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

Synthesis report

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

Corporate Document Services
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Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AACT</td>
<td>Actual Average Clearance Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDC</td>
<td>Benefit Delivery Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDS/Cs</td>
<td>Benefit Delivery Sites/Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF</td>
<td>Brought Forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>Benefit Processors</td>
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<td>BPS</td>
<td>Benefit Processing Site</td>
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<td>BPT</td>
<td>Benefit Processing Team</td>
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<td>BPTO</td>
<td>Benefit Processing Team Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Customer Management System</td>
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<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Claim Preparation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>Claims Preparation Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPTO</td>
<td>Claims Preparation Team Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>Child Support Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CST</td>
<td>Claim Service Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Claim Service Team Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCI</td>
<td>Departmental Central Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEX</td>
<td>CMS Dialogue Expert</td>
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<tr>
<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
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<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>Financial Assessor</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAM</td>
<td>Financial Assessor Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCO</td>
<td>First Contact Officer</td>
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<td>FTA</td>
<td>Fail To Attend</td>
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<tr>
<td>HB</td>
<td>Housing Benefit</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRT</td>
<td>Habitual Residency Test</td>
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<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>Incapacity Benefit</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDOC</td>
<td>Initial Date of Claim</td>
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<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>Income Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVR</td>
<td>Interactive Voice Routing</td>
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<td>Jobseeker’s Allowance</td>
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<td>Jobseeker’s Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>LMS</td>
<td>Labour Market System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSO</td>
<td>Local Service Outlet</td>
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<tr>
<td>MI</td>
<td>Management Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFA</td>
<td>No Fixed Abode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NINO</td>
<td>National Insurance Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Personal Adviser</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAM</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMAD</td>
<td>Performance Measurement and Analysis Division (Jobcentre Plus)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSCS</td>
<td>Pensions Strategy Computer System</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOM</td>
<td>Standard Operating Model</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPR</td>
<td>SOM Process Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>S4 information</td>
<td>Student details of the past four years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tele-team</td>
<td>Telephone Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>WFI</td>
<td>Work Focused Interview</td>
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Summary

In February 2006, Jobcentre Plus launched the Standard Operating Model (SOM) Process Review (SPR) pilot to address concerns about delays in handling new and repeat claims and attendant business processes. The SPR pilot introduced a number of changes and enhancements to the claiming process aiming to improve customer service and staff experience, and to provide a more efficient process that was affordable and did not lead to an adverse impact on performance. This report synthesises the findings from the evaluation of the SPR pilot.

Methodology

The evaluation aimed to test the robustness of the SPR pilot and assess the extent to which it met its objectives. This was achieved through:

- over 250 interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff before and after the pilot was implemented;
- thirty-six in-depth interviews with customers;
- over 60 observations of interactions between staff and customers at First Contact and in Jobcentres;
- surveys with almost 1,700 customers who started a new or repeat claim under the pilot and in areas where the pilot was not in operation; and
- an analysis of performance and management information.

Key findings

Overall, the SPR pilot addressed many of the existing bottlenecks and issues that caused delays in the handling of new and repeat claims for benefit. The pilot SOM was also transferable to different offices and districts. It was tested in a small area – North Lincolnshire – and extended to another area operating in a very different set of circumstances – Central London – and could be delivered in both. Some bottlenecks remained, however, which affected the extent to which the pilot was able to
improve the overall efficiency and performance of the claiming process. Further refinements are therefore needed to increase the speed with which new and repeat claims for benefit are handled.

The following highlights the key findings from each aspect of the claiming process.

First Contact

The SPR plot delivered clear improvements to the early stage of the claims process, making First Contact quicker and more efficient. In particular:

- The Freephone number reduced customer complaints about the cost of calls to Contact Centres.
- The Interactive Voice Routing (IVR) reduced the volume of inappropriate calls and facilitated the new accelerated process for Rapid Reclaims.
- The introduction of a single call made First Contact more efficient and removed previous delays experienced by customers between inbound and outbound calls. Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) were also more likely to be booked to take place within three-five days of customers’ Initial Date of Claim (IDOC) in a single call than in a call-back.
- First Contact Officers (FCOs) felt more ownership for handling customers’ claims under the new system and reported a greater sense of achievement in completing a customers’ claim.

Call-backs continued to be used in a number of cases, particularly for people calling from a mobile phone (for whom the free phone number was not free) and for claims with a Child Support Agency (CSA) interest. For these cases, two calls were still used to gather data: an inbound call made by the customer in which basic details were collected; and an outbound call made by the Contact Centre to collect more detailed information. The delays and inefficiencies associated with this process remained.

Jobcentre

Changes implemented by the SPR pilot brought a number of benefits to Jobcentres, including:

- The Claim Service Team Officer (CSTO) replaced the Financial Assessor (FA) team.\(^1\) A new on-demand system was introduced, whereby customers were seen by the first available CSTO in the team, replacing fixed appointments previously used.\(^2\) The on-demand system led to a more responsive service that allowed customers to be seen when needed.

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\(^1\) Since the pilot, CSTOs have reverted to the title of FA.

\(^2\) In Central London it was the intention that all Jobcentres removed the FA diaries prior to the SPR Pilot.
• The removal of FA diaries also reduced the amount of managerial time spent allocating FAs to customers and synchronising FA meetings with Personal Adviser (PA) appointments.

• Customers waited less time to see Jobcentre staff, tended to arrive on time for their WFI appointment with a PA, and spent less time in interviews/appointments at the Jobcentre.

• New A10 forms, which were introduced to CSTOs to update customer statements after meetings with customers, minimised delays for customers that were caused by the slow running or crashes of the Customer Management System (CMS).3

• Transferring the management of Brought Forward (BF) systems from Jobcentres to Benefit Delivery Centres (BDCs) reduced the workload pressures previously experienced by FAs and meant that claims arrived at the BDC more quickly.

A number of issues or bottlenecks in the claims process persisted under the pilot. In particular, there was a lack of clarity about the scope of CSTO meetings under the pilot, particularly around the extent to which customer statements were complete and accurate before being passed onto the BDC.

Claims preparation and benefit processing

The pilot introduced some efficiency savings to claims preparation and benefit processing in BDCs. More specifically, the SPR pilot successfully increased the speed with which claims were moved from the Jobcentre to the BDC by transferring responsibility for claim preparation and the management of the BF system from Jobcentres to BDCs. Efficiencies were maximised at Glasgow BDC, where the claims preparation and benefit processing functions were combined. The main benefits identified were:

• Staff working under the combined Claims Preparation (CP)/Benefit Processors (BP) model felt greater ownership of claims, which encouraged more accurate data collection at preparation stage.

• Dedicated resources to deal with customers’ telephone enquiries freed up staff time to concentrate on core preparation and processing tasks.

• The introduction of A10 forms to amend Customer Records reduced the need for reworking.

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3 Initially this was introduced to record all amendments made, later this was revised so that CSTOs could use their discretion. CSTOs mainly used the A10 form to capture large volume of additional information missing from the customer statement.
In general, however, resources at the BDC were stretched and staff struggled to handle the volume of work and so bottlenecks formed. A high number of customers’ calls were left unanswered due to insufficient resources in the telephone enquiry teams. Courtesy calls to customers were rarely made. In addition, staff identified a range of factors that were generally unrelated to the pilot but that affected their ability to prepare and process claims quickly and efficiently. These factors included:

- backlogs of claims from Jobcentres that were inherited at the start of the pilot;
- staff absences;
- receiving inaccurate and/or incomplete customer statements; and
- disruptive interruptions by requests for emergency payments.

It was difficult to gauge whether or not the level of resourcing in BDCs would have been sufficient without the backlogs inherited from Jobcentres and the additional work that these generated.

Conclusions

In general, the pilot made some headway to speeding up the claiming process, improving customer experience and improving staff experience at First Contact and (to a lesser extent) in Jobcentres. Bottlenecks persisted in the later stages of the new and repeat claims process, which limited the extent to which the pilot was able to meet its objectives. As a result, the pilot did not deliver clear improvements in the Average Actual Clearance Times (AACT) for all three main benefits. The pilot SOM would benefit from further refinement to improve AACT performance and we recommend that priority is given to a review of the resources and capacity available to handle claims preparation, benefit enquiries at the BDC and benefit processing.
1 Introduction

In February 2006, Jobcentre Plus commissioned ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd to evaluate the SPR pilot. This report synthesises the findings from the evaluation.

