Employers’ use of alternative Jobcentre Plus service delivery channels: investigation of issues

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A report of research carried out by Carol Goldstone Associates on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions
## Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ v

The Authors ................................................................................................................ vi

Summary ..................................................................................................................... 1

1 Background and objectives ................................................................................... 7
  1.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 7
  1.2 Research objectives ......................................................................................... 7
  1.3 Channels available to employers through Jobcentre Plus ......................... 8

2 Research method .................................................................................................... 11
  2.1 Methodology ..................................................................................................... 11
  2.2 Sample structure .............................................................................................. 12

3 Classification information and web usage ............................................................ 15
  3.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 15
  3.2 Company and respondent classification ....................................................... 15
  3.3 Internet capacity ............................................................................................... 16

4 Recruitment practices ............................................................................................. 19
  4.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 19
  4.2 Range of sources used ...................................................................................... 19
  4.3 Company website ............................................................................................... 20
  4.4 Newspapers and trade press ............................................................................. 21
  4.5 Internet job boards ............................................................................................. 21
  4.6 Employment agencies ......................................................................................... 23
  4.7 Word-of-mouth and off-street recruitment .................................................... 24
  4.8 Summary of recruitment practices .................................................................. 25
Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all those in Jobcentre Plus who provided help and guidance on this project. In particular, we are indebted to Janet Allaker and Natalie Rhodes for their assistance. Thanks also to the employers who gave their time freely to discuss the issues examined in this study.
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Summary

Background and method

This report details findings of a qualitative study commissioned by Jobcentre Plus to provide information about employers’ awareness, usage and attitudes towards e- and tele-channels with emphasis on the opportunities for future expansion of e-channels. The services examined included Employer Direct, Employer Direct Online (EDon) and Job Warehouse. Seventy two interviews were completed with a range of employers in 66 companies across Britain.

Internet capacity

With very few exceptions, most companies had full computer and internet availability. Employers’ internet capability ranged from highly competent to a computer averse minority who preferred to avoid electronic media where possible. With exceptions, those disliking computer technology tended to be older and in low tech industries.

Recruitment practices

Apart from small companies, most used a range of recruitment providers including the company website, print media, internet job boards, employment agencies and (some small companies only) word-of-mouth.

In general, channel of communication was not spontaneously discussed as a strength or weakness of the chosen provision. The most important exception to this was in relation to internet job boards where users identified channel strengths including speed, medium effectiveness and business advantages.
Jobcentre Plus – image and attitudes

**Branding:** Some or all of the Jobcentre Plus brand names, especially Job Warehouse, were unfamiliar to many employers, even those using the services. Many users did not differentiate between Employer Direct and its online counterpart.

**Jobcentre Plus image:** The image of Jobcentre Plus tends to have lagged behind the changes made over recent years. For example, the image of jobs displayed on walls still remained strong and this outdated image acted as a deterrent, reducing the number of jobs placed with the service.

Many non-users had no specific reason for not using Jobcentre Plus but had just not thought of it.

**Strengths and weaknesses:** Jobcentre Plus’ greatest asset was that it provides a free service. Not all non-users were aware of this. Although of less importance, the diversity of candidates was also seen as a strength.

The lack of screening perceived by many employers was a significant weakness as much time might be spent on ineligible and unqualified candidates. Other key weaknesses were the perceived low calibre of candidates and the number of candidates believed to attend interviews only to secure their benefits.

Elements of the recruitment process

**Notification:** For most employers, notification was the part of the recruitment process most likely to be considered in selecting a provider. Way ahead of channel choice, speed and ease of use were the most critical criteria. Exceptions were those preferring personal contact or with low levels of computer ability who were more likely to opt for phone notification. Email notification was the preferred choice for employers who had put vacancy information together for internal purposes or to send to other providers also.

**Advertising/display:** For the majority of employers, interest in display was lower than notification. Many Jobcentre Plus users had never looked at their advertisements on the web. The number and type of jobseekers who would see the advertisement was more critical than the medium in which it is displayed.

**Applications:** Employers were divided in the extent to which they wanted recruitment providers involved in the application process. Many of those preferring to deal with this entirely in-house opted for the Apply Direct service. Others wanted help with short listing or the provision of application forms to be part of the service. For these employers, Jobcentre Plus’ service provision was inadequate, not least because of the lack of screening of candidates.
Jobcentre Plus services

**EDon:** EDon users were divided between those who had found out about the service from Jobcentre Plus contacts and those who had discovered it themselves by browsing the net. Other potential users, currently using the Employer Direct service, are unaware that an on-line system exists.

Most EDon users found the service easy to use although a minority considered it cumbersome and not very user friendly. It was particularly liked for its speed (especially in comparison with phone notification) and the ability to access the system at any time, including out of hours.

Many users were aware of teething problems and subsequent technical difficulties. Some were tolerant of these but others had stopped using the system as a result. Several aspects of the service were mentioned as areas for improvement including the limited space available for the advertisement and difficulties in making changes.

**Employer Direct:** Employer Direct was the service of choice for those who preferred personal contact or disliked electronic media. Users also included employers unaware of the on-line option, infrequent recruiters and those lacking confidence to negotiate the systems. A number of users had reverted from the EDon system after experiencing technical problems.

Each employer tended to use only one of the notification methods available (phone, email and, less frequently, fax). Email was rated as being as quick as the online EDon system and significantly faster than notification by phone.

There were divergent views about the speed of notifying vacancies by phone. Those considering it too slow were likely to have adopted the email option or to have moved across to EDon.

Customer satisfaction was high although specific problems were identified such as a high level of errors and the amount of time for jobs to appear on the website.

**Job Warehouse:** Half the Job Warehouse users included in the study had tried the system but reverted to EDon or, less commonly, Employer Direct because of the problems they encountered.

Most critically, views were polarised as to whether jobs can be updated quickly using the Job Warehouse system. Although some users uploaded all their jobs within a couple of minutes, others reported that each job took them this time. It is recommended that this is further investigated since lengthy upload time is a significant disincentive to using the service.

The other main reason for moving away from the Job Warehouse system was a reduction in the number of applications received following transfer to the service. The reason for this was the additional portal needed for jobseekers to access Job Warehouse vacancies, a step frequently not taken. Current users also complained about this feature of the service.
Overall, despite some problems, current users were generally satisfied. There was an appreciation of the progress that had been made in a short time although it was not felt that Job Warehouse had yet reached the same technological excellence as the best internet job boards. This was a more urgent priority than adopting facilities available on other internet job boards.

Employer engagement

Current contact: The minority of organisations with an account manager valued the service and felt it to be of mutual benefit. Other organisations have established informal contacts with local Jobcentre Plus offices, perceived as mutually beneficial. Opportunities for such contacts have reduced since the introduction of call centres for recording job vacancies and this is a cause for regret for some employers.

Other existing contacts tended to be sporadic in time and location and to depend on the policies in place at local offices. Contacts included participation in job fairs, display of posters at Jobcentre Plus offices and manning a kiosk on site for a day.

Preferred contact: Level of contact is a very individual choice. Whereas some employers welcomed regular contact, others preferred to retain control and instigate any contact with Jobcentre Plus. Overall, infrequent contact at quarterly intervals would best satisfy the range of preferences.

The preferred communication channel for such contact was generally phone or email. Frequency of contact was deemed more important than channel.

Drivers and barriers for channel choice

Drivers: The two main drivers encouraging use of specific channels for recruitment provision are cost or value for money and time taken or saved. At a much lower level of importance, other drivers included the e-capability of the specific employer and his/her level of preference for personal contact and the type of staff being recruited.

Barriers: Most employers did not see any barriers to using e-channels for all parts of the recruitment process. Indeed, for recruitment of younger people, it was considered advantageous as it portrayed the organisation as modern. A minority, especially those who were personally uncomfortable with computer technology, felt that it was important to retain online and offline methods to be fully inclusive.

Differences across employer type: Variables affecting the channels selected for recruitment provision were, in order of priority, company size (or number of vacancies per year), the employer’s personal approach to e-technology and industry sector. Employment agencies which have large recruitment needs and sectors with high turnover and seasonal requirements such as hospitality and construction were likely to behave as larger companies in selecting channels. Overall, those undertaking the most recruitment are the most likely to be amenable to increasing e-communication in the recruitment process.
Conclusions: next steps for Jobcentre Plus

When considering Jobcentre Plus and the services it offers, channel usage is of secondary concern to employers compared with other issues. In particular, employers criticised Jobcentre Plus for sending unscreened and inappropriate candidates for consideration. Satisfaction will not significantly increase unless this feature of the service is changed.

However, the number of vacancies posted is likely to increase if a vigorous marketing campaign is aimed at employers. This can be used to update Jobcentre Plus’ outmoded image and emphasise recent improvements. For non-users, the campaign should stress that Jobcentre Plus services are free; for customers, wider awareness of EDon is likely to result in converts from the Employer Direct service.

Despite improvements, further changes to the technology will improve the service for customers and these should be implemented before trying to introduce additional facilities to the system.

In particular, changes to Job Warehouse could significantly increase take up rates. Further investigation should be undertaken to determine why some employers record that each vacancy takes several minutes to upload and removal of the additional portal would improve the number of applicants achieved from advertisements placed with the service.
1 Background and objectives

1.1 Introduction

Jobcentre Plus uses a variety of channels to deliver its services to employers. These include face-to-face, telephone and internet routes for vacancy placing, servicing and employer engagement or account management.

Although Jobcentre Plus has previously commissioned a number of pieces of research concerning employers, none has looked specifically at the issues relating to channel preference for employers and there are therefore some gaps in the understanding of employers’ familiarity with and attitudes towards different service delivery channels. In addition, Jobcentre Plus is currently revising its channels strategy for employers, with a particular view to expanding e-channels for the future, and it was therefore considered timely to investigate this area in more detail.

This report details the findings of a qualitative study among employers that was commissioned in order to inform the channels strategy.

