Where new ASMs entered the role without a recent advisory background they may have lacked the skills or confidence to undertake qualitative aspects of performance management, and therefore, over-relied on the AAT. However, it is equally true that the AAT may have helped this group of ASMs to interpret the wide range of numerical performance data available and therefore, enhanced their capacity to manage in comparison to being without the AAT. Of course this is a counterfactual which can’t be accurately measured, but some respondents did suggest that the AAT may have helped in this regard. Regardless, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the AAT does need to be balanced with a range of additional performance management information and that the introduction of the new ASM tier, among other changes in the organisation, may have constrained this in places.

8.2 Balance with other information

ASMs widely reported that they recognised the need to use AAT in combination with a wider range of information including qualitative information. However, in some cases, they acknowledged that despite this they felt that they still over-relied on the AAT at the expense of other forms of management.
In particular, respondents were asked about the use of observations to balance the AAT. Responses to these questions were highly variable. Many respondents reported that observations using the QAF are a very effective tool for supporting Adviser performance. Indeed, many respondents identified these as a more appropriate means of identifying good and poor performance and as a prelude to effective coaching and performance improvement. However, other respondents, while noting the importance of qualitative performance management and coaching, suggested that there are weaknesses in the QAF approach. These were related to the QAF itself, with some identifying aspects of the framework as being formulaic, and others noting that formally observing Adviser performance does not always lead to an accurate impression of how an Adviser generally performs during interviews with customers. Some ASMs reported that they found being seated amongst Advisers was a more effective means of gathering qualitative information about Adviser performance as they were able to informally observe a more representative range of Adviser interviews.

In addition, many ASMs and Advisers reported that while observations are undertaken, in many places this is not at the expected rate of one per month. The reasons for not being able to do the required number of observations tended to be time-related but also included a lack of capacity in terms of skills, experience or confidence among new ASMs without an Advisory background or who had been in other roles for a long period of time prior to their appointment. In these cases, there was some indication that ASMs may be becoming more confident over time and that observations may be used more frequently in the future as a result of this. However, some ASMs reported that they continued to lack the time to conduct one observation per month for all Advisers and that they required the flexibility to be able to focus observations on those Advisers that they identified as requiring the most support.

Where ASMs did note that they lacked the time or confidence to undertake observations on a frequent basis, they accepted that there may be a tendency to over-rely on the AAT to measure Adviser performance. This was despite their recognition of the importance of contextualising and balancing the AAT with a wider range of qualitative information.

### 8.3 Use of feedback

Both ASMs and Advisers were asked about the provision, use and quality of feedback on Adviser performance. It was clear from respondents’ answers to these questions that feedback is highly variable, in terms of frequency, quality and impact.

In relation to frequency, in places feedback was given on a regular monthly basis. However, in others the pattern was much more sporadic, taking place as part of six-monthly or annual reviews only. As one Adviser put it:
‘There are some Advisers who don’t know their score from one month to the next; there are others who get it told to them... again in a variety of ways.’

(JSA Adviser)

These patterns seemed to be more related to differences between officers and individual ASMs rather than being district-wide patterns. Where monthly feedback was not given this was related to a number of issues. Among these was a lack of time for ASMs, especially where they managed peripatetically between several offices. Instabilities in staffing at ASM level also appeared to have disrupted patterns of feedback, with relatively late appointment of ASMs or changes in ASM correlating with low levels of monthly feedback. There was some suggestion in some places that where regular feedback had not been given, it is planned to introduce this in the near future.

There were also differences in the nature of feedback. In some cases, it was reported that feedback was dominated by the AAT, while in others the AAT formed only part of the feedback process. Where ASMs saw the AAT as only one (and in some cases minor) component of performance management, the sources of information used to inform feedback were much wider than the AAT and focused mainly on more qualitative information.

Differences also extended to the impact of feedback. In some cases this clearly resulted in Advisers feeling that they had been coached and supported to improve. However, in others Advisers reported that feedback simply resulted in them feeling under increased pressure to meet targets rather than being supported.

Fears among Advisers about how the AAT was being used did not always fit with how ASMs reported using the AAT. In some cases, where ASMs reported a relatively relaxed attitude to the AAT, Advisers remained concerned that managers over-relied on it to the exclusion of other more qualitative indicators of performance. They were also worried that the limitations of the tool itself, therefore, meant that their managers developed an unrepresentative impression of their performance. Interestingly, some Advisers were clearly aggrieved at their AAT score, even where they had not received negative feedback from their manager after scoring below the required level or where their manager had accepted as genuine the reasons for not meeting benchmarks.

These apparent contradictions between Advisers’ perceptions of the AAT and their own reported experiences of how it is used are significant. In one district, this was explained by office and district level managers as a product of the embedded culture of reliance on numerical performance management throughout the organisation. They also suggested that the impact of earlier performance management tools for Advisers, such as the RAG tool, had damaged the trust of Advisers in managers’ use of such tools.
8.4 Motivation, morale and self-management

Advisers and their managers were asked about the impact of the AAT on Adviser motivation and morale. Again, answers revealed a variety of different impacts, with some being positively motivated by the AAT. However, a large numbers of respondents, even where clearly attempting to meet the benchmark levels and therefore exhibiting some motivational impact, suggested that the AAT was one among several organisational dynamics that were contributing to low morale. Despite this, even where Advisers challenged the legitimacy of the tool overall, or specific benchmarks, the majority reported that they did vary their behaviour in response to some extent of self-monitoring against the AAT benchmarks.