1.1 The aims and objectives of the SPR pilot

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

- the volume of emergency payments;
- avoidable enquiries; and
- complaints from customers\(^4\).

The objectives of the pilot were to:

- improve the level of customer service with fewer contacts, easier access and speedier decision making;
- improve staff experience by providing a process which was transparent, user friendly and makes more sense to those who deliver it; and
- provide a more efficient, affordable new claim process without having an adverse impact on performance.\(^5\)

1.2 The evaluation

The evaluation set out to test the robustness of the SPR pilot and assess the extent to which it met its objectives. The findings are based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative research and analysis, as follows:

\(^4\) Pg 1-2, Evaluation strategy for the SPR pilot, DWP.

\(^5\) Efficiency was considered in terms of clearance times/accuracy and amount of reworking.
• **Depth interviews with staff.** Over 250 depth interviews were held with Jobcentre Plus staff before and after the pilot was implemented. The purpose of these interviews was to identify issues with and bottlenecks in the claiming process, understand how they affected the delivery of services to customers and staff experience, and establish the pilot’s impact.

• **Depth interviews with customers.** A small number of customers (36) who started a new or repeat claim for benefit under the pilot were interviewed in depth to explore how the SPR pilot affected their experience of making a claim for benefit.

• **Observational research.** Over 60 observations were conducted in Contact Centres and Jobcentres before and after the pilot was implemented to understand how the pilot worked in practice and how it affected interactions between staff and customers.

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

• **Analysis of performance and management data.** Completed by the Performance Measurement and Analysis Division (PMAD) of Jobcentre Plus to assess the impact of the pilot on benefit processing speed performance and to provide contextual figures to support the evaluation findings.

1.3 Report structure

The rest of this report is structured as follows:

• **Chapter 2** provides some background information on the SPR pilot, highlighting the key changes made to operations;

• **Chapter 3** outlines the impact and effectiveness of the pilot across each stage of the claims process;

• **Chapter 4** presents the evaluation’s conclusions; and

• **Chapter 5** makes some recommendations for the national roll-out of the pilot.
2 The Standard Operating Model Process Review Pilot

This chapter provides an introduction and overview of the SPR pilot for new and repeat claims. It begins by explaining how the pilot was tested in two distinct areas before highlighting the changes the pilot introduced to the claiming process.

2.1 The pilot areas

In February 2006, the SPR pilot was launched in North Lincolnshire. The area was chosen to lead implementation because it was a small area that performed well across the range of Jobcentre Plus targets and where the CMS was relatively stable. Parts of the pilot began on the 27 February 2006, with the full process going live on 13 March 2006 across the following sites:

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

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

- Pembroke Dock Contact Centre (South West Wales);
- Glasgow BDC; and
- ten Jobcentres – Barnsbury, Denmark Street, Finsbury Park, Highbury, Islington, Kentish Town, Kensington, Marylebone, Notting Hill and Westminster.6

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6 Six of these Jobcentres were covered by the research: Barnsbury; Finsbury Park; Highgate; Kentish Town; Marylebone; and Westminster.
Central London provided a much more complex and challenging environment in which to test the pilot. The number of Jobcentre Plus staff involved and the volume of people claiming benefits were much higher than in North Lincolnshire, and the District tended to perform less well against its targets. According to Jobcentre managers staff turnover was also relatively high, and the type of customers was more diverse. In particular, Central London is home to a large number of people who do not speak English and people with no fixed abode (NFA).

### 2.2 Key changes introduced by the pilot

The SPR pilot made a wide range of changes to the SOM for new and repeat claims across all aspects of Jobcentre Plus. Table 2.1 highlights the key changes for each stage of the claiming process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of the claiming process</th>
<th>Key changes</th>
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| Contact Centres               | • Freephone Access: A standard Freephone 0800 number was introduced to replace the previous 0845 number.  
|                               |  
|                               | • IVR Routing: The pilot introduced an IVR system that asked customers to select whether they wanted to make a new or repeat claim for benefit and provided alternative numbers for queries that should be dealt with elsewhere. Customers were able to self-identify themselves as Rapid Reclaim claimants through the IVR.  
|                               |  
|                               | • Handling new and repeat claims in a single call: Where possible, FCOs collected all information from customers in one single call. This replaced the dual call system used previously, in which FCOs answered inbound calls from customers, spent around 15 minutes collecting basic information and then arranged for another FCO to call the customer back within 24 hours to complete the data gather.  
|                               |  
|                               | • Removing job searches from First Contact: FCOs were not intended to conduct any job searches under the pilot.  
| Jobcentres                    |  
|                               | • A new ‘on demand’ Claim Service Team (CST): The CST replaced the FA team. Customers were seen by the first available CSTO in the team, removing the FA diaries used previously.  
|                               |  
|                               | • Reduced check and initial data gather: The CSTO meeting was confined to verifying the customer’s identity, checking the completeness of the statement, addressing any unanswered questions and gathering initial evidence.  
|                               |  
|                               | • Targeted pre-calls to replace blanket ‘pre-calling’: Pre-calls were only planned to occur if the Fail to Attend (FTA) rate was 17 per cent or more, or if the WFI date was booked five days or more after the initial inbound call to the Contact Centre.  

Continued
Table 2.1 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of the claiming process</th>
<th>Key changes</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Benefit Delivery Sites/ Centres</strong></td>
<td><strong>Revised process for updating the customer statement:</strong> The pilot introduced the use of a new A10 form to record amendments to the customer statement rather than entering changes onto CMS during meetings with customers. Later this was revised so that customer statements were amended clerically and A10s were only used when large volumes of additional information needed to be captured.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Customer statements for people whose WFI was waived or deferred sent direct to the BDC:</strong> Before the pilot, some Income Support (IS) and all Incapacity Benefit (IB) customers sent their statements back to a Jobcentre where it was either prepared for processing by an FA or placed in the BF system because information or evidence was missing. Under the pilot, customers were asked to forward their claim straight to the BDC.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Courtesy calls to customers:</strong> Upon receipt of the claim, teams working in Benefit Delivery Sites/Centres (BDS/Cs) were expected to contact the customer by telephone to explain that they had received the Customer Statement and to outline what happened next.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>BF system transferred to BDS/Cs:</strong> Responsibility for claim preparation was transferred from FAs in Jobcentres to BDS/Cs. In North Lincolnshire, a new Claims Preparation Team (CPT) was set up to chase missing evidence and documentation required to process a claim for payment. In Glasgow, this function was incorporated into the roles and responsibilities of the existing Benefit Processing Team (BPT).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Answering customer queries:</strong> Before the pilot, BPTs handled calls from customers who were enquiring about the progress of their claim. In North Lincolnshire, the new CPT handled incoming customer calls. In Glasgow, a new telephone enquiries team (Tele-Team) was set up in the BDC to manage and direct customer calls.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Since the pilot, CSTOs have reverted to the title of FA.
2. In Central London it was the intention that all Jobcentres had removed the FA diaries prior to the SPR Pilot.
3 Research findings

This chapter presents the main findings from the evaluation of the SPR pilot. It covers each stage of the claiming process in turn: Section 3.1 looks at First Contact delivered by Contact Centres; Section 3.2 covers the delivery of services in Jobcentres; and section 3.3 presents the findings for claim preparation and processing in BDS/Cs. Each section sets out the difficulties experienced before the pilot and assesses the extent to which these were addressed by the SPR pilot.

3.1 First Contact

Before the pilot was implemented, Contact Centre staff identified a number of aspects of First Contact that created unnecessary work for staff, delays for customers, and/or complaints. These issues included:

- **The cost of calls.** Staff reported that customers regularly complained about the cost of inbound calls to the Contact Centre and routinely received requests for call-backs, particularly from customers using mobile phones.

- **Inappropriate calls.** Contact Centre management and staff complained that they received a high volume of calls that were deemed to be inappropriate. These calls tended to be general benefit enquiries or customers chasing their benefit payment. Contact Centre staff felt that such calls were beyond their remit and took up valuable FCO time, which affected their ability to take new or repeat claims.
• **The dual call system.** Before the pilot, the Contact Centre collected information over two calls: an inbound call from a customer, which lasted 15 minutes on average and covered the basic details of a customer’s circumstances; and an outbound call that typically lasted 45 minutes to gather more detailed information. Outbound calls were generally conducted by a different FCO to the one who handled the inbound, and were intended to take place within 24 hours. Contact Centre staff felt that this dual call system generated a number of inefficiencies. First, FCOs who conducted outbound calls routinely reported that there were inaccuracies in the data gathered at the inbound stage, which required reworking, and believed that there was some duplication in the information gathered across the two calls. Failed outbounds, where FCOs called customers back but they were not available or contactable, were identified as a significant problem. These calls wasted staff resources, could cause considerable delays in progressing customers’ claims, and reduced FCOs’ ability to book a WFI within four days of a customer’s IDOC7.

• **Identification of Rapid Reclaim customers.** FCOs explained that questions to establish whether or not a customer was a Rapid Reclaim were placed at the end of the script of the CMS for the inbound call. They felt that this was illogical, wasted staff time and provided a poor customer service because they spent around 15 minutes gathering data that was not needed.

3.1.1 Receiving and routing calls for new and repeat claims

The SPR pilot introduced a new 0800 Freephone number for customers who wanted to make a new or repeat claim for benefit. Contact Centre staff and customers felt that this was an improvement. Customers who called from a landline were routinely pleased that they did not have to pay for the call. FCOs believed that the Freephone number helped to reduce customer complaints about the cost of calls and so there was less pressure on staff to finish the call as quickly as possible. Customers who called from a mobile phone were the exception here, because calls from mobiles were not free. Staff at Pembroke Dock Contact Centre, who handled a high volume of calls from mobiles, continued to receive requests for call-backs and subsequent difficulties contacting customers8.

A new IVR system was introduced by the pilot to distinguish between new claims and Rapid Reclains and to redirect inappropriate queries. Contact Centre staff generally welcomed the IVR and customers commonly thought that the options were straightforward and easy to understand. FCOs felt that the IVR helped to implement a fast track Rapid Reclaim process by asking customers to identify

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7 The IDOC is the date a customer completes an inbound call with the Contact Centre.

8 PMAD data shows that London customers are more likely to phone from mobiles, and not have a land line number that they can use, than customers from other parts of the country.
themselves as a new claimant or a Rapid Reclaim via the telephony and that this saved them time. Some FCOs believed that customers incorrectly selected the Rapid Reclaim option due to language problems or because they thought it referred to a quicker process. To handle such situations, staff routinely verified customers’ selection on the IVR before proceeding with the call. FCOs did not perceive this to be a problem because the same Officer could handle the call if they were a new claimant or a Rapid Reclaim.

Contact Centre staff consistently believed that the IVR reduced the volume of inappropriate calls received, but did not stop them completely. Pembroke Dock Contact Centre, which serves customers from Central London, still received a considerable volume: almost a fifth of all calls handled between 30 May and 13 October (18 per cent) were logged by FCOs as inappropriate compared to just four per cent taken by Grimsby Contact Centre between 17 April and 13 October 2006. Most of the inappropriate calls received by Pembroke Dock were recorded in the ‘Other’ category and so the nature of these calls is not clear. A third of all inappropriate calls from Central London customers (33 per cent) were for ‘Enquiries on existing claims’, which supports findings from staff research that customers struggled to contact the BDC.

3.1.2 Taking new and repeat claims for benefit

The introduction of a single call – replacing the dual inbound-outbound call process – was perhaps the most significant change to First Contact introduced by the SPR pilot. Most new and repeat claims for benefit were handled in a single call under the pilot: 80 per cent of claims in North Lincolnshire and 72 per cent from Central London. Rapid Reclaims have always been dealt with in a single call where possible. Of those claimants who would otherwise have used a dual call, 77 per cent and 70 per cent respectively used a single call in the pilot. There were a range of instances when two calls were used to handle a new or repeat claim for benefit, including:

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

The categories for analysis were as follows: ‘Enquiry on existing claim’; ‘Complaint’; ‘Jobcentre related enquiry’; ‘Not Jobcentre Plus’; and ‘Other’.
Overall, the single call system was positively received by customers and staff. They both perceived that it sped up the First Contact process by removing the delay between inbound and outbound calls. Staff also believed that the single call helped to reduce the inefficiencies associated with failed outbound calls. These perceptions were supported by an analysis of Management Information (MI), which showed that WFIs were booked to take place sooner in a single call than in a call-back. In Central London, WFIs booked in a single call were, on average, 4.3 days after IDOC. This was 1.7 days faster than WFIs booked in a call-back. In North Lincolnshire, single calls booked WFIs 3.4 days on average after IDOC, or 0.7 days faster than those booked in a call-back.

A range of 3-5 days has been identified as the optimum time between IDOC and the WFI, to leave enough time for a customer to gather all the required evidence for an appointment at the Jobcentre and to make the WFI early enough to manage AACTs and to avoid FTA. The single call made a large improvement to the ability of the Contact Centres to book WFIs efficiently, particularly for Central London customers. In Pembroke Dock, 85 per cent of WFIs booked in the single call were within the optimum three-five days compared to only 52 per cent of those booked in a call-back. There was no real difference in the numbers of WFIs booked within three-five days in North Lincolnshire. In Central London WFI booking speed improved significantly over the course of the pilot. The average time from IDOC to WFI began at over five days, but more recently has been below four days.

These findings indicate that the single call improved efficiency and improved the experience for customers, whose priority is to get their claim up and running as quickly as possible. In addition, staff preferred the greater ‘ownership’ afforded by the single call because it was easier to build a rapport with customers and so collect the required information. They believed that it helped to reduce errors and contributed to a sense of achievement, enhancing their job satisfaction.

### 3.1.3 Call length

Before the pilot, some Contact Centre staff were concerned about the potential length of the single call, worried that it would be tiring, stressful and physically uncomfortable to handle long calls. In general, these concerns were not realised. The average time for standard single calls – not including Rapid Reclaims – was 42 minutes in Grimsby Contact Centre and 50 minutes at Pembroke Dock. Calls involving Language Line were an exception, with FCOs reporting that these tended to last between an hour and an hour and a half in the single call. Calls of this length were felt to be stressful for both customers and staff. Even though the CMS script remained largely unchanged, staff routinely thought that single calls took less time than the combined time for inbound and outbound calls used before the pilot. Some FCOs attributed this to the rapport established with customers in a single call. Unfortunately, there is no directly comparable data from before the pilot to estimate how much handling time was saved by the new processes.
In the qualitative research, customers expressed surprise at what they felt was a long call. Some customers said that they did not mind if it meant ‘getting the claim right’. Strong objections to the call length were concentrated amongst customers who had been through First Contact relatively recently\(^\text{10}\) or those who had used a public phone box, who found it less conducive to have a conversation with an FCO due to background noise and distractions.

### 3.1.4 Mini-breaks

Staff across both Contact Centres said that they rarely used mini-breaks, although MI data showed that six per cent of calls used a mini-break in Pembroke Dock compared with only one per cent in Grimsby. FCOs’ perception, though, was that mini-breaks were not usually necessary because customers typically had ‘sufficient information’ to hand. It was unclear, however, what was deemed to be sufficient and this appeared to be a question of personal judgement. Some FCOs felt that there was a natural break between inbound and outbound screens of CMS, while staff used a ‘workaround’ to set up the next part of the call and this was used as a kind of mini-break for customers to find information.

### 3.1.5 Data gathering

Before the pilot was implemented, FCOs consistently raised concerns about customers’ ability to provide all the information required in the single call. Some, but not all, staff understood the potential impact of incomplete statements in causing delays later on in the claiming process and felt that this might reflect badly on them and their work. Contrary to these initial concerns, staff routinely reported that there was no change in the volume of missing information on customer statements. FCOs typically believed that customers ‘either have the information or they don’t’ and neither a call back nor a mini-break would make a significant difference. The vast majority of customers believed that they could provide all the information required ‘very easily’ or ‘fairly easily’ in the single call (92 per cent of survey respondents in North Lincolnshire and 80 per cent in Central London).

Despite these assertions, however, some Contact Centre staff asserted that the pilot’s priority was to move customers through First Contact as quickly as possible. One FCO explained that staff stopped arranging call-backs to collect outstanding information – as they had been doing in the pilot’s early days – after the importance of adhering to single calls was impressed upon them.

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\(^{10}\) Customers who were making a new claim after a recent failed claim or customer who had made a claim just outside the rapid reclaim criteria.
‘Before we were re-booking calls because we were trying to cut down on the questions that the Jobcentre would have to finish off because obviously we were aware that the FA only had twenty minutes to do all their work before the pilot and that they didn’t have the time to go over all of this and I think feedback from [area] as well and through our manager is that we needed to make sure that FCOs were gathering everything and then all of a sudden we are in this pilot now where we are pushing them through and the focus isn’t on that anymore, the focus is on getting them out of the way today.’

(Contact Centre staff)

3.1.6 Call flow

Contact Centre management felt that the biggest challenge of the single call was managing (and answering) the flow of calls from customers with the resources available. In practice, both centres coped well. A number of flexibilities were built into the pilot to help, including:

- the ability to draw on a wider pool of staff who were trained to work on the pilot; and
- an option to revert to the dual call system in period of high call volume.

Management staff stressed that these measures were resisted as far as possible. However, the existence of such flexibilities should be taken into account when considering the pilot’s real efficiency and whether these efficiency levels could be maintained through national roll-out.

3.1.7 Job searches

As part of the pilot, job searches were removed from First Contact. Instead, FCOs offered customers a dedicated job search from Jobseeker Direct. Staff views of this change were mixed. Some FCOs considered that job searches were an integral part of the claims process that should be included within the single call. Others believed that job searches slowed down First Contact and were best conducted in a dedicated call by someone from Jobseeker Direct who offered more specialised knowledge and experience. In these cases, staff felt that the removal of job searches improved their experience of the job because it allowed them to concentrate on their core task of gathering full and accurate information. FCOs reported that customers did not routinely take up the offer of a call-back from Jobseeker Direct call back. Unfortunately, no data was available to confirm or refute that the number of job searches fell under the pilot.

3.1.8 Rapid Reclaims

A new clerical Rapid Reclaim process was introduced by the SPR pilot and FCOs widely regarded as a success. Staff felt that this process was simpler and quicker. They liked the fact that there was no need to go into CMS, and that the FCO only needed to check the toolkit, along with whether or not a customer’s circumstances had changed. FCOs also felt that the new process saved time and that customers
reacted better as it was quicker for them. In some cases, FCOs felt that the new Rapid Reclaim process did not speed up the overall claiming process for customers because they still had to wait four days before visiting the Jobcentre for a WFI.

### 3.1.9 Overall staff experience

In general, FCOs perceived that the new process implemented by the pilot was an improvement, with staff reporting that they felt a greater sense of achievement dealing with customers from start to finish in the single call. Some of the issues affecting FCO job satisfaction before the pilot persisted. There were still frustrations with CMS, some inappropriate calls and long calls involving Language Line.

In Pembroke Dock, the Admin. Team felt that they struggled to support the effective delivery of the SPR pilot and this reduced their job satisfaction. More specifically, the Team worked with FCOs who delivered both the SPR pilot and the previous SOM process to take new and repeat claims for benefit. Contact Centre staff found this confusing and reported that mistakes were made as a result, particularly in the notes provided to Admin. staff. These mistakes complicated the work of Admin. Team, limited their ability to send customer statements out on the day First Contact was completed, and contributed to the development of a slight backlog.

Contact Centre management staff did not feel that the pilot affected staff absence or sickness.

### 3.1.10 Overall customer satisfaction

Research with customers in Central London and North Lincolnshire showed that the pilot improved customer service at First Contact. Customers were more likely to think that the overall service at First Contact was ‘very good’ or ‘good’ in the pilots than in comparator areas, across both London and Lincolnshire (Figure 3.1)\(^{11}\). In addition, customers surveyed from Central London who had previously made a claim were more likely to think that their experience of First Contact under the pilot was an improvement (46 per cent). This compares with only a third (34 per cent) in West London.

Despite these very positive messages, some customers commented that they did not feel well informed about the overall claims process following First Contact. Some reflected that inadequate information or advice at First Contact stage contributed to delays or failed claims later in the claims process.

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\(^{11}\) Seventy-three per cent of respondents in Central London indicated that service was ‘very good’ or ‘good’, compared with 63 per cent in West London. The comparable figures for North Lincolnshire and the rest of North Yorkshire and the Humber are 81 per cent and 57 per cent.
3.2 Meetings in Jobcentres

Jobcentre staff identified a number of issues before the SPR pilot was introduced that affected their ability to work with and progress new or repeat claims for benefit, including:

- **FA workloads.** The FA role was very resource intensive. FAs routinely complained about heavy workloads and felt that they had to continuously prioritise seeing customers who visited the Jobcentre. This face-to-face work meant that FAs struggled to spend time preparing claims for processing, particularly where evidence or documentation was missing or outstanding, and so felt that they were unable to meet all their responsibilities effectively.

- **Managing the BF system.** Claims that required further information, evidence or documentation were placed in a BF system in the Jobcentre for further work. The BF system was generally difficult to manage as FAs concentrated on meeting customers and addressing their queries. As a result, some claims placed in the BF were not worked on for some time and so there were delays in progressing them to Benefit Processing for payment. Some claims for Income Support (IS) and all claims for IB were particularly vulnerable because these customers did not visit the Jobcentre for a meeting with a FA or a PA.

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**Figure 3.1 How customers rated the overall level of service at the Contact Centres**

Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd.

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12 The ‘good’ category shown in the graph combines the survey responses ‘very good’ and ‘good’. Likewise, the ‘poor’ category combines survey responses ‘very poor’ and ‘poor’.
• **FA appointments running over.** Some FA meetings took longer than 20 minutes, either because they involved a complex claim or because customers arrived late at the Jobcentre. As a result, FA meetings routinely ran into the appointment time allocated for a WFI with a PA.

• **Diary management.** PA and FA Managers (FAMs) pulled off details of the appointments booked for WFIs on a daily basis. This information was used to assign FAs to customers for a 20-minute meeting before the WFI. FAMs reported that up to half of their time was spent organising the FA diaries.

• **Incomplete and inaccurate customer statements.** FAs complained that customer statements routinely required amendments or contained unanswered questions. When this occurred, FAs spent time during meetings with customers to update or make changes to statements on CMS. Amending statements on CMS during customer meetings was reported to take quite a long time, because CMS was slow, could ‘crash’, or because of the number of amendments required. This prolonged the FA meeting, frustrating the customer and possibly making them late for their WFI.

• **Footfall.** Staff in some offices reported that high numbers of customers visited the Jobcentre without an appointment to either provide documentation to support their claim or to chase payment. Such visits interrupted FA work and limited the extent to which FAs were able to work on claims in the BF system.

### 3.2.1 Targeted pre-calls

Under the pilot, pre-calls were only planned to occur if the FTA rate was 17 per cent or more or if the WFI was booked to occur five days or more after the initial inbound call to the Contact Centre. Staff feedback about the changes to pre-calls varied across Jobcentres. In North Lincolnshire, staff generally carried out targeted pre-calling for customers whose WFI was four days or more after IDOC. Across Central London, there was a lack of clarity and consistency about when pre-calls should be conducted. Some Jobcentres conducted blanket pre-calling, while others did none at all. Some Jobcentre staff expressed reservations about cutting out pre-calls, because they considered them to be important in minimising FTA rates and ensuring that customers knew what evidence to bring to their WFI. Management Information (MI) analysis showed that there were actually reductions to FTA rates in both pilots but they could not be directly attributed to the revised process because of the pre-pilot variability of this measure. There was no evidence that either site’s approach to pre-WFI calls was more effective at reducing FTA than the other.

### 3.2.2 Managing work

The changes implemented by the SPR pilot led to improvements in efficiency for some aspects of work in Jobcentres, as follows:
Jobcentre staff consistently believed that the new ‘on demand’ Customer Service Team (CST) allowed them to better accommodate customers who were early for their appointments and to adapt those who were late or FTA. The Team was also able to use the more flexible system to cover each other when a CSTO needed more time with a customer. Staff perceived that waiting to see a member of the Team also decreased.

According to survey data, customers in Central London (a pilot area) spent less time waiting to see Jobcentre staff and less time in appointments/interviews than those in West London (the comparator). There was no comparable difference between pilot and comparator areas in Lincolnshire.

The removal of FA diaries reduced the amount of managerial time spent allocating staff to customers and synchronising FA meetings with PA appointments.

PAs in London preferred the new staggered appointment system, because they felt that it was easier to accommodate staff shortages, particularly if customers were not all arriving at the same time. This view was not shared by PAs in North Lincolnshire, who felt it was easier for staff to cover each other if appointments were synchronised. The reasons for these different views and experience are unclear, but may be linked to the existing ‘on-demand’ system already in place in some London Jobcentres before the pilot was introduced.

### 3.2.3 CSTO meeting

The pilot reduced the length of customer meetings with a CSTO to 15 minutes, compared with 20 minutes available for FA meetings. CSTOs consistently questioned if the reduced time allocation was realistic, especially for customers:

- with a complex case;
- who arrived late;
- who did not receive their customer statement before the meeting;
- who were from a different country;
- who needed a Habitual Residence Test (HRT); and
- attending a large Jobcentre dealing with a high volume of customers because time was lost waiting to be directed and walking to the CSTO, who could be located on the other side of the office or on another floor.

Changes were made in response to these concerns during the SPR pilot. Customers were asked to arrive 20 minutes prior to their PA appointment so that the full 15 minutes was available with a CSTO. Some staff still felt this was insufficient, particularly for more complicated customer claims.

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13 Since the pilot, CSTOs have reverted to the title of FA.
Concerns around the adequacy of time available for a CSTO meeting were, in part, related to staff confusion about what CSTOs were and were not supposed to cover in the reduced claims check introduced by the pilot. Jobcentre staff felt that greater clarity was needed to explain where their job ended and that of staff working in BDS/Cs started. Some staff appeared reluctant to perform a reduced claims check, or held reservations about the logic of this aspect of the pilot. These members of the CST asserted that allowing errors to go unnoticed at the Jobcentre could result in greater delays further down the line, and so believed that the reduced claim check was a false economy. No definitive evidence was available at the time of writing this report to establish if the pilot increased or reduced the level of inaccurate or missing information on customer statements.

The SPR pilot introduced a new A10 form for CSTOs to use to record amendments and additions to customer statements rather than entering data onto CMS during meetings. CSTOs in North Lincolnshire routinely felt that the new form duplicated work since changes were made twice: once to record changes on the form; and then again to update CMS once customers left. This process was adapted during the pilot so that A10 forms were only used in limited instances, when statements required substantial changes that would take a long time to enter onto CMS. Central London CSTOs perceived that the revised use of A10 forms was an improvement on practice before the pilot – when all changes were made straight onto CMS – and allowed them to deal with customers more efficiently.

3.2.4 Work Focused Interviews

PAs and PA Managers (PAMs) consistently believed that customers were more likely to arrive at the WFI appointment on time following the introduction of the pilot. They felt that this was significant improvement as it ensured the full 40 minutes allocated for a WFI was available and less waiting for customers. Overall, PAs did not believe that the reduced claim check and increased emphasis on delivering customers to the WFI on time affected the extent to which benefits were discussed in WFIs.

3.2.5 The Brought Forward system

Responsibility for managing and handling the BF system was transferred from Jobcentres to BDS/Cs under the pilot. Jobcentre staff reported that this change considerably reduced the workload of the CST. There were mixed views across staff and offices as to whether or not this signaled an improvement to the overall claiming process. In general, Jobcentres and staff who struggled before the pilot, with a large backlog of claims in the BF system, welcomed the change. In particular, they thought that allowing CSTOs to primarily concentrate on seeing customers improved both staff experience and customer service.
'I think that the benefit side of things sits better with the benefit processing and the Benefit Delivery Centres...they’ve got the experience there. And it frees us up a little bit in some ways to concentrate on what we’re really about, helping people back into work. So I am actually pleased.'

(Jobcentre Staff)

In contrast, staff in Jobcentres that were able to manage the BF system before the pilot believed that their customers experienced longer delays under the pilot because BDS/Cs were working through a backlog of claims inherited from other Jobcentres. The CST in these offices expressed frustration at having ‘lost control’ over the claims process. They felt powerless to speed things up and were unable to advise their customers of the progress of their claim once it had left the Jobcentre.

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

(Jobcentre Staff)

Some of these staff pointed to increasing numbers of customers coming into the Jobcentre to complain about delays in receiving their benefit payment as evidence of deterioration in customer service. While two-fifths of customers who were surveyed from North Lincolnshire (40 per cent) and a third from Central London (32 per cent) reported that they visited their local Jobcentre to enquire about the progress of their claim, there were no significant differences to experiences in areas and Districts where the pilot was not in operation. Unfortunately, no data is available to definitively establish if Jobcentres that were able to manage the BF system before the pilot experienced an increase in footfall after the pilot because customers’ benefit payment was delayed.

3.2.6 Customer statements for customers and people whose WFI was waived or deferred

Under the pilot, customers whose WFI was waived or deferred were asked to send their customer statements and supporting documentation direct to the BDS/C to avoid delays at the Jobcentre. Some staff felt that this approach reduced their workload because they were no longer expected to handle claims for these customers. Others reported that they still had to respond to customers under the pilot whose claim was waived or deferred because they continued to use the Jobcentre to send information and to follow up their claim. These ad hoc visits to the Jobcentre continued to interrupt planned work and were resource intensive.

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14 WFIs are waived or deferred for some people claiming IS and all people claiming IB.
CSTOs did not know if redirecting statements straight to the BDS/C reduced the end-to-end processing time for their customers or simply transferred the bottleneck from the Jobcentre to the BDS/C. The AACT for IB claims did actually improve under the pilot compared with IS and Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) claims which did not realise similar improvements. A possible explanation for this could be that the majority of IB claimants have re-scheduled WFIs, whereas a large proportion of IS claims and all JSA claims still come via Jobcentres.

### 3.2.7 Sending information to Benefit Processing

Before the pilot, staff – particularly those working in Central London – asserted that information frequently went missing in transit between Jobcentres and the BDC. When this happened, statements and evidence had to be re-sent, which delayed the claims process and frustrated customers. Some staff hoped that combining claim preparation and benefit processing functions on one site under the pilot would help to address this problem. This was not the case, however, and Jobcentre staff continued to report instances when customer statements, evidence and documentation went missing in transit to Glasgow.

### 3.2.8 Overall staff experience in Jobcentres

Staff’s overall experience of the pilot depended on the Jobcentre in which they worked and their role. In offices that reported that they successfully managed new and repeat claims and the BF system before the pilot, staff routinely thought that the changes were unnecessary and questioned if customer service improved under the pilot. In offices that were not on top of the BF system and held a backlog of outstanding claims, Jobcentre staff perceived that the pilot improved their ability to do their job and made it easier to manage their workload.

CST staff held mixed views about their new role. Some perceived that their work had become repetitive and they missed the variety of the previous FA role. Others were pleased with the restricted workload and felt that the removal of some areas of responsibility alleviated stress caused by a heavy workload. CSTOs still raised concerns about the volume of work, particularly the number of customers they were expected to see in a day under the SPR pilot, and did not feel that this was achievable.

Jobcentre staff routinely stated that they welcomed the pilot’s increased emphasis on customers to collect and forward the evidence and documents needed to support their claim to the BDS/C.

### 3.2.9 Overall customer service in Jobcentres

Findings from customer research on their experience of services in Jobcentres included the following:

- Customers surveyed from the Central London were more likely to think that the overall service at the Jobcentre was ‘very good’ or ‘good’ than counterparts in West London (63 per cent and 56 per cent respectively). There were no significant differences in levels of satisfaction between North Lincolnshire and the rest of the East and North Yorkshire and the Humber District.
• Customers in Central London generally spent less time waiting to see Jobcentre staff and less time in appointments/interviews than those in West London (the comparator). There was no significant difference between the North Lincolnshire pilot and its comparator, the rest of the East and North Yorkshire and Humber District.

• More than half of survey respondents in both Central and West London who attended an appointment at a Jobcentre said they had to repeat the same information to more than one staff member. The difference in figures for the two areas is not significant, implying that the pilot did not lead to ‘fewer contacts’ for customers within the Jobcentre office.

• Although there were consistent reports of friendly and helpful staff, customers routinely felt they were not provided with detailed information about what would happen to their claim once it left the Jobcentre. Some reported that neither CSTOs nor PAs could give customers a clear idea of how much money they could expect to receive.

Figure 3.2  How customers rated overall level of service at Jobcentres


15 The ‘good’ category shown in the graph combines the survey responses ‘very good’ and ‘good’. Likewise, the ‘poor’ category in the graph combines the survey responses ‘very poor’ and ‘poor’.
3.3 Claims preparation and benefit processing

Before the SPR pilot was introduced, staff working in Benefit Processing Teams (BPTs) raised a number of concerns regarding the speed and efficiency with which claims were received and handled, as follows:

- **Delays in receiving claims.** Jobcentres held onto a large number of claims in their BF systems while waiting for customers to provide outstanding evidence and information. This was particularly the case for customers whose WFI was waived or deferred – some claims for IS and all claims for IB – and who BPT staff perceived to be more vulnerable than customers whose claims were straightforward and could be processed more quickly. As a result, there were delays in the progress of claims from Jobcentres to BDS/Cs and in the payment of benefits.

- **Incomplete information and re-building claims.** BPT staff routinely reported that they received customer statements that were inaccurate or incomplete and required a lot of re-working. A high proportion of claims could not be successfully pushed from CMS to Legacy systems, and so BPT Officers (BPTOs) had to spend time rebuilding some claims.

- **Answering customer enquiries.** BPTOs consistently reported handling calls from customers who wanted to know what was happening with their claim. These calls interrupted the Team’s work and slowed down the speed with which they were able to process claims.

As indicated in Chapter Two, the transfer of responsibility for claim preparation activities from Jobcentres to BDS/Cs was handled differently in the two pilot areas. In North Lincolnshire, a distinct CPT was established to prepare all claims for processing. This team was based at BDSs and was separate to the BPT, which focused on processing claims for payment. In Glasgow BDC, serving customers from Central London, the CPT function was incorporated into the roles and responsibilities of the existing BPT. This approach allowed the same officer to complete both sets of tasks for a single claim.

While there were some common findings across the two pilots, the combined model trialled in Glasgow appeared more effective in addressing the objectives of the SPR pilot. Broadly speaking, BDC staff believed that the combined CPT/BPT delivered greater consistency across preparation and processing and led to some efficiency savings. BDS/C staff in both pilots raised a number of issues that were not specifically related to the pilot design but affected their ability to deliver its objectives. These included:
• **Inheriting a backlog of claims.** BDS/C staff inherited large backlogs of unprepared claims from the pre-existing SOM at the start of the SPR pilot. Staff felt that starting with a backlog meant that they had no time to adjust to the new system and, where necessary, refine it. Under the pilot, BDS/C staff had to respond to large volumes of customer queries and emergency requests from people whose claims were already outstanding. The backlog was also thought to affect the number of requests for emergency payments as people had to wait longer for their claim to be processed. Staff suggested that time and resources were needed before the pilot to clear the backlog so that they could then focus on delivering the revised claiming process.

• **Stretched resources.** Resources at the BDS/Cs were stretched by sickness, annual leave, and the creation of a Telephone Enquiries Team to handle incoming calls from customers. Staff felt that these factors slowed down the turnaround of claim preparation and processing.

• **Requests for emergency payments.** BDS/C staff reported that they received a large number of requests for emergency payments. These requests arrived with little or no warning and required immediate attention, and so work was interrupted to prepare the emergency payment. The volume and timing of requests for emergency payments placed a considerable constraint on the extent to which Officers were able to progress new and repeat claims.

• **The completeness and accuracy of customer statements received.** CPT/BPT staff routinely expected customer statements to be more accurate and complete on arrival at the BDS/C. Officers felt that this increased their workload as a lot of time was needed to collect and verify outstanding information for customers’ claims.

The sections below look at how changes introduced by the pilot affected claim preparation and benefit processing functions within the BDS/C. Differences between the two pilots and their set-up are highlighted where relevant.

### 3.3.1 Receiving claims

The SPR pilot successfully increased the speed with which claims were moved from the Jobcentre to the BDS/C by transferring responsibility for claim preparation and the management of the BF system from Jobcentres to BDS/Cs. There continued, however, to be delays associated with the transit of claims from London to Glasgow and this is supported by MI data. Figure 3.3 shows that almost all claims in North Lincolnshire arrived at the BDSs on the day or the day after a customer’s WFI was completed. For customers in Central London, claims took one or two days to reach Glasgow BDC and a significant number took longer than this.
Glasgow BDC staff also felt that delays in sorting and distributing claims once they arrived at the centre worsened at the start of the pilot due to poor labelling of documentation or the inclusion of papers with no notes or reference material. The Admin. Team generally associated these difficulties with the initial transfer of Jobcentres’ backlog of claims to the BDC. As the pilot became more established, Admin. staff were able to handle incoming claims more efficiently.

### 3.3.2 Courtesy calls

The SPR pilot introduced plans for CPT/BPT staff to make courtesy calls to customers on their claim’s arrival at the BDC to let customers know that they had received their documentation and to outline what would happen next. Research with staff and customers showed that courtesy calls were not routinely made. Instead, CPT/BPT only contacted customers when they were either preparing their claim and required further evidence or information or responding to their enquiries. As a result, the BDS/Cs provided customers with less information about the progress of their claim under the pilot than previously.

Customers routinely complained that they did not know what was happening with their claim. Almost half of all customers surveyed in North Lincolnshire (48 per cent) and two-fifths of those in Central London (40 per cent) contacted Jobcentre Plus to chase their claim. These contacts generated inappropriate calls to the Contact Centres, footfall in local Jobcentres, and enquiries to CPT/BPTs. Courtesy calls may have helped here, but it is not possible to say definitively due to the lack of courtesy calls made by BDS/BDC staff.
3.3.3 Claims preparation

BDS/BDC staff generally supported the transfer of claim preparation activities from Jobcentres to CPT/BPTs. They believed that officers who had detailed benefit knowledge and worked in ‘backroom’ functions, away from face-to-face contact with customers, were able to review and prepare claims more quickly, and provide more consistent information to customers about the information or evidence needed to process their claim. CPT/BPT staff consistently felt that the BDS/Cs were under-resourced. This was particularly the case for the new CPT in North Lincolnshire, which was overwhelmed by the volume of work, most of which was caused by factors that were unrelated to the pilot. However, it was difficult to gauge whether or not the level of resourcing would have been sufficient without the backlogs inherited from Jobcentres and the additional work associated with these.

Partly in response to the high volume the CPT in North Lincolnshire set up a ‘Work Pending’ system to ensure that claims were handled in the order that they arrived at the CPT. CPT staff believed that this approach also encouraged a greater parity of service for all customers, particularly for people claiming IS or IB whose WFI was waived or deferred. CPT Officers (CPTOs) felt that these customers were neglected before the pilot was introduced, because their claims were more likely to be left in Jobcentres’ BF system than those with more straightforward cases. However the negative impact of the work pending system was that more straightforward claims such as JSA spent longer in the system than before the pilot.

Staff interviewed in Glasgow BDC described a system where each CPT/BPT officer had their own BF system, and worked on the claims in it from preparation to processing. In general, officers thought this worked well, allowing individuals and teams to take ownership of claims and monitor missing information more closely.

CPT/BPT staff identified incomplete claims and inaccurate statements arriving at the BDC as an ongoing issue that constrained the speed with which claims were prepared for processing. Officers routinely reported that these claims were placed in the BF system for further work. Claims that went into the BF system took longer over the CPT and BPT stages than those that did not. Figure 3.4 shows how the distribution of processing times differs between the two sites. Rapid Reclaims are not included in these charts as in North Lincolnshire, these claims were sent directly to the BPT from the Jobcentres. Eliminating these claims from the analysis means that the figures are more comparable.

Although it was not officially BDC staff responsibility to prepare the claim before the pilot, BDC staff routinely reported that they received inaccurate/incomplete statements and had to prepare the claim in order to process it before the pilot.
Figure 3.4  Time taken for claim forms to be processed following receipt in CPT

North Lincolnshire

Glasgow

Days from Jobcentre to CPT

Days over CPT and BPT

Percentage of claims processed

BF
Non-BF

Percentage of claims processed
The separate CPT in North Lincolnshire placed a much higher proportion of claims in the BF system: 40-50 per cent in North Lincolnshire compared to 20-30 per cent at Glasgow BDC. The difference in MI between the two sites suggests there were significant differences in the way the BF system was managed between the sites. The reasons for this are unclear. One reason could be that North Lincolnshire received a higher volume of inaccurate/incomplete claims. However, it is more likely that the difference reflects the different staffing arrangements and level of processing experience at the claims preparation stage.

In North Lincolnshire the CPT was mainly staffed by people who were FAs before the pilot. FAs were used to placing claims in the BF when there was any small amount of evidence missing, whereas Glasgow CPT/BPT had greater experience of processing claims and dealt with minor missing evidence on the spot rather than placing them in the BF system. It was an advantage that in Glasgow the CPT and BPT was combined as the decision to place the claim in the BF system could be made more easily.

In North Lincolnshire, JSA claims spent, on average, eight days in the BF system compared to 16 days in Glasgow. The higher number of claims put in the BF system yet a shorter average length of time spent in the BF system in North Lincolnshire supports the theory that claims were placed in the BF system with minor missing information.

In Glasgow, most claims which took a long time to process had been in the BF system whereas this was less true of North Lincolnshire. The average time for claims which had been into the BF system in Glasgow was 20 days compared to seven days for those which had not been in the BF system. In North Lincolnshire, the comparable figures were 19 and 15 days. If Rapid Reclaims are included, the average time for all JSA claims over the CPT and BPT stages is 13 days in North Lincolnshire and eight days in Glasgow. One possible reason for this is that all claims in North Lincolnshire were put in a work pending system in North Lincolnshire (as described above) dealt with claims by date order, regardless of whether they were put in the BF system. Secondly the transfer between CPT and BPT in North Lincolnshire created a delay of BF and non-BF claims.

3.3.4 Benefit enquiries

New Telephone Enquiry Teams were established alongside the pilot to handle the volume of customer enquiries directed to BDS/Cs. Before the pilot was implemented, some staff were concerned that the SPR pilot would increase the volume of incoming calls to BDS/Cs primarily as a result of the transfer of claim preparation activities from Jobcentres. The introduction of dedicated resources to deal with

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17 In North Lincolnshire, two CPTOs were allocated on a rota basis to dealing with telephone enquiries, whilst in Glasgow a dedicated Tele-team was staffed by individuals from the CPT/BPT on a six month rotational basis.
customers’ telephone enquiries was therefore welcomed in principle as a means of freeing up CPT/BPT time for the additional responsibilities adopted\(^17\). In practice, however, insufficient resources were allocated and the Tele-teams could not cope. There were a high volume of unanswered calls at Glasgow BDC. These unanswered calls raised a number of concerns and issues, including:

- staff believed that a high number of unanswered calls contributed to poor customer service at the BDC;
- Contact Centre and Jobcentre Plus staff consistently believed that their staff resources were diverted from their core tasks to handle calls from customers who could not get through to the BDC; and
- customers routinely visited their local Jobcentre when they could not get through to the BDS/Cs, contributing to footfall.

Customers who were able to contact a CPT/BPT Officer found it very difficult to establish any specific information about their claim. Instead, they were simply informed of a backlog and customers reported that BDS/C staff were unable to tell them where their claim was or when they could expect payment. Customers found this frustrating.

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

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

Where customers were given specific reasons for delays, they generally centred on incomplete customer statements or outstanding evidence. Some customers asserted they were not clearly told what was required by staff earlier on in the claims process (at the Contact Centre or Jobcentre) or that evidence went missing after it was submitted. In some instances, customers reported that their claim was subsequently processed quite quickly once the problems were identified, discussed and addressed. For other cases, however, customers routinely reported that it took weeks to chase their claim, during which time no one could tell them what was going on with their claim.

### 3.3.5 Pushing claims

Overall, staff interviewed before the pilot hoped that the transfer of claims preparation to BDS/Cs would help to improve the proportion of claims successfully pushed from CMS to Legacy systems. MI data does in fact show a slight increase in the proportion of claims successfully electronically transferred over the course of the pilot. However, these are in line with a national improvement in push rates and so cannot be directly attributed to the pilot.
3.3.6 Processing

Staff interviewed in Glasgow BDC felt that the combined CPT/BPT encouraged greater ownership and responsibility for claims, and reduced duplication of work between claims preparation and benefit processing. They believed that officers were more likely to request accurate and sufficient information earlier in the process as a result, which in turn meant claims could be processed more efficiently. In contrast, BPT staff in North Lincolnshire pointed to incomplete claims arriving at BPT, which was partly due to difficulties in the CPT to collect all the information required within the 30 day hand off while working through existing backlogs. In order to deal with these incomplete claims, the BPT set up their own BF system to manage claims still awaiting information.

An additional benefit of the combined CPT/BPT model implemented in Glasgow was having all functions based on one site. This meant that the main delays incurred between claims preparation and benefit processing were related to the push process\(^\text{18}\). This is in contrast to the North Lincolnshire model, which incurred a delay in transferring the paper based hand off (the input document) between the CPT and BPT because some of the teams were based in different locations.

3.3.7 Time taken in claims preparation and benefit processing

In general, staff routinely felt that the pilot was not successful in speeding up claim preparation and benefit processing, towards the end of the claiming process. Inherited backlogs and stretched resources may have obscured the pilot’s potential ability to create efficiencies. Preparing claims for processing was the most time consuming part of the process, and formed a bottleneck that delayed the payment of benefits and limited scope to delivering improvements in actual average clearance times. JSA claims took on average 11 days in the CPT in North Lincolnshire. Thirty-five per cent of claims arrived in the BPT on the day that the CPT finished preparation, but 24 per cent and 29 per cent of claims respectively arrived in the BPT one or two days later. Once the claim was with the BPT they were generally processed by the BPT on the day of receipt or the day after, although a small amount of claims which took much longer than this raised the average duration to three days. The picture was very similar for IS and IB claims, with the most time consuming stage being the CPT followed by delays of one or two days in transit between the CPT and BPT and relatively quick benefit processing.

In Glasgow, JSA claims took eight days from receipt in CPT to benefit clearance. There was no MI available to measure any delays in the handoff to the CMS push expert due to the combined CPT/BPT role. IS claims took one day more on average, and IB claims one day less.

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\(^{18}\) Responsibility for pushing claims from CMS to Legacy has been transferred back to Jobcentres since the pilot.
3.3.8 Staff experience

While pointing to the backlog of claims and under-resourcing, CPT/BPT staff in Glasgow welcomed the new combined role and thought that it could improve job satisfaction in the long run. They felt that it made sense for one officer to see a claim through from preparation to processing and believed that their detailed benefit knowledge made them well placed to do so.

In contrast, low staff morale and low levels of job satisfaction were widespread in North Lincolnshire BDSs. The CPT in particular was disappointed with the impact and effectiveness of the SPR pilot, and particularly the inability to manage workload within the resources available. The lack of improvement in claim delivery times since the pilot’s implementation was also felt to contribute to poor motivation and low staff morale.

3.3.9 Customer service

In general, staff felt that the pilot did not deliver improved customer service at the claim preparation and benefit processing stage of the claiming process. They identified a number of issues that constrained their ability to improve customer service, including:

- continued delays in preparing and processing claims, in part due to backlogs inherited from Jobcentres; and
- the high volume of unanswered calls as a result of inadequate resources dedicated to dealing with customer enquires.

Research with customers supported these concerns. Customers routinely reported that they were not able to get through to the BDS/C on the phone and received poor information when they did (as discussed in Section 3.3.4). In addition, customers surveyed in both pilot areas were much more likely to blame the BDC for any perceived delays than any of the other stages of the claims process (Jobcentre or First Contact). Figure 3.5 shows how respondents’ satisfaction deteriorated with each stage of the claims process.
3.4 The end-to-end business process

A key criteria for measuring the pilot’s success is the impact on AACT for Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), IS and IB. JSA AACT is considered to be the purest indicator of the total end-to-end time from Call Centre to benefit clearance\textsuperscript{19}.

The impact of the pilot process on AACT was measured by comparison with other districts which had been matched to the pilot sites in terms of their past AACT performance, and the similarity of their business processes (offices must be integrated and use the CMS system). This comparison enabled outside factors which may have affected AACT and been confounded with the pilot effect to be accounted for.

\textsuperscript{19} JSA AACT is measured from first contact at the Contact Centre, whereas IB is measured from the Date of Claim (DOC) which is the date that a completed claim form is received at a Jobcentre Plus location and IS is measured from the date that the evidence requirement is satisfied. As such, JSA AACT is the purest indicator of end-to-end speed as it is directly affected by the speed of the Contact Centre, whereas the other two benefits are only affected indirectly by Contact Centre processes.
After six months worth of post implementation AACT data the analysis showed:

- Evidence of an adverse effect on JSA AACT for both sites beginning around the start of the pilot. North Lincolnshire has shown signs of a recovery but has still not returned to pre-pilot levels. There is little evidence that performance will return to pre-pilot levels soon in Central London.

- No evidence of any impact, positive or negative, on IS AACT for either site.