1.2 Research objectives

The overarching objective of the research was to provide information about employers’ awareness, usage and attitudes towards e- and tele-channel recruitment. However, this overall objective can be broken down into a number of secondary objectives:

- to investigate the use of different service delivery channels used by employers to recruit staff both through Jobcentre Plus and competitor recruitment partners;
- to understand employers’ views of the various tele- and e-channel recruitment channels provided by Jobcentre Plus and competitors;
- to determine the drivers for employers’ choice of channel, within different recruitment methods;
- to explore what barriers prevent use of e-channels for recruitment by employers;
1.3 Channels available to employers through Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus are planning to gradually increase usage of e-channels for use by employers. The proposed research needed to examine the impact that this shift will have on employers.

This study included the following services which Jobcentre Plus currently offers employers:

**Vacancy placing:**

- **EDon**
  
  Online notification by employers, available 24/7 via Jobcentre Plus website.

- **Employer Direct**
  
  Employers notify Adviser via phone, fax or e-mail. Vacancy advertised in same outlets as EDon but service available only during office hours.

- **Job Warehouse**
  
  Bulk notification of vacancies, often operated by third parties on behalf of employers. Less detailed vacancy information than EDon or Employer Direct.

**Vacancy servicing:**

- **Vacancy Service Manager**
  
  A Vacancy Service Manager (VSM) oversees a vacancy up to the time it is filled and is responsible for liaising with the employer. VSMs have face-to-face contact with some employers.

- **Apply Direct**
  
  Candidates apply directly to employers rather than using Jobcentre Plus as intermediary. Includes all Job Warehouse vacancies but can be used for those notified to Jobcentre Plus via other means.
Employer engagement

• **Face-to-face and telephone account management**

Jobcentre Plus provides three levels of account management, depending on level of priority allocated to employer. Priority largely follows the number of relevant vacancies placed with Jobcentre Plus although other factors may also be taken into consideration.
2 Research method

2.1 Methodology

The nature of the objectives clearly pointed to a qualitative methodology and depth interviewing was selected as the most appropriate medium for this study.

A total of 72 interviews were undertaken across 66 organisations. The majority were conducted face-to-face but 16 interviews were conducted by telephone. Except where permission was refused by the respondent, all interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis purposes.

The sample for the study was provided by Jobcentre Plus from its main database (for Jobcentre Plus users) with a supplementary sample from Experian which was used for identifying suitable non-users. All selected contacts were sent a letter in advance of contact to advise them that the study was taking place and to provide them with an opportunity to opt out.

Contact details on the sample were screened as part of the recruitment process to ensure the most appropriate individual was interviewed. Since the topics to be discussed included both strategic issues (deciding which recruitment routes to use) and practical issues (actual day-to-day involvement in the recruitment procedure) it was sometimes necessary to interview more than one individual in the organisation.

In general, (main) interviews with Jobcentre Plus users were completed with the person who is in most contact with Jobcentre Plus about vacancy placement and, if appropriate who deals most often with the relevant VSM. For non-users, the interview was with the person with responsibility for selecting recruitment sources and the relevant candidate for recruitment. In addition, non-user organisations were eligible for interview only if they had needed to fill a semi-skilled or non-skilled vacancy over the previous six months. These vacancies had to be of the type which are most commonly advertised in Jobcentre Plus.

Copies of the screening questionnaire, topic guide and opt out letter used are appended to this report.

Fieldwork was undertaken in April and May 2006.
2.2 Sample structure

Table 2.1 shows the final achieved sample and how this met the agreed quotas. Employment agencies were excluded from the size and sector quotas:

Table 2.1 Achievement against quota

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Quota</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70 (including up to ten follow-up interviews)</td>
<td>72 (including six follow-up interviews)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Respondent type**
- Job Warehouse: 15+ / 17
- EDon: 15+ / 23
- Employer Direct: 15+ / 24
- Non-user: 15+ / 9
- Lapsed user: 15+ / 6

**Company type (industry sector)**
- Real estate, renting and business activities: 4+ / 4
- Wholesale and retail trade: 4+ / 4
- Hotels and restaurants: 4+ / 6
- Health and social work: 4+ / 5
- Manufacturing: 4+ / 6
- Public administration and defence, compulsory social security: 4+ / 5
- Transport, storage and communication: 4+ / 5
- Other community, social and personal service activities: 4+ / 7
- Construction: 4+ / 3
- Education: 4+ / 6
- Agency: NA / 15

**Location**
- London: 4+ / 8
- North East: 4+ / 7
- Yorkshire and Humberside: 4+ / 4
- East: 4+ / 6
- East Midlands: 4+ / 3
- West Midlands: 4+ / 4
- North West: 4+ / 9
- South East: 4+ / 5
- South West: 4+ / 7
- Scotland: 4+ / 9
- Wales: 4+ / 5

Continued
Table 2.1  Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company Size (number of employees)</th>
<th>Quota</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 10</td>
<td>11+</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 49</td>
<td>11+</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 249</td>
<td>11+</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250 or more</td>
<td>11+</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
- 12 organisations used both EDon and Employer Direct;
- nine organisations have centralised recruitment nationally or over multi-regions.
3 Classification information and web usage

3.1 Introduction

The first part of the topic guide covered basic information such as the size and structure of company, its sector and the number and type of recruits it was likely to require over a period. This section also included respondent information including the individual’s main responsibilities, with particular reference to the importance of recruitment within their job. This information was partly to get respondents thinking about their company’s recruitment policies and procedures. Additionally, it provided a contextual background against which their subsequent comments could be placed.

This chapter also looks at the e-channel capability available within the organisation and examines the extent to which employers are web literate. This information will be critical to understand the extent to which e-channels can be expanded, especially if other channels are to be limited or withdrawn.

3.2 Company and respondent classification

The organisations included within the research were of many different types, the biggest single group being employment agencies since these are an important element within the Jobcentre Plus database. Around one in four of those interviewed were from an employment agency – these varied by type (specialists and generalists were included) and geographic coverage (local and national). In addition, the sample included organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Large, multi-site organisations tended to operate using one of two different approaches to recruitment. In the first variant, recruitment was undertaken centrally for all locations; generally, local managers would have limited autonomy in the process although they may have responsibility for the final staff selection, especially for non-managerial positions. Alternatively, although an organisation may have
some processes and procedures laid down, local managers had a degree of autonomy in the recruitment process, including some leeway in selecting recruitment providers.

Respondents from larger organisations tended to work within the HR and/or training function. For this group, recruitment was a major part of their role and they tended to have hands on experience of all parts of the process with line managers becoming involved in or after short listing of candidates. Such organisations generally have detailed recruitment policies and practices.

In small and medium sized companies, recruitment was generally undertaken by the owner or partner or by a senior director. For these individuals, recruitment is a small aspect of their responsibility and, especially for the smallest organisations, may be an uncommon – and, therefore, unfamiliar – requirement.

Within the agencies, the respondent was generally one of their senior recruitment advisers, typically the individual nominated as the key point of contact between themselves and their local Jobcentre Plus office.

In general, as may be expected, the overall number of recruits required per year was approximately proportional to company size. Nonetheless, there were some sectoral variations. For example, turnover was particularly high in the catering and hospitality sectors so that medium and larger organisations anticipated a continual need for new staff. These sectors, together with some others such as construction, also experienced seasonal fluctuations.

### 3.3 Internet capacity

Since a critical element of this investigation involved usage of and attitudes towards electronic forms of communication, it was important to establish respondents’ Internet access and their general attitudes towards computer usage.

Broadly, respondents ranged across a spectrum as regards their personal approach to computer usage in general and the internet in particular. At one end of the spectrum were those individuals for whom surfing the net has become a way of life and one with which they are both familiar and comfortable. Many of this group were office based individuals who use computers for many aspects of their work. Although not exclusively so, many were young and working in high tech industries such as communications or parts of the public sector.

‘I’m computer literate. I haven’t got any problems with doing anything on computers so I’m quite used to cruising the internet and things.’

(EDon, health, small)

At the other extreme were a small number of computer averse individuals who avoided using computers for any purpose, even when these were in the organisation.
‘Others do it for me. I’m a reluctant user, I don’t have a computer I’m afraid, I don’t use one. So all e-mails that are for me go to our PA and I get the hard copy print. That suits me. So it’s basically I’m transferring IT into the written word.’

(Employer Direct, construction, small)

Although there were several exceptions, those averse to computer and internet usage tended to be older and less skilled individuals, primarily in smaller companies.

While relatively uncommon, examples were found of organisations with no computers at all and several others had no internet access. Those employers with no computers were all very small and had exclusively unskilled or semi-skilled staff. However, it should be noted that others in similar sectors had full internet access and often included highly web literate staff. The lack of computerisation could be, at least in part, a result of the owner’s personal antipathy to the technology.

Between these two extremes were a number of individuals who had some computer access but who were occasional or semi-reluctant users. These employers can and do use computers as part of their job but, rather than using e-mail or the web, prefer more personal formats for communication. The main channel for this will be telephone with face-to-face meetings arranged when they consider this appropriate.

Although most respondents did use computers at work and/or at home, some organisations had restricted computer access at work. Sometimes this was restricted to banning specific sites. Elsewhere, policies were stricter with access restricted to most of the internet. In such cases, specific individuals may be permitted to use only websites considered to be essential for their job.

Individual attitudes to and familiarity with the web proved to be a major factor in influencing attitudes to and choice of communication channel for all aspects of work – including preferences in dealing with Jobcentre Plus.
4 Recruitment practices

4.1 Introduction

To understand how Jobcentre Plus fitted into the range of recruitment providers that each employer used, information was gathered about all sources that were used; reasons for using the selected providers and the advantages and disadvantages of each; and the relationship between provider and type of recruits sourced.

This chapter briefly examines the providers used other than Jobcentre Plus. It looks at the reasons for choice with particular emphasis on the channels of communication used.

4.2 Range of sources used

A minority of employers used no other recruitment source than Jobcentre Plus. Generally, these were smaller organisations with minimal recruitment needs. They also tended to be among the more satisfied Jobcentre Plus users – their experience had been positive, the requisite recruits had been hired and they did not anticipate any need to look further if they should need new staff in the future.

Similarly, some of the smaller non-users interviewed advertised in only one place, typically the local newspaper or a preferred employment agency, and were unlikely to think more widely in the future since the provider met their needs.