Where Advisers were motivated by the AAT, these also tended to report that they had been motivated in the past by the Daily Placing List (DPL) which operated under the previous JET performance management regime. Some of these respondents reported positively that the AAT had advantages over the DPL in that Advisers were in control of their achievement of benchmark levels, whereas in the past they were not fully in control of the achievement of Job Entries.

A larger group of Advisers, however, reported at least some level of demotivation and low morale, which they attributed at least partly to the AAT. Where the AAT was attributed with a negative impact on morale, a number of specific reasons underpinned this. Some Advisers, especially LP or IB Advisers reported that they found it extremely difficult to reach benchmark levels and therefore, that this was demoralising and demotivating. Others reported that the lack of control of FTA rates meant that there was little they could do to ensure that they met required numbers of interviews.

Conversely, others were concerned about the expectations of the numbers of interviews that they should be able to complete and the pressures that this placed on achieving a range of outcomes from an interview within a compressed period of time. Where Advisers reported that they were unable to undertake all the actions necessary within the scope of the interview, they often reported that they had then to complete administration outside office opening hours (i.e. out of interviewing time) resulting in the accrual of flexi-time. However, their morale was further damaged as taking flexi-time off did not result in this time being deducted from the time available for completing interviews. This meant that there was no reduction in the numbers of interviews expected by the AAT benchmark and thus, they were under even greater time pressure. A number of Advisers also reported that they perceived the AAT to drive a low-quality high-productivity agenda that resulted in poor quality customer services and as a result of this, low morale also.

Further, other Advisers reported that the sampling and checking aspect of the AAT resulted in low morale where they felt that ASMs were using this to ‘nit pick’ or find fault with their performance, for instance by identifying faults with JSAGs.
When pressed on the apparent impact of the AAT on morale, a number of other additional and contextual issues were also highlighted: First, many of the comments about the AAT were related as much to the means of implementing it as they were to the structure of the AAT itself. For instance, where Advisers were confident that ASMs would listen to explanations for below benchmark performance or where comments about the quality of their interviews (resulting from checking) were appropriate, or where they felt that the AAT was appropriately balanced with other information, they were less demoralised by it. In one district, managers reported that they perceived the impact of the AAT on morale to be more related to a lack of trust in the use of performance information by managers as a result of previous performance management tools, such as the DPL or RAG tool.

Further, there was some considerable evidence that low morale resulted from other organisational changes rather than the AAT. These concerns were principally related to efficiency initiatives and frequent staffing changes, though frequently changing management initiatives (including around performance management) were also cited. Indeed, morale was so low in one office (incidentally where the AAT was not given much weight by the ASM) that some Advisers reported consciously under-performing to ensure that apparent good performance on the AAT would not prevent them from being able to take redundancy if the opportunity arose.

Even where Advisers were demoralised by the AAT or the organisational context and also where they reported being resistant to undertaking actions with customers (e.g. submissions or BOCs) as a result of the AAT, the tool did appear to have an impact on Advisers’ own self-management. For some Advisers this resulted in the maintenance of detailed spreadsheets documenting their performance on a daily basis. Others simply kept a mental note of how they were doing. However, the majority did report that they did attempt to modify their behaviour by undertaking more interviews, submissions or BOCs according to whether they were on course to meet benchmark levels.

### 8.5 Managing sampling and checking

In some districts there were attempts to standardise approaches to managing the sampling/checking component of the AAT, with the production of a checklist for undertaking this. One district has also introduced a ‘checking the checkers’ process, whereby the district performance team requested several of an ASM’s checked samples in order to improve consistency across the district. In another district, the AAT checking process had been subsumed within a broader range of checks on the quality of Advisers’ work.

### 8.6 Identifying and supporting poor performers

Most management respondents reported that they would be wary of using the AAT as the sole means of identifying poor performance. Indeed, for the most part managers suggested that the AAT has not highlighted any examples of poor
performance that were not already known to them. ASMs tended to report that where AAT was used it was as an initial indicator which would then be followed up using other sources of information, including discussions with individual Advisers themselves.

Few respondents – managers or Advisers – reported experience of AIPs. Some ASMs reported that they purposefully used informal feedback rather than AIPs in the first instance. For their part, some Advisers reported that they had been identified as requiring improvement by the AAT without this ever being explained to them or any action being identified. Others reported receiving straightforward feedback about how to improve, such as encouragement to do more BOCs or submissions. A small number of respondents reported negative responses to low or poor performance such as the distribution of AAT league tables by email or being ‘hauled over the coals’. In both cases, this had resulted in revised behaviour but it was unclear whether this represented increased performance or just compliance with benchmarks. Indeed, some managers commented that they thought AAT might obscure low performance by encouraging a simple compliance culture. One respondent reported having been initially placed on an AIP after receiving a poor AAT score. However, he subsequently challenged the basis on which he was scored and had the AIP withdrawn. Several others reported being placed on AIPs in situations where they felt their ‘under’ performance was explicable by FTA rates or low levels of interview bookings by DASOs.