- No direct evidence of an impact on IB AACT, although both sites improved their IB AACT by around six – eight days over the course of the pilot. The method used did not pick up an impact because pre-pilot variation for IB AACT was very large, and also there has been a national improvement of approximately two days since April which was to be taken into account. Despite this the pilots have effectively shown that good IB AACT performance is possible under the new process.

Several factors have been identified which are likely to have affected performance in the months after the pilot rolled out, these include inheriting backlogs of claims from Jobcentres, resource issues in CPTs, and the inevitable disruptive effects caused by implementing, and fully complying with, a new process. These problems mean that the effect of the actual process and the way it was implemented may have been slightly confounded, but overall the results imply that the process needs to be further refined in order to improve AACT performance.

Findings from staff and customer research are consistent with these findings. Staff, in particular, believed that overall processing times were similar to those before the pilot. Staff routinely felt that while efficiency savings were created at the front end of the claiming process, these were countered by continued – or even increased – delays towards the end. Research with customers highlighted that the delivery of services at First Contact and in Jobcentres affect those delivered by Benefit Delivery Sites/Centres. More specifically, inaccurate or incomplete data collection and/or poor information provision at First Contact and in Jobcentres contributed to delays in claim preparation and benefit processing (see Section 3.3.2).
4 Conclusions

This chapter draws together the conclusions of the evaluation. It assesses the extent to which the SPR pilot delivered improvements in efficiency, staff experience and customer service.

4.1 Delivering efficiency

There was strong evidence that the pilot was successful in speeding up the front-end of the claiming process. The single call at First Contact was shorter and reduced duplication compared to the dual-call system used before the pilot and it removed the delays previously built in between the inbound and outbound calls. The IVR system reduced the volume of inappropriate calls received at the Contact and reduced the time needed to take new and repeat claims. FCOs were more likely to book WFIIs within the optimum period of three – five days after customers’ initial date of claim in the single call than in a call-back. Customers spent less time waiting in Jobcentres and their claim was generally received by BDS/Cs within one or two days of their WFI.

The most time-consuming aspect of the claims process was in claims preparation. Frustratingly for staff bottlenecks appeared in this aspect of the process which were largely unrelated to the pilot. These included:

- backlogs of claims from Jobcentres that were inherited at the start of the pilot;
- stretched staff resources;
- inaccurate and/or incomplete customer statements received; and
- disruptive interruptions by requests for emergency payments.

This impeded the ability of the pilot to deliver improvements to AACT for the three main benefits. While there is some evidence that it contributed to specific improvements for individual benefits, particularly IB, the pilot process would benefit from further refinement to improve AACT performance.
4.2 Improving customer service

Overall, the pilot was successful in improving customer service at the front end of the claiming process, at First Contact and (to a lesser extent) in Jobcentres. The SPR pilot was successful in providing fewer contacts and easier access for customers, through:

• the IVR, which made access easier through routing and particularly for Rapid Reclaim customers; and
• the single call, involving discussions with one FCO rather than two as done previously.

There remained areas where customers’ experience of claiming did not improve or did not meet their needs. In particular, customers felt ill-informed about the progress of their claim and continued to be dissatisfied with the length of time taken to receive payment.

The pilot did not deliver speedier decision making, easier access and fewer contacts for the following reasons:

• outstanding or missing evidence;
• customers were unclear about who to contact to find out about their claim and were passed around;
• difficulties accessing the BDS/C; and
• delays in claim preparation.

4.3 Improving staff experience

In general, the pilot made sense to staff, who found most of the changes user friendly and transparent. Key aspects of the pilot that improved staff experience were:

• the single call, which FCOs found easy to use, increased the level of their ownership of a claim and enhanced their sense of achievement in dealing with the customer all the way through First Contact;
• walkthroughs of the process and guidance provided helped to make the pilot transparent;
• the on-demand CST allowed for greater flexibility and helped to ensure that customers arrived for their WFI on time;
• BDS/BDC staff were pleased that they had responsibility for both preparing and processing claims, as it allowed for greater consistency; and
• the Tele-team reduced freed up CPT/BPT time to prepare and process claims.
Further work is needed, however, to make the claiming process a more cohesive end-to-end business process.

The pilot was not fully transparent, however, and staff felt the following issues were unclear:

- the level of information gathering required by FCOs and CSTOs and how much should be left for BDS/C staff; and
- FAs who were redeployed as a result of the pilot wished for a clearer rationale for the pilot.

4.4 Overall conclusions

The SPR pilot is transferable to different local operating contexts and successfully achieved improvements across all of the pilot objectives. The pilot had a positive impact on staff and customer experience and efficiency, particularly at the front-end of the process. Alongside some of the improvements, the pilot highlighted certain issues for attention. A key recommendation is that priority be given to a review of the resources and capacity given to dealing with the back end of the claiming process.
5 Recommendations

This chapter summarises the key recommendations that would further improve the end-to-end process of the SOM pilot. Overall, the pilot highlighted that resources and capacity at each stage of claims processing should be reviewed as a priority if the SPR pilot is to be fit for purpose. Moreover, the pilot underlined the importance of administrative capacity to manage the increased volumes of data inputting at key stages of the process. The pilot also raised a need for improved awareness for FCOs on ‘benefit critical’ questions within CMS, and for the clarification of roles and responsibilities for staff more widely under the new system.

5.1 Overall recommendations

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

- Rectifying the bottlenecks at the back-end of the process. Further review of the management of claim preparation between benefit processing teams, particularly between IS and IB.

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

- Quality Assessment Frameworks. Quality procedures for all offices need to be adapted to fit with the pilot.

- Staff training. Further training and a detailed walk-through diagram were requested.

- Greater emphasis on educating customers. Each role within the process should be clearly outlined to the customer and placing the onus on customers to provide accurate and timely evidence to process the claim.
5.2 Recommendations for the Contact Centre

The following key recommendations were identified to improve the SPR pilot’s delivery and effectiveness at First Contact:

- the previous SOM and the SOM pilot should be operated by different members of staff;
- review resources for the Admin. Team;
- all FCOs should take both new claims and rapid reclaim calls;
- specific Admin. Team training and preparation should be delivered before the pilot;
- training for FCOs should incorporate practical elements, such as practice calls and the opportunity to shadow trainers. IT equipment should be available to FCOs in a quiet designated space for the training;
- improving FCO awareness of ‘Benefit critical’ questions within CMS;
- greater clarification on the level of information required to progress a claim should be provided; and
- improve communication to customers to enforce the need to check their statements before attending their WFI and instructions on what they need to bring as evidence with them to the their appointment, and explicitly tell customers that they will see two people and what their roles are.

5.3 Recommendations for Jobcentres

The following key recommendations were identified to improve the delivery and effectiveness of the SPR pilot in Jobcentres:

- training for Floor Walkers and security staff on the procedure for handling evidence brought into Jobcentres by customers;
- improving the communication between Jobcentres and the BDC;
- ensuring that CSTOs understand the remit of their meetings;
- for CSTOs and PAs to provide clearer explanation about their roles to reduce the amount of customers that ask PAs benefit related questions – freeing up PA time to focus on work discussions;
- explanation of the CSTO and PA roles and the approximate length of time of each meeting should be clearly specified in the appointment letter received prior to visiting the Jobcentre;
- greater clarification regarding the overlap in responsibilities between the CST and BPT; and
- placing greater responsibility on customers for gathering and sending evidence, as they continued to use the Jobcentre as a resource to send evidence from.
5.4 Recommendations for Benefit Delivery Sites/Centres

The following recommendations were identified to improve the delivery and effectiveness of the SPR pilot for BDS/Cs:

- combine the BPT/CPT role to improve efficiency and reduce delays;
- review resources available for staffing the Tele team;
- review staffing needed on the JSA Registration team;
- review cost of training BDC staff to perform joint IS and IB claims preparation and benefit processing;
- improve the use of existing systems used by BDC, that are available to Jobcentre staff so they can find out directly about a customers claim without calling the BDC to find out where the claim has got to;
- improve the process for labelling claims arriving from the Jobcentre so that they can be easily distributed and tracked within the BDC;
- re-visit the blanket courtesy call;
- improve the technical capability of the Tele-team (introduced in Glasgow at the same time as the pilot);
- consider improving access to the BDC to customers by making it a Freephone number; and
- improve telephone access to the BDC for Jobcentre staff, possibly setting up either a caller identification, IVR option or provide direct dial numbers to BDC staff.