Most employers, however, used a selection of sources, generally highlighting one or other method as their preferred option but backed up by alternatives. Typically, one provider was used for one type of vacancy and another for other types of recruitment. Most medium and large organisations also advertised vacancies internally.

Although there were very occasional mentions of other sources such as radio, the main recruitment providers mentioned by employers were:

• own website;
• local/national newspapers;
• trade press;
• employment agencies;
• internet job boards;
• word-of-mouth/off street.

Each of these is briefly discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

4.3 Company website

Many of the organisations covered in this study – including several of the small and very small companies – had their own website. Companies with minimal recruitment needs were unlikely to use this website to advertise their vacancies.

‘The website is purely an information tool for the membership and prospective members. We wouldn’t use that for recruiting.’

(Lapsed, other social, small)

However, for large and multi-site organisations, especially those with a continual or regular need for new staff, advertising on their own website was a quick, easy, readily available and cost free method of advertising vacancies. In many cases, even where local managers had a reasonable level of autonomy to decide where else they may wish to advertise, inclusion of all vacancies on this website was company policy. Most employment agencies also operated the organisation’s own websites and this tended to be their most important outlet.

‘We generally don’t use the paper as far as I’m aware...And we don’t have any requirement to use another website.’

(Job Warehouse and Employer Direct, Agency)

Within some organisations, individual managers had access and could load on their own vacancies; elsewhere, a centralised system was used and details would be uploaded by a specific individual or department, who could be at a different location from the recruiting employer. Similarly, applications may be gathered centrally or direct to the recruiter.

The attractions of using the company website were that it attracted applicants who were keen to work with the specific organisation and that the company application form could be made available for electronic completion or downloading.

However, the value of using the website was variable, largely due to the channel’s wide availability. Some employers found it to be a great source of applicants but others disliked the opportunity for anyone to apply, regardless of suitability. Some employers, particularly but not exclusively those working in international chains, noted that they frequently received overseas applications from individuals with little or no English and no valid visa.
4.4 Newspapers and trade press

Print media, including local and (occasionally) national press, trade and professional publications, were commonly used for advertising job vacancies.

Local papers were used because of their facility to attract local applicants – sometimes from a slightly wider constituency than the employer’s specific town or locality. However, the source was perceived to be less appropriate for jobs requiring specific skills or qualifications; conversely, trade and professional press were ideal for such vacancies but less appropriate for administrative or unskilled roles.

Newspaper advertising was considered to be expensive. Furthermore, employers varied in the success they had enjoyed in filling vacancies through this route. It was therefore a favoured route for some but a method of last resort for others. There were some comments that the route is rather dated and in decline.

It is interesting to note that many of the comments made about newspaper advertising closely matched attitudes towards Employer Direct advertising and the Employer Direct staff. For example, similar methods were used to submit advertisements (a mixture of phone, fax and e-mail) and there were parallel comments about the relationship between the employer and the advertising team at the local paper.

Channel choice was not an important feature when advertising in the press. Dealings with the advertisement department were usually by phone or e-mail although one respondent whose local office was just two doors down the road found it most convenient and efficient to go into the local paper office personally. Most would be sent proofs of the advertisement by e-mail or fax.

Print media did not deal at all with applicants (in terms of screening or supplying application forms, for example); this was never mentioned as a reason for not using them as a source.

4.5 Internet job boards

A large number of internet job boards were mentioned by employers. These included both generalists such as Monster or Fish4Jobs and specialists such as Jobsgopublic for public sector vacancies or InsuranceJobsBoard for insurance. Although some users appreciated the way that generalist sites allowed jobs to be categorised within various sectors, this was insufficient for others who expected their target group to visit only the relevant specialist board.

Most job board users (although not all) were larger organisations with significant numbers of vacancies, especially those who were particularly web-minded or those who worked in high tech industries. The other main users of internet job boards were employment agencies who nearly all either used and/or ran internet job boards. Some employers who used agencies were aware that, although they did not use internet job boards directly, their vacancies had been uploaded.
This electronic channel was praised for its speed and the fact that advertisements were instantly accessible to applicants. Some also used additional facilities available on some of the sites such as CV browsing. There was also an appreciation of the way that the site could be used for speedy screening of applicants and that unsuitable applicants could be routinely rejected by standard e-mail. Another feature was the ability to monitor the number of times the job vacancy had been viewed.

‘Every week or so we just view the actual advert and then see how many times it’s been viewed and see if it’s been successful or not or if it’s been forwarded on to other people.’

(Employer Direct, business activities, very small)

There were a few mentions of advantages in the advertising element of the process. For example, one respondent noted that she had full control over her copy when using her selected job board:

‘You can refresh it daily, you can update if you’re not really getting a response, try different phrases. …You really feel like you’re managing it because…nobody else is interfering with it, nobody else is cutting down the text that you’ve put. Anything that you put in is there, that is what’s advertised.’

(EDon, Agency)

Those using internet job boards tended to be quite experimental, running trials with new or different boards to see how well they performed and the number and calibre of applicants they provided. There was a clear need to obtain adequate value for money before a contract with a specific job board would be signed.

‘If we’re paying an extra £300 a month for something like OS2i then we would expect that to increase our revenue by times ten of that for example, so we’d expect a further £3,000 to be coming in on a monthly revenue. If it’s not bringing that in then it’s not really worth that extra expense when we’re paying for all of the other websites as well, so it’s all revenue based really.’

(Job Warehouse and Employer Direct, Agency)

The choice of board did not appear to depend on the ease of uploading jobs or the way in which these were advertised.

A small number of employers had tried internet job boards and rejected them as poor value for money but most users were very satisfied with this route which they saw as the growing and most up-to-date method.

‘I just find that more applicants now are attracted more to job hunting on line, it just seems to have gone that way really.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, Agency)
Some employers believed that use of Internet job boards enhanced the company image.

‘I think that as an organisation we need to move into the 21st century in terms of recruitment.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, education, small)

As with internal websites, there were some criticisms that non-qualified applicants could apply and that submissions were received from overseas individuals with poor English and/or no visa. However, with a job board, such applicants could be easily rejected by use of standard rejection letters.

‘It’s just an easier way of screening really. I suppose because it is more faceless in a way it’s speedier because you can just fly through and automatically send back a no very sorry, you’re not suitable.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, agency)

Unlike employers using other providers, there was a tendency amongst job board users to discuss channel related issues such as speed, effectiveness of the medium and the business advantages that it offered. These employers had identified electronic media as the most effective route. Their decisions centred on which board(s) to use. Key criteria were cost and/or value for money of the selected board, the ease with which it provided them with suitable candidates and, sometimes, additional facilities provided.

When discussing Jobcentre Plus (especially EDon and Job Warehouse), several put forward their favoured job board as a standard to which Jobcentre Plus should aspire. Others felt that this was unrealistic; in such cases, the perceived inferiority of Jobcentre Plus was a reason for limiting its use or not using it at all.

4.6 Employment agencies

Although many employers used employment agencies, especially for specialist or professional staff, the high cost was a strong deterrent. Users, therefore, fell into two distinct categories – those for whom they were the key recruitment provider and those for whom they were used very much as a last resort, if all else had failed. In such circumstances, agencies could provide good value for money.

‘If we can go direct to an agency and they’ve got somebody who’s got the exact skills that we’re looking for, then it may be more cost effective for us to pay that fee, rather than go through three months of advertising and still have no joy, so it’s balancing it really.’

(EDon, hotel, large)

As with Internet job boards, both specialist and generalist agencies were used.
Those using agencies were aware of the high cost involved, but appreciated the critical screening process that most undertook, effectively short listing the candidates on behalf of employers. The saving to the employer in time and effort represented value for money.

‘I’m trying to limit it down to what I actually want. I’d rather not be getting a deluge of stuff through that takes me most of my day to wade through. That’s why we pay the agents to do that.’

(Non-user, transport, medium)

Agencies who were described as providing a ‘scatter gun’ approach (i.e. forwarding details of any of the jobseekers on their books and failing to adequately screen) were quickly deselected as providers, as were those who ‘plagued’ employers with marketing calls about available candidates, regardless of whether they had vacancies.

Channel choice (for any part of the process) was not an important feature for those using agencies. As for Jobcentre Plus, their dealings would be by phone and/or by e-mail, depending on personal preference. It was usual, however, for CVs to be sent across by e-mail. Having provided the agency with details of the vacancy, most were unaware of – and unconcerned about – the channels used by the agency to pass on the information to their candidates.

4.7 Word-of-mouth and off-street recruitment

A significant minority of small and very small employers – primarily those with only occasional recruitment needs – indicated that their main source of recruitment was word of mouth. As may be expected, such a method was not found at all in the large organisations who tended to use laid down policies (at least on paper) which followed recommended recruitment practice. In medium and large organisations, therefore, employers may be alerted about potential candidates by word-of-mouth but, unlike smaller companies, these would need to apply through normal procedures or would be added to the short list of candidates garnered from more conventional processes.

For small and generally unsophisticated organisations (typically looking for unskilled or semi-skilled workers), word-of-mouth was easily the best route to finding appropriate new staff; existing staff and other contacts would be actively canvassed to suggest individuals they knew.

‘Some firms have schemes for employees that if you find somebody that we recruit we’ll give you a little bit of a bonus so we use that or we have used that in the past.’

(EDon, manufacturing, medium)
Most importantly, new recruits would be found at no cost. In addition, new workers were often recommended by existing staff who knew the company requirements and would only suggest contacts who could adequately fill the role, were known to have appropriate qualifications or experience and who, critically, would ‘fit in’ with the existing work force and be ‘people like us’.

A small number of employers, especially in retail outlets and in pubs or small hotels, described taking on staff who had walked in off the street ‘on spec’ to see if there were any suitable vacancies available.

‘People just walk in off the street. That’s the normal.’

(Employer Direct, hotel, very small)

Such individuals were perceived as being eager to work and, as with word of mouth candidates, could be recruited at no cost.

Word of mouth was considered to be an effective and speedy recruitment route. In some cases, more formal recruitment would be undertaken only if no informal recommendations were forthcoming. Those using the route saw no disadvantages to it and were unlikely to have considered equality issues.

