A report of research carried out by BMRB Social Research on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Basic skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPA1</td>
<td>Data Protection Act 1</td>
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<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
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<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
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<td>FT</td>
<td>Fast Track Assessment</td>
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Summary

Disadvantage Markers are a system of indicators used as part of the Jobcentre Plus monitoring system. The markers are located on the Labour Market System and they are designed to identify customers from particular disadvantaged groups. The markers were initially introduced for a range of reasons, including: to provide the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) with reliable data from which to analyse disadvantage and associated labour market outcomes; to reduce embarrassment for customers so as not to have to continually refer to the disadvantage; and to encourage advisers to offer appropriate provision to disadvantaged customers.

Markers are currently set for a range of disadvantages, including: disability, ethnicity, lone parenthood, lowest qualified, refugee status, homelessness, ex-offending and misuse of drugs and alcohol. The research primarily focused on those comprised within the ‘Disadvantage Group’ marker, which include: homelessness, ex-drug and alcohol misuse and ex-offender markers.

As a result of the sensitivity of recording such information, a number of human rights and data protection issues were placed around the design of the Disadvantage Group marker, which required customers to: disclose the disadvantage without being prompted by the adviser; provide consent for the markers to be set; sign a DPA1 consent form; and be made aware that markers can be removed at any time on request.

In order for the data created by the markers to be of use, it was important that information recorded on the system was stored in a consistent and reliable way and that use of the markers was not impractical for Jobcentre Plus advisers. However, comparisons drawn between the number of customers going through Jobcentre Plus and the volume of markers being set, suggested the markers were being under-utilised for certain categories, particularly for the Disadvantage Group marker.

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1 Markers for ethnicity, disability and lone parents were introduced prior to April 2004. Markers for lowest qualified, refugee status and person without accommodation in April 2004 and in April 2005, markers for ex-offenders and alcohol and drug misusers.
As a result of issues identified, particularly concerns regarding under-utilisation and inconsistency of use, DWP commissioned *BMRB Social Research* to carry out a multi-staged programme of qualitative research to explore use of the markers in greater depth, particularly trying to uncover: how the Disadvantage Markers were currently being used by advisers; whether this varied according to customer groups; and how the use of these markers could be improved overall.

The research took place between September 2006 and March 2007 and comprised three stages: developmental research with stakeholders and advisers; mainstage research with advisers and disadvantaged customers (comprising 36 depth interviews with advisers and 53 depth interviews with customers); and a reflection stage with stakeholders.

**Awareness and knowledge of Disadvantage Markers**

Disadvantage Markers were not usually viewed as a tangible set by Jobcentre Plus advisers, although once explained, there was a general awareness of the existence of the Disadvantage Markers. Awareness and knowledge was not comprehensive and differed in terms of both what and how much advisers knew. Patterns of awareness and knowledge were very much linked to districts and a clear hierarchy of understanding could be identified, ranging from one area where knowledge was widespread and comprehensive, through to another area where knowledge was comparatively low. Variations were also noted between Jobcentre Plus offices within each district and differences were thought to relate to the knowledge of individual advisers, which was underpinned by the degree of training and guidance received by Jobcentre Plus; levels of adviser pro-activity; and the previous experience and background of advisers.

The nature and depth of the knowledge exhibited was mixed: Advisers generally felt confident about their understanding of the processes involved in setting established markers and knowledge was attributed to the fact these disadvantages had Jobcentre programmes attached to them and, consequently, received more attention in the jobcentre. Knowledge and understanding of the processes involved in setting the more recently introduced markers, such as the Disadvantage Group marker, were much less pronounced. Advisers suggested they lacked knowledge on a number of specific aspects of the process, including: knowing in what circumstances and when the markers should be set and what the data protection procedures associated with this were. It was clear that the purpose of setting the markers had not usually been considered by advisers prior to the interview and when probed, explanations tended to be speculative and confused.

Customers’ awareness of Disadvantage Markers was limited. Customers were often unable to recall whether information regarding barriers to work had been recorded on the Labour Market System (LMS) during the interview and their understanding of the purpose of the markers was also limited.
Experience of using the markers

Use of Disadvantage Markers was linked to understanding and this meant that patterns of use tended to reflect those outlined for awareness and knowledge. Variation in use was, therefore, noted according to type of marker and between districts. In addition to this, use of the markers related to the type of Jobcentre adviser, for instance, between Mainstream and New Deal.

Established markers were found to be widely used, as was the refugee marker. Use of the refugee marker was thought to be widespread as a result of the link between this and the ethnicity marker and as a result of the automatic prompt on LMS. Use of the Disadvantage Group marker was more limited and patterns of use were attributed to lack of awareness and knowledge regarding the location of the markers and procedures for setting the markers, as well as a lack of jobcentre emphasis and unwillingness by customers to have the marker set. Importantly, even where markers were not said to have been set, advisers were clear that issues of disadvantage were still being discussed with customers and recorded on the system.

Advisers expressed a clear understanding that multiple markers could be set on LMS and were confident that, where required, multiple markers would be set.

Generally, where the Disadvantage Group marker was used, advisers were allowing customers to raise the issue of disadvantage spontaneously. Advisers were, however, often unaware they were required to ask permission from the customer before setting the marker and use of the DPA1 form was extremely rare with the exception of one district.

Views on Disadvantage Markers

Advisers’ views on the markers varied by type of marker, with the lone parent, disability\(^2\) and Lowest Qualified markers broadly seen as working well. Adviser views were influenced by perceptions of the accuracy of the data collected via the markers; the ability of advisers to effectively handle customers’ problems; and the resources available to Jobcentre Plus to manage disadvantage.

Adviser views on the principle of using markers to record disadvantage were mixed and focused on the perceived ability of markers to help and support customers, advisers and DWP more widely.

For the most part, customers said they were happy to discuss and be asked about a disadvantage directly, providing the information gathered was deemed relevant to their job search and providing it was then taken forward and used by the advisers to help support them in some way. Customers were generally happy to have their disadvantage recorded on LMS, as they recognised it could help tailor support and prevent these issues for being repeatedly discussed throughout the life of their claim.

\(^2\) The disability marker was usually referred to as the person with disability (PWD) marker.
Reasons underpinning under-utilisation, inconsistency and inaccuracy

Patterns of use were very much associated with awareness and knowledge of the markers and this was seen as being directly linked to levels of training and guidance, as well as to the emphasis placed on the markers in the jobcentre, which not only raised knowledge regarding the mechanics of using the markers, but also highlighted their importance. Aside from a lack of awareness and knowledge, a number of other barriers to use were evident and these included:

- practical barriers, such as time factors, managing other responsibilities, managing other initiatives and ability to use LMS. LMS was identified as a wider problem, one that impacted on advisers across Jobcentre Plus, especially, less experienced advisers and this was said to be a result of a lack of training on using the system;

- perceived lack of resources to assist customers once a disadvantage had been identified, including the availability of provision;

- refusal by customers to acknowledge or record the disadvantage; and

- sensitivities associated with discussing disadvantage and concern that following procedures, such as the DPA1, would act as a barrier and undermine relationships.

It should be noted, however, that the sensitivity of the subject matter was not perceived to provide a complete barrier and it was certainly not a primary factor underpinning use.

Not only were a number of barriers noted to using the markers, but importantly, very few factors were identified as motivating behaviour and encouraging use. For example, the lack of emphasis placed on the markers in the Jobcentre not only failed to make advisers aware of the markers but it also failed to motivate use. Lack of understanding regarding the purpose of the markers also impacted, as without understanding and buying into the value of the markers, advisers were unenthusiastic about their use. Furthermore, advisers suggested the absence of a link between Job Outcome Targets (JOT) and the markers (and general negative attitudes towards JOT per se); this meant that JOT was not perceived as encouraging use.

Lack of understanding was also seen as a key factor underpinning the issue of accuracy. However, practical constraints and sensitivities regarding the subject matter were also thought to play a role. Advisers’ perception of inaccuracy was seen as being as important as the reality, as this affected how advisers viewed the markers and how they used them. For example, where advisers suspected markers were being set inaccurately, the data stored was questioned and perceived to be of limited use.
Implication of findings for DWP: can the markers be made to work?

Based on the findings it is clear that patterns of use are not intrinsically tied up with the sensitivity of the subject matter and that with changes, use of the markers could be improved significantly. Certainly, the effective use of the markers demonstrated in one district, suggests that markers could be improved elsewhere if other districts were to employ a similar strategy. However, addressing the full range of issues raised in the research would perhaps be more difficult given that difficulties often extend beyond the markers to wider issues within Jobcentre Plus, such as training, guidance, use of LMS and availability of support services and provision.

It is clear that in order to improve use of the markers it would be necessary to tackle both barriers to use and issues of motivation. A range of key factors could be considered to assist in tackling under-utilisation, inconsistency and inaccuracy and these very much link to raising levels of awareness and knowledge. Crucially, these were being adhered to in areas where the markers were being used more effectively. These include:

- increasing knowledge regarding the full range of markers via formal training or guidance, focusing on how the markers are defined, where they are located, how they should be communicated and data protection procedures that accompany these, such as the DPA1 form. Importantly, informal ad hoc learning can be seen as perpetuating inconsistent and inaccurate patterns of use;

- emphasising the importance of the markers at district and jobcentre level. As a result of the plethora of other initiatives operating at any given time, advisers look to management to highlight initiatives of importance and advisers focused on these;

- clearly communicating the purpose of the markers and stressing the importance and usefulness of them in order to encourage a more consistent application. Given the view expressed by both advisers and customers that markers and discussions of disadvantage need to be relevant and actionable, it is important to show how the markers could be of use to customers. Certainly, the effective use of the ‘established markers’ with clear programmes of support, suggested that the Disadvantage Group markers could be improved if they had similar benefits. Clarifying these benefits to advisers, could also help advisers pass these messages onto customers, thus helping them broach and sell the markers.

Demonstrating the potential usefulness of the markers to advisers in carrying out their role, should also be highlighted; and
• addressing practical considerations noted by advisers, in relation to how to use the markers on LMS and how to locate and use guidance relating to this. Certainly, this would involve making it easier to identify the Disadvantage Group marker, for example, by locating the marker in a more easily accessible position or introducing a prompt in the same way as with the refugee marker¹. As previously mentioned, advisers’ ability to effectively use the LMS was identified as a problem extending beyond the use of the markers and it was felt that across the board, advisers would benefit from further training on the LMS.

¹ Note: use of a prompt for the Disadvantage Group Marker was opposed by legal advisers as it was felt to be against principles of self-declaration.
1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Disadvantage Markers are a system of indicators used as part of the Jobcentre Plus monitoring system. The markers are located on the Labour Market System (LMS) and they are designed to identify customers from particular disadvantaged groups. The markers were initially introduced to reduce embarrassment for customers so as not to have to continually refer to the disadvantage in an interview, and to encourage advisers to offer appropriate provision to disadvantaged customers. Over time, Disadvantage Markers were also seen as a good way to produce quality data regarding disadvantaged customers who are often seen as being ‘hard to reach’ using more traditional survey methods.

A number of disadvantaged groups are affected by the markers: Prior to April 2004, Jobcentre Plus already identified certain disadvantages using markers, including: disability, ethnicity and lone parents. In April 2004, markers were introduced for lowest qualified customers, those with refugee status and persons without accommodation (homeless). The markers were further expanded in April 2005 to include: ex-offenders and misusers of drugs and alcohol.

As a result of the sensitivity of recording such information, a number of human rights and data protection issues were placed round the design of the Disadvantage Group Marker\(^2\), which included markers for persons without accommodation; ex-offenders; and misusers of drugs and alcohol. Specifically, these procedures stipulated that in order for certain markers to be set it was necessary for the customer to: disclose the disadvantage without being asked by the adviser; provide consent for the markers to be set; sign a DPA1 consent form; and be made aware that markers can be removed at any time on request. Markers were also set to be removed automatically if: ‘employment’ was ticked on the LMS; the customer’s record was not checked for six months; or routinely following one year.

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\(^2\) Disadvantage Group Marker comprises homelessness, ex-drug and alcohol misuse and ex-offender markers.
In order for the data created by the markers to be of use, it was important that information being recorded on the system was recorded in a consistent and reliable way and that use of the markers was not impractical for Jobcentre Plus advisers. However, comparisons drawn between the number of customers going through Jobcentre Plus and the volume of markers being set, suggested the markers were being under-utilised for certain categories. In particular, there was found to be a mismatch identified between data for services such as Freshstart, Employment Benefit Surgeries (EBS), Progress2Work (p2w) and Progress2Work-LinkUP (p2w-LinkUP), with the markers for ex-offenders, the homeless, drug and alcohol misusers and refugees.

As a result of issues identified in relation to the Disadvantage Markers, particularly concerns regarding under-utilisation and inconsistency of use, DWP commissioned BMRB Social Research to carry out a multi-staged programme of qualitative research to explore use of the markers in greater depth, particularly trying to uncover: how the Disadvantage Markers were currently being used by advisers; whether this varies according to customer groups; and how the use of these markers could be improved overall. The research commenced in September 2006 and was completed in March 2007.

1.2 Report outline

The report is divided into five chapters: this chapter provides background to the research and methodological approach adopted; Chapter 2 explores awareness and knowledge of the markers from the perspective of advisers and customers, focusing on the extent and nature of understanding; patterns in variation; and sources of gathering information. Use of the markers is considered in Chapter 3, looking specifically, at how advisers use the markers, how they raise and discuss disadvantage; the process by which they set markers; and the overall factors underlying patterns of use. Chapter 4 considers advisers’ and customers’ views of the markers, based on experience and also in principle. Finally, a summary of the key research findings, main conclusions and suggestions for change are outlined in Chapter 5.

1.3 Research objectives

The overall aim of the research was to explore, in detail, the use of Disadvantage Markers used as part of Jobcentre Plus’ monitoring system, with a view to gaining a greater understanding of the issues underlying under-utilisation of the markers and to improve usage.

More specifically, the research explored:

• awareness and knowledge of the Disadvantage Markers – exploring levels of awareness and knowledge regarding the markers and sources of gaining this information;
• perceptions of the purpose of the markers, looking at views on when and for whom they should be used;

• experiences of using the Disadvantage Markers, with a particular focus on discussing and selling the markers, as well as the process and accuracy of recording this information on the system;

• views on using the Disadvantage Markers, looking at what works well and what works less well, especially highlighting any problems or difficulties associated with using the Disadvantage Markers both practically and emotionally;

• differences between using the Disadvantage Markers for certain customer groups in comparison to others, for example, using the markers for lone parent customers or refugees in comparison to ex-offenders;

• experiences, views and impact of the change to the performance-based points system, including the addition of ex-offenders, refugees, the homeless, and drug and alcohol misusers to Priority 2 group of the job outcome targets hierarchy;

• attitudes towards the principle and impact of using Disadvantage Markers; and

• suggestions for change or improvement of the Disadvantage Markers, especially focusing on how to improve use of the markers and the overall reliability of the data.

1.4 Research design

The research comprised three stages overall: a developmental study; mainstage research with advisers and customers; and a reflection study. A detailed sample profile is provided in Appendix A.

1.4.1 Stage one: developmental research

Prior to conducting the mainstage research a developmental study was conducted with stakeholders and advisers:

• Stakeholder research – Research was carried with key stakeholders from DWP head office and Jobcentre Plus in September 2006 ahead of the mainstage research, in order to gather contextual information regarding the markers. The research included two focus groups and three telephone depths, lasting 90 and 60 minutes respectively.

• Adviser workshops – Two 90 minute mini workshops were conducted with Jobcentre Plus advisers in October 2006. The workshops aimed to gather contextual information, but also to test out materials to be used as part of the study (see Appendix B).
1.4.2 Stage two: mainstage research

The main stage of the research sought to build on the research conducted in stage one. The main stage of research included two parts: research with Jobcentre Plus advisers and research with disadvantaged customers. The research was carried out between November and December 2006:

- Research with advisers – In total 36 depth interviews were conducted with Jobcentre Plus staff operating across five Jobcentre Plus districts, with seven interviews taking place in each district. Specifically, the sample consisted of 30 face-to-face depth interviews with a mix of mainstream and new deal advisers each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes and six telephone depths – five with district managers and one with a Contact Centre adviser. The interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes.

- Research with customers – Face-to-face depth interviews were conducted with 53 disadvantaged customers across the same five districts. The types of disadvantaged customers interviewed included: the homeless, ex-offenders, drug or alcohol misusers and refugees. In addition to this, five interviews were conducted with ‘other’ disadvantaged customers, including lone parents, customers with disabilities, black and minority ethnic (BME) customers and those with the lowest qualifications.

The research was conducted across five Jobcentre Plus districts which were nominated by Jobcentre Plus. These districts were not selected to be representative of Jobcentre Plus but to provide a geographical spread across the United Kingdom.