Respondents’ experience of Performance Management Support Boards was also mixed. Few Advisers had detailed knowledge of the Boards. Management respondents reported some early experiences but that it was too early to comment definitively on their impact, since in most cases only one or two of these had as yet been conducted. However, what views were expressed tended to suggest that managers viewed these as more supportive than RAG Boards, with the emphasis more on sharing good practice and identifying means of supporting improvement than simply identifying poor performers. Some respondents also felt the Performance Management Support Boards provided an opportunity to learn from other ASMs and to gather information on improving performance and managing staff with improvement plans. AAT was used to inform Performance Management Support Boards alongside other sources of information.

8.7 Use of management information

Management information generated from the AAT is being used to measure performance at a number of levels including; individual, team, office and district. In a number of districts data was being presented in a similar way to how it used to be using the RAG tool.

Management information was specifically being used within the Performance Management Support Boards which were generally felt to be a supportive environment for managers to talk about general and specific issues to do with Adviser performance.
9 Behaviours driven by the Adviser Achievement Tool

Generally, the AAT did drive Adviser behaviour in the sense that it encouraged Advisers to maintain the required level of interviews and to ensure that interviews result in submissions and BOCs. Most Advisers reported that while they recognised the incentive that the AAT gave in terms of meeting the benchmarks, they nevertheless resisted the temptation to undertake BOCs or submissions where they felt it to be inappropriate. However, there were a very small minority who admitted to carrying out inappropriate behaviour.

‘I personally don’t have any issues because over the years I’ve learned to play the game anyway and can find ways around and still produce the figures they want, still do the job, but take short cuts if I need to do it.’

(DEA)

Although the vast majority of respondents said they themselves resisted the temptation to undertake BOCs or submissions that they felt were inappropriate, respondents were also asked to comment on any perverse behaviours that might be encouraged by the AAT. Several of these were reported:

• Many respondents felt that an overall impact of AAT was a move from giving more quality customer service to more process-driven behaviours, depersonalising the interaction with customers so that Advisers spend more time looking and inputting into their computer screens than interacting with the customer.

• The interview benchmark may encourage Advisers to rush interviews and to focus on quantity rather than quality, especially for those Advisers who are particularly motivated by meeting quantitative targets.

• Several Advisers felt that ‘selfish behaviour’ could be generated as a result of the AAT. This included a lack of willingness to help out colleagues with interviewing because of the knock-on effect of having to do more submissions and BOCs. It was felt that this could generally undermine teamwork.
• In several districts the practice of ‘ghost interviewing’ was alluded to. This included the generation of an interview either to provide time for the completion of paperwork from previous interviews or to make up the number of BOCs or submissions by completing these without the customer being present.

• ASMs and Advisers themselves commented on the ability of Advisers to submit one or a small number of customers to a large number of jobs to increase their submissions rate.

• There were also reports of selecting ‘easy customers’ to undertake BOCs on, such as young people living with their parents and without children, even where Advisers recognised that other customers might be more suitable. The reasons for this included a lack of confidence in undertaking BOCs, a belief that they are inappropriate for specific customers or in certain circumstances, or simply a lack of time available within the scope of the interview.

• Some Advisers also complete BOCs without the customer being present to overcome confidence or time problems.

• In one District an IB Adviser was selling the BOC to IB customers who might not necessarily be ready to entry employment by telling customers it was a way of checking they were receiving the correct benefit entitlement.

• Advisers were generally reluctant to report that they submitted customers to inappropriate jobs, though many acknowledged that the AAT introduced a pressure to do this and may lead to others doing so.

• There was also a concern that the AAT could provide a rationale to caseload ‘easy customers’ so they could be used to submit to jobs or that there could be an over-reliance on submitting caseload customers to jobs in order to meet the submissions benchmark.

However, the AAT had also in places encouraged action to address problems such as a lack of confidence or ability in undertaking BOCs, such as through the checking component. In one district an LP Adviser who did not have enough interviews to meet their AAT benchmark was being trained to undertake take partner WFIs in order to improve their interview statistics. There was also evidence of Managers and Advisers creating ways to fulfil the BOC benchmark. These included: ‘selling the idea of the BOC’ by using example figures to illustrate how a customer might be better off in work and then encouraging the customer to bring their own figures to the next interview; telling the customer they were going to do the BOC to check that they were receiving their full entitlement of benefits and sending out the BOC stencil with invitations to interview and asking customers to bring their competed forms with them when they came in.

Advisers and Managers were also asked if the AAT ever drove Advisers to spend time with customers from Priority Groups 4 or 5 (i.e. those customers who should be referred to self-help channels) in order to raise their performance to benchmark levels. There was no reported evidence of this behaviour and respondents were very confident that this was not taking place.
The AAT was also found to drive certain behaviours from Managers. Many Managers felt they had to work hard to counter a misapprehension amongst Advisers and some ASMs that the numerical scoring of the AAT was more important than other more quality performance measures. However, it was conceded that this was a difficult message to get across because even if an ASM did understand and accept the reasons for the low score of a particular Adviser, that Adviser would still be seen as underperforming in terms of the AAT which could be very demoralising for the Adviser. Some Advisers reported supportive behaviour from their ASM in terms of the AAT both with regards to the constructive feedback of scores and also in terms of supporting improvement. However, there were also a small number of cases where Advisers clearly felt that AAT was leading to inappropriate behaviour from ASMs. This included: nit picking quality checks, being overly driven by the benchmarks and a more aggressive style of management.