4.8 Summary of recruitment practices

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, channel choice was seldom a feature in selection of recruitment providers or for any part of the process. Overall, elements relating to channel tended to be of fairly low priority compared with other features such as cost or effectiveness (i.e. providing adequate suitable candidates).

The main exception to this rule was the use of internet job boards. In this case, the electronic channel was deliberately selected because of its perceived benefits. Such benefits could be identified in all elements of the process although notification of vacancy and managing applications were more likely to be spontaneously discussed than how the advertisement was displayed.
5  Jobcentre Plus: image and attitudes

5.1  Introduction

This chapter deals with general issues relating to the use of Jobcentre Plus and the image that it portrays from the perspective of both users and non-users. It concludes with a section looking at the various perceived strengths and weaknesses which affect that image. Although many of these were independent of the channels used, they were often of far more concern to employers than channel related issues.

5.2  Jobcentre Plus branding

Although many of the employers did recognise one or more of the brand names used for Jobcentre Plus’ vacancy placing services (Employer Direct, EDon and Job Warehouse), a significant minority of employers knew none of them, even after prompting. This lack of awareness, even amongst those using a specific service, meant that it was occasionally difficult to ascertain whether an employer was using EDon or Job Warehouse without detailed probing.

Of the three, Employer Direct was the name that was most likely to be recognised. However, several employers were unable to distinguish between Employer Direct and EDon, using the former term while undoubtedly using the electronic system. There was evidence that some users perceived Employer Direct and EDon as part of the same service.

‘I’ve only used recently the online, because it is dead easy. …The last time I used it, I thought it was called Employer Direct.’

(EDon, other social activity, very small)

For such users, the web based notification was just a further variation on the ability to use phone, fax or e-mail to notify Jobcentre Plus of vacancies.
Users were untroubled by their lack of knowledge of the service name but more intensive marketing of the brand names amongst users might highlight the availability of the different services.

5.3 Image of Jobcentre Plus

As is common with re-brandings, the image of Jobcentre Plus has not kept pace with the changes that have been implemented in recent years. Many employers, both users and non-users, retained the perception of Jobcentres with jobs advertised on postcards around the walls. Several noted that they had not been into a Jobcentre since job searching themselves, often many years ago.

Individuals such as these had no awareness of the changes that had taken place, although some commented that, on reflection, they were not surprised that systems had been modernised.

However, there is no doubt that the out of date image of Jobcentres as old-fashioned, grim and functional was a disincentive for many employers and prevented or minimised the number of jobs that would be placed there.

‘I just think people have still got a perception of the Jobcentre that is for more kind of unemployed, under-skilled kind of jobs and I think other people may be prevented from going there for jobs if they’re not in that sort of category and perhaps employers might not post jobs there which aren’t in that category. …I think that’s the image still. I don’t think it’s changed much over the years really.’

(EDon, public administration, large)

However, in several cases, the failure to use Jobcentre Plus was not a positive decision by non-users – they had a service which had worked for them in the past and they had just not thought of using Jobcentre Plus. Such employers may be encouraged to try the service following a simple marketing circular – by post or e-mail – especially if this emphasises the fact that there is no charge (see also Section 5.4).

Some employers were more familiar with the current nature of the Jobcentres and the changes that had been introduced, especially the computerisation of vacancies.

‘I’ve had superb responses from it. I don’t know whether it’s because of the new way that the Jobcentre advertises posts because, you walk in, you go on a computer, you put in the job that you want…The old system of putting the card into the Jobcentre we never got anywhere.’

(EDon, health, small)

This was generally positively perceived, although some felt that the changes had not yet gone far enough. This group believed that the technology would need to be further improved if Jobcentre Plus is to successfully compete with other providers, especially internet job boards, in the modern market.
5.4 Strengths and weaknesses of Jobcentre Plus

Employers’ image of Jobcentre Plus was further clarified by asking about its perceived strengths and weaknesses. These tended to be common across all types of user, regardless of the service(s) that they used.

The greatest strength – mentioned spontaneously by nearly all users – is the fact that its services are free. In an expensive field, Jobcentre Plus’ lack of cost was often sufficient to encourage employers to use the service as its sole recruitment provider or as a supplementary route. Lack of cost meant that its use was risk free.

It should be noted that not all non-users were aware that Jobcentre Plus did not charge. On being told of this, a couple of respondents observed that they would therefore give Jobcentre Plus a try next time they had a vacancy to fill.

‘If it’s free, we’ll have two! Well, we would try it, I think. The proof of the pudding would be in the quality of applicants.’

(Non-user, business activity, large)

As noted above this suggests that a marketing campaign amongst non-users, emphasising the lack of charge, might prove beneficial in increasing take-up.

In addition to the lack of cost, the wide diversity of applicants available was also seen as a strength by some employers. In some cases it was a key reason for using Jobcentre Plus.

‘It was more in fulfilment of our Equal Opportunities policy than in any expectation that the selected candidate might come from that route.’

(EDon, other social activity, very small)

Use of Jobcentre Plus encouraged applicants from a greater variety of cultural backgrounds and also from a wider geographic locality than could be achieved, for example, through the local paper.

‘I can go back to my Board of Management and say to them…we’ve had X amount of people return application forms and these are the different ethnic minority groups, they’ve come from different areas, these are the different skills. …I feel that I’ve at least started to really work towards what we strive to achieve with regards to diversity.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, other social activity, medium)

In general, employers judged the success of Jobcentre Plus on the number of applicants who were sent. However, the nuance of this varied. Whereas some were looking for large numbers of applicants, others would be more satisfied with fewer applicants provided that they were considered appropriate for the vacancy. For a third group, success meant that the vacancy had been filled by a Jobcentre Plus applicant. In each case, success or failure to meet the preferred criterion would be identified as a strength or weakness of the service.
Following on from this, although the diversity of Jobcentre Plus candidates was perceived as a strength by some employers, others wanted a more focused selection of individuals all of whom would be suitable for the job and identified the diversity as a weakness.

There were complaints from some that Jobcentre Plus applicants tended to be of lower calibre than those sourced elsewhere.

‘I can’t imagine having an advertisement posted in the Jobcentre for this company and getting a candidate from that who is befitting of it.’

(Non-user, business activity, large)

One prevailing view was that the problem with Jobcentre Plus candidates was that they were all out of work. Although not all employers assumed that unemployed Jobseekers would be of lower calibre than candidates wishing to change jobs, some did express the view that any candidate with ambition or initiative would be job-seeking using other sources than (just) Jobcentre Plus.

‘I don’t want to be found to be derogatory but I think if you’re out of work and you’ve got the capabilities of filling a role, I think you should do that role without going to the Jobcentre.’

(Employer Direct, transport, medium)

Employers believed that this attitude could be shared by the candidates. Several employers reported that some applicants would not tell them that they had been sent by the Jobcentre, feeling that this automatically put them at a disadvantage.

Exceptionally, one respondent believed that all jobseekers would visit the Jobcentre Plus website, regardless or whether or not they were currently in work.

There were several other complaints that arose about the use of Jobcentre Plus, regardless of the service(s) used. In particular, the problem most commonly identified was the failure of Jobcentre Plus staff to screen applicants adequately, if at all. This factor was of far greater importance than the range of available channels through which vacancies could be advertised and was considered the greatest weakness of the service.

Employers were sent candidates who lacked appropriate qualifications, certifications or experience which were essential for the job. This resulted in the employer wasting a great deal of time dealing with unsuitable applicants and a great deal of frustration and upset for jobseekers who did not realise that they were unsuitable for the job. For many users, this failing was the main reason why Jobcentre Plus was not used more widely.
'It’s been very, very difficult to buy in from the Jobcentres, because what we tend to get is people who aren’t screened. So we may as well just put a blanket [advert] out in the Manchester Evening News and say anybody ring us. It doesn’t matter what spec we put on the job we’ll still get people ring us and not having been pre-screened, can’t speak English, don’t understand what we’re asking them and they’re ringing with client advisers sat beside them. So it’s not particularly good.’

(Job Warehouse and EDon, Agency)

‘They don’t screen the applicants. …They send us everybody that walks in. If they’re breathing and they’re walking they send them to me. I specifically request trained technicians with a minimum of two years experience and I get somebody who wants to be a trainee technician, a 19-year-old.’

(Employer Direct, transport, very small)

A minority of users felt that their relationship with the local Jobcentre Plus office was sufficiently good to ensure that some screening would take place but this was exceptional.

‘Jobcentre Plus know what we’re looking for so if [the jobseeker] was to go to one their advisers and say I’m interested in that job, before letting them phone us they would see whether they were actually suitable, do they have the qualifications to actually apply for the job.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, education, small)

Those whose candidates were screened tended to be particularly satisfied with the service they received from Jobcentre Plus.

One respondent felt that screening could easily be accomplished. She described a system adopted by one of the internet job boards she used as a template for Jobcentre Plus.

‘It allows you to put in the self selection, the questions, so you can have, I think, up to five questions that you put out with your ad, so before anyone can apply, they’ve got to be able to answer yes to at least three. When you log on to Reed you see who’s applied and you see whether they meet that initial criteria. So if the person has ticked the three out of five that you want them to tick, as the minimum, then you know then they’ve met your criteria at that stage.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, other social activity, medium)

The lack of screening was exacerbated for many employers by the experience or expectation that Jobcentre Plus applicants would include a high proportion of individuals who were not interested in the job and were just wasting the employer’s time in order to secure their benefits.
‘Their names shouldn’t be on the books for them to send them to such as me to waste my time interviewing them knowing very well that they don’t want a job. Some of them are blatant enough to tell you they don’t want a job. They actually tell you that. They come in and they’ll tell you before, look, I don’t really want a job here, I’ve got to come here for, cos that’s part of the job, they’ve got to be seen to look for work.’

(Employer Direct, hotel, small)

This was a critical issue and was raised by a high proportion of users and non-users as a disadvantage of using Jobcentre Plus.

Outside of applicants, other weaknesses were also identified within the system across all services. The first of these was the need to link a specific vacancy with a particular Jobcentre Plus office. This was a frustration for organisations who had vacancies available across the UK or across an entire region but it was also criticised by others who perceived their location as having a wide catchment area.