1.4.3 Stage three: reflection research

The final stage of this research was reflective in nature and included re-visits to key stakeholders from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) head office and Jobcentre Plus. The purpose of the re-visits was to feedback some of the key findings from stage two and to explore reactions to these findings and possible reasons for them.

In total, eight depth interviews were carried out, these took place between February and March 2007 and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

1.5 Recruitment

Respondents were purposively selected by our in-house team of specialist field recruiters, using the sample criteria or quota outlined above and agreed with DWP. Purposive sampling is designed to ensure coverage of key sub-groups within the target population so that variations in experience between groups may be explored:

- Jobcentre Plus and DWP staff, including: head office staff; jobcentre advisers; Contact Centre advisers; and district managers were sampled via a contact list provided by Jobcentre Plus and given to DWP.
customers were recruited via a sample acquired from national and local organisations and providers that focused on supporting disadvantaged customers, such as, Action for Employment and Working Links. National contacts were gathered from desk research by BMRB and local contacts were provided by jobcentre contacts.

1.6 Conduct of the research and analysis

All the fieldwork for this study was undertaken by experienced qualitative researchers, using non-directive interviewing techniques. They were exploratory and interactive in form so that questioning could be responsive to the views, experiences and circumstances of the individuals involved. Interviews for each stage were guided by a topic guide developed by BMRB, in close liaison with the DWP (see the appendices). Although topic guides ensure systematic coverage of key points across interviews, they were used flexibly to allow issues of relevance to respondents to be covered.

Alongside the topic guide and standard interview techniques, disadvantage customer profiles and pen portraits were also used to explore adviser approaches to dealing with disadvantage in a more grounded and contextualised way. These tools can also be found in the appendices at the end of the report.

All the depth interviews and group discussions were digitally recorded in stereo. The verbatim transcripts produced from the digital recordings were subject to a rigorous content analysis, which involved systematically sifting, summarising and sorting the verbatim material according to key issues and themes, within a thematic matrix. Further classificatory and interpretative analyses were then derived from the analytic charts and these formed the basis of the findings reported in subsequent chapters.

The findings reported have been illustrated with the use of verbatim quotations, case illustrations and examples. Where necessary the details of the contributors or their subjects have been moderately changed to protect anonymity.

The methods used in this research are wholly qualitative in nature. The purposive nature of the sample design means that the research cannot provide any statistical information relating to the prevalence of these views, experiences or reflections in the general population. Any attempt to provide numerical evidence of this kind would require a quantitative research methodology. The aim of qualitative methods is to define and describe the range of emergent issues, rather than to measure their extent.

3 The interviewing style adopted is non-directive in that qualitative interviews are open in form rather than structured or direct. The approach is also flexible and responsive throughout.
2 Awareness and knowledge of Disadvantage Markers

This chapter of the report outlines respondents’ awareness and understanding of the Disadvantage Markers operating as part of Jobcentre Plus’ monitoring system. The research looks at the full range of markers, although it concentrates on the Disadvantage Group Markers\(^4\) and the marker set for refugees. Awareness and knowledge is primarily considered from the perspective of advisers, looking at the nature and depth of adviser understanding; variation in awareness and knowledge; and sources of information utilised. Customer perceptions are also considered.

**Key points**

- When advisers were asked to spontaneously outline their awareness and knowledge of the Disadvantage Markers, it became clear the markers were not viewed as a tangible set.

- Despite exhibiting a general awareness of the existence of the markers, advisers’ awareness and knowledge was not comprehensive and differed in terms of its nature and depth.

- Established markers with related programmes of support such as, the lone parent or disability markers were widely recognised. In contrast, awareness of the more recently introduced Disadvantage Group markers were more limited even when prompted.

- Patterns of awareness and knowledge were linked to districts and a clear hierarchy of understanding could be identified. Variations were also noted by individual advisers.

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\(^4\) Disadvantage Group Marker comprises homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse and ex-offender markers.
• Advisers generally felt confident about their knowledge of the processes involved in setting established markers. However, understanding of the processes involved in setting the Disadvantage Group marker were less pronounced.

• There was found to be a lack of clarity regarding the criteria required to place a marker, with advisers demonstrating very little knowledge of any official definitions.

• Awareness and knowledge of the data protection procedures were mixed. Knowledge of the need for customers to volunteer information was more widely understood although it was not comprehensive. In contrast, awareness of the DPA1 form was limited.

• The purpose of setting the markers had not usually been considered by advisers and when probed on this, explanations tended to be speculative and often confused.

• Advisers gathered information about Disadvantage Markers from a range of sources, including: formal training; information provided by management; and open learning. Awareness of guidance notes was minimal even where prompted.

• Perhaps unsurprisingly, customers’ awareness of Disadvantage Markers was limited.

2.1 Awareness of the markers

Importantly, when advisers were asked during the interview to spontaneously outline their awareness and knowledge of the Disadvantage Markers, it became clear that Disadvantage Markers were not usually viewed collectively as a tangible set; rather they were seen as a series of disconnected markers that required information to be recorded on LMS. As a consequence of this, when awareness of the Disadvantage Markers was initially explored, advisers were often confused about what qualified as such and offered a very broad range, including markers such as, potentially violent or economically disadvantaged.

‘I mean Disadvantage Markers I guess to me would probably be more around somebody who possibly had health issues, a recognised disability, possibly somebody who lived in an area that you could possibly class as being disadvantaged economically.’

(Mainstream adviser, District C)

2.1.1 Variation in levels of awareness and knowledge

Once explained and specifically probed, there was found to be a general awareness among advisers of the existence of the Disadvantage Markers. However, awareness and knowledge was not comprehensive and differed in terms of both its nature
and depth. Understanding was found to vary according to the type of marker but
differences were also identified between and within districts.

**Awareness by type of marker**

Established markers with related programmes of support such as, the lone parent
or person with disability markers were widely recognised and considered easy to
understand. This was also found to be the case for the refugee marker. In contrast,
awareness and knowledge of the more recently introduced Disadvantage Group
marker, which encompassed markers for homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse
and ex-offending, was more limited even when prompted and in some instances,
advisers had no awareness of these markers. For example, when asked about
markers for drug and alcohol, one adviser stated:

> ‘Not that I’m aware of. I mean I am not saying there isn’t one [marker for
drug and alcohol misuse], there may well be one but it is not one that I am
aware of or that I would even know about.’

(Mainstream adviser, District B)

Likewise, there were mixed levels of awareness of the lowest qualified marker.

**Awareness by district**

It was clear that patterns of awareness and knowledge were very much linked
to districts and a clear hierarchy of understanding could be identified. Levels of
awareness and knowledge were spread on a continuum ranging from one area
where knowledge was widespread and comprehensive, through to another area
where knowledge was comparatively low and advisers were confused about a
number of issues, such as: what Disadvantage Markers comprised; the location of
the markers on LMS; and the procedure for setting them.

The level of awareness and knowledge demonstrated by districts between these
extremes was more variable and clustered around specific markers or procedures.
Understanding of the Disadvantage Group marker for example, tended to be
focused in two districts, with advisers presenting a clear sense of the marker and
associated procedures, such as data protection. Variations in understanding of the
refugee marker were less pronounced with the exception of one area, where it
was said the refugee population was extremely low.

Levels of understanding were generally attributed to the amount of attention and
emphasis placed on the markers at office and district level.

**Awareness by individual adviser**

Variations in awareness and knowledge were also noted between Jobcentre Plus
offices within each district and differences were thought to relate to the knowledge
of individual advisers. Importantly, variation in awareness or knowledge was not
identified by type of adviser, for example, mainstream compared to New Deal.
Factors underpinning variation in adviser knowledge included:
• levels of adviser pro-activity regarding keeping up to date with changes to the
guidance and updates on LMS;
• level of training and guidance received on markers, as well as that received on
LMS more generally; and
• experience and background of advisers, such as, experience of working in the
Jobcentre and their work history in terms of areas of specialism, for example,
previous careers working in the Benefits Agency.

2.2 Knowledge of the markers

The nature and depth of the knowledge exhibited by advisers in cases where they
had heard of the markers was also mixed. This section considers the knowledge
shown on a range of issues, including knowledge of: the process of setting the
markers; defining disadvantage; related procedures, such as data protection; the
purpose of the markers; and the link between the markers and Job Outcome
Targets (JOT).

2.2.1 The process of setting markers

Advisers generally felt confident about their knowledge and understanding of
the processes involved in setting established markers, such as the lone parent
and disability markers. Advisers attributed their knowledge and understanding
regarding the process of setting these markers, to the fact these disadvantages
had jobcentre programmes attached to them, which often affected the type of
benefit claimed and the type of adviser support received.

‘Yes, if somebody is a Lone Parent they should have the box ticked when
they first contacted to say they are a Lone Parent. It should probably say, if
it’s been built properly that their primary benefit is Income Support and that
they are unemployed and not claiming JSA, so that they get the right sort of
benefit claimed and the type of adviser support received.’

(Mainstream adviser, District B)

Furthermore, as a result of this, advisers often suggested they had received
considerable training and guidance in relation to these disadvantages and much
emphasis had been placed on setting this information correctly on LMS. The
refugee marker was seen very much as an established marker and as such, advisers
also tended to have a good knowledge of how to set this.

Knowledge and understanding of the processes involved in setting the more
recently introduced markers, such as the Disadvantage Group marker, were much
less pronounced, especially among advisers with more limited awareness of the
markers overall. Advisers suggested they lacked knowledge on a number of specific
aspects of the process, including: when the marker should be set; data protection
procedures relating to this; and the length of time that markers remained on LMS.
Data protection is discussed in Section 2.2.3.
Where advisers were aware of the Disadvantage Group marker, it was recognised that the marker should ideally be set early in the life of a claim, so that information could be recorded and the relevant support provided to the customer. However, as issues of disadvantage covered as part of this marker were not always raised early on as a result of their sensitivity and time factors, there was felt to be a mismatch between the ideal and reality. Importantly, this meant that advisers were often confused about whose role it was to set the marker. For example, Fresh Claim, Restart and Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) advisers thought the role of setting these markers would fall with New Deal advisers and New Deal advisers, often believed these would be set earlier on in the process.

The length of time the marker remained on the system was not usually raised spontaneously, however, when probed, it was usual for advisers to assume that the Disadvantage Group marker would remain on the customer’s LMS record until it was removed. Certainly, there was very limited awareness, even amongst advisers with relatively high levels of knowledge overall, that this marker would be removed automatically after one year.

2.2.2 Defining disadvantage

For the most part, there was found to be a lack of clarity regarding the criteria required to place a marker. Advisers tended to demonstrate very little knowledge of any official definitions of the range of disadvantages covered by the markers and generally assumed that disadvantage was, in part, defined by a customers’ self-perception.

‘Just leave it up to the person really [to define disadvantage], whatever they say to you in the interview, is that right? I’m not sure if we’re meant to do that you know.’

(New Deal adviser, District E)

Notwithstanding this, ease of defining disadvantage was said to vary according to the type of marker: The lone parent and lowest qualified markers were deemed easiest to identify because they could be judged according to the type of benefit claimed and as a result of conducting a Basic Skills assessment. The refugee marker was deemed more ambiguous as advisers were unclear whether Home Office paperwork was required, or whether the marker could still be set once an individual had been given leave to remain. There was also a lack of clarity regarding the difference between markers for homelessness, for example, between the ‘no fixed abode’ and ‘person without accommodation’. Advisers were not always aware of both of the markers or indeed the difference between the two. However, where they were aware they usually recognised the impact these markers had on the regularity of signing (with customers marked as ‘Person Without Accommodation’ required to sign on a daily basis).

As suggested, advisers were unclear about the extent to which they were expected to rely on customers’ self-definition of a disadvantage. For example, advisers
queried the boundary between recreational and on-going use of drugs or alcohol and for what type of misuse a marker should be set. Similarly, advisers were unsure if the ex-offender marker should be used to note any conviction, at any time or only in the case of recent convictions or those where a custodial sentence had been served.

2.2.3 **Data protection procedures**

Awareness and knowledge of the data protection procedures related to the Disadvantage Group marker were mixed and knowledge tended to be clustered within two of the five Jobcentre Plus districts included in the research. Advisers in other districts either felt unsure about data protection procedures or they demonstrated very limited and ‘patchy’ understanding. Knowledge of the need for customers to volunteer information was more widely understood across districts, although this was not comprehensive. In contrast, awareness of the DPA1 form was limited and with the exception of one district, advisers tended not to be familiar with this.

A range of data protection procedures relating to use of the markers were highlighted by advisers across the interviews, although as suggested these tended to be concentrated in two districts. Broadly, these are ordered according to how widely they were mentioned, starting with the most familiar:

- the customer must volunteer information concerning their disadvantage;
- advisers can probe but must not ask directly about a disadvantage;
- the customer may ask to see any aspect of their LMS record;
- permission from the customer to set a Disadvantage Group marker must be sought;
- advisers must be open and clear about the reasons for setting the marker;
- unless agreed with the customer, information on disadvantage(s) must not be passed to an outside agency or employer;
- a form (DPA1) must be signed by the customer to agree the setting of the marker, verbal consent is insufficient;
- the signature from the form must be retained but the rest destroyed; and
- the drug and alcohol marker must not be referred to in the conversations box.

2.2.4 **Purpose of Disadvantage Markers**

It was clear that prior to the research interview the purpose of setting the markers had not usually been considered by advisers and when probed on this, explanations tended to be speculative and often confused:
‘I think Disadvantaged markers are people who need the extra help to sort themselves out … they’re dependent on something … I can’t think of the top of my head.’

(New Deal adviser, District A)

Certainly, with the exception of one district, advisers were clear that this information and key reasons for setting the markers had not been communicated to them. Assumed reasons for using the markers included: to provide DWP with statistics on disadvantage; to tailor customer support; to assist the adviser in their task. These issues are discussed in more detail below.

• DWP statistics – Advisers recognised that DWP head office used data from across LMS records to undertake statistical analysis and suspected that information generated by the markers would be used to inform employment policy, such as the organisation of provision or the effectiveness of early entry to programmes.

‘So they [DWP] can assess the types of people they’ve coming in claiming benefits … Maybe because they want statistics about how useful, how an early entry provision is to our programmes, ‘cos we’ve got a set of people which include these disadvantaged people, they can go onto our programmes earlier than the normal job seeker, ‘cos they seem to be more disadvantaged and furthest away from the labour market, so maybe it’s some sort of statistic for that, and probably for the customer to have you know, perhaps it hasn’t been asked of them in the past, and for them to have a fair go really.’

(Mainstream adviser, District D)

‘I mean everything is always about statistics I guess, I suppose they are looking at, what percentage of people are lowest qualified, the ethnic people that come into the Jobcentre, the problems they face and the rest of it, the drug abuse.’

(New Claims adviser, District C)

• Tailored customer support – The markers were perceived as ultimately being of benefit to customers and therefore advisers assumed they would be used to focus Jobcentre Plus resources, in terms of particular customer needs across the country, for example, the organisation and resourcing of local provision.

• To assist advisers – Disadvantage Markers were also perceived to be a tool to be used by advisers to assist them in working with customers. Markers were thought to be there for advisers to check customer details and gather background information prior to conducting an interview, for instance to gain insight on any particular issues affecting the customer, such as a disadvantage. They were also said to be there to encourage advisers to broach and discuss sensitive issues. Interestingly, despite espousing these views, advisers rarely used the markers this way in practice.
‘Ideally you can easily see if a customer has a disadvantage before the interview and make appropriate preparations, just like a doctor reading a patient’s notes.’

(New Deal adviser, District E)

Advisers tended not to make a connection between the markers and JOT. Indeed, in some cases, advisers were certain they were not linked because this information had not been provided to them by their managers (who they said, very much focused on JOT); or because they did not believe it would be a policy because they regarded it as negative. For example, it was felt that a link between JOT and Disadvantage Markers would encourage advisers to pressure customers into disclosing disadvantage or falsely mark them as such. When asked about the link between JOT and disadvantage, one adviser stated:

‘They couldn’t do that, could they [make link between JOT and disadvantage]? They couldn’t give you a target for somebody who’s got a problem. I would say that was wrong … We used to have targets for people with disabilities, markers, you’d have more points for that. But I couldn’t say that they could give you a target for refugees or a target for people who’ve got drug problems … Because I think it’s discriminating, personally’.