Respondents were also asked what impact AAT has on staff motivation and morale. The overwhelming response was that it had impacted negatively and that staff were feeling pressure and stress as a result of the AAT as well as feeling demotivated. Morale within JCP offices was generally described as low.

Some Advisers did see the AAT as a replacement for the Daily Placing List, both in the way that it motivated Advisers to achieve certain benchmarks but also in the way it provided focus to their job role. However, there were some Advisers who saw no similarities between the Daily Placing List and the AAT. In fact a number of Advisers who had been top performers under JET were underachieving on the AAT and felt demotivated and frustrated by their performance using the AAT.
Advisers and managers were asked for their overall views of the AAT. Many respondents at all levels reported some positive views of the AAT. Where Advisers were positive they liked the additional control that the AAT allowed them over their performance in comparison to the previous JET regime and the DPL:

‘Overall I like it because it puts the control back onto the Adviser. What you are measuring is something that the Adviser can physically control. How many job subs I do in an interview is within my control, more than it did with the Job Entry Target that we used to have because that depended as much on the person you had sat in front of you anyway.’

(ND Adviser)

Management respondents were positive about the role the AAT plays in ensuring appropriate levels of productivity. They also identified benefits in terms of the role played by the tool in identifying learning and development needs, for instance in completing BOCs.

Where respondents disliked the AAT they were critical of the pressure that it placed them under, the means by which it was implemented at a local level, the rigidity of the tool and the potential for the tool to drive inappropriate behaviours. Advisers were particularly concerned about the impact of flexi-time on the AAT and the way in which other time is deducted from available interviewing time. Managers noted these concerns and were typically concerned at the impact of the AAT on morale.

Respondents themselves also identified a range of potential improvements:

- clarify the rules about what time can be deducted from interviewing time;
- consider including flexi-time as deductible time;
- ensure that the AAT is balanced with more qualitative information;
• improve the quality of data collection, perhaps through greater linkages with LMS;

• ensure that the AAT is able to reflect the broader range of tasks undertaken by Advisers including through the inclusion of referrals within the scoring framework in the AAT. Several respondents suggested that a shared benchmark between Submissions and Referrals might help to ensure that there was a single measure of ‘moving a customer on’ within the course of an interview. Other suggestions for inclusion within the scoring framework were work trials. In addition, Advisers were concerned that the AAT needed to reflect other activities which move customers closer to the labour market, but was not specifically a job submission;

• the number of interviews to be subjected to qualitative checks should be increased to ensure that the sample is more representative of the full range of interviews undertaken.
11 Conclusions

The findings from this review suggest there is a need for some form of measurement of Adviser activity and performance. While this is possible using other sources of information, derived from the OAR in conjunction with qualitative information derived from checking of interviews and observations, there is value to having a tool which provides an analytical structure to this information.

However, the current AAT does not perform this function effectively. This is partly the product of the design of the current AAT and it is partly the result of inconsistencies in the ways in which the AAT is implemented. It is also crucial that any measure of Adviser activity is seen as credible and legitimate by those most connected with it; ASMs and Advisers. In particular there are widespread and seemingly well founded concerns about the rigidity of the current tool and its lack of flexibility to cope with the different challenges facing different Adviser groups. There are also apparently valid concerns about the capacity of some ASMs to appropriately contextualise and balance the information provided by the AAT. In addition, there are some weaknesses and technical loopholes in the AAT which mean that the tool may be the subject of manipulation and may drive inappropriate behaviour.

Collectively these factors mean that the AAT should be maintained but in revised form. The next section sets out some recommendations for how this might be achieved.
12 Recommendations

This conclusions and key findings from this review are used below to shape some recommendations for how the AAT might be redesigned so it is better able to fulfil the task of credibly measuring the performance of Advisers, providing ASMs with information to enable them to identify good and poor performance and therefore, to focus appropriate support and coaching on those that require it. The recommendations focus not only on the design of the tool itself but on communication and guidance to be provided to ASMs to ensure that the tool is implemented in ways that are consistent with its overall objective. A central concern for these recommendations is that the tool and its implementation are better aligned with behavioural expectations about Adviser activity.

The recommendations set out here have been derived from an independent consideration of the evidence collected as part of this project. They are not binding and are intended to inform discussions and consideration by the JOT Key Performance Group. It is this group that will make final decisions about the future of the AAT. In some cases, the recommendations (in bold text) are accompanied by some possible suggestions for how these might be achieved. These suggestions would require more detailed consideration by the JOT Key Performance Group before being taken forward.

This review suggests that the JOT Key Performance Group should consider:

- **Reinforcing JOT messages about appropriate behaviours** and strengthening communications regarding AAT, its rationale and link to JOT and overall Jobcentre Plus strategies. This should not just use written guidance but should take the form of workshops, information to be cascaded through team meeting structures and even multi-media techniques such as videos of roll-play situations and other learning and development materials. These might also be made available on the intranet for use on an ongoing basis.