‘I had to put a different advert in each Jobcentre, it had to be tied to a specific site. So I think what we did was advertise vacancies at each of our sites, I think, of which we have 15. So I think that’s the way we got round it. …It was quite a lengthy process.’

(EDon, public administration, large)

There were a number of problems associated with closing dates for vacancies. A number of large and medium sized organisations tended to have an ongoing requirement for particular types of staff and wanted their vacancies kept open indefinitely – this was particularly common amongst organisations in the hospitality and public sectors although it also occurred elsewhere. Employers were frustrated by the need to constantly re-open the vacancy although a minority had managed to avoid this restriction.

‘We left it as just open because we were having big problems recruiting at that point. But we kept getting phoned to see if we wanted it closed.’

(EDon, hotel, medium)

Others had recorded a closing date but were still contacted by Jobcentre Plus staff about this. They queried whether the entry was properly recorded or ever looked at by Jobcentre Plus staff.

‘When I close a job it doesn’t automatically get closed at their end. I think you’re supposed to close it online, then phone up and ask for it to be closed as well. So it’s almost like double entry.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, Agency)

Jobcentre Plus has recently stopped the procedure by which employers are contacted to check whether or not vacancies should remain open. Employers who have continuous recruitment needs and would like their vacancies given a permanent status may find that their jobs are closed despite a preference to keep them open. A small number were aware of the new policy at the time of interview.
'At the moment with the Jobcentre, the advert was ongoing, so they were calling me every month to see if we wanted it kept in or not, but they’ve changed the system now I think so that we’re supposed to call them. Apparently now we [have to phone them], which is something that I’ll probably forget to do.’

(Employer Direct, health, medium)

Another general criticism was targeted at the inability of employers to cover particular applicant characteristics in their advertisements. The existing rules were too ‘politically correct’ for them.

‘I’m also not allowed to put things in the advert like excellent communication skills for reasons, which I don’t understand. I mean they must have excellent communication skills. If a security officer needs to evacuate a building in a terrorist threat they must be able to be understood over a radio, therefore excellent communication skills, yet I’m not allowed to say that.’

(Job Warehouse and Employer Direct, Agency)

‘We had a Welsh speaking job, they told me that I couldn’t put that Welsh speaking was essential. …I had to contact somebody else in the Jobcentre to resolve it.’

(Job Warehouse, Agency)

It is possible that restrictions were unduly severe because of misinterpretation of the rules by overzealous staff but there are undoubtedly cases where employers have been unable to advertise as they wished. For a small number, use of Jobcentre Plus was discouraged by concerns that they were unable to specify in the advertisement details that they considered essential.
6 Elements of the recruitment process

6.1 Introduction

Employers were encouraged to think separately of the three elements of the recruitment process – notification of vacancies to the recruitment provider, the display of the advertisement itself and the application process. Each of these is dealt with briefly in this section, with particular emphasis on preferred channels.

6.2 Notification of vacancies

For most employers, their main concern was the notification process from themselves to the provider. The process had to be quick and simple to administer with little room for error. It was at this part of the exercise that channel selection was most likely to be of some importance to the employer.

Preference was closely linked to the individual and his or her level of computer literacy and comfort of using the internet. Those with low computer literacy, together with those who had a strong personal preference for human contact would generally opt for telephone methods of notification; conversely, many of the computer literate group preferred electronic notification.

Within the latter group, some expressed no preference between use of e-mail and on-line notification, perceiving both as quick and easy to administer. Some employers had already needed to prepare a description of the vacancy with all appropriate detail. This might have been prepared for other vacancy services or for internal purposes – for example, to get a vacancy approved by a company board. For some of this group, it was more convenient to notify Jobcentre Plus by e-mail rather than using an online service since the detail had already been put together in a suitable document which could be attached or copied onto an e-mail.
‘We have a vacancy bulletin which we compile each week in Word format [for our website] and we simply e-mail it over to our contact at the Jobcentre. …It’s just a cc. list, yeah. So it’s no extra work for us at the minute.’

(Employer Direct, public administration, large)

Others preferred the structured option of completing a template. In either case, use of electronic media was generally part of their everyday work.

Even amongst those using electronic notification, there were a number who indicated that they would want to have developed some sort of personal relationship with the provider prior to using the provider’s system.

### 6.2 Advertising or display

Compared with the notification process, there was much lower interest in the advertising or display of job vacancies, once the relevant information had been imparted. This was equally true for both Jobcentre Plus users and those using competitive providers.

Although some employers and agencies regularly inspected their advertisements, they were in the minority. Most Jobcentre Plus users had never looked at their advertisements on the web and, although many had seen a proof of the advertisement before it was uploaded, the tendency was to assume that the advertisement was properly and adequately displayed. There were reports of advertisements with fundamental errors that had come to light only after applicants had learned that the job was different from what they expected.

One reason why advertisements were not always examined on the web was because they could be difficult to find, especially if no reference number was issued, as often seemed to be the case.

‘If I’m checking on the internet, if my job that I put on the previous day is actually in there, the way that you would actually find it is so long-winded it’s not clear. I think I put in a job last year for a chef or a cook and I put in Cook, [location] as much detail as I can and of course you’ve got a trillion cooks in [location]. Because there’s nothing that you can actually put in to identify that that’s actually my new post not anybody else’s I have to open every single job that looks anything remotely like what I think I’ve put in.’

(EDon, manufacturing, medium)

Even among those with a sufficient interest to check every advertisement that was displayed, employers were more concerned about the number and type of people who would see the advertisement than they were in the medium through which it was available to jobseekers or its appearance.

The actual advertisement itself was of concern to some employers who wanted specific information imparted within the copy. Internet job boards in particular met this need because of the ability to include whatever information the employer
wanted. Others were happy to depend on the recruitment provider to ensure that all relevant information was provided and displayed. The thinking amongst this latter group was that the provider had the experience to know exactly what was required since this was their key business. They appreciated the fact that the provider would prompt them for everything that was needed to describe the job and the entire package adequately so that they were unlikely to forget anything important.

For Jobcentre Plus users, concern was expressed about the limited amount of detail which could be provided in the copy.

‘There wasn’t enough wording in the actual advertisement. I would have liked to have put a little bit more detail about the job but we had to condense it down because they only had a certain amount of spaces I guess on their computer so we had to condense and condense.’

(Lapsed user, communications, large)

This drawback was common to all Jobcentre Plus vacancy placing services.

6.3 Applications

Compared with other parts of the process, the application process produced the greatest variety in views. In general, the application process was perceived to be the employer’s own responsibility and was subsequently not considered to be the most important part of the service provided by Jobcentre Plus and its competitors.

The majority of organisations described a short listing process which was typically followed by job interviews in order to select the candidate. Some organisations were very particular about the routes through which applicants should contact the organisation and a wide range of preferences were described.

The application routes varied from company to company and application forms could be accessed over the company website, by telephone or by personal application. With vacancies placed with Jobcentre Plus, there was an opportunity to record how applicants should contact the employer. This was generally welcomed although a small number noted that they were unable to allow the full range of contact methods that they were willing to use.

Some organisations did not mind what method applicants used but others were quite specific. There were several examples quoted where job applicants – and Jobcentre Plus advisers – had used alternative methods of approach (e.g. making telephone contact when e-mail or post had clearly been specified). For a minority, this distraction was a major disincentive to using the Jobcentre Plus service. They assumed that the advisers had not made candidates aware of the employer’s preferred communication route and had possibly failed to read the specification themselves.
Where the recruitment provider had a role at all, it was in helping the organisation to produce an adequate and appropriate short list. This enabled the employer to minimise the amount of time required to screen and short list candidates. For some employers, their satisfaction with the recruitment provider was proportional to the amount of help offered with this part of the process. The perceived lack of screening of candidates which occurred with Jobcentre Plus was therefore considered to be a very negative aspect of the service since it increased rather than minimised the recruitment burden experienced by the employer.

Vacancies placed via Job Warehouse plus some other vacancies, as specified by the employer, are dealt with via Apply Direct. In these cases, applicants contact the recruiting organisation directly and Jobcentre Plus has no involvement. The method was used by a number of organisations who wanted maximum control over the whole of the recruitment process and was therefore generally the preferred method of contact when recruiting through Jobcentre Plus or through competitors.

“They offer more services than we actually tap into, the likes of, the initial skills matching, short listing, some interviewing, I know that they do the issuing of job applications. We don’t tap into that side of it at all, just from the point of view of wanting things to be processed in our own single system, and our managers wanting to keep hold of the reins of selecting candidates, so there are services that they provide that we’ve not really utilised, I suppose.’

(Job Warehouse, health, large)

Amongst Jobcentre Plus users, use of the Apply Direct service was rejected by employers who anticipated that its use would involve them in obtaining too many unsuitable applicants.

Employers using agencies were particularly likely to discuss the application process as an important element in their choice of provider, especially where they were satisfied with the screening role that the agency undertook. The high cost was justified by the reduction in man hours they devoted to short listing candidates.

The additional facilities offered by some Internet job boards were also important to a minority of employers and were a factor in the selection of that board. Electronic CV submission and the ability to quickly and easily submit standard rejection letters were both mentioned as useful features. However, although valued by users, such facilities were unlikely to be the main or only reason for choosing a particular board.

Overall, there was some interest expressed by employers in the availability of interactive application procedures. For example, several employers would welcome an interactive link between the Jobcentre Plus advertisement and their own website for access to application forms or the potential for CV browsing through the Jobcentre Plus system. However, although these were generally considered desirable, interest was at a relatively low level, not of interest to the majority and seldom considered to be critical. Other areas were of more concern and higher priority.
7 Jobcentre Plus services

7.1 Introduction

Many employers had experience of using more than one of the available vacancy placing services (Employer Direct, EDon and Job Warehouse). In particular, many longer term users of Jobcentre Plus had used Employer Direct and had subsequently moved across to Job Warehouse or EDon when these services were introduced. In other cases, employers had tried using Job Warehouse or EDon but had experienced technical problems and had reverted back to the Employer Direct system which they considered more basic and therefore more reliable.

This chapter examines each of the three services and identifies the advantages and disadvantages of each that were of particular interest to employers.

7.2 Employer Direct On-Line

EDon users were divided between those who had been told of the on-line option by Jobcentre Plus staff and those who had discovered it themselves.

‘I’d been contacted by the local Jobcentre, OK well let’s see what the result is and our applications increased and we did fill some positions. …I had somebody come to the hotel, basically gave me a pack, these are the steps you need to go through and then I went off and did that myself.’

(EDon, hotel, medium)

‘I found it quite by chance and thought that will save me a million, it’ll save me so much time just to be able to go in and put it on. …I think it should have been promoted better to all the current or previous clients.’

(Employer Direct, retail, very small)

An important point to note is that as there had been no global marketing effort to advise all clients of the service, several Employer Direct users were not aware that an on-line option was available. Although not all Employer Direct users expressed an
interest in the EDon service, a number were very interested indeed and a couple intended to explore the option as soon as the interview was over.

‘Without a shadow of a doubt it would definitely be of interest yes. I wasn’t aware of that at all.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, manufacturing, large)

This indicates that there is significant potential to convert existing users to the electronic service, provided that users know that the service is available.

Although there were a number of areas that users would like changed, the overall level of satisfaction with the EDon service was very high. The key features that were most frequently mentioned by users as positive attributes of the service were ease of use and the ability to use the system in their own time.

‘It’s extremely easy. It’s really, really easy, yeah, just literally straightforward, just tab boxes and just typing in and you can view it at the end what it’s going to look like.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, retail, small)

‘When the web based system came in, what was attractive about that was I could sit at my desk, work at my own pace and put in the exact details that I wanted to. I just felt I had a bit more control over it.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, other social activity, medium)

The availability of the service out of office hours was favourably mentioned by several employers as a real convenience. For example, one hotel manager was able to use quiet spells during his night shifts to notify vacancies; time for this would be difficult to find during the day.

The speed of the system was also appreciated. Those who had previously been users of Employer Direct approvingly compared the time taken for notification with the amount of time taken if using the call centre.

‘It’s probably quicker to be honest ‘cos by the time you’ve dictated everything out and she’s read it back to you, you could have typed it in yourself.’

(EDon, health, small)

One popular time saving feature was the ability of the system to provide a template that could be used for subsequent vacancies.

‘It stores the previous job ads so I can just go back to the previous job ad, alter it and re-post it.’

(EDon, health, small)

However, not all users were aware of the facility or were able to access it. Examples were found of employers regretting the absence of such a feature as they repeatedly needed to load in the same details for vacancies.
The main negative feedback about the EDon system came from a few users and lapsed users who had experienced some difficulties in accessing the system or who had problems with the system crashing while in use.

Whereas most users found EDon easy to use, this was not always the case. Some employers found it awkward to use and others criticised the level of detail required:

‘EDon if we’re on the subject of EDon, my criticisms of it, it’s very complicated. I think it could be more user friendly. There’s a lot of gobbledygook that you’ve got to go through to get into the real issue of advertising a job and I know there’s legal requirements [but] from a potential employer’s perspective it’s probably a little bit too detailed, it should be slimmed down and easier to access.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, hotel, very small)

Teething problems in the early days of the system had been experienced by some users. Most users had recognised these as temporary and had been prepared to persevere with the system. The difficulties encountered had occasionally been sufficient to discourage use of EDon.

‘EDon, not particularly user friendly, the system crashes most times we try to use it and at present it’s not working at all.’

(Job Warehouse and EDon and Employer Direct, agency)

Some employers moved back to Employer Direct and others ceased using Jobcentre Plus entirely. Some lapsed users may be encouraged to give EDon another try, if they can be convinced that technical problems have been resolved.

EDon users were asked about their experiences with the technology involved, in particular, whether there were aspects of the on-line notification process that worked particularly well or badly for them.

In common with other Jobcentre Plus services, the aspect most likely to be mentioned was the limited amount of space available in the advertisement to describe the vacancy. The lack of space made it difficult to provide an adequate explanation of what the job was about.

‘Certain parts of my ad are cut down to the extent where what is essential, you have to have health and hygiene etc., is missing…I’m the employer, I know what I’m looking for hence I’m not putting in lots of words in there just for the sake of being very verbal, it’s a case of this is exactly what we’re looking for, therefore, it’s important information.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, agency)

Although some employers were able to provide concise job descriptions, others felt that they were forced to omit essential information which would help applicants understand the job and its requirements.
It was suggested that insufficient description of the vacancy might be one reason for getting many inappropriate candidates applying. One recommended solution was an option for a further screen to input a more detailed job description.

A number of other minor problems with technical features were mentioned by individual users which had caused difficulty or irritation. Examples of these included difficulties in making changes – employers complained of the need to re-input whole sections or even the whole draft after making a simple mistake. Another technical problem was that the system sometimes froze so that input had to be started again.

‘It drops out sometimes. It can freeze and then you’ve got to start all over again so you might have typed in the whole of your 500 characters of job description, get to the end, click your submit and the whole thing disappears. You’ve got to start all over again. That’s happened quite a number of times.’

(EDon, manufacturing, medium)

Both these problems reduced the major time advantage that the electronic system had over Employer Direct.

Although employers clearly saw the need for log on IDs or passwords (there were several mentions of needing to contact Jobcentres because these had been forgotten), there were some complaints that the security system was overly complex.

In addition to technical difficulties, minor problems with advertising copy were also mentioned. Examples of this were the inability to specify the amount of experience in a generalised way, a need to constantly re-contact the local Jobcentre Plus office to get the company name included in the advertisement, a requirement to specify a precise salary and a similar requirement to specify a precise level of experience.

‘There’s a section on there where you can put in the amount of experience that you need somebody to have and it’s something like nought to so many years experience. When I went on there, I wanted to put in that somebody had to have some experience. They didn’t have to have a year’s experience, but they needed to have more than nothing. It wasn’t easy to put that into that particular section.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, manufacturing, very small)

For most users, the EDon system was a significant improvement on the previous Employer Direct system that they had used. Technological problems were not considered to be overwhelming although most were able to identify changes that they would like to be made to the system.
7.3 Employer Direct

Although, as noted above, some users of the basic Employer Direct service reported that they would have preferred to use the web based electronic version had they known of it, others very clearly preferred to remain with Employer Direct and would not be interested in changing to EDon.

Most Employer Direct users had one particular notification method that they used, varying across telephone, e-mail and, less frequently, fax. In general, their attitudes to the service and their reasons for choosing to use Employer Direct rather than EDon related to the notification method they used.

For some organisations using the phone option to notify vacancies, personal contact was of particular importance.

‘I’d rather do it over the phone, speaking to people you know? These electric things are fair enough, quite good and that, but it’s nice to be able to speak to somebody?’

(Employer Direct, construction, very small)

Others were not sufficiently confident about their ability to use the system or to input adequate information.

‘I’d prefer just to phone or e-mail and then somebody else would put it on, just to make sure I was doing it OK.’

(Employer Direct, health, medium)

Other individuals preferred to allow Jobcentre Plus staff to upload the information for them as they believed it would save time over doing it themselves.

‘I don’t have time or resource to upload myself ‘cos we have so many vacancies, so they have that service where they do it for me and I’m able to view the details by using Employer Direct and just make sure that everything’s set up there correctly. …it’s an incentive at the moment that I don’t have to do it myself, so I appreciate that service that they offer.’

(Employer Direct, education, large)

Jobcentre Plus call centre staff were generally considered to be knowledgeable and helpful, especially for employers with minimal experience of recruitment advertising. However, the employers’ need for guidance from call centre staff reduced with experience so that they might be readily persuaded of the advantages of the electronic system.

‘If you’re not sure what you want to say in terms of the advert, the guys on the phone are very structured in the way that they ask the questions, to ensure that the information that they put up is clear and concise. So that’s quite beneficial, the first few times I did it, but now I’ve done it with them previously, I know the information that I need to put.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, retail, very small)
As with EDon users, the time taken to load vacancies was critical to employers. There was a diversity of opinion about the amount of time required to notify a vacancy by telephone. Whereas some employers considered it a lengthy process which they would prefer to circumvent, others perceived it to be quick and easy.

‘There’s not really a problem with the ringing in, it’s not really a time consuming thing really. It’s probably just as quick as on the web anyway.’

(Employer Direct, business activity, very small)

Employer Direct users opting for e-mail (or fax) notification had generally selected the method because they considered the channel to be faster.

‘I’ve tended to do it by e-mailing the Jobcentre website, rather than phoning, because I find the process is quite lengthy when I send it by phone and I haven’t necessarily got the time. They always handle the call very efficiently and very nicely, but it seems to take forever.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, hotel, medium)

As with EDon users, employers using e-mail for notification perceived the system as electronic and, therefore, faster and more up-to-date than telephone notification. However, some clearly differentiated between the two e-channels, especially if they had experienced problems with the Jobcentre Plus technology.

‘When I’ve tried to [use EDon], I had problems with it, which is why I send them an e-mail and I had tried to do it online a few times and I got frustrated with it. I’m obviously not doing something right, but I just find it easier just to send an e-mail.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, hotel, medium)

As noted earlier (see Chapter 6.2) another reason for preferring to use e-mails rather than EDon for notification was that details of vacancies would be prepared for administrative purposes of for other providers.

For those perceiving Employer Direct notification to be a lengthy process, this was the biggest disadvantage to the system. Other lesser disadvantages to the service were also identified. Firstly, it could sometimes take a day or two for jobs to appear on the website and employers were not told when it was put online, even if this had been requested. Another concern, specific to the Employer Direct system, was a high level of errors found in the advertisements from inaccurate copy taking.

‘We don’t check very often but actually we probably should because we get a high level of errors and we tend to find them out because applicants complain or somebody phones us up and they quote a reference that we’ve never heard of or they say that’s not fair you told me it was 37 hours a week on the Jobcentre website, and now you’re telling me it’s part-time and things like that.’

(Employer Direct, public administration, large)
Overall, although a minority felt that the administrative procedures should be streamlined, most Employer Direct users were satisfied with the service that they were receiving, with staff receiving particular praise.

However, for most users, the key variable in determining their satisfaction level was unlikely to be related to the channels they were using but rather whether or not they were able to fill their vacancy from the advertisement placed with Jobcentre Plus.

‘It doesn’t matter how you do it you could fax it, e-mail it – it doesn’t matter but it’s the end product you’re getting that’s more important to us.’

(Non-user, transport, medium)

7.4 Job Warehouse

Interviews were undertaken with seventeen organisations who were current or lapsed Job Warehouse users. Seven were still using the service while nine had tried, or considered trying, the system but were not current users. Amongst the lapsed group, seven were EDon users and the other two were using Employer Direct; all were still current users of Jobcentre Plus.

Thus, employers trying the Job Warehouse service were divided between current users, who, with some reservations, were mostly quite happy with the system, and lapsed users who had disliked the system or felt it inappropriate for them.

Current users were satisfied with the existing service to varying degrees depending on how closely the service closely met their needs of uploading large numbers of new vacancies. However, it was notable that the most satisfied users tended to be those where the decision maker was not personally involved in uploading vacancies whereas less satisfied and lapsed users tended to have responsibility for uploading vacancies as well as determining strategy as regards vacancy placing. In those companies where the decision maker was not the person uploading vacancies, this task was typically undertaken by a team of IT specialists or a member of the secretarial or administrative team (several of whom were interviewed as follow up respondents). One very enthusiastic Job Warehouse user regularly sent vacancy details to his Jobcentre Plus VSM for uploading.

As large recruiters, all of those interviewed as part of the Job Warehouse sample used their organisation’s website for vacancy advertising in addition to Jobcentre Plus. Most also used other sources, particularly internet job boards and their critique of the service therefore often included comparison with these competitive systems.

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1 The final employer selected from the Job Warehouse database believed that he was an EDon user and had never heard of Job Warehouse. Even after prompting, it was not certain which service he was using so his responses have been omitted from this part of the analysis.
There were two main reasons why lapsed organisations had decided not to use Job Warehouse. The first was a perception that the system for uploading vacancies was lengthy and cumbersome. Users had found the system too time consuming and one noted that as the system used DOS, one mistake could mean that the entire input had to be restarted. Using EDon or Employer Direct was quicker and easier.

Another potential user had used the system only once, having been put off by the time it took to put on one set of vacancies. He also complained that the guidance notes were too complex.

However, most current users found the system easy to administer and felt that it took little time to upload jobs.

‘I log onto the system, fill in the questions, I mean they ask questions like, how many hours is the position for, who’s it for, all sorts of questions, what the job entails, what the wage is, it takes you step by step, really easy, because it is asking you simple questions and you just fill it in and then you send the details off.’

(Job Warehouse, agency)

Satisfied users were able to upload very quickly but there was a wide variety in reported upload times. One user took two minutes to upload all her company’s vacancies whereas another reported it taking several minutes per vacancy. This suggests that different methods are being utilised in approaching the uploading task. Whereas some are able to transfer entire files, others need to upload vacancies on a one by one basis. In the latter case, the time taken is longer and employers are less prepared to use the system. Further investigation should be undertaken to ascertain how uploads are being undertaken since this is a major deterrent to service use.

As was the case for EDon, some employers had problems using the template service or were unaware that it was available.

‘It would probably help if there was a system where, when you log in you could actually store the most used vacancies. So say like, for us, the one that we recruit from most is an insurance adviser. We’d probably recruit about 300 – 400 of those per year. Now each time that we go in we’ve got our own word doc and then we’ve got to copy and paste it and things like that. But if we had something stored then we could just change the location, the contact name, things like that. Something like that would really, really help.’

(Job Warehouse and EDon, agency)

One other strong disincentive to using the Job Warehouse service was identified by both current and lapsed users – a significant reduction in the number of applications resulted from the Job Warehouse service compared with using Employer Direct or EDon. The reason for this was the need for jobseekers to use an additional portal within the Jobcentre Plus website and jobpoints to access agency jobs, a step that many potential applicants failed to take.
‘It would lead to another website, but candidates didn’t actually seem to know how to get into this website to view the vacancies in Job Warehouse, so I don’t actually think we had any response from it. … You see where it says candidates access it by a separate website, they weren’t, they don’t access it.’

(Job Warehouse and Employer Direct, agency)

One employer, who had discussed the possibility of moving onto the system with Jobcentre Plus staff because of the ease of uploading jobs onto the website, had specifically decided against it because he had realised that there would be fewer potential applicants viewing his vacancies.

‘We were interested, we’ve had a number of talks with Jobcentre Plus… It’ll be far easier to get the information by file transfer onto the Job Warehouse site and we were contemplating doing that on a daily basis. One of the drawbacks, which led us to hold back from doing that, was that we didn’t think they were a prominent enough position on the Jobcentre Plus website. … We didn’t actually ever use Job Warehouse, because of what we considered to be a major issue.’

(EDon, public administration, large)

Others had not appreciated that the number of applicants would fall until they had actually tried the system out. Some users had then stopped using the system but even those still using it considered this to be a major drawback.

There was a preference amongst Job Warehouse users that the system should be combined with EDon to include the best of both systems together.

‘They pointed out that Job Warehouse was very much in a pilot position at the moment and they felt at one stage that perhaps the good points from Job Warehouse and the goods point from the EDon facility could be rolled into one and at the end of the day you’ve got one website, which caters for everything and we’d certainly welcome something like that.’

(Job Warehouse and EDon, public administration, large)

While uploading time and the reduction in applicant numbers were undoubtedly the most important and most frequently reported problems, a number of other difficulties were identified, each mentioned by just one or two users. As for EDon and Employer Direct, the limited space available for job description was criticised. Job Warehouse users compared this with other internet job boards where they could input as much as they needed to. Another problem was the failure of the Job Warehouse system to display all of an employer’s vacancies on the website if a large number of vacancies had been placed by the employer. This was a problem both for agencies and the very large organisations, both of whom wanted all of their vacancies to be available on the system.

There were also some difficulties encountered in relation to inputting postcodes. One respondent reported that the system did not always work correctly because the postcode input did not always match the location for the job. She thought that the
postcode used for the location search might be output from the wrong location on the database. Another postcode problem related to the inability of the system to upload jobs without a full postcode. One regular user estimated that around 15 per cent of his jobs failed to upload because they did not have the full eight digit postcode.

Employers using Job Warehouse were amongst those most likely to check the system to view their advertisements. The large numbers of jobs advertised through Job Warehouse made it difficult for them to locate their own.

‘Every now and then, yes, I go along to see whether people search...Sometimes you can’t quite find the jobs that you’re looking for. So every now and then I will put [location] in, do a keyword search just to see what you get back up. ...Sometimes ours have been there, sometimes I’ve had problems finding them.’

(Job Warehouse, agency)

Although Job Warehouse is advertised as an ‘Apply Direct’ service, a small number of users felt that Jobcentre Plus advisers should screen applicants. There were particular criticisms of advisers encouraging applications by inappropriate candidates. However, criticisms of lack of screening were far less prevalent amongst Job Warehouse users than users of Employer Direct or EDon.

Even the most enthusiastic Job Warehouse users were aware of problems with the system. In part, these were put down to teething problems or the bureaucracy of a government system. However, as with EDon, some lapsed users had proved to be less patient with the new system, assuming that the fault was permanent.

Compared with other internet job boards, it was felt that Job Warehouse still has much to learn. However, several users noted positively how far the system has advanced in a short time and they were optimistic that the rate of change would continue.

‘To be where they are with the uploading, in previous lives I’ve dealt with some other online job boards, who that is all they do and they are behind the times on how to upload positions and Jobcentre are much more advanced than them, so I’d say that’s a pro. But again, I always think there’s room for improvement in everything though.’

(Job Warehouse, agency)

Job Warehouse users were particularly aware of the facilities offered by other internet job boards. Most of these tended to fall within the application process such as the ability to browse CVs, searching for suitable applicants by use of key words, automatic responses to applicants and online application or transfer to the client website. As with users of other services, the Job Warehouse users ranged from those who would be enthusiastic users of such services to those who wanted the job board only as a means to advertise their vacancies.
There was no strong call for Job Warehouse to offer these facilities although a few saw their absence as a weakness of the system. The wish list suggested by users included the ability for applicants to call up jobs by employer and the facility for an interactive link from the Job Warehouse site to other selected websites.

It is of interest to note that many of the lapsed Job Warehouse users were very enthusiastic EDon users. EDon offered them the speed and ease of uploading vacancies that they considered to be lacking in Job Warehouse.

Unlike the EDon service where many users had discovered the existence of the service themselves by browsing the Jobcentre Plus website, only a minority of Job Warehouse users had found the service themselves. Most had been advised of the Job Warehouse service by Jobcentre Plus staff.

’Someone gave me a call and asked me if I would like to have a go at using it. Because I think we’d faxed through about four jobs all one after the other [when there were technical problems]. And then literally a couple of days later, someone came through on the Job Warehouse and said, have a go at it, once you’ve got a template up and running then you can keep using it.’

(Job Warehouse, agency)
8 Employer engagement

8.1 Introduction

Jobcentre Plus operates three levels of account management, depending on the level of priority given to the specific employer. The main driver in determining priority is the number of relevant vacancies placed with Jobcentre Plus.

In addition to account management, the main contact that many employers have with Jobcentre Plus staff will be when submitting vacancies through Employer Direct (with greatest contact for those using the telephone channel) or providing feedback to Jobcentre Plus about their potential applicants who have been advised of the vacancy. This latter contact has recently been stopped due to changes in Jobcentre Plus targets meaning this type of feedback is no longer required from employers.

As part of its requirement to understand the channels that employers would prefer to use for all parts of the service, the study included an examination of current and preferred engagement between employers and Jobcentre Plus.

8.2 Current contact with Jobcentre Plus staff

Only a small number of employers included in this study had a personal account manager with Jobcentre Plus; these were mostly large organisations and others such as employment agencies that placed large numbers of vacancies.

Several of these organisations had regular face-to-face meetings with their account manager while others had frequent telephone contact. All such contacts were very highly valued.

‘There’s a new Jobcentre Plus manager and we actually meet and we actually sit down and plan our objectives and what we hope to achieve and improve on. We’re very happy to meet and know each other, yep.’

(Job Warehouse, health, large)
When asked about their contact with Jobcentre Plus, most employers talked only about follow up requests seeking feedback on individual jobseekers and the confirmation that specific jobs had been filled so that the vacancy could be closed off.

These were most commonly dealt with by phone although those with large numbers of vacancies had received lists of individuals via fax or e-mail. Reactions to these varied. Most perceived them to be time consuming and bureaucratic although some employers felt obliged to respond since the Jobcentre Plus service was free.

‘I’ve got to understand that Jobcentre Plus it’s a free service isn’t it? And it’s all part of the Government driven thing. And if they’re looking for someone that might be claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance and not actually seeking for jobs but pretending they are. If they wanted to phone up to check this out, then yes I put my full cooperation on that. Go through a list of all the people who’ve applied, interviewed and so on, that can be a bit challenging cos I don’t always have that information to hand.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, manufacturing, large)

The task was difficult for all sizes of organisation and was seldom considered to be of benefit to the employer. Few small and medium sized employers had easily accessible records of all applicants and larger organisations were dealing with large candidate numbers. Most will be delighted that feedback will no longer be required. In fact, the irregularity of the contact had been an irritant to some employers who felt that it should be regular or not at all. However, a few will miss the only personal contact they currently have.

Examples were found of employers in medium and large organisations who, at some time in the past, had had an account manager. Most missed the relationship.

‘We used to have very good contact with [location], with regards to all the job fairs and things. …They’d ring up and say we’ve got this job fair, it’s a hospitality based fair, would you like to attend it? Book tables, how did it go, you’d get good follow up, who you took on, who you didn’t, it was very well put together but now it’s just, it’s a bit more faceless.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, agency)

‘This was when I was in [location 1], from the [location 1] Jobcentre and I found them fantastic, very, very helpful, but I’ve had absolutely no contact with anyone from [location 2]. …The opportunity was there, in terms of, right here’s the basics and if you need the support, this is where I am and this is where you can get it. I found it quite straightforward, but the opportunity was there.’

(EDon, hotel, medium)
A number of employers with some regularity of recruitment had developed contacts with local Jobcentre Plus staff members which were viewed as important. However, the ability to build up such relationships depended on the policies of the local office and the goodwill of the staff.

Those wanting to forge a relationship were looking to work with the local Jobcentre to encourage employment in general, in addition to any regular contact in relation to specific job vacancies. Examples of this included participation in job fairs, arranging for posters to be displayed in the local Jobcentre Plus office or having a kiosk in the office for a day. Such events were considered to be constructive in developing relationships and were mutually beneficial since they ensured that the local office had a better understanding of the employer’s needs.

‘We had a brilliant rapport with [location] actually when we did the mass recruitment we were looking for permanent staff. You know, they were very, very good, they worked in conjunction with us, they put a window display together for us, they rang us every week’

(Job Warehouse and EDon, agency)

Such rapport was very much dependent on the local office. There were also examples of employers who were very keen to build up relationships with the local Jobcentre but had been unable to do so.

‘I would say that is an area of concern. That is an area that I’m currently working on with them to really improve the relationship at all levels because I can’t say that I’ve had a great deal of support or response from them. …We share the same people at the end of the day. So it’s kind of a win-win but it’s trying to just get through those first few hurdles and move the relationship on a bit.’

(EDon, manufacturing, medium)

Another had been refused permission to display posters in the local office – a rejection he assumed was because he was from an employment agency.

Amongst those who considered it important to forge personal relationships with the local Jobcentre Plus staff, there was a feeling that such relationships were harder to develop than in the past, largely because of the introduction of call centres.

‘It would just be nice if you could get that contact back where you feel like somebody actually cares about your jobs that are being advertised with the Jobcentre as opposed to just a call centre employee, who are very nice still but still are not going to ever really help you.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, agency)

Several Job Warehouse users complained of their pattern of contact. Good relationships had been fostered by Jobcentre Plus staff eager to sign them up but, despite assurances that these relationships would continue, this had not happened.
‘As far as they’re aware we might not be able to upload our jobs, so we might not even be using them. We might be getting absolutely no one through or we might be getting all our candidates from the Jobcentre.’

(Job Warehouse, agency)

‘I don’t have any contact at all [now] with people within Job Warehouse.’

(Job Warehouse, health, large)

8.3 Preferred contact with Jobcentre Plus staff

Respondents were asked about their preferred contact with the Jobcentre Plus network. Both frequency of contact and channel of communication were explored. The preference was a highly individual choice. At one extreme, employers wanted regular contact with the Jobcentre Plus office, expecting this as an example of customer care. As previously noted, some Employer Direct users had selected this service specifically because it involved some engagement with the recruitment provider. Others felt that personal contact was likely to improve the standard of service they received.

‘It’s probably the awareness of the individual branches in the Jobcentre across the UK knowing about what vacancies, whereas if I phoned you up on a Monday morning to tell you about my vacancies they’re going to stick in your mind a little bit more.’

(Job Warehouse, agency)

Other employers did not want any contact from the Jobcentre at all unless it was to deal with issues that the employer had personally initiated. This group tended to describe themselves as too busy and did not want to be drawn away from their main tasks. Jobcentre Plus was just one of many suppliers serving their business.

‘I’ve got three people on my team that I look after and if I’ve got the Jobcentre ringing up, taking hours on the phone it wastes my time.’

(Job Warehouse and EDon and Employer Direct, agency)

Between the two extremes, many employers felt that they would appreciate some contact from Jobcentre Plus although they did not want this to be too frequent. Typically, an occasional call to ensure that there were no problems with the service would be appreciated.

‘It’s about getting that balance right, it’s about having the personal service, but also not plaguing the life out of you.’

(EDon, hotel, medium)

Although there was some variation, the most popular frequency for contact was deemed to be quarterly. Such frequency would show an interest in the individual employer without being over burdensome.
There were also variations in the preferred channel for such contact. The two main methods suggested were telephone and e-mail – in line with other channel issues, the preference for telephone was stronger amongst those with greater interest in personal contact. A small number of employers would also welcome face-to-face contact although this was not generally expected. The channel of contact was not a key issue – appropriate frequency was more key to increasing customer satisfaction.

However, regardless of an individual employer’s views about frequency and method of contact, all employers expected to be provided with contact details for a named manager in case they should have problems. All employers had a number that they could contact but not all had been provided with a named contact and it was felt that this would be appropriate.
9 Drivers and barriers for channel choice

9.1 Introduction

Earlier chapters have examined different aspects of employers’ recruitment behaviour and their dealings with Jobcentre Plus. This chapter draws together these findings to focus on the core subject of this study – channel choice.

The first part of the chapter looks at the drivers that lead to choice in the area of recruitment and, in particular, how this feeds into the choice of channels for the process. This is followed by an examination of the perceived barriers to use of electronic channels and the chapter concludes with a summary of differences observed across various employer groups.

9.2 Drivers for channel choice

There are two main factors which will encourage employers to select a specific channel for recruitment provision – cost and time.

Cost, or value for money, was constantly cited as a reason for recruitment related decisions. For example, specific types of provider such as newspapers, agencies or internet job boards were selected on the basis of cost or value for money. The reason for many employers testing various internet job boards recently is to see how effective they are at meeting the employer’s needs. As the most recent entrant to the provision mix, this market is still developing with new entrants and additional features regularly under development.

In terms of cost, Jobcentre Plus has an obvious advantage because it is free to employers. This fact alone is often sufficient to ensure that it is within an employer’s list of providers. However, not everybody considered that lack of cost was sufficient.
‘Obviously theoretically it’s free but there’s no advantage if we’re not actually getting any product from it if you know what I mean.’

(EDon, public administration, very small)

In common with other internet job boards, Job Warehouse has been developing rapidly since its introduction and it, too, benefits from lack of cost. As seen previously (see Chapter 7.4), although cost is a critical variable in selecting Internet job boards it is not the only factor considered.

The second key variable is time or time saving. This may be of equal or greater importance than money. For example, organisations using employment agencies for recruitment provision often used them because the screening and short listing undertaken by the agency saved them a great deal of staff time.

Time saving was equally important in selecting the Jobcentre Plus service that best suited the employer. In particular, one of the key reasons for choosing to use or not use Job Warehouse depended on how long the employer believed it would take to upload vacancies. Where the employer’s own systems and procedures allowed quick upload, use of the system was continued, sometimes despite other drawbacks being identified. Conversely, where the employer perceived that uploading was a lengthy procedure, the system would be abandoned in favour of speedier methods.

A number of other factors blended in with time and cost to provide the employer with his rationale for channel choice, for all parts of the recruitment process. The first of these was the e-capability of the individual and his organisation. Where an employer had no computer access or where he was personally averse to using computers, the individual was unlikely to champion electronic modes of recruitment. If such an individual was the key decision maker for recruitment strategy, the organisation would utilise traditional methods of recruitment. For Jobcentre Plus, the route of choice for such organisations would be Employer Direct and they are likely to be the last converts to electronic media such as EDon.

Another highly personal preference in the mix is the attitude to personal contact. The employers interviewed included both those who had a strong predilection for personal contact and those who would opt to minimise contact – often as a means of time saving. While the latter will naturally incline towards EDon, those wanting personal contact are likely to perceive benefits in placing vacancies over the phone. In order to encourage this group to increase its use of electronic media, a higher level of employer engagement will be required to compensate for removing contact at the notification stage.

The final element which was an important driver in determining preferred recruitment channels was the type of staff being sought. Some employers may choose to use more traditional channels if they anticipate that applicants may be unskilled or have low levels of literacy. It may, therefore, be necessary to ensure that employers understand that the means by which they notify vacancies does not affect the way that candidates access the vacancy advertisements. Those involved with the most
vulnerable candidates (for example, applicants with mental health problems or learning difficulties) may need further reassurance that this group in particular will receive adequate guidance and help from the fully trained advisers and that steps will be taken to ensure that they are not intimidated by the Jobcentre Plus environment.

Although cost and time are the key drivers for employers in guiding channel choice, it must not be overlooked that one critical factor, unrelated