(New Deal adviser, District D)

2.3 Sources of awareness and knowledge

Advisers gathered information about Disadvantage Markers from a range of sources, both formal and informal, these included:

- formal training – information concerning the markers was said to have been covered in training sessions attended. For example, some new advisers said that they had learnt about the markers as part of their learning framework training. More exceptionally, guidance had been received on specific markers from local co-ordinators, such as the refugee co-ordinator;

- information provided by management and the district via office meetings, guidance and memos. Advisers also mentioned receiving LMS updates; and

- open learning – advisers mentioned seeking out information informally via a range of courses, including: guidance notes; the intranet; email bulletins; or from colleagues. Crucially, this form of information gathering tended to be reactive and was usually said to have been undertaken once the marker had been brought to the attention of the adviser. Gathering data from these types of informal sources was thought to have resulted in an inconsistent and mixed understanding about the markers.

Spontaneous awareness of guidance notes was minimal and even where prompted (using a copy of drug and alcohol, ex-offender, ethnicity, and refugee status guidance), advisers were usually uncertain about whether or not they had seen the guidance previously. This lack of certainty was attributed to the volume
of guidance available to advisers which was said to be immense and as a result, it was seen as being unwieldy and prohibitively time-consuming to locate and review. Furthermore, the guidance was perceived as being difficult to understand once it had been located as a result of its format and content, for example, advisers criticised it for being overly wordy and difficult to read on screen. For these reasons, advisers often suggested they would only seek out guidance on an ad hoc basis when it was required.

2.4 Customer awareness and knowledge

Perhaps unsurprisingly, customers’ awareness of Disadvantage Markers was limited. However, disadvantaged customers recalled discussing barriers to work with their adviser and provided a range of examples regarding these, including:

- poor social skills;
- laziness;
- a lack of suitable jobs; and
- low levels of confidence. As one customer explained:

  ‘Confidence, I’ve got no confidence. People stare at me a lot … Because I look weird. When you walk, they are always looking at you. Everyone was looking at us. It’s not paranoia, it’s true. I have noticed it.’

  (Customer, person with disability and homeless, District E)

Customers were also often unable to recall whether information regarding these barriers to work had been recorded on LMS during the interview. Interestingly, customers in one district exhibited much greater awareness of the process of setting the markers and these findings linked with the adviser study, with the district in question being the same as that noted in the adviser study as demonstrating the fullest knowledge.

Customers tended not to express any clear knowledge about the purpose of using the markers but generally assumed the markers were a tool to help assist them in their search for work. However, in one isolated case, setting the markers was spontaneously raised and described as a way for advisers to meet their targets and to take credit for getting customers into work. This was viewed negatively by the customer, who felt it was unfair for advisers to take credit for outcomes largely achieved by the customer themselves.
‘I don’t even know why they’re [advisers] there to be honest. Why can’t people just go Jobcentre, go on a job printing machine, get your job, send them off, you don’t need them … Because when you print off a job off the job printing machine, they want the, what’s the words, they want to make out as if they’ve found the job for you so they get more Government money, or I suppose they do that, but why should they when I’m the one that looked for the job and I’m the one that’s sending it off? Because they want to look on their computer, then they print it out, then they get their recognition for them finding you a job that you’ve found yourself. It’s rubbish.’

(Customer, drug and alcohol, District A)
3 Experience of using the markers

This chapter of the report focuses on use of the Disadvantage Markers, from the perspective of Jobcentre Plus advisers and customers. Specifically, it considers the nature of use, including a consideration of the type of markers being used, the use of more than one marker and adherence to data protection procedures; approaches to discussing disadvantage; approaches to setting the markers; and finally it explores the key factors underpinning patterns of use.

Key points

- Differences in use of Disadvantage Markers were visible within and between districts. Markers also varied according to type of marker and type of adviser.

- Established markers, including the lone parent or disability markers were widely used, as was the refugee marker. Use of the Disadvantage Group markers, including homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse and ex-offender, was more limited.

- Where markers were not set, advisers were clear that issues of disadvantage were still being discussed with customers.

- Advisers expressed a clear understanding that more than one marker could be set on the Labour Market System (LMS) and were confident that where required, multiple markers would be used.

- Where advisers used the Disadvantage Group markers, adherence to data protection procedure varied. In particular use of the DPA1 form was extremely limited.

- Variations in approaches to discussing disadvantage were evident and differed according to: the type of disadvantage; the personal style of the adviser; the perceived likely reaction of the customer; and practical issues, such as the time available.
• Customers’ experiences of discussing disadvantage broadly aligned with that outlined by advisers.
• A range of key factors were identified as impacting on use of the markers, including: awareness, knowledge and experience; training and guidance; district and Jobcentre emphasis; perceptions of value and purpose; practical constraints; LMS; sensitivities around asking questions; and acceptance of the marker by customers. Overall, JOT was found to have very limited impact on behaviour regarding the markers.

3.1 Use of the markers

Use of Disadvantage Markers, was very much linked to understanding and therefore, patterns of use tended to reflect those outlined for awareness and knowledge. Variation in use could, therefore, be found according to type of marker and differences were also visible within and between districts. A hierarchy can be identified between districts regarding use, with use of the markers spread on a continuum ranging from one district where use was widespread and comprehensive, through to another area where use of the markers was limited. Patterns of use between these two extremes were more variable. Importantly, use of the Disadvantage Group marker was very much focused in two districts. When describing use of the markers, one adviser stated:

‘I suppose the Disadvantage Marker is highlighting somebody who needs additional support … I don’t use them that often to be honest … I do tend to forget about that.’

(New Deal adviser, District C)

However, in addition to variation by type of marker and district, use of the markers was also related to the type of Jobcentre advisers, for instance, mainstream versus New Deal. New Deal advisers were said to be on the whole, more likely to discuss issues of disadvantage, as a result of:

• the type of customers entering New Deal, who it was thought more likely to be disadvantaged, as a result of the requirements for entering New Deal which meant that customers were long-term unemployed and more likely to have barriers to work of this nature; and

• the nature of New Deal itself, in particular the caseloading, which meant advisers usually had more time to focus on the customers’ barriers to work and develop a trusting relationship as a result of which customers were more likely to discuss sensitive issues.
'I think if we identify that there is a need to, then yes we would [set the marker at new claim stage], but as I say, it's not always apparent, so it may be sort of later down, later on, that things are discovered so that the other members of staff in other areas would do that ... Maybe if they go to New Deal ... In the slot we've got, we've got 40 minutes if that, to see somebody and to get a whole lot of things done actually, sometimes it's not enough time, but that's another issue, so unless it's, as I say, I wouldn't sort of spend loads and loads of time going into all of this, it's just that if I'm sure, then it goes on, if not then it's left to see what happens later.'

(New claims adviser, District D)

3.1.1 Use by type of marker

Established markers, including the lone parent or disability markers were widely used, as was the refugee marker. Patterns of use regarding the LP and disability markers were attributed to a number of factors, such as: the ease of defining these disadvantages, which linked to the relative openness of customers to highlight these issues; the connection between these disadvantages and benefit entitlement or programmes of support; and the emphasis placed on these in the jobcentre and media.

'The Lone Parent process, I would say they would be more or less a 100% accurate ... That's what you're kind of based on, you know that's part of your targets, the accuracy of markers, at which stage in the lone parent process the marker is set, because that defines when the person gets called in for an interview, and if those markers are not set correctly it could affect the client's money, so you make sure you're on the ball with those markers you know. Other markers, the homeless, drug addiction, they wouldn't necessarily be accurate.'

(New Deal adviser, District E)

'We do have Lone Parent as well, it's a marker we tick, we need to tick them just to show on our records that this person is a lone parent.'

( Restart adviser, District C)

The disability marker was also being used to record wider issues, such as drug and alcohol misuse, primarily as the advisers deemed this disadvantage to fall under the heading of 'disability'. This usually only occurred in cases where the adviser was unaware of the specific markers for drug and alcohol misuse, however for some, it was seen as a more appropriate and sensitive way to record this information as a consequence of the nature of the barrier to work.

'I'll refer them [people with drug and alcohol problems] on to the organisations and I think they help with job search as well. They give them all round support. I'd put it under health [marker] because it's addiction a physical thing.'

(New claims adviser, District B)
Use of the refugee marker was thought to be widespread as a result of the link between this and the ethnicity marker and as a result of the automatic prompt on LMS. This said, more exceptionally, advisers suggested they failed to use the refugee marker as a result of: a lack of time; because they did not think it was the appropriate juncture (as in the case of the Contact Centre); or because they avoided issues of ethnicity altogether. For instance, rather than discussing ethnicity issues and setting the marker in discussion with customers, ethnicity was, in some instances, assumed on the basis of factors such as, appearance or name. Advisers suggested they adopted this approach as they found it awkward to discuss ethnicity if the ethnic background of the customer appeared ‘obvious’.

‘To be honest I will be honest here myself, I can tell a White British and I don’t ask. I know she is white British and she was born here and so I just say I have done that. But if I am not sure of the nationality then I do ask. And like for instance this morning I asked a lady and I knew she was from Africa because I am from there and I knew from the name and I knew from the accent. But half the time I think most of the advisers know it is white British.’

(New Deal adviser, District A)

Use of the Disadvantage Group markers, including homelessness, ex-drug and alcohol misuse and ex-offender markers, was more limited. Similarly, there was mixed levels of use of the ‘Lowest Qualified’ marker. Broadly, patterns of use regarding the Disadvantage Group marker were attributed to:

• **a general lack of awareness of the markers:**

  ‘Moderator: “Are you aware there’s a marker for homeless customers?…”  Respondent: “No”.’

  (Restart adviser, District C)

  ‘Is there a marker for homelessness? I’m not sure to be honest.’

  (New Deal advisers, District C)

• **a lack of knowledge regarding the location of the markers on LMS,** which linked to visibility of the marker and automatic prompts;

• **a lack of knowledge regarding the procedures for setting the markers;**

• **a lack of emphasis from management on the marker;** and

• **refusal by the customer to have the marker set on LMS.** Refusals were said to be rare but despite reassurances by advisers, there were said to be instances of this occurring. Customers were said to have refused due to a concern this information would be passed on to potential employers in the future, or because they did not believe these issues were relevant to their job search.

It is important to note, that even where markers were not said to have been set, advisers were clear that issues of disadvantage were still being discussed with customers and that this information was being recorded on LMS in notes pages,
as part the Action Planner in the case of New Deal advisers and in conversation boxes by mainstream advisers. Primarily this was said to occur in the case of the Disadvantage Group marker, however it was also noted in relation to the lowest qualified marker.

Two main reasons were provided for using notes page instead of the markers and these included:

- **a lack of awareness and knowledge** – Advisers used notes pages to record disadvantage in cases where they were either unaware of the markers, or where they lacked sufficient knowledge regarding how to set them;

- **views on the usefulness of the markers compared to the notes pages** – Gathering information in the notes pages was often perceived as being more useful than setting the markers, as not only were advisers able to record more detailed information about the disadvantage and how it was being addressed; but they felt notes pages were ultimately a more widely used tool.

  ‘Personally for me, as long as I know I’ve put as much as I can in the Action Plan, it is going to benefit me when I see that customer next time because I’ve got as much in there as I could possibly get in there.’

  (Multi-functioning adviser, District B)

  ‘The thing is like I said you only record everything in one place and that is Action Plan … it is easy for us to log everything on there because each time we send them to a provider or programme centre or anywhere what they require is an Action Plan.’

  (New Deal adviser, District A)

### 3.1.2 Use of more than one marker

Advisers expressed a clear understanding that more than one marker could be set on LMS and were confident that where required, multiple markers would be set. Advisers recognised that disadvantaged customers tended to have multiple barriers to work and therefore, it was often necessary to do this. When explored in detail, the setting of multiple markers tended to take place in the case of the more established markers, such as the marker for lone parent, disability and lowest qualified.

Although ultimately all the necessary markers would be set (in cases where advisers were aware of these), it was unlikely that these would all be set at one time, rather, setting markers would be staggered over a number of interviews. This approach was thought to be more sensitive and it was felt this helped to maintain trust and rapport. In the case of New Deal advisers, the setting of more than one marker was often approached strategically, with advisers establishing the range of barriers affecting employment initially and then gradually setting the relevant markers over time.
Although advisers argued that in theory they would set more than one marker for those disadvantages falling under the Disadvantage Group marker. In reality it was thought this would occur less frequently, as it was felt that customers were less likely to make advisers aware of multiple disadvantages of this nature as a result of their sensitivity.

### 3.1.3 Use of data protection procedure

Where advisers used the Disadvantage Group markers, adherence to data protection procedure varied across three elements of the procedure. These were whether the adviser:

- allowed the customer to identify the disadvantage;
- asked the customer’s permission to set the marker; and
- used the DPA1 form.

**Allowing the customer to identify the disadvantage**

Broadly, where the Disadvantage Group marker was used, advisers were allowing customers to raise the issue of disadvantage spontaneously, rather than asking them directly about housing, drugs, alcohol or a previous conviction for example.

However, more direct approaches were being taken to identifying disadvantage (discussed in more detail in Section 3.2.1); with advisers in one area using a check list of disadvantages to prompt the discussion and other advisers asking customers outright about issues such as drugs or alcohol, albeit sensitively, if they suspected the customers had a problem of this nature. It should be noted that advisers were not intentionally flouting data protection where this occurred, rather, they were simply unaware of data protection procedures in relation to this.

**Asking the customer’s permission to set the marker**

Advisers were often unaware they were required to ask permission from the customer before setting the marker and as a consequence, they were not usually carrying out this procedure. Failure to carry out this procedure was not exclusively a result of lack of awareness, however, with certain advisers suggesting that although they were aware of the need to do this, they chose not to as a result of time constraints during the interview and because they genuinely did not believe the customer would be interested.

In contrast, permission was being sought in some instances and the marker was only set once agreement had been confirmed. Adherence to these procedures tended to be focused within the district where awareness and knowledge was the most comprehensive. For a further discussion on setting the markers, see Section 3.3.
Use of the DPA1 form

Use of the DPA1 form was extremely limited with the exception of one district where it was being used by all the advisers included in the study. However even in this case, use had been curtailed by limited supplies and in the interim period, advisers were setting the marker without the form but informing customers they would need to provide a signature of consent in the future.

Lack of use was attributed a range of factors, including:

• lack of understanding regarding the purpose and value of the form;
• concern the form would act as a barrier to consent; and
• lack of time to complete the process during the interview.

The reasons given were found to be interlinked in so much as, lack of understanding about the purpose of the form and its value resulted in the process being perceived as a ‘waste of time’. Advisers found it particularly difficult to comprehend the reasons and purpose for having to destroy part of the form following the interview. For example, advisers questioned the purpose of asking the customer to complete a form they were then going to discard. There was also confusion over how and where the forms should be stored once completed.

‘The thing is [with the DPA1 form], is it necessary if the customers consent, explain to them about the DPA, and if they’re happy with it then I don’t see why, it’s like more waste of paperwork … To just destroy it, so then you know, and if they’re happy with it then, as long as they’re happy with it, you’ve told them, I think that should be sufficient, because otherwise there’s too much paper work, and plus its going to be destroyed anyway … Yes I mean they might, we explain to them and then you’ll find some people who will happily sign it, but then sometimes they will try read it, and then it’s a time issue … So you go through all this, its easier just to tell them and if they’re happy with it.’

(Restart adviser, District B)

3.2 Approaches to discussing disadvantage

This section of the report considers the range of approaches used by advisers when discussing disadvantage with customers. Variations in approaches were evident and differed according to: the type of disadvantage; the personal style of the adviser; the perceived likely reaction of the customer; and practical issues, such as the time available. The section primarily focuses on adviser approaches to discussing disadvantages incorporated within the Disadvantage Group marker, such as drug and alcohol misuse, homelessness and ex-offending.

Advisers suggested they were initially alerted to the idea that a customer might have a disadvantage as a result of behaviour displayed during the interview. The characteristics mentioned by advisers for identifying drug and alcohol
misuse included: erratic mood swings; disorientation; slurring of words; lack of concentration; sweating; failing to remember a previous discussion or smelling of alcohol. Regarding homelessness, advisers said if a customer was dirty, smelly or appeared not to have changed their clothes between visits, they would ask about their housing situation.

It was only said to be in circumstances where a disadvantage was suspected, that advisers would purposefully focus the discussion around these issues, or employ other tactics to further explore the issues, for example, organising adviser interviews at a range of times to better observe any changes in behaviour.

Ex-offending was said to be easier to identify compared to other disadvantages within the Disadvantage Group Marker, as the customer would usually be known through Freshstart or it would naturally come up in conversations about work history. However, where this was not the case, advisers said they would become suspicious if a customer was evasive about gaps in their employment history.

Advisers carefully considered the best time to raise issues of disadvantage with customers and part of this involved taking into account the likely reaction of the customer. Certainly, advisers often felt it was good practice to build a level of rapport and trust before these issues were discussed and they steered away from raising these topics if the customer seemed ‘depressed’ or ‘anxious’ for example.

3.2.1 Adviser approaches

A range of approaches were used by advisers to assist in the discussion of disadvantage, including:

- **the use of questions to encourage conversation about disadvantage**
  - Advisers used questions reactively and proactively as prompts and probes to help uncover disadvantage. For example, they would be as an opening gambit or in response to a comment made by customers about their circumstances. Prompts and probes were also used once a disadvantage had been disclosed, to help tease out relevant details. The types of questions asked by advisers included:
    - ‘Tell me about any other barriers to work you think you might have?’
    - ‘Have you had any gaps in employment? Why was that?’
    - ‘Do you have any problems getting up in the morning?’
    - ‘Were you out last night, I can smell alcohol?’

- **use of a visual aid listing disadvantages** – A visual aid outlining a range of issues was being used in one district to check for disadvantage. In this case, the list was being shown to the customer and they were asked if any of the issues outlined were applicable. Although the primary purpose of this ‘check list’ was to prompt discussion, it was also thought to be a welcome labour and time saving device. In some instances, the DPA1 form was itself used as a visual aid, whereas other advisers had simply mocked up a form for their personal use. It
should be noted, this approach was generally said to have been used as a last resort, if discussions were not flowing freely:

‘I issue them with the DPA1 [as a check list], and they don’t have to fill it in if they don’t want to, we tell them that it’s for statistics and it would be an advantage if they did fill it in because we can perhaps do a bit more for them with the early entry … It is details of what the Data Protection Act is, it is called a DPA1, and it has got all the information regarding what the Data Protection Act is, what that means to them and then it does list certain bits of sensitive information that we could hold on the system about them and give them an option to tick and give us further information. Some of the customers would read through it, particularly if they have volunteered the information before I have had chance to issue it. I actually tell them what’s in there, what it is I am giving it to them for and I ask them to sign, and I show them on the system where I have put it and I am very happy to do that. The customers that haven’t volunteered that information, most of them tend to scan read it.’

(New Claims adviser, District C)

‘Anybody who has a disadvantage or a barrier to the labour market, the Data Protection Act is discussed with them. We have a stencil of which they can read through and tick which is how you can sometimes pick up the customers that don’t want to volunteer the information or you are unsure of and you don’t want to ask the question, then they read through the stencil and they might tick, but a lot of them read through the stencil and then just give it back and say “no that doesn’t apply to me”.’

(New Claims adviser, District C)

• **providing information on support and provision available via the Jobcentre** – Advisers found they were able to instigate discussions about disadvantage, by outlining the range of support and training provision available to customers and asking the customer if anything would be of use;

• **direct questioning** – In some instances, advisers demonstrated a preference for adopting a more straightforward approach and asked customers directly about issues relating to disadvantage. If advisers were unsure about their suspicions, they suggested they would talk these over with a colleague before broaching the subject. Advisers using this approach were generally confident about the effectiveness of this and argued that providing the customer felt comfortable and secure and did not believe they were being forced into work, they were usually happy to discuss issues frankly. Furthermore, it was seen as being more time effective.

### 3.2.2 Customers’ experiences of discussing disadvantage

Customers’ experiences of discussing disadvantage broadly aligned with that outlined by advisers. Customers recalled being asked directly about disadvantage; being shown a list or questionnaire; and offering information freely. In the latter
case, customers were often unsure what had led them to discuss the issue and could not recall it being raised. However, there were customers who were able to recall conversations being triggered by questions asked by the adviser and questions were said to have related to: barriers to work; work experience and discussions regarding previous benefits claimed, for example, disability benefit which was said to have raised issues of drug misuse.

‘I was on the sick then because New Horizons had led me on to that and I was telling them [Jobcentre] and she asked do you mind letting me know why, what is your sickness and that? Drug addiction, which I had been clean for over a year now which she actually praised me and said that was good. That’s when she put me on to [local provider] and Working Links you know.’

(Ex-drug user, District E)

More exceptionally, customers claimed they had attempted to discuss issues about disadvantage with their adviser, but had found the adviser to be unresponsive.

3.3 Approaches to setting the marker

In instances where advisers were engaging customers in the process of setting the marker, the style adopted tended to be rather informal and relaxed so as not to cause the customer any concern. A number of methods were used by advisers to ‘sell’ the markers to the customer and encourage agreement to the markers being set. The methods could be used in isolation or in combination and they included:

- **setting the marker in view of the customer** but only stopping to explain in detail if the customer questioned the recording of this information;
- **clearly emphasising the confidentiality of the markers** and reassuring customers that the marker information would not be passed to employers;
- **communicating the purpose and benefits of the marker**, such as, tailored support and provision; and
- **actively involving the customer in setting the marker**, for instance, showing the customer how the information was recorded on the LMS screen.

Unsurprisingly, customers found it difficult to recall whether or not they had been involved in the decision to set the marker on LMS. This said, a number of customers did recall discussing this issue with their adviser and seeing this recorded on the computer screen. Interestingly, awareness was isolated to those customers located in the district said to be operating this procedure most consistently.

3.4 Factors impacting on use of the markers

This final section of the chapter pulls together the key factors underpinning use of the markers, drawing on and expanding on issues alluded to throughout the
The key factors underpinning use were found to work together and reciprocally impact on one another, these included:

- awareness, knowledge and experience;
- training and guidance;
- district and jobcentre emphasis;
- value and purpose of the markers;
- practical constraints, such as interview length;
- the LMS;
- sensitivities around asking questions; and
- acceptance of the marker by customers.

3.4.1 Advisers’ awareness, knowledge and experience

Awareness and knowledge of the markers was clearly found to have an impact on how they were used in practice by advisers, particularly, awareness of the existence of markers and knowledge regarding procedures for setting them, such as, where the markers were located, when they should be set and data protection issues.

Lack of knowledge regarding at what stage in the claims process the markers should ideally be set was also said to result in markers not being recorded, as advisers were assuming this task was being undertaken by another adviser at a different stage of the process. As said previously, Fresh Claim, Restart and Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) advisers thought the role of setting these markers would fall to New Deal advisers and New Deal advisers, often believed these would be set earlier on in the process. Importantly, some advisers also assumed that Contact Centres might set the Disadvantage Group marker; however, an interview with a staff member at a Contact Centre adviser showed that Contact Centres did not necessarily regard setting the Disadvantage Group markers as part of their role.

‘I think they [contact centre staff] know they’re there but I’m not sure they see it as their role to do it, because we just gather information. Whereas it’s more in depth with the advisers and everything. So it’s seen as more their role to actually do that, because they can explain to the customer exactly what it means and how they can help and everything. So I don’t think they particularly see it as their role to do that.’

(Contact Centre adviser)

In addition to awareness and knowledge, experience of dealing with particular customer groups also impacted on use of the markers. Variations in experience were very much seen as being driven by the demographic make-up of the district and more specifically, the local area, which often meant that certain advisers simply did not have experience of working with certain customer types. For example, in one district, advisers suggested they had limited knowledge of using the refugee marker, as the refugee population in the area was very small.
3.4.2 Training and guidance

Levels of awareness and knowledge were thought to be inextricably linked to levels of training and guidance received regarding the markers. Although advisers were said to have received training and guidance regarding the more established markers, there was said to be a paucity of training and guidance received in relation to more recently introduced markers, such as the Disadvantage Group marker.

Limited training and guidance received regarding the markers, was very much seen as being part of a wider issue about training in the jobcentre. Formal training and guidance was described as being minimal overall, with advisers very much learning on the job or from information provided by colleagues. The use of guidance notes and Open Learning was criticised, as not only were they said to be difficult to locate on the system, but the material was seen as cumbersome and difficult to use, with electronic files proving hard to read and the large volume of data seen as difficult to cover within limited time.

3.4.3 Local and district emphasis

Use was very much attributed to the amount of attention and emphasis placed on the markers at district and jobcentre level. As previously mentioned, there were clear patterns of use across the districts taking part in the research and this was very much linked to the emphasis said to have been placed on the markers within the districts. For example, where advisers showed a high level of use it was usually suggested that markers had been a ‘local hot topic’, with the Disadvantage Group marker having been highlighted as a priority by their management. The sense of district priority was supported by interviews conducted with district managers, with their levels of knowledge and sense of priority mapping onto that of advisers in their district.

‘Not that long ago in truth [became aware of the markers], there was an emphasis put on it perhaps a couple, three months ago, saying you know, use the markers, prior to that I don’t think I did particularly. It’s sort of more recently that I’ve been more aware of them, so I’ve been using them. I don’t know whether I use them all, I tend to use mostly the lower qualified, and that’s because it’s been drummed into us recently, got to put that in, so I do that … We usually [heard] through meetings usually, emails and probably by meetings and we discuss it to make sure everybody knows what’s expected.’

(New Claims adviser, District C)

Local emphasis was seen as being an important influencing factor for two main reasons: firstly because it raised levels of awareness and knowledge about the markers which impacted on use; and secondly, because it raised the profile of the markers and emphasised the importance of setting them. Interestingly, even where advisers were aware of the markers, it was found that without an emphasis from management, advisers were not always using them, as they simply did not perceive it to be of value.
Unless you are told that it’s [setting the markers] really important then you don’t read too much into it.’

(New Deal adviser, District E)

3.4.4 Value and purpose of the markers

The value placed on the markers was found to underpin use, with advisers who recognised the benefit of these (in terms of how far they helped customers, advisers and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)) being generally more motivated to use them.

The perceived benefit to customers was usually linked to local provision and support and it was felt that if markers were identified as helping advisers to manage customer needs effectively, for example, guiding them towards appropriate provision, then they were more inclined to use them. In contrast, if there was perceived to be a lack of local provision, then advisers did not always believe it was worth setting the marker, as they were concerned that very little would come from this.

‘I think it’s the mental health ones, I really do feel for them. I could weep sometimes for them, I mean it does make you feel a bit emotional, I mean I’m usually okay but when you see somebody with a mental health problem and there’s nobody looking after them, where do they go? And it really does upset me, because I think we haven’t got anything for them, we can’t physically do anything for them … the markers aren’t useful to me, they are for statistics, but not for me or the customer.’

(New claims adviser, District C)

Lack of suitable provision, was also said to impact on the advisers ability to ‘sell’ the marker to customers, as it was difficult to demonstrate the value of the markers without this. Importantly, advisers felt they needed a ‘hook’ to persuade customers of the potential benefit to them of setting the marker and if they could not identify a hook, then they saw little purpose in using the marker.

Awareness of the use of markers for statistical analysis was minimal (although it was more pronounced in one area). However, where it was assumed, this was thought to have motivated advisers to use the markers, especially where they thought it would be used to help focus local resources.

3.4.5 Practical considerations

Advisers suggested that a general lack of time in interviews impinged on their ability to set markers and follow the required procedures, such as, waiting for the customers to raise their disadvantage and discussing and agreeing the setting of markers. In particular, it was felt that for more sensitive disadvantages, such as those covered under the Disadvantage Group marker, it was necessary for the advisers to invest time in the customer and develop rapport before a marker could be set, time advisers did not always feel they were able to afford given the need to conduct other aspects of their role. Importantly, the less familiar advisers were with the processes of setting markers, the more time the process could take,
especially if they needed to consult a colleague or look up guidance and this further impacted on the time available.

Time factors were said to be exacerbated in the case of disadvantaged customers, as it was felt customers with these types of issues were more prone to turning up late for interviews or failing to show altogether.

‘What could happen is, we would book a follow on interview, we’d get the basic stuff done, and we could book a follow up interview then, but that happens very rarely to be honest with you, it’s rare, this is an ideal world, and I’m, more often than not, the customers are coming late, their forms are not completed, you know, it’s the hard job just to get the basics done, without, you know, all this further questioning. That’s the problem, there is not specialist, there’s no somebody in house that we could book these people in for, because they are not identified immediately it’s only through questioning … I probably wouldn’t even go to that stage if I was 20 minutes into my interview, and I knew I had to give him a signing card, I knew I had to job search for him, and I knew I had to draw a job seeker’s agreement, it would be the last thing on my mind.’

(Mainstream adviser, District D)

3.4.6 The Labour Market System

Knowledge of the location of markers on the LMS was mixed and varied according to individual adviser experience and by the type of marker. The ease with which markers could be identified on the system was central to how widely and consistently they were used. For example, markers designed with an electronic adviser prompt, that required mandatory fields to be completed before the record could be closed, such as ethnicity and lone parent, were said to be used much more consistently than those without.

In contrast, the Disadvantage Group markers were seen as being rather difficult to locate and in some cases ‘hidden’.

‘I can’t say I’m aware of when it was brought in because with our LMS system, I don’t know whether you’re familiar with it, there’s lots of new things being introduced, releases three or four times a year. With being a New Deal Adviser for eight years, it was really identifying what you could record on the system that would make it a lot easier for my colleague to identify the problems if I wasn’t here. I think it’s just down to the LMS system, I think it’s a really good system. There’s always been lots of markers but the Disadvantage Marker, because that only really covers ex-offenders and drug and alcohol. The other markers are hidden everywhere else on LMS so you’ve got to know where to actually look.’

(New Deal adviser, District D)

The infrequent use of these markers meant that even where they had been used, knowledge was rarely consolidated and as a consequence, advisers found it difficult to remember from one time to the next.
Difficulties using LMS extended beyond specific problems relating to the organisation of the markers, with understanding of how to use the system said to be inconsistent overall. This was especially true for less experienced advisers. Difficulties using LMS were said to stem from a lack of initial formal training, which meant knowledge was gathered in a very ad hoc way from colleagues or on the job. The lack of on-going training, for example, regarding updates on new markers, meant advisers also found it difficult to keep up with any changes.

‘Physically put them in. The disadvantaged group I never put in. I know the green marker. I know where it is you know, but I don’t know how you go about setting it or what is in it to be quite honest … Yes I don’t know everything about LMS. I had half a day’s training on LMS when I first came here and I was a benefits person. And then I came here and half a day later I am qualified to use LMS … Apart from the PWD I didn’t receive any training … There are lots of little boxes, even like employer, an employer box. I don’t know I look at an employer box and it says something pops up at me. It said something to me the other day and I thought where is this thing they are saying I should look at. I don’t know what it is. You know and half a day’s training within LMS there is so much information on LMS they could put on there that you could use and you just don’t know how to you know. I know that that green marker comes up for disadvantaged group but I don’t know how to use it.’

(New Deal adviser, District A)

3.4.7 Sensitivity associated with disadvantage

Although the sensitivity of the subject matter did affect how advisers used the markers (especially in the case of mainstream advisers), for example, whether they broached the issue of disadvantage or whether they adhered to all the procedural requirements linked to the markers, it was not found to have a pronounced impact. Advisers suggested that, broadly, they accepted discussing disadvantage was part of their job and generally felt comfortable raising and discussing these issues providing they had time. These views are substantiated by the idea that advisers discussed issues of disadvantage even where they were not setting the markers.

‘I have to do the diagnostics regardless to get into the interview really, I mean I might only be an adviser but I do put a lot of effort into it and getting people into maybe training or jobs that they really want rather than something that they don’t want.’

(New claims adviser, District C)

Nevertheless, there were examples of advisers who found using the markers difficult as a result of the sensitivities and as a result found it easier to record the information in the notes pages or put off recording the information believing it would be picked up later in the claim, for example, at New Deal or once rapport had been developed.
The sensitivity of an issue was said to be more likely to impact on the customers’ behaviour, for example, how likely or happy they would be to divulge a disadvantage. Customer acceptance of placing markers is outlined in the following section.

### 3.4.8 Customers’ acceptance of the marker

Although rare, refusal by the customer to have the marker set was identified as a reason for not using the markers by both advisers and customers. It was clear that agreement to have the markers set was linked to three issues: the perceived relevance of information to their job search; the level of trust the customer had in the adviser; and how confidential they considered the information recorded on LMS to be.

In cases where advisers were viewed as trustworthy, customers suggested they were more likely to agree to have sensitive information recorded on their file, either as they assumed it would be for a good reason or because they believed the reasons given by the adviser.

> ‘Absolutely, I would trust my adviser. They are not going to stop me from getting a job by saying something detrimental to a prospective employer. Well at least I wouldn’t have thought they would. At the end of the day they would just be cutting off their own noses to spite their faces, there would be no point in that….and [my adviser] has always been very good with me. If I have had questions he has always been there to answer them for me…. He knows what I am looking for. He knows me by name as soon as I walk in.’

(Customer, alcohol use, District A)

The confidentiality of the data was also of paramount importance to customers. Customers needed to know the information would not be passed on, especially to employers, as they were concerned this would negatively impact on their job prospects. This was felt to be especially important for the drug and alcohol misuse markers.

> ‘I wouldn’t say they are more wary, it is just you get the ones that just don’t trust the system, they think that the information would get to an employer.’

(New claims adviser, District C)

### 3.4.9 Job Outcome Targets

The link between Job Outcome Targets (JOT) and Disadvantage Markers was explored as part of the research, in order to observe how far JOT affected use of the markers in the jobcentre.

Overall, JOT was found to have very limited impact on behaviour regarding the
markers. Importantly, awareness of the link between JOT and the markers was extremely minimal, which meant advisers had not identified this as a potential reason for setting the markers. However, even once this relationship was explained by the researcher, advisers were quite categorical that JOT would not impact on behaviour. Reasons for this linked to the mechanics of JOT and in particular, the fact JOT was a jobcentre, rather than individual-based target and therefore, was not found to be individually motivating. Adviser views regarding the impact of JOT were summed up by one adviser who stated: ‘I couldn’t give a jot about JOT’.
4 Views on Disadvantage Markers

This chapter considers adviser and customer views on the Disadvantage Markers. It includes a consideration of how advisers and customers believe the markers are working in practice and also explores views of the markers in principle. Views were found to be linked to perceptions of the impact of the markers, specifically, how they were thought to impact on customers, advisers and on Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus policy more widely.

Key points

- Adviser views on the effectiveness of the markers varied by type of marker, with the lone parent, disability and lowest qualified markers broadly seen as working well. In contrast, views regarding the Disadvantage Group marker and in some instances, the refugee markers were more mixed.

- Adviser views focused on: the accuracy of the data collected via the markers; the ability of advisers to effectively handle customers’ problems; and the resources available to Jobcentre Plus to manage disadvantage.

- Overwhelmingly, customers suggested they were happy to discuss disadvantages with advisers, as although ‘embarrassing’, customers understood advisers required this information to assist and support them in their search for employment.

- In certain cases, customers explained how divulging and discussing these issues had resulted in them receiving additional support for their disadvantage.

- Customers were generally happy to have their disadvantage recorded on the Labour Market System (LMS), as they recognised it could help tailor support and prevent these issues for being repeatedly discussed throughout the life of their claim.
Adviser views on the principle of using markers to record disadvantage were mixed and focused on the ability of markers to help and support customers, advisers and DWP more widely. The types of issues considered included: assisting customers and targeting support; recording information on LMS; the impact on DWP and Jobcentre Plus policy; and stigmatising customers.

4.1 Advisers’ views on use of the markers

As part of the discussion advisers were asked to consider how well they believed the markers were currently working. Views on this varied by type of marker, with the lone parent, disability and lowest qualified markers broadly seen as working well. In contrast, views regarding the Disadvantage Group marker and, in some instances, the refugee markers were more mixed and they related to a range of issues, including:

- Views on the accuracy of the data collected via the markers – Advisers understood there were a wide range of factors impacting on use and non-use of markers and that this potentially led to inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the way in which markers were used.

  The issues of inaccuracies and inconsistencies were raised by both advisers who were aware they were not always following the procedures and also by those who believed they were. Examples given by advisers of not following procedures included, closing down a prompted marker without discussing the issue by marking it as ‘prefer not to say’ and completing the ethnicity box without discussing it with the customer. Advisers who believed they were following procedures often expressed doubt over colleagues’ use of the markers and queried how far they were adhering to the processes or how accurately they were recording information. For instance, one adviser described how they had to change markers as they were incorrect: ‘I have changed markers sometimes because they are marked incorrectly’. It should be noted that this was more pronounced in the district exhibiting the most inconsistent usage.

  As a result of the perceived inaccuracies and inconsistencies, advisers suggested they did not necessarily ‘trust’ the information recorded on the LMS (or lack of it) and instead chose to follow up these issues again with customers if they suspected a need. In this way, rather than provide advisers with information to help tailor support to the customer and thus, save time for the adviser, the processes were being repeated. For example, one adviser explained how just because markers were set, they would not necessarily accept that the disadvantage had been discussed and agreed.
‘Like, I wouldn’t always know, if they come to me and they’ve already got drugs marked, I wouldn’t always know what went on in the conversation then. It could be just some, one of the advisers thinking I can smell alcohol on his breath … I wouldn’t know how they’d gleaned that information from them then … I would just look at them myself and just sort it out from there then.’

(Mainstream adviser, District D)

- **Ability to effectively handle customers’ problems** – In some instances, the markers were criticised for the additional pressure they were thought to place on advisers in terms of dealing with customers’ personal problems. The markers were said to open up quite sensitive avenues of discussion which advisers did not always believe they were fully equipped to deal with. Examples included discussing the reasons behind drug and alcohol problems; types of criminal offences committed; or housing problems. Although advisers acknowledged this was part of their role and were generally happy to raise issues of disadvantage, they did not always believe they were the best placed to deal with these issues as ultimately they were trained in job search, rather than counselling; and

  ‘The main complaint is the principle of obtaining the information because we are not counsellors and we are not trained to deal [with personal problems]. Although we are trained in providing guidance in our services (obtaining this information can sometimes open up other avenues of discussion that you don’t want to get involved in or you are not trained to get involved in) [the discussion] can invoke a reaction off the customer that is not very nice, you know, some customers can be argumentative and aggressive with us during the interview.’

  (New claims adviser, District C)

- **Views on the resources available to Jobcentre Plus to manage disadvantage** – Advisers did not always believe there were sufficient resources available to them via the jobcentre to provide the level of support and provision required by customers experiencing these problems. Not only was this seen as undermining the support advisers could provide, but advisers’ felt if after raising customers’ expectations they were unable to deliver, this could have a negative impact on the customer-adviser relationship. Exceptionally, advisers argued that either Jobcentre Plus needed to focus resources on these issues, or accept that these were beyond the scope of the jobcentre.

### 4.2 Customers’ views of Disadvantage Markers

As part of the study, customers were asked to consider how they felt about discussing issues of disadvantage with jobcentre advisers and having these issues recorded on the LMS. These views are outlined overleaf:
4.2.1 Views on discussing disadvantage

Overwhelmingly, customers suggested that they were happy to discuss disadvantages with advisers. Although this was often described as ‘embarrassing’, customers understood that advisers were there to assist and support them and would need to be aware of this information if they were to help them find employment. There was also a sense that if you wanted to receive benefit, you had to expect these types of questions would be asked.

‘They have got a right to know certain things. People can’t just come down here and expect money without working and not be prepared to give some information away … I suppose it’s fair enough yes. If you don’t like it don’t claim the dole and go and get a job, simple isn’t it.’

(Ex-offender, District B)

In certain cases, customers explained how divulging and discussing these issues had resulted in them actually receiving additional support. For example, a homeless customer said they had been supported in finding accommodation and a drug user had been referred to ‘Working Links’ where they had been helped to overcome their drug problems.

For the most part, customers said they were happy to be asked about a disadvantage directly, providing the information gathered was deemed relevant to their job search and providing it was then used by the advisers to help support them in some way. Ultimately, customers wanted to know that this information was being used in a practical way, rather than simply being stored on the computer system. These views extended to the more sensitive areas of disadvantage, including discussions about drug and alcohol misuse and providing these were handled sensitively, which customers suggested they were, they were happy to discuss these.

However, where customers did not see their disadvantage as being relevant to their job search or saw it as a personal issue, beyond the remit and business of the jobcentre, they were less positive and indeed willing to discuss these issues. This was not isolated to the Disadvantage Group marker; rather, it extended to all the markers, including lone parent, disability and lowest qualified.

‘I just, it’s like none of their business is it? That’s like, that’s [drug and alcohol] too private really isn’t it? Asking if you’ve got a drug problem, you know, a drug problem or an alcoholic … If you want to get help then you go to a rehab don’t you, you don’t go to the jobcentre to tell them that … Not really, it’s just, I don’t know, I just feel they don’t need to know everything about you, only where you live, your details and what job you want, that’s all they need to know really. Not every little thing.’

(Customer, drug and alcohol, District A)

4.2.2 Views on recording disadvantage

Customers were generally happy to have their disadvantage recorded on LMS, as they recognised the fact that not only could it help to tailor support, but it
should also prevent them from having to repeatedly discuss issues of disadvantage throughout the life of their claim, which they found embarrassing.

However, customers’ views of the acceptability of the record were on the condition that customers were offered a choice to decide whether the marker was set; and that the marker was removed when the issue was no longer relevant. Choice and accuracy were deemed important in order to ensure that incorrect information was not placed on a customer’s record.

Notwithstanding this, more exceptionally customers were suspicious that advisers could have an ulterior motive to recording disadvantage, for example, meeting targets.

4.3 Views on the principle of the markers

Advisers’ views on the principle of using markers to record disadvantage (if working effectively) were explored and views were found to cluster around a range of key issues:

- **Assisting customers and targeting support** – Broadly, advisers were able to identify the positive benefits of the markers (despite the time burden) in that they had the potential to identify disadvantage and help customers into work through tailored support. It was thought that if used correctly, markers could aid discussions between advisers and customers and help to prompt lines of questioning relating to barriers to work. Specifically, advisers viewed the markers as a means to help the ‘hardest to help’ into employment and felt that, in the long run, the markers should be able to do this by identifying relevant support avenues.

- **Recording information on LMS** – Advisers recognised that recording information on LMS could be useful, in that it should save time across the life of a claim and prevent repetitive discussions taking place. However, as the information was currently seen as being unreliable, advisers were not using the markers in this way.

Despite acknowledging the benefits, advisers did express some concern over the amount of personal data being collected on customers by the jobcentre, especially, in relation to sensitive disadvantages, such as those helped under the Disadvantage Group marker. Moreover, they felt it made light and over-simplified these issues, by simply marking them with a ‘tick in a box’.

- **Impact on DWP and Jobcentre Plus policy** – In principle, advisers felt that the markers could help to inform policy decisions regarding unemployment patterns and as a result, help customers and advisers. This long-term gain was felt to be positive because it would help to overcome problems related to the level of support available for advisers to offer and customers to receive.
- **Stigmatising customers** – Advisers expressed some concern about the potential for the markers to label and stigmatise customers. Specifically, they questioned use of the term ‘Disadvantage Marker’ as it was felt this had the potential to pigeonhole customers as difficult to help (when this was not always the case) and as a consequence, negatively impact on advisers’ willingness to assist customers. For example, it was suggested that an adviser might consider the data collected on the system and make judgements about the customer prior to meeting them and as a result approach the interview differently.

  ‘I don’t like markers. I don’t mind them for certain people, like the disability and lone parent, these are obvious things, but sometimes, like I said, for the ex-offenders I don’t like them, I don’t like stigmatising people … As I said earlier, other people look at it and think oh, he’s a waste of space, but the person could have been in for not paying a fine, for a road traffic offence, and not paying their fines – a lot of them don’t pay their fines for different things they get, and they’re not a waste of space, they’re just young people and that’s going to live with them forever, all the way through the life of their claim.’

  (New Deal adviser, District, E)
5 Conclusions

This final chapter of the report outlines the key conclusions in relation to the main aims of the research and also details suggestions for change as highlighted by respondents. Following a summary of the key findings, it considers key reasons for under-utilisation, inconsistency and inaccuracy in the use of the markers; and finally, the implication of the findings for the Disadvantage Markers is discussed.

5.1 Summary of key findings

5.1.1 Awareness and knowledge of Disadvantage Markers

Importantly, when advisers were asked during the interview to spontaneously outline their awareness and knowledge of the Disadvantage Markers, it became clear that Disadvantage Markers were not usually viewed as a tangible set. Once explained there was found to be a general awareness among advisers of the existence of the Disadvantage Markers. However, awareness and knowledge was not comprehensive and differed in terms of both what and how much advisers knew.

Established markers with related programmes of support such as, the lone parent or disability markers were widely recognised and considered easy to understand. In contrast, awareness and knowledge of the more recently introduced Disadvantage Group marker, which encompassed markers for homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse and ex-offending, was more limited even when prompted.

It was clear that patterns of awareness and knowledge were very much linked to districts and a clear hierarchy of understanding could be identified. Levels of awareness and knowledge were variable and ranged from one area where knowledge was widespread and comprehensive, through to another area where knowledge was comparatively low. Variations in awareness and knowledge were also noted between Jobcentre Plus offices within each district and differences were thought to relate to the knowledge of individual advisers. Factors underpinning variation in adviser knowledge included:

- levels of adviser pro-activity;
- the degree of training and guidance received by Jobcentre Plus; and
- the experience and background of advisers, for example, whether they had experience of the jobcentre, the Benefits Agency or non-Civil Service positions.
The nature and depth of the knowledge exhibited by advisers in cases where they had heard of the markers was mixed. Advisers generally felt confident about their knowledge and understanding of the processes involved in setting established markers, such as the lone parent and disability markers. Knowledge and understanding were attributed to the fact these disadvantages had jobcentre programmes attached to them and as a consequence of this, more emphasis had been placed on the marker in the jobcentre, with advisers often suggesting they had received considerable training and guidance in relation to these disadvantages and setting this information correctly on LMS.

Knowledge and understanding of the processes involved in setting the more recently introduced markers, such as the Disadvantage Group marker, were much less pronounced, especially among advisers with more limited awareness of the markers overall. Advisers suggested they lacked knowledge on a number of specific aspects of the process, including:

- in what circumstances and at what point the marker should be set. There was found to be a lack of clarity regarding the criteria required to place a marker. Advisers demonstrated very little knowledge of any official definitions of the range of disadvantages covered by the markers. Notwithstanding this, ease of defining disadvantage was said to vary according to the type of marker; and

- data protection procedures relating to this, such as asking permission to set the marker, completing the DPA1 form and the length of time that markers remained on the Labour Market System (LMS). Awareness and knowledge of the data protection procedures related to the Disadvantage Group marker were mixed and knowledge tended to be clustered within two of the five Jobcentre Plus districts taking part in the study. Advisers in other districts either felt unsure about data protection procedures or they demonstrated very limited understanding. Knowledge of the need for customers to volunteer information was more widely understood across districts, although this was not comprehensive. In contrast, awareness of the DPA1 form was limited and with the exception of one district, advisers tended to be unfamiliar with this.

It was clear that prior to the research interview the purpose of setting the markers had not usually been considered by advisers and when probed on, explanations tended to be speculative and confused. Assumed reasons for using the markers included: to provide DWP with statistics on disadvantage; to tailor customer support; and to assist the adviser in their task.

Advisers gathered information about Disadvantage Markers from a range of sources, both formal and informal, these included: formal training; information provided by management; and open, ad hoc learning. Spontaneous awareness of guidance notes was minimal and even where prompted (using a copy of drug and alcohol, ex-offender, ethnicity, and refugee status guidance), advisers were usually uncertain about whether or not they had seen the guidance previously.
Perhaps unsurprisingly, customers’ awareness of Disadvantage Markers was limited. Customers were also often unable to recall whether information regarding these barriers to work had been recorded on LMS during the interview. Customers did not generally have a clear understanding of the purpose of the markers.

5.1.2 Experience of using the markers

Use of Disadvantage Markers was very much linked to understanding and therefore, patterns of use tended to reflect those outlined for awareness and knowledge. Variation in use could, therefore, be found according to type of marker and differences were also visible within and between districts. Use of the markers by type, could be seen as flowing on a continuum between high and low use and this is demonstrated in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Use of the markers, by type

In addition to variation by type of marker and district, use of the markers was also found to be related to the type of jobcentre adviser, for instance, between Mainstream and New Deal, with advisers often expressing confusion regarding at what stage in the claim the markers should be set and therefore, what type of adviser should take responsibility for this task.

Established markers, including the lone parent or disability markers were found to be widely used, as was the refugee marker. Use of the refugee marker was thought to be widespread as a result of the link between this and the ethnicity marker and as a result of the automatic prompt on LMS. Use of the Disadvantage Group marker was more limited and patterns of use were attributed to a range of factors, including a:

- general lack of awareness of the markers;
- lack of knowledge regarding the location of the markers on LMS;
- lack of knowledge regarding the procedures for setting the markers;
- lack of emphasis from management on the marker; and
- refusal by the customer to have the marker set on LMS.
It is also possible that the general sensitivity of the Disadvantage Group Marker (in comparison to the less contentious markers, such as lone parent marker), contributed to patterns of use, although it should be noted that overwhelmingly advisers suggested they felt comfortable discussing sensitive issues and accepted this was part of their role. Even where markers were not said to have been set, advisers were clear that issues of disadvantage were still being discussed with customers and that this information was being recorded elsewhere on LMS in notes pages or conversation boxes.

Advisers expressed a clear understanding that multiple markers could be set on LMS and were confident that where required, multiple markers would be set.

Where advisers used the Disadvantage Group markers, adherence to data protection procedures varied across three elements of the procedure, including whether the adviser: allowed the customer to identify the disadvantage; asked the customer’s permission to set the marker; and used the DPA1 form. Generally, where the Disadvantage Group marker was used, advisers were allowing customers to raise the issue of disadvantage spontaneously. Advisers were, however, often unaware they were required to ask permission from the customer before setting the marker and as a consequence, they were not usually carrying out this procedure. Use of the DPA1 form was extremely limited with the exception of one district where it was being used by all the advisers included in the study.

Variations in approach to discussing disadvantage were evident and differed according to: the type of disadvantage; the personal style of the adviser; the perceived likely reaction of the customer; and practical issues, such as the time available. A range of approaches were used by advisers to assist in the discussion of disadvantage, including:

• the use of questions to encourage conversation;
• the use of a visual aid listing disadvantages;
• providing information on support and provision available via the jobcentre; and
• asking direct questions.

Customers’ experiences of discussing disadvantage broadly aligned with that outlined by advisers. Customers recalled being asked directly about disadvantage; being shown a list or questionnaire; and offering information freely.

In instances where advisers were engaging customers in the process of setting the marker, the style adopted tended to be rather informal and relaxed so as not to cause the customer any concern.

Key factors underpinning patterns of use

Importantly, the key factors underpinning use were found to work together and reciprocally impact on one another, these included:
• awareness, knowledge and experience of the markers;
• training and guidance on the markers;
• district and jobcentre emphasis on the markers;
• understanding of the value and purpose of the markers;
• practical constraints, such as interview length;
• ability to use the LMS;
• sensitivities around asking questions; and
• acceptance of the marker by customers.

Overall, Job Outcome Targets (JOT) were found to have very limited impact on behaviour regarding the markers. Importantly, awareness and knowledge regarding any link between JOT and the markers was minimal, which meant JOT did not impact on adviser behaviour. Furthermore, when probed on the use of JOT per se, advisers tended to be very negative suggesting that the structure of JOT, which they perceived as focusing on group rather than individual targets, meant JOT was not influencing behaviour.

5.1.3 Views on Disadvantage Markers

Advisers’ views on the markers varied by type of marker, with the lone parent, disability and lowest qualified markers broadly seen as working well. In contrast, views regarding the Disadvantage Group marker and in some instances, the refugee markers were more mixed. Adviser views were influenced by perceptions of: the accuracy of the data collected via the markers; the ability of advisers to effectively handle customers’ problems; and the resources available to manage disadvantage. More exceptionally, advisers questioned whether managing disadvantage of this nature should fall within the remit of Jobcentre Plus or whether it was overstepping its remit.

Overwhelmingly, customers suggested they were happy to discuss disadvantage with advisers. Although this was often described as ‘embarrassing’, customers understood that advisers were there to assist and support them and would need to be aware of this type of information if they were going to help them secure employment. In certain cases, customers explained how divulging and discussing these issues had resulted in them actually receiving additional support. For the most part, customers said they were happy to be asked about a disadvantage directly, providing the information gathered was deemed relevant to their job search and providing it was then taken forward and used by the advisers to help support them in some way.

Customers were also generally happy to have their disadvantage recorded on LMS, as they recognised it could help tailor support and prevent these issues being repeatedly discussed throughout the life of their claim, which they favoured.
Adviser views on the principle of using markers to record disadvantage were mixed and focused on the ability of markers to help and support customers, advisers and DWP more widely. The types of issues considered included: assisting customers and targeting support; recording information on LMS; the impact on DWP and Jobcentre Plus policy; and stigmatising customers.

Clearly, perceptions regarding how relevant and actionable the markers were underpinned attitudes towards the markers for both customers and advisers.

5.2 Consideration of key research questions

5.2.1 Reasons for under-utilisation and inconsistency of the use of markers

Clearly, the research findings demonstrated that Disadvantage Markers were not being used consistently across the board and that real variation could be identified regarding both what and how markers were being utilised. Patterns of use were extremely variable overall, with inconsistencies evident within and between districts, as well as between advisers, including types of advisers, such as Mainstream or New Deal. Notwithstanding this, the markers were found to be more widely utilised in two districts and processes adhered to thoroughly in one.

Utilisation and consistency of use was clearly affected by the type of marker, with certain markers being used much more comprehensively than others. The more established markers such as the lone parent and disability marker were said to be more widely used, as was the refugee marker (as a consequence of the prompt on LMS and its link to ethnicity). In contrast to this, use of the Disadvantage Group marker, which encompassed markers for homelessness, ex-drug and alcohol misuse and ex-offending, was used less broadly and less consistently overall.

Patterns of use were very much seen as linked to awareness and knowledge, with advisers exhibiting much greater awareness and understanding of the established markers compared to the Disadvantage Group marker. Specifically, this was said to relate to a:

- general lack of awareness of the markers;
- lack of knowledge regarding the location of the markers on LMS;
- lack of understanding regarding who and at what stage the markers should be set; and
- lack of knowledge regarding the procedures for setting the markers, including, requiring customers to raise the issue of disadvantage, agreeing to have the markers set and signing the DPA1 form.

Lack of awareness and knowledge can be directly linked to levels of training and guidance and the emphasis placed on the markers in jobcentres. Providing training and guidance and emphasising the markers not only impacted by raising
awareness and understanding of the mechanics of using the markers but also by promoting the value of using them. Essentially, where this had occurred, it gave the markers credence and put them on the agenda. This form of communication was seen as being especially important, given the difficulties experienced by advisers when using guidance and the problems that ensued from ad hoc open learning, for example, advisers passing on incorrect information. In addition to this, the individual proactivity of the adviser, previous experience and demography of the local jobcentre also impacted on levels of awareness and knowledge.

Besides a lack of awareness and knowledge, a number of other barriers to use were evident and these included:

- practical barriers, such as time factors, managing other responsibilities, managing other initiatives and the ability to use LMS, including being able to locate the markers on the system. Practical issues played a part in patterns of use, especially in the case of mainstream advisers, who it was thought generally (once they had set up the claim) had less time to spend discussing barriers to work with customers. LMS was identified as being a wider problem, one that impacted on advisers across Jobcentre Plus, especially less experienced advisers. Difficulties using LMS in relation to the markers were noted and this was seen as a result of a lack of training on using the system more widely;

- the perceived lack of resources to assist customers once a disadvantage has been identified, including the availability of provision. Importantly, lack of resources, particularly the availability of provision to deal with these issues, did impact on behaviour, as advisers were reluctant to raise issues of this nature if they did not think they would be able to follow this through and provide support to the customer;

- refusal by customers to acknowledge or record the disadvantage. Although customers were usually happy to disclose and discuss disadvantage, there were examples of customers refusing to do so; and

- the sensitivities associated with discussing disadvantage and certain procedures, such as the DPA1, act as a barrier and undermine relationships. The sensitivity of the subject matter contributed to the under-utilisation and consistency of the Disadvantage Group markers. Certainly, it made it more difficult for advisers to broach issues; get them out in the open; and deal with them efficiently, especially earlier on in the life of a claim. However, it is important to note, that the sensitivity of the subject matter was not perceived to provide a complete barrier and it was certainly not a primary influencing factor underpinning use. In contrast, advisers usually suggested they felt confident about raising these issues and in practice did so regularly as part of their job, regardless of whether or not the markers were set.

Not only were a number of barriers noted to using the markers but importantly, very few factors were identified as motivating behaviour and encouraging use. For example, the lack of emphasis placed on the markers in the jobcentre not
only failed to make advisers aware of the markers but also failed to motivate use. Lack of understanding regarding the purpose of the markers also impacted, as without understanding and buying into the value of the markers, advisers were unenthusiastic about their use. Furthermore, advisers’ general negative attitude towards JOT meant it was not acting to motivate behaviour.

In terms of the use of multiple markers, it was clear that advisers were aware of the possibility of setting more than one marker and indeed, believed they did this where required. Although this is somewhat conflicting, under-utilisation and inconsistency were generally attributed to low awareness and knowledge and therefore, it is likely these extended to use of multiple markers.

### 5.2.2 Reasons for inaccuracy of use

As discussed, markers were clearly being under-utilised and inconsistently used but in addition to this, the research also raised questions in relation to the accuracy of use. Inaccuracies related to the type and quality of the data input on the system regarding the disadvantage, but also to adherence to the data protection processes linked to the Disadvantage Group marker, specifically, issues of allowing the customer to raise disadvantage; involving the customers in setting the marker; and completing the DPA1 form, all of which were found to have been conducted inconsistently and inaccurately across the board, with the exception of one district.

Examples of advisers not using the markers accurately included:

- use of the disability marker to record issues of drug and alcohol misuse;
- the ethnicity and refugee marker not being set;
- completing the ethnicity marker, without discussing the issue with the customer; and
- recording disadvantage in notes pages or conversation boxes, rather than setting a marker.

Importantly, advisers were not intentionally flouting policy in these cases; rather, they simply lacked awareness and knowledge of how to set the markers and the data protection processes associated with this. Lack of understanding (driven by lack of training and guidance) is seen as a key factor underpinning issues of accuracy. However, as with under-utilisation and inconsistency, other factors were also thought to be at play; for example, practical constraints such as advisers’ time and problems with the LMS.

Adviser perceptions of inaccuracy were seen as being as important as the reality of inaccuracy, as this affected how advisers viewed the markers and how they used them. Importantly, certain advisers (primarily those who used the markers) expressed concern over their colleagues’ use of the markers and they raised doubts about how accurately the markers were being used. As a result of this, trust in the markers was undermined and as a consequence, rather than assume
information recorded on the system (or lack of it) was accurate, they supposed it was not and gathered the data themselves to be certain. As a result of this, rather than helping advisers in their task of preparing for interviews, saving time and resources and preventing customers from having to repeat issues of disadvantage, the markers were being of more limited benefit. It should be noted that this was more pronounced in districts showing inconsistent patterns of use.

5.3 Suggestions for change

As part of the research, respondents, including advisers and DWP head office staff, were asked to make suggestions regarding how the markers could be improved. Suggestions primarily related to raising awareness and knowledge of the markers and dealing with practical constraints and these are discussed below.

5.3.1 Raising awareness and knowledge

With regards to increasing levels of awareness and knowledge, it was suggested that advisers needed to be made more aware of the markers and processes involved with these, such as defining disadvantage and setting the markers.

It was suggested that the purpose and value of the markers needed to be clearly and consistently communicated to advisers across districts. It was felt this could be achieved in a number of ways, including:

• increasing the focus placed on the markers in the districts, making them a local ‘hot topic’ within the jobcentre;

• offering feedback to each district on the statistics taken from their area in relation to the markers, to help get staff involved and interested in the data; and

• providing clear and comprehensive training or guidance on the types of markers in use and how to use these.

5.3.2 Dealing with practical constraints

Participants also highlighted suggestions for change relating to practical issues, these included:

• increasing interview times – Extending customer interviews was suggested by advisers, in cases where a disadvantage was known or suspected, for example, in cases where customers were referred through Freshstart or refugees with ESOL needs. It was felt extending interview times would be especially useful for interviews taking place earlier in the life of a claim. However, queries were raised regarding the appropriateness of employing this form of positive discrimination, as it was not deemed to be fair on other customers. Moreover, the resource implications of doing this were also questioned; and
• improving systems – In particular it was felt use of markers could be improved by making them easier to locate on LMS and by including more prompts and compulsory fields.

5.4 Implication of findings for DWP: can the markers be made to work?

Based on the findings it is clear that patterns of use are not intrinsically tied up with the sensitivity of the subject matter and that with changes, use of the markers could be improved significantly. Certainly, the effective use of the markers demonstrated in one district, suggests that markers could be improved elsewhere if other districts were to employ a similar strategy. However, addressing the full range of issues raised in the research would perhaps be more difficult given that they often extend beyond the markers to wider issues within Jobcentre Plus, such as training, guidance, use of LMS and availability of support services and provision, which is perhaps beyond the remit of this research study.

It is clear that in order to improve use of the markers it would be necessary to tackle both barriers to use and issues of motivation. A range of key factors could be considered to assist in tackling under-utilisation, inconsistency and inaccuracy and these very much link to raising levels of awareness and knowledge. Crucially, in areas where the markers were being used and procedures were being adhered to, the issues outlined below were usually being followed. These include:

• increasing knowledge regarding the full range of markers via formal training or guidance, focusing on how the markers are defined, where they are located, how they should be communicated and data protection procedures that accompany these, such as the DPA1 form. Importantly, informal ad hoc learning can be seen as perpetuating inconsistent and inaccurate patterns of use;

• emphasising the importance of the markers at district and Jobcentre level. As a result of the plethora of other initiatives operating at any given time, advisers look to management to highlight initiatives of importance and advisers focused on these. For example, use of the Action Planner was said to have been emphasised by management and therefore, New Deal advisers were very much focusing on this;

• clearly communicating the purpose of the markers and stressing the importance and usefulness of them in order to encourage a more consistent application. Given the view expressed by both advisers and customers that markers and discussions of disadvantage need to be relevant and actionable, it is important to show how the markers could be of use to customers. Certainly, the effective use of the ‘established markers’ with clear programmes of support, suggested that the Disadvantage Group markers could be improved if they had similar

5 Use of a prompt for the Disadvantage Group Marker was opposed by legal advisers as it was felt to be against principles of self-declaration.
benefits. Clarifying these benefits to advisers, could also help advisers pass these messages on to customers, thus, helping them broach and sell the markers. Demonstrating the potential usefulness of the markers to advisers in carrying out their role, should also be highlighted; and

- addressing practical considerations noted by advisers, in relation to how to use the markers on LMS and how to locate and use guidance relating to this. Certainly, this would involve making it easier to identify the Disadvantage Group marker, for example, by locating the marker in a more easily accessible position or introducing a prompt in the same way as the refugee marker\(^6\). As previously mentioned, advisers ability to effectively use the LMS was identified as a problem extending beyond the use of the markers and it was felt that across the board, advisers would benefit from further training on the LMS.

\(^6\) Use of a prompt for the Disadvantage Group Marker was opposed by legal advisers as it was felt to be against principles of self-declaration.
Appendix A
Technical appendix

A brief outline of the research design and conduct is given in Chapter 1. This appendix provides further details of the research methods used in this study.

A.1 Research design

The research was qualitative in design and comprised three stages overall: a developmental study; a mainstage of research with advisers and disadvantaged customers; and a reflection study. Adopting a multi-staged and iterative approach to the research design allowed the research to:

• re-assess and amend the design and approach at each stage of the process in order to make best use of the research and take account of learning from each stage;

• assist in the development of research tools, including the topic guides and profiles or vignettes;

• enable respondents groups, to reflect on findings imparted by other participants and offer suggestions and solutions to any problems identified; and

• produce more rounded and complete understanding of the issues, considered from the viewpoint of a range of those people involved in the process, including staff and customers.

A range of data collection techniques were used, including: group discussions, workshops, face-to-face in-depth interviews and telephone depth interviews. A qualitative approach to the research enabled respondents to raise issues of importance in their own words and vocabulary, in the context of their own circumstance and, with probing by the moderator, ensured issues were explored and examined in full. As qualitative methods permit researchers to adapt their approach during the sessions, they are able to be sensitive to the needs and circumstances of the people taking part.
The three stages of research are outlined in detail below:

**Stage one: developmental research**

Prior to conducting the mainstage research a developmental study was conducted with stakeholders and advisers.

- **Stakeholder research** – Research was carried out with key stakeholders from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) head office and Jobcentre Plus in September 2006 ahead of the mainstage research, in order to gather contextual information regarding set-up, application and principles behind the markers. This stage included individuals responsible for using the data created by the markers and those responsible for setting targets. The research included two focus groups and three telephone depths, lasting an hour and a half and 45 minutes respectively.

- **Adviser workshops** – Two 90 minute mini workshops were conducted with Jobcentre Plus advisers in October 2006. The workshops aimed to gather contextual information but also aimed to develop and test out materials to be used as part of the study. General thoughts on the Disadvantage Markers were also gathered, to provide contextual information and to help inform the topic guides.

**Stage two: Mainstage research**

The main stage of the research sought to build on the research conducted in stage one. The main stage of research included two parts: research with Jobcentre Plus advisers and research with disadvantaged customers. The research was carried out between November and December 2006.

- **Research with advisers** – In total 36 depth interviews were conducted with Jobcentre Plus staff operating across five Jobcentre Plus districts, with seven interviews taking place in each district. Specifically, the sample consisted of 30 face-to-face depth interviews with a mix of mainstream and new deal advisers each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes and six telephone depths, five with district mangers and one with a Contact Centre adviser. Each interview lasted between 20 and 40 minutes.

  The adviser sample was designed to include a mix of advisers, including both Mainstream and New Deal. However, final selection was chosen by a designated gatekeeper operating in each office and they were asked to provide a spread of the full range of advisers using the markers. The sample profile is outlined below.

- **Research with customers** – Face-to-face depth interviews were conducted with 53 disadvantaged customers across five districts. The types of disadvantaged customers interviewed included: the homeless; ex-offenders; drug or alcohol misusers and refugees. In addition to this, five interviews were conducted with ‘other’ disadvantaged customers, including lone parents, customers with disabilities, black and minority ethnic (BME) customers and those with the lowest qualifications.
Stage three: reflection research

The final stage of this research was reflective in nature and included revisits to key stakeholders from DWP head office and Jobcentre Plus. The purpose of the revisits was to feed back some of the key findings from stage two and to explore reactions to these findings and possible reasons for them.

In total, eight interviews were conducted and these took place in February and March 2007.

A.2 Sample design and selection

As is usual in qualitative research, the sample was designed to ensure full coverage of the key sub-groups within the target population, in order to identify and explain variations in views and experiences between them. Purposive sampling is designed to ensure coverage of key sub-groups within the target population so that variations in experience between groups may be explored.

The recruitment was managed by the BMRB Qualitative Research field team who used a network of specialist recruiters to select the respondent sample. The field managers were fully briefed on the project and provided with detailed recruitment instructions.

Prior to the commencement of the recruitment, the Department wrote to regional managers/field directors to obtain consent for research to be undertaken in their area. Following this agreement a contact list from which we could recruit Jobcentre Plus staff was received.

In terms of the head office and data analysts, a named list of contact details of appropriate staff was provided by DWP. In the case of advisers, district contacts acted as gatekeepers to the relevant advisers on the ground in the jobcentre. The gatekeepers were given the option to organise the interviews or provide BMRB with a list of advisers from which we drew our sample. They chose to use the former method.

The customer sample was identified through a number of organisations (national or local) that focused specifically on supporting disadvantaged customers, such as Action for Employment and Working Links. Jobcentre contacts provided information on a range of local and national providers they used to support customers and this was the primary route for identifying sample. Staff at the provider organisations were contacted and asked if they would be happy to assist in the recruitment. Once agreed, they identified and approached a selection of customers who they perceived to be disadvantaged and following this, gained their consent to be interviewed. The interviews were all arranged via the providers.

All respondents were recruited using a mix of face-to-face and telephone recruitment. All recruiters are members of the IQCS (Interviewers Quality Control Scheme).
A.3 Conduct of the fieldwork

The workshops, group discussions, interviews and telephone depths were moderated by a team of six experienced qualitative researchers who have extensive experience of carrying out qualitative research and who have been trained in the techniques of non-directive interviewing.

All the fieldwork was exploratory and interactive in form so that questioning could be responsive to the experiences and circumstances of the individuals involved. Interviews for each stage were guided by a topic guide developed by BMRB, in close liaison with the DWP. Although topic guides ensure systematic coverage of key points across interviews, they were used flexibly to allow issues of relevance to respondents to be covered through detailed follow up questioning.

The wording of the questions and the conduct of interviews were designed to be appropriate to the needs and circumstances of the people being interviewed. All members of the research team took part in a briefing to ensure the interviewing approach was consistent across the sessions.

Alongside the topic guide and standard interview techniques, we also used disadvantage customer profiles (developed during the workshop) and associated pen portraits to explore adviser approaches to dealing with disadvantaged customers in a more grounded and contextualised way. The profiles were intended for use in conjunction with the experience section of the topic guide to help jog the adviser’s memory on how they deal with particular types of customers and they were also used if the adviser lacked experience of a particular type of disadvantaged customer in order to stimulate discussion. These profiles are outlined below.

Adopting a qualitative approach has made it possible to report on the range of views, experiences and suggestions reported by advisers, customers and providers. The purposive nature of the sample design as well as the sample size, however, means that the study cannot provide any statistical data relating to the prevalence of these views, experiences or suggestions.

The interviews with advisers were held at their jobcentre in a private office and customer interviews were carried at the provider centre in a quiet room. All the interview sessions were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim; participants were notified of this at the time of their recruitment and again at the start of each session.

It is customary practice to use respondent payments when carrying out most qualitative general population research and as such, the customer respondents were all given £25 as a ‘thank you’ for giving up their time to take part in the research.
Analysis

Material collected through qualitative methods is invariably unstructured and unwieldy. Much of it is text-based, consisting of verbatim transcriptions of interviews. Moreover, the internal content of the material is usually in detailed and micro form (for example, accounts of experiences and inarticulate explanations). The primary aim of any analytical method is to provide a means of exploring coherence and structure within a cumbersome data set whilst retaining a hold on the original accounts and observations from which it is derived.

The analysis of the workshop sessions was undertaken using a qualitative content analytic method called ‘Matrix Mapping’ which involves a systematic process of sifting, summarising and sorting the material according to key issues and themes.

The first stage of ‘Matrix Mapping’ involves familiarisation with the data (in the form of verbatim transcripts) and identification of emerging issues. Based on this preliminary review of the data as well as the coverage of the topic guide and the researchers’ experience of conducting the fieldwork, a thematic framework is constructed.

The subject headings included in the matrix used on this project for advisers were as follows:

1. Respondent background details and awareness of the markers.
2. Knowledge of disadvantage markers.
3. Experience of using disadvantage markers.
4. Views on the use of disadvantage markers.
5. Views on factors affecting consistency and accuracy of the markers.

The subject headings included in the matrix used on this project for customers were as follows:

1. Respondent background details.
2. Current circumstances and nature of the disadvantage.
3. Views on disadvantage questions, grounded and hypothetical.
4. Views on disadvantage markers.

The analysis then proceeds by summarising and synthesising the data according to this thematic framework that comprises a series of subject charts displayed in Excel.

Material from each transcript was summarised and transposed under the appropriate subject heading of the thematic matrix. The context of the information was retained and the page of the transcript from which it came noted, so that it is possible to return to a transcript to explore a point in more detail or to extract
text for verbatim quotation. Once the data had been sifted a map was produced which identified the range and nature of views and experiences.

The mapping process is similar regardless of the topic being considered. The analyst reviews the summarised data; compares and contrasts the perceptions, accounts, or experiences; searches for patterns or connections within the data and seeks explanations internally within the data set. Piecing together the overall picture is not simply aggregating patterns but weighing up the salience and dynamics of issues and searching for structures within the data that have explanatory power, rather than simply seeking a multiplicity of evidence.

A.4 Sample Profiles

Advisers

A total of 31 advisers and five district managers took part in the research. Seven interviews were held in each district.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jobcentre Plus</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JSA*</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream (fresh claims/re-start)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSA advisers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Deal advisers</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District managers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District managers – one in each area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disadvantaged customers</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Area A</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-offenders</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug/alcohol misuse</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Other’</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Other’ including lone parents, customers with a disability, BME customers and customers with lowest qualification.
Appendix B
Topic guides and stimulus materials
Topic Guide
Disadvantage Marker Study
Stage one: Head Office Staff

Overall Research Aims:

- To explore in detail the disadvantage markers used as part of Jobcentre Plus’ monitoring system from the perspective of head office staff, with a particular focus on those markers set for: homelessness; ex-drug and alcohol misuse; ex-offenders; and refugees

Specifically, it aims to gather:
- Contextual information regarding the markers;
- Views on the principle of the markers;
- Experiences and views on the application of the markers;
- Suggestions for change; and
- Suggestions regarding subsequent research stages.

1. INTRODUCTION

- About BMRB
- About the research; commissioned by DWP
- Outline key aims – to help gather contextual information and to inform subsequent stages;
- Re-visits
- Length of interview / paired-depth /mini group - 60-90 minutes
- Confidentiality
- Digital recording

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

- Briefly explore work history
  – Length of service
  – Previous roles
- Explore respondent’s current role
  – Job title
  – Main responsibilities
  – Length of time in role
- Explore current association with markers
  – What currently use markers for as part of role; how use the information
  – Any other ways could use information provided by the markers
Explore how unique information gathered by the markers is; whether they use alternative forms of information and what these are

3. THE PRINCIPLE OF DISADVANTAGE MARKERS

Note to researcher: background knowledge will vary between respondents

• Briefly explore history/background of the disadvantage markers; how did the markers come about; reasons for this

• What groups are affected by the markers; how would they define each disadvantaged group – probe: homelessness; ex-drug and alcohol misuse; ex-offenders; and refugees – reasons for this

• At what stage would they expect the markers to be used by the advisers; explore how flexible this is

• Explore the key purpose of the markers overall from their perspective
  – Explore the benefit of disadvantage markers and reasons for this
  – Who is supposed to benefit from the markers – probe: head office, customers, advisers, other
  – How are they of benefit – provide examples

• Explore reasons for introducing markers for particular disadvantaged groups – probe on: homelessness; ex-drug and alcohol misuse; ex-offenders; and refugees – reasons for this

• Explore views on the principle of disadvantaged markers – explore positive/negative views on the ‘idea’ of the markers; any problems identified

• Ideally how do they need the markers to work; what do they need to do; what information do they need to produce
  – How will this benefit or be of use to their role

• Explore views on whether markers can achieve this/meet their needs – reasons for these
4. EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF DISADVANTAGE MARKERS

- *Spontaneously* explore experiences and views of the disadvantage markers

- Explore in detail **what works well and what less well** – probe on: application, outcomes, other
  - Outline reasons for these views and provide examples

- Explore **views on use/application of markers in the Jobcentre**; explore whether any problems identified

- Explore experiences and views of the following, outline reasons and provide examples – **probe on**:  
  - Under utilisation of markers
  - Consistency of use
  - Accuracy of information recorded
  - Applying multiple markers
  - Other

- Explore whether anything **inhibits the use of markers** – probe: technical issues (screen layout), data protection/confidentiality, removal of markers after 12 months, other

- Explore **whether use/application of markers varies** according to type of marker/type of disadvantage – **probe**: Lone Parents, disabled customers, homeless customers; ex-drug and alcohol misusers; ex-offenders; and refugees
  - Explore what difference this makes, outline reasons for this and provide examples

- Explore views on the impact **changes to the performance based points** system might have on the markers
  - Explore whether believe changes will impact on the application of the markers; what change will this make – reasons for this

- (Considering views on ideal use of markers section 3), explore how far the markers are **currently matching their needs**; explore any shortfalls - reasons for this
5. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE MARKERS

- Explore whether would seek to make any changes to the markers as they stand at this time – reasons for this

- Outline any suggestions for improving or changing the markers overall – **probe:** concept, application/ delivery, outcomes, other

- Explore suggestions for improving the following:
  - Level of use of the markers overall
  - Reliability
  - Accuracy
  - Consistency
  - Multiple usage
  - Other

- Any other changes or improvements

6. SUBSEQUENT RESEARCH STAGES

- Explore whether any points/ issues respondents would like to make/ raise about subsequent research stages

- Explore any topics for discussion or specific questions that should be included – reasons for including these

- Any other useful pointers/ advice for the following stages

- Ideally what would the respondent like to get from this research
  - What information would be useful to their role
  - Any specific questions that need to be answered - how would this be of benefit

- Any other issues

THANK AND CLOSE
Workshop Topic Guide
Disadvantage Marker Study - Stage One: Adviser Workshop

Overall research aim for the workshop:

To construct a 'profile' or typology of disadvantaged Jobcentre customers

Specifically, it aims to gather:
- Contextual information regarding awareness, experience and views of the markers;
- Information on disadvantage customer types – nature of disadvantage customers; and
- Suggestions regarding subsequent research stages

Summary of aim for research overall: to explore in detail the use of disadvantage markers used as part of the Jobcentre Plus monitoring system, with a view to gaining a greater understanding of the issues underlying the under utilisation of the markers.

1. INTRODUCTION

- About BMRB
- About the research; commissioned by DWP
- Outline key aims – to help gather contextual information and to inform a series of interviews with advisers around the UK;
- Length of workshop – 2 hours
- Confidentiality
- Digital recording – offer participants opportunity not to have the session recorded but explain importance of an accurate record of workshop and emphasise anonymity

2. ABOUT THE ADVISERS

- Job title
- Main responsibilities; customer group work with
- Jobcentre location; type of area

3. AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF DISADVANTAGE MARKERS

- Spontaneously explore awareness and knowledge of disadvantage markers
- Explore what know about disadvantage markers
  - How became aware of markers
  - Explore perceived purpose of markers – probe: to provide statistical data; to assist the customer; or other perceived purpose
Explore who markers apply to – **probe**: Lone Parents, disabled customers, homeless customers; ex-drug and alcohol misusers; ex-offenders; and refugees; other

Explore awareness of Data Protection issues in relation to the markers, including knowledge of guidance (advisers have to let customers volunteer the information that they fall into these groups)

**4. EXPERIENCE OF USING DISADVANTAGE MARKERS - briefly**

- **Explore experience of using the disadvantage markers**; what experience do advisers have of using the markers
  - What stage in process are markers introduced/ used; reasons for this
  - How are markers introduced; what information is provided – whether varies by customer type

- **Explore views on the use of disadvantage markers; what works well and what works less well**
  - Explore how feel about ‘selling’ marker to customers
  - Explore any difficulties/ problems with the disadvantage markers overall – probe: time constraints, technological issues, emotional and social issues; awareness, knowledge and confidence of markers

- **Briefly, explore views/ impact of inclusion of disadvantaged groups as part of JOT structure/hierarchy**

**5. DISADVANTAGE CUSTOMER GROUPS**

*Note to researcher: explain that we are trying to identify ‘ideal’ groups/types and realise that groups are potentially diverse and overlapping*

- Describe in detail the **range of disadvantaged customer ‘groups’ or ‘types’** advisers deal with
  - **Probe on**: persons without accommodation/address; misusers of drugs and alcohol, refugees, ex-offenders; lone parents; disability; lowest qualified, other

- How would they define/ describe each category
  - Person without accommodation/address
  - Lowest qualified
  - Drug and alcohol misuser
  - Refugee
    - Are advisers distinguishing between refugee; migrant; asylum seekers
  - Ex-offender
  - Other

- Do they use any informal phrases to describe these customer groups/types – short hand

- Explore what characteristics define disadvantaged customers who fit into these categories

- Give **EXAMPLES** of customers who would fit into each category based on their experiences and contacts – pen pictures
– How do they recognise them; what characteristics do they recognise them by

**Probe:**
- What do they look like
- How might the customer behave
- What the customer might say; and how they might say it

• Explore details of customers who exhibit **multiple disadvantage** – what types of multiple disadvantage do they exhibit
- Give **EXAMPLES** – pen pictures
  - How do they recognise them; what characteristics do they recognise them by

6. **DEVELOP PROFILES**

*As part of this discussion we wish to ‘capture’ the full range of disadvantage clients in a small number of profiles – approximately six*

**USE** a whiteboard / flipchart to construct a set of profiles with characteristics based on previous discussion

• Explore spontaneous views on what profiles should be included (based on previous discussion); reasons for this
• Explore how customer types previously discussed might be collapsed or extended to create ‘ideal’ profiles which reflect full range of disadvantaged customers
• Outline which defining characteristics should be included under each

**Note to researcher: show previous profiles used and briefly explore:**
- Views of previous profiles, whether any aspects of these can be used in profiles of disadvantaged customers; reason for this
- Anything wish to amend following this discussion

**Testing out profiles**

• Briefly test the profiles by examining how personal advisers would deal with each customer type

**Explore:**
- What stage in the process markers would be introduced/ used; reasons for this
- How are the markers introduced; what information is provided
- Whether approach varies by customer/ disadvantage type

• Any customer types missing (based on testing out) – **probe:** persons without accommodation; misusers of drugs and alcohol, refugees, ex-offenders; lone parents; disability; lowest qualified, other
• Revise profiles in the light of discussion

7. **SUBSEQUENT RESEARCH STAGES - briefly**

• Explore whether any points/ issues respondents would like to make/ raise about subsequent research stages exploring disadvantage markers
• Explore any topics for discussion or specific questions that should be included – reasons for including these
• Any other useful pointers/advice for the following stages
• Any other issues

THANK AND CLOSE
Workshop Topic Guide
Disadvantage Marker Study - Stage two: Adviser depths

Overall research aim:
To explore in detail the use of disadvantage markers used as part of the Jobcentre Plus monitoring system, with a view to gaining a greater understanding of the issues underlying the under utilisation of the markers.

Specifically, it aims to gather:
- Awareness and knowledge of the disadvantage markers;
- Perceptions regarding the purpose of the markers;
- Experiences and views on using the disadvantage markers, including differences in using the markers with certain customer types;
- Experience, views and impact of the change to the performance based points system;
- Attitude towards the principle of disadvantage markers; and
- Suggestion for change or improvement.

1. INTRODUCTION

- About BMRB
- About the research; commissioned by DWP
- Outline key aims
- Length of interview – up to 90 minutes
- Confidentiality
- Digital recording – explain importance of an accurate record and emphasise anonymity

2. BACKGROUND/CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

- Briefly explore work history
  – Length of service
  – Previous roles

- Explore respondent’s current role
  – Job title
  – Main responsibilities; customer type/s work with
  – Length of time in role

- Jobcentre location; type of area
- Any issues/ disadvantage particular to area or Jobcentre
3. EXPERIENCE OF USING DISADVANTAGE MARKERS

**Note to researcher:** Use the customer profiles flexibly during this section of the topic guide, or at the end of this section as considered appropriate.

*Use profiles as prompts to explore experience of the markers in more detail; or to prompt advisers on customers they have less experience of.*

- Explore in detail experiences of using disadvantage markers
  - Explore **how markers are introduced to customers**; reasons for this
    - What **stage** in the overall process are markers introduced/ used
    - What factors so they consider in this decision; reasons; provide examples
    - How are the markers introduced; how is issue approached
      - **Probe:** phrases used; ways of prompting discussion; any limits on what advisers can say
    - How are markers ‘sold’; what information is provided to customer; whether any tool are used – **probe:** ADF; training; support; other
  - Explore **type of customers adviser tends to use markers used for**; explore nature of disadvantage; reasons for this
  - Explore whether customers are **multiply disadvantaged**
    - Explore whether use single or multiple markers - reasons for this
      - If use single, explore how decision made regarding which disadvantage marker to use; what factors are considered
      - Explore whether any difficulties using multiple markers – **probe:** in terms of dealing with customers; practically
  - Explore **whether use/application of markers varies** according to type of marker/ type of disadvantage – **probe:** Lone Parents, disabled customers, homeless customers; ex-drug and alcohol misusers; ex-offenders; and refugees
    - Explore what difference this makes; outline reasons for this - provide examples
  - Explore **consistency of use of markers** - reasons for any inconsistency; whether varies according to customer type - reasons for this
  - Explore **accuracy of use**; reasons for any inaccuracies, whether varies by customers type – reasons for this
  - Explore **action once marker is placed**; what actions follow this; whether advisers act on this – how act on this; what restricts/inhibits actions
  - Explore **experience of inclusion of disadvantaged groups as part of JOT targets**
    - Explore emphasis/pressure put on markers in Jobcentre in relation to JOT targets; reasons
4. VIEWS ON THE USE OF DISADVANTAGE MARKERS

- Explore views on the use of disadvantage markers; what works well and what works less well

- Explore respondent’s views on using the markers
  - How do they feel about ‘selling’ marker to customers; does this vary by customer type; reasons why
    - Explore any problems experiences when selling the markers; any difficulties broaching issues
  - Explore views on issues of data protection and confidentiality; whether identify any problems with this; reasons why

- Explore any difficulties/ problems with the disadvantage markers overall
  - Explore if anything impinges on use of markers
    **Probe:**
    - Time constraints
    - Technological issues
    - Emotional and social issues
    - Awareness, knowledge and confidence of markers
    - Other

- Explore whether difficulties experience vary according to customer group; reasons for this

- Explore views/ impact of inclusion of disadvantaged groups as part of JOT targets
  - Explore whether will make any difference to use of markers; reason for this
  - Explore whether will raise profile of these groups more widely and impact of this

- Explore views on the principle of the disadvantage markers
  - Explore positive/ negative views on the ‘idea’ of the markers; any problems identified
  - Explore **benefits** and **disbenefits** for customer and adviser
    - Explore whether markers benefits the customer/ adviser – reasons for this
    - Explore how this benefit occurs – reasons for this
  - Explore whether adviser/customer needs to benefit in order for it to be worth setting the marker
  - Explore any problems personally; from perspective of adviser and customer
  - Explore views of the value of the markers overall

- Considering views on ideal use of markers, explore how far the markers are currently matching their needs; explore any shortfalls - reasons for this
  - Explore views on whether markers can achieve this/ meet their needs – reasons for these
5. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE MARKERS

- Explore how can the use of the markers be improved overall – probe: practical, technical, emotional, other
  - How can they be changed to allow more use to be made of them
  - How can the data be made more reliable, accurate and consistent
  - Any other changes/improvements

- Any other changes or improvements

THANK AND CLOSE
Mainstage Topic Guide
Disadvantage Marker Study - Stage two: customer depths

Overall research aim:
To explore in detail the use of disadvantage markers used as part of the Jobcentre Plus monitoring system, with a view to gaining a greater understanding of the issues underlying the under utilisation of the markers.

Specifically, it aims to gather:
- Contextual information regarding customers’ personal circumstances;
- Experiences and views of Jobcentre contacts, with a particular focus on the use of disadvantage markers;
- Views on the principle of disadvantaged markers (grounded and hypothetical); and
- Suggestions for change or improvement.

Note to researcher: this topic guide will need to be used flexible to best explore issues relating to the key aims.

1. INTRODUCTION
- About BMRB
- About the research; commissioned by DWP
- Outline key aims
- Length of interview – 20 to 30 minutes
- Confidentiality; not impact on benefits or relationship with Jobcentre
- Digital recording – explain importance of an accurate record and emphasise anonymity

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION
- Explore personal details: age, family, hobbies
- Explore employment history – probe: types of employment; length of employment
- Explore claiming history – probe: length of time claimed benefit; type of benefit claimed
  - Explore reasons for unemployment; any variations
3. CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES

- **Spontaneously** explore current circumstances; what activities are they currently engaged in (in addition to claiming benefit)
  - **Probe**: work, training, support/ counselling, other Jobcentre related activities; other
- Explore length of time engaged in activities
- Explore nature of activities
- Explore reasons for engaging in current activity; how became involved in activities
  - Whether any organisation/s were instrumental in this – **probe**: Jobcentre; other
- Explore views on activities currently undertaken; what liked/ disliked about current activities; reasons for this
- Explore views on current situation; how feel about personal circumstances
- Explore future aspirations or goals; how aim to move towards these; any problems/ issues need to be addressed to achieve this

Note to researcher: if disadvantage is raised explore:
- Nature of disadvantage
- Any other disadvantages
- Impact/ relevance of disadvantage
  - **Probe**: on personal life; employment (job search and experience); other

4. EXPERIENCE AND VIEWS OF THE JOBCENTRE

*Note to researcher: get the respondent to talk through recent visits (approximately three) to the Jobcentre to establish details of visits.*

- Explore approximate number of times attended Jobcentre in last year/ 6 months
  - Outline reasons for these visits; whether they varied in purpose; what Jobcentre employee had contact with
- Explore when last had an adviser interview/ meeting
- Outline details of last meetings (note: go back to up to three meetings as appropriate to explore experience/s of markers)

**Explore:**
- **Details** of the meeting – **probe**: length of meeting, who meeting was with; type of adviser – **probe**: mainstream; ND, Contact Centre adviser; other
  - Explore how well knew adviser
- **Nature** of the meeting; purpose of the meeting
- **Content** of the meeting; what was discussed; type of questions asked by adviser – **probe**: employment, benefit, personal circumstances, support services, training provision, other
  - Any information requested by adviser; nature of this; what done with information
  - Any information/ advice provided by advisers
  - Any help/ support provided/ offered – **probe**: whether referred to another organisation
5. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE MARKERS

- Explore how approach to use of the markers be improved overall
- Explore how their experiences of markers could be improved
- Any other changes or improvements

THANK AND CLOSE
Disadvantage Markers - DWP and JCP head office re-visits

Overall Research Aims:

- The overall aim of the research is to explore in detail the use of disadvantage markers used as part of Jobcentre Plus' monitoring system, with a view to gaining a greater understanding of the issues underlying under-utilisation of the markers and to improve usage overall.

- Specifically, the research aims to explore advisers' reactions to top line findings from stage two of the research, focusing on findings that relate to:
  - Awareness and knowledge of the disadvantage markers;
  - Experience of use of the disadvantage markers;
  - Views on using the disadvantage markers; and
  - Suggestions for change or improvement.

Note to researchers: Familiarise yourself with stage one interviews to follow up any specific issues raised by respondents. Key findings from stage two are outlined in text boxes. Please familiarise yourself with these prior to the interview and use as appropriate.

1. INTRODUCTION
   - About BMRB – independent organisation
   - Project for Department for Work and Pensions
   - Multi-staged project/ aims of the project
   - Confidentiality/tape recording
   - Duration of interview (45 mins)

2. BACKGROUND – BRIEFLY
   - Recap on respondent’s current role
     - Job title
     - Main responsibilities
     - Length of time in role
   - Recap on delivery and use of the markers and explore any changes
     - Explore any changes to policy
     - Explore changes in use of markers on the frontline; any changed in statistics
     - Explore any changes on use of markers by JC+/ DWP
     - Explore any changes to use of data/ statistics gathered
     - Explore any other changes
3. ADVISERS’ AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE MARKERS

Note to researcher: feedback findings from research (outlined below) to advisers as appropriate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings from previous research stage:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Advisers were generally aware of Disadvantage Markers although awareness was not comprehensive. Awareness and knowledge varied by type of marker, across districts and by individual adviser;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The term ‘Disadvantage Marker’ was not universally recognised and markers were not viewed as a ‘set’. Confusion was expressed regarding which markers qualified as ‘disadvantage markers’;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overall advisers’ knowledge of setting the disadvantage group marker was more limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Uncertainty regarding location of markers on LMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Mixed awareness of need for customer to volunteer information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Limited awareness of DPA1 form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness and knowledge of the guidance notes was minimal. Guidance was viewed as difficult to find on LMS.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prompts to use with findings, explore:

• Overall reactions to the findings; explore views on the findings – reasons for these

• Whether respondent can offer any explanations for the findings or expand on these in any way

• Any suggestions for how this could managed; policy changes that could be made; how could this be approached |
  – Any approaches currently used effectively to manage these issues

• Explore any other comments/ aspects they would like to explore in more detail
4. USING DISADVANTAGE MARKERS

Note to researcher: feedback findings from research (outlined below) to advisers as appropriate.

Findings from previous research stage:

- In line with awareness and knowledge, use of markers was inconsistent and varied by type of marker (refugee; lone parent and PWD more widely used); by district and on an individual basis;

- Where markers were not being set, advisers suggested that issues of disadvantage are discussed, recorded and actioned (in the notes pages or in conversation boxes);

- Where markers are being used, all relevant markers are set;

- Approaches to broaching the issue of disadvantage varied, and included asking direct questions and adopting more subtle approaches;

- There was variable adherence to data protection including limited use of DPA1 form. Agreement to record marker was not gained universally.

- Main reasons for under use of markers included: lack of awareness and knowledge, a low emphasis placed on markers in Jobcentre and lack of information/guidance received. Other barriers included lack of time, difficulties using LMS and customer reluctance;

- JOT not identified as impacting on behaviour nor identified as possible future incentive;

- The potential for the markers to be incorrectly set was noted by advisers. As a result advisers had lost confidence in accuracy of marker information on LMS.

Prompts to use with findings include:

- Overall reactions to the findings; explore views on the findings – reasons for these

- Whether respondent can offer any explanations for the findings or expand on these in any way

- Any suggestions for how this could managed; policy changes that could be made; how could this be approached
  - Any approaches currently used effectively to manage these issues

- Explore any other comments/ aspects they would like to explore in more detail
5. CUSTOMERS: VIEWS OF DISADVANTAGE MARKERS

Note to researcher: feedback findings from research (outlined below) to advisers as appropriate.

Findings from previous stage of research:

- The customer experience aligned with that outlined by advisers
- Reasons for resisting disclosure included: embarrassment; concern about possible impact on benefits; concern about possible impact on job prospects/ views of employer; view disadvantage was a personal issue;
- Disclosure also varied by type of disadvantage, with ex-offending and drug and alcohol disadvantages viewed most difficult to raise;
- Overwhelmingly, customers suggested they were happy to be asked and discuss disadvantage, providing it was deemed relevant and would be used to support them.
- Overall customers were happy to have their disadvantage recorded on LMS. However it was deemed important to offer customers the choice and to ensure confidentiality from potential employers.

Prompts to use with findings include:

- Overall reactions to the findings; explore views on the findings – reasons for these
- Whether respondent can offer any explanations for the findings or expand on these in any way
- Any suggestions for how this could managed; policy changes that could be made; how could this be approached
  - Any approaches currently used effectively to manage these issues
- Explore any other comments/ aspects they would like to explore in more detail
6. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND CHANGE

Note to researcher: feedback findings from research (outlined below) to advisers as appropriate.

- Clearly communicate the purpose and value of the markers
- Advisers need to understand each stage of process and reason for this
  - Defining disadvantage, setting marker, data protection
- More detailed and comprehensive information, training or guidance on the markers and the process of setting them
- Increased focus on markers at district and office level
- Ensure markers are easy to locate on LMS
  - Introduce more prompts
  - Improve adviser understanding of LMS overall
- Increased interview time
  - Especially for early interviews
  - If known through Freshstart
  - Sensitive disadvantage suspected
  - Refugees with limited English language

- Spontaneously explore views on suggestions made for improving/encouraging use of disadvantage markers
  - How realistic/practical are the suggestions; any problems/difficulties with these
- Outline any suggestions for change of improvement
  
  Probe:
  - Awareness and knowledge
  - Use of the markers
  - Explore any actions/approaches to overcoming barriers to use

- Explore any other suggestions
- Explore any other comments

THANK AND CLOSE
B.1 Five basic profiles

Developed in stage one adviser workshop:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surmountable disadvantage</th>
<th>Pronounced specific disadvantage</th>
<th>Perpetual returners</th>
<th>Multiply disadvantaged</th>
<th>Hardest to place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English speaking</td>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>Relapsed misuser of drugs or alcohol/PWA</td>
<td>Resistant to work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated</td>
<td>Major language problems</td>
<td>Ex-offender re-offended</td>
<td>Health problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic expectations</td>
<td>Lone parent with childcare problems</td>
<td>Use excuses to avoid work</td>
<td>Refuse to work for cultural reasons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some qualifications/ transferable skills</td>
<td>Never worked</td>
<td>Coveting drug/drink problem</td>
<td>Brag about problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared to use p2w</td>
<td>Unwilling to use p2w</td>
<td>Work not a priority</td>
<td>Drug/alcohol misuser</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled but able to work</td>
<td>Perceptual barriers e.g. travel</td>
<td>Happy to live off benefit</td>
<td>Other sources of income through black economy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational drug use only</td>
<td>Lacks aspiration</td>
<td></td>
<td>Without accommodation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor criminal offence only</td>
<td>Disadvantage may be a cover</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No home but staying with friend</td>
<td>Drug/alcohol misuser</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Won’t admit drug/alcohol use</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Violent/sexual criminal record</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inappropriate/ irrational behaviour</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mental health problems</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Completely unwilling to work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B.2 Pen portraits

Profile A
- Male, aged 47
- Recently out of prison (drink driving offence)
- Clean and smart appearance
- Good English language skills
- Keen and motivated to work, transferable skills
- Prepared to use progress2work
- Realistic expectations
- Lacks confidence
- Flexible attitude to work:
  – would ideally like office work but would be prepared to take any type of job available

Profile B
- Female, aged 34
- Refugee, major language barrier
- Brings school-aged children to jobcentre to translate
- Transferable skills
- Suspicious of adviser
- Has no smart interview clothes
- Unwilling to work
- Doesn’t want to travel

Profile C
- Male, aged 24
- Dressed in latest clothes with lots of gold jewellery; high-tech mobile phone
- Has had a series of jobs in warehouses/packing but only held for short periods
  – sacked
- Brags to adviser about involvement in crime, although suspect not all true
- Has no desire/aspiration to work
- Claims to be homeless, although suspect living with girlfriend
- Unrealistic wage goals, wants to earn more than adviser believes he is able to earn
- Recreational drug user
Profile D

- Male, aged 48
- Out of work for over ten years
- Scruffy and dirty appearance, smelly
- Often late for appointments
- Wants money as a giro, no bank account
- Claims money recently stolen
- Smells of alcohol, often drunk at interview
- Criminal record for petty crimes
- Lacks aspiration and motivation
- Good qualifications and experience from a job lost ten years ago due to alcohol problem

Profile E

- Male, aged 34
- Not worked for 12 years, been in prison for sexual offence
- Regular non-attendance at adviser interviews
- Unpredictable mood changes between appointments; either depressed and withdrawn or hyperactive and chatty
- Sometimes aggressive
- Some qualifications – gained whilst in prison
- Little or no motivation to work
- Suspected drug problem although customer has not admitted this
Appendix C
Policy background

• Reason for markers.
• What markers there are.
• Procedures governing these – i.e. when they should be set, where they should be set, data protection.
• The link between Job Outcome Targets (JOT) and markers.