- **Reinforcing the message** to Managers and Advisers that AAT is just one of a suite of performance management tools available which should not be taken in isolation or overly-relied upon.
• Improving transparency in the way that the tool is managed by issuing more detailed guidance on how to flexibly, but effectively, manage performance using the AAT through:
  – reiterating the requirements for ASMs to undertake regular observations with all Advisers, whilst maintaining flexibility for targeting observations on those Advisers who need them most;
  – stronger guidance about how ASMs might structure dialogue with Advisers about apparent under-performance on benchmark levels, with the opportunity for Advisers to provide explanations for missing benchmarks;
  – ensuring that ASMs provide Advisers with monthly feedback on their performance on the AAT so that Advisers are able to amend their behaviour and performance in response to this.

• **Considering varying the benchmarks for different Advisers**, a process which should be informed by the key work objectives of the different Adviser roles and which would be mindful of the implications for multi-functioning Advisers. There may be scope to introduce differing benchmark levels for different Adviser types where they perform specialist roles full-time. Where Advisers are multi-functioning there may be scope to include a calculator of time spent performing one role or another, or where this is too complex (i.e. Advisers performing two roles or where the distribution of their time is irregular) to have a standard AAT with average benchmark levels, similar to the present design. An alternative option would be to base the interview benchmarks on a credit system so that different types of interview (e.g. New Claims, Restart, fortnightly New Deal interviews, Lone Parent WfIs, etc) can be attributed a different time weighting (credits). Overall productivity could then be benchmarked and measured by reference to time credits. Different interview types might also be allocated different expectations of levels of output from the interviews in terms of submissions, Better Off Calculations or referrals.

• **Exploring how the AAT might better accommodate Advisers’ flexible working arrangements**.

• **Considering reconciling the differences between the wording of the submissions benchmark definition and the data measured under this benchmark**. The maintenance of the benchmark definition and amending the data collection which is measured against it would be the preferable means of achieving this, though this may prove to be technically difficult.

• **Considering incorporating referrals into the AAT**. One means of achieving this might be to incorporate a shared benchmark with submissions, therefore building-in flexibility for Advisers to vary their behaviour according to client needs.
• **Clarifying the rationale and issue guidance on BOCs** to highlight when and where they are appropriate. Consider issuing guidelines as to whether reasons for not conducting a BOC should be recorded on LMS. In particular, Advisers require a better understanding of the detailed rationale for BOCs. This should cover the circumstances when the full BOC methodology (with the customer present) is preferable to the use of generic or standardised example BOCs.

• **Standardising benchmark levels for BOCs.**

• Several districts have refined or amended the guidelines regarding the checking and sampling element of the AAT. **Consider reissuing national guidance based on emerging best practice at district and regional level about procedures for sampling and checking.**

• **Considering the number of interviews to be sampled and checked** to ensure that there is a balance between representativeness and resource use.
Appendix A
Manager topic guide

AAT Review
Topic Guide for Managers

**Note to interviewers:** This Topic Guide is for use with Adviser Managers, Operations/Business Managers, District Managers and District Performance Managers.

The guide covers a wide range of topics and it is not expected that every topic will be covered in depth in every interview. Judgement should be used in ensuring that the most appropriate questions are asked of each respondent/group and that interviews should last no more than one hour.

1 Design of AAT
1.1 Is the current AAT Model appropriate to use as a tool for managing Adviser performance? Why/Why Not?

PROBE in particular for:

1.1.1 Expected performance benchmarks
1.1.2 Numerical scoring
1.1.3 Sampling/checking

1.2 Do Managers feel AAT is a fair measure of Adviser performance?

1.2.1 Is it an accurate measure of performance?
1.2.2 Is it a consistent measure of performance?

1.3 Are the four components of the scoring matrix the most suitable measures for assessing Adviser performance?
PROBE for each component:

1.3.1 Interviews conducted (why/why not?)
1.3.2 Submissions (why/why not?)
1.3.3 BOCs (why/why not?)
1.3.4 Referrals (why/why not?)

1.4 Is the random sampling/checking element of the AAT appropriate?
1.4.1 Do you understand it?
1.4.2 Is this sufficiently structured/consistent between ASMs checking the sample?
1.4.3 Is the number sampled sufficient/too many/too few?

1.5 Are there other aspects of an Advisers job which might be measured and included in the scoring matrix?

1.6 Is the weighting in the scoring matrix structured appropriately?

1.7 Does AAT work as a universal Adviser management tool?

1.8 Should AAT be tailored for each type of Adviser?
1.8.1 If so, how?

1.9 If AAT were tailored for different types of Adviser, how would this impact on multi-functioning officers and offices?
1.9.1 Would differentiated AATs be workable in this environment?
1.9.2 How much, if any, additional work would this create for ASMs?

2 Communication and guidance
2.1 How well do you understand AAT?
2.2 What guidance have you received related to AAT?
2.3 How could the guidance be improved?
2.4 How well has AAT been communicated to you?
2.5 How could communications have been improved?
2.6 What learning and development related to AAT is available?
3 AAT for Disability Employment Advisers

3.1 Are the separate benchmarks for DEAs more appropriate than the standard AAT model?

3.2 Do DEAs receive different guidance about AAT?
   3.2.1 If so, in what way?

3.3 What is good about the guidance and how could it be improved?

3.4 Are DEAs managed differently to other Advisers through AAT?

3.5 Are the benchmarks set for DEAs correct?

4 Management of AAT

4.1 How is AAT being used by Adviser Managers to manage the performance of Advisers?
   4.1.1 Does AAT enhance the capacity of ASMs to manage Adviser performance?
   4.1.2 Would ASMs be able to manage performance better without AAT?
   4.1.3 How do ASMs interpret the benchmarks relating to submissions, BOCs and referrals (specifically, are they used as individual targets?)

4.2 How do Managers manage those Advisers who do not have an AAT?

4.3 Are there differences in how Advisers are being managed using AAT?

4.4 Is AAT balanced with other more qualitative individual performance management such as Observations (using QAFs)?

4.5 Is it time consuming to use AAT as a management tool?
   4.5.1 Is too much time spent using it?
   4.5.2 Is the time taken to administer AAT directly resulting in other forms of qualitative performance management not being used or not being implemented as they should be?

4.6 What feedback results from using AAT?
   4.6.1 Specifically, are ASMs able to use the information provided by AAT to coach and improve Advisers’ performance?
   4.6.2 Is AAT a suitable tool to use to provide this information?

4.7 What guidance have Adviser Managers had in using AAT to manage the performance of Advisers?

4.8 Examples of good practice of using AAT to manage performance
4.9 Do Advisers feel Managers use AAT correctly to manage performance?

4.9.1 Do staff have confidence in AAT as a management tool?

4.9.2 Do Advisers interpret benchmarks in relation to Submissions, BOCs and Referrals as targets?

4.9.3 Do staff understand how the scoring of AAT is weighted and calculated?

4.9.4 If not, would a better understanding of this impact on how it is interpreted (i.e. whether it matters if benchmarks are not met)?

5 Behaviours driven by AAT

5.1 Have any different behaviours been driven since the introduction of AAT?

5.2 What behaviours does AAT drive from staff?

5.3 Are these behaviours desirable? i.e. are they the type of behaviours that AAT is meant to drive?

5.4 Does AAT lead to Advisers spending time with customers from Priority Groups 4 or 5 in order to raise performance to benchmark levels?

5.5 Does AAT result in inappropriate activities with customers?

5.5.1 Do Advisers undertake BOCs where these are not necessary for the customer just to fulfil AAT benchmarks?

5.5.2 Do Advisers inappropriately submit customers to jobs in order to fulfil AAT benchmarks?

5.5.3 Do Advisers inappropriately refer customers to provision in order to fulfil AAT benchmarks?

5.5.4 Do Advisers inaccurately record information to fulfil AAT benchmarks?

5.6 Does AAT drive behaviours which are consistent with the overall emphasis of Jobcentre Plus?

5.7 What behaviours does AAT drive from Adviser Managers?

5.8 Are these behaviours desirable?

5.9 What impact does AAT have on staff motivation and morale?

5.9.1 Is there any evidence that AAT acts as a replacement for the Daily Placing List in motivating some Advisers?
6 Using AAT to improve performance
6.1 How are poor performing staff identified?
6.2 Have managers had to manage staff whose performance has been identified as poor under AAT?
6.3 How did they deal with this?
6.4 Have ASMs sought ways of managing the scoring of AAT to ensure that Advisers do not have to have an Adviser Improvement Plan?
6.5 How useful are Adviser Improvement Plans?
6.5.1 What impact do they have on Advisers?
6.5.2 Do they result in increased performance and learning from experience or are they seen as disciplinary and demotivating?
6.6 Is AAT helpful in Performance Management Support Board meetings?
6.7 If so, how and why is it useful?
6.8 If not, why not, and how could AAT be used more effectively in future meetings?

7 Management Information
7.1 How is MI used when it is received?
7.2 Does it measure the correct aspects of performance for managers to use it as a tool to measure Adviser performance?
7.3 How is MI used in the Performance Management Support Board meetings to identify and improve performance of individual Advisers?
7.4 How aware are staff of their own performance on MI?
7.5 Do you have confidence in the MI?
7.6 Do Adviser managers rely on OAR to manage performance rather than the quality aspects of AAT?

8 Improving AAT
8.1 What are your overall views of AAT?
8.2 What aspects of AAT work well?
8.3 What aspects of AAT could be improved?
8.4 Are there any elements of AAT which do not work/are inappropriate?
Appendix B
Adviser topic guide

AAT Review
Topic Guide for Advisers

Note to interviewers: This Topic Guide is for use with NJI Advisers, Restart Advisers, JSA Advisers, New Deal Advisers, LP Advisers and IB Advisers.

The guide covers a wide range of topics and it is **not** expected that every topic will be covered in depth in every interview. Judgement should be used in ensuring that the most appropriate questions are asked of each respondent/group and that interviews should last **no more than one hour**.

1. Design of AAT

1.1 Is the current AAT Model appropriate to use as a tool for managing Adviser performance? Why/Why Not?

PROBE in particular for:

1.1.1 Expected performance benchmarks
1.1.2 Numerical scoring
1.1.3 Sampling/Checking

1.2 Is AAT a fair measure of Adviser performance?

1.2.1 Is it an accurate measure of performance?
1.2.2 Is it a consistent measure of performance?

1.3 Are the four components of the scoring matrix the most suitable measures for assessing Adviser performance?
PROBE for each component:

1.3.1 Interviews conducted (why/why not?)
1.3.2 Submissions(why/why not?)
1.3.3 BOCs (why/why not?)
1.3.4 Referrals (why/why not?)

1.4 Is the random sampling/checking element of the AAT appropriate?

1.4.1 Do you understand it?
1.4.2 Is this sufficiently structured/consistent between ASMs checking the sample?
1.4.3 Is the number sampled sufficient/too many/too few?

1.5 Are there other aspects of an Adviser’s job which might be measured and included in the scoring matrix?

1.6 Is the weighting in the scoring matrix structured appropriately?

1.7 Does AAT work as a universal Adviser management tool?

1.8 Should AAT be tailored for each type of Adviser?

1.8.1 If so, how?

1.9 If AAT were tailored for different types of Adviser, how would this impact on multi-functioning officers and offices?

1.9.1 Would differentiated AATs be workable in this environment?

1.9.2 How much, if any, additional work would this create for ASMs?

2 Communication and guidance

2.1 How well do you understand AAT?

2.2 What guidance have you received related to AAT?

2.3 How could the guidance be improved?

2.4 How well has AAT been communicated to you?

2.5 How could communications have been improved?

2.6 What Learning and development related to AAT is available?
3 AAT for Disability Employment Advisers
(Only to be asked of Advisers with knowledge/understanding of DEA AAT)

3.1 Are the separate benchmarks for DEAs more appropriate than the standard AAT model?

3.2 Do DEAs receive different guidance about AAT?
   3.2.1 If so, in what way?

3.3 What is good about the guidance and how could it be improved?

3.4 Are DEAs managed differently to other Advisers through AAT?

3.5 Are the benchmarks set for DEAs correct?

4 Management of AAT

4.1 How do you use AAT to manage your own performance?
   4.1.1 Do you have confidence in AAT as a management tool?
   4.1.2 Do Advisers interpret benchmarks in relation to Interviews, Submissions and BOCs as targets?
   4.1.3 Do you understand how the scoring of AAT is weighted and calculated?
   4.1.4 If not, would a better understanding of this impact on you interpret it?

4.2 How do Managers use AAT to manage your performance?
   4.2.1 Do ASMs interpret benchmarks in relation to Interviews, Submissions and BOCs as targets?

4.3 Do ASMs use other more qualitative individual performance management such as Observations (using QAFs)?

4.4 What feedback results from using AAT?
   4.4.1 Specifically, do you receive coaching and support based upon AAT to improve your performance?
   4.4.2 Is AAT a suitable tool to use to provide this information?

4.5 Are there differences between the ways in which different ASMs manage Advisers using the AAT?

4.6 Can you identify any examples of good practice of using AAT to manage performance?
Behaviours driven by AAT

5.1 Have you changed the way that you work since the introduction of AAT (and as a result of AAT)?

Probe:
5.1.1 Why/Why not?
5.1.2 In what ways?

5.2 Are these behaviours desirable? i.e. are they the type of behaviours that AAT is meant to drive?

5.3 Does AAT result in inappropriate activities with customers?
5.3.1 Do you ever spend time with customers from Priority Groups 4 or 5 in order to raise performance to benchmark levels?
5.3.2 Do you ever undertake BOCs where these are not necessary for the customer just to fulfil AAT benchmarks?
5.3.3 Do you ever inappropriately submit customers to jobs in order to fulfil AAT benchmarks?
5.3.4 Do you ever inappropriately refer customers to provision in order to raise the level of referrals in your AAT?
5.3.5 Do Advisers inaccurately record information to fulfil AAT benchmarks?

5.4 How much time do you spend looking at AAT issues (either in considering how to improve performance or looking at administrative data etc)?

5.5 What behaviours does AAT drive from Adviser Managers?
5.5.1 Are these behaviours desirable? Why/Why not?

5.6 What impact does AAT have on staff motivation and morale?

5.7 Do you see AAT as a replacement for the Daily Placing List in any way?
5.7.1 In what way?
5.7.2 Why?
6 Using AAT to improve performance

6.1 Have you been identified as being in the lower two performance categories of the AAT?
   6.1.1 Which one?
   6.1.2 Did you understand why?
   6.1.3 Do you feel this was an accurate reflection of your performance?
   6.1.4 Did you understand how to improve your performance?

6.2 Have you been given an Improvement Plan?
   6.2.1 Was this effective? Why/Why not?
   6.2.2 What impact did this have on you? Why?

6.3 Do you think that ASMs ever manage the scoring of AAT to ensure that Advisers do not have to have an Adviser Improvement Plan?

7 Improving AAT

7.1 What are your overall views of AAT?
7.2 What aspects of AAT work well?
7.3 What aspects of AAT could be improved?
7.4 Are there any elements of AAT which do not work/are inappropriate?
Appendix C
Jobcentre Plus Directors and Trade Union Representatives topic guide

AAT Review
Topic Guide for Directors and Trade Unions

**Note to interviewers**: This Topic Guide is for use with Directors and Trade Unions.

It is much less structured than for other respondent groups and it is also expected that interviews will generally be shorter. Judgement will need to be used to ensure the right issues are covered.

1 General discussion
1.1 Please tell us your general views of AAT?

Prompts:

- Does Jobcentre Plus require an input measurement tool?
- Does this need to be standardised?
- Is the AAT an appropriate mechanism to fulfil this role?
- What are the advantages of the AAT?
- What are the disadvantages?
Design of AAT

2.1 What are your views of the specific ways in which the current AAT is designed?

Prompts:
- **PROBE** in particular for:
  - Expected performance benchmarks
  - Numerical scoring
  - Structured achievement targets
- Are the four components of the scoring matrix the most suitable measures for assessing Adviser performance?
  - Interviews conducted (why/why not?)
  - Submissions (why/why not?)
  - BOCs (why/why not?)
  - Referrals (why/why not?)
- Are there other aspects of an Advisers job which might be measured and included in the scoring matrix?
- Is the weighting in the scoring matrix structured appropriately?
- Does AAT work as a universal Adviser management tool?
- Should AAT be tailored for each type of Adviser? If so, how?
- If AAT were tailored for different types of Adviser, how would this impact on multi-functioning officers and offices?

Communication and guidance

3.1 What are your views on the ways in which expectations about the use of AAT have been communicated to staff?

Prompts:
- Do you think the communication and guidance have been effective?
- Do you think staff understand the key messages about how to use AAT? If not, in what ways do they not understand and why?
- How could communications have been improved?
- What Learning and development related to AAT is available and should be available?
4 AAT for DEAs

4.1 What is your view of the separate benchmarks established for DEAs? Is this a more appropriate way of structuring an input measurement tool?

Prompts:
- Are the separate benchmarks for DEAs more appropriate than the standard AAT model?
- What is good about the guidance for DEAs and how could it be improved?
- Are DEAs managed differently to other Advisers through AAT?
- Are the benchmarks set for DEAs correct?

5 Management of AAT

5.1 How is AAT being used to manage Adviser performance? (inc by ASMs, OMs, BMs, DPMs)?

Prompts:
- Is it used differently in by different manager groups? (i.e. Does the approach by ASMs differ from OM/BMs, etc)
- Is it being used differently by different managers? (i.e. Do different ASMs use different approaches, etc).
- How do ASMs interpret the benchmarks relating to submissions, BOCs and referrals (specifically, are they used as individual targets?)
- Is AAT balanced with other more qualitative individual performance management such as Observations (using QAFs)? Why/Why not?

5.2 What is your view of how AAT is being used to manage Adviser Performance?

Prompts:
- Is it appropriate to interpret benchmarks as targets?
- To what extent is the current differentiation (if any) in the way in which AAT is used appropriate?
- How appropriate is the current balance between reliance on AAT and use of more qualitative measures?

5.3 Specifically, does AAT facilitate or constrain the ability of managers to manage Adviser performance?
6 Behaviours driven by AAT

6.1 Have any different behaviours among Advisers been driven since the introduction of AAT?
- What are these and Why/why not?
- Are these appropriate? Why/Why not?
- Does AAT lead to Advisers spending time with customers from Priority Groups 4 or 5 in order to raise performance to benchmark levels?
- Do Advisers undertake BOCs where these are not necessary for the customer just to fulfil AAT benchmarks?
- Do Advisers inappropriately submit customers to jobs in order to fulfil AAT benchmarks?
- Do Advisers inappropriately refer customers to provision in order to fulfil AAT benchmarks?
- Do Advisers inaccurately record information to fulfil AAT benchmarks?

6.2 Have any different behaviours been driven by Adviser Managers?
Prompts:
- What are these and Why/why not?
- Are these appropriate? Why/Why not?
And if required – use prompts at 6.1.

6.3 What impact does AAT have on staff motivation and morale?
Prompts:
- Is there any evidence that AAT acts as a replacement for the Daily Placing List in motivating some Advisers?

7 Using AAT to improve performance

7.1 How are poor performing staff identified?
Prompts:
- Does AAT help with this?
- Are there other things that might help?
7.2 How useful is AAT as a tool to support Performance Management Support Board meetings?

Prompts:
- What are the specific advantages?
- What are the drawbacks?
- How could this be improved?
- Do you know of good examples of how AAT is used to support effective Performance Management Support Boards?

7.3 How useful are Adviser Improvement Plans?

Prompts:
- What impact do they have on Advisers?
- Do they result in increased performance and learning from experience or are they seen as disciplinary and demotivating?
- Do Adviser Managers ‘cheat’ to avoid Advisers being placed on Improvement Plans?

8 Management Information

8.1 How useful is the range of MI that is available in managing performance?

8.2 Do managers rely too much on OAR quantitative data to the exclusion of some of the more qualitative information and tools available?

8.3 How might the range of MI be improved?

9 Improving AAT

9.1 How might AAT be improved?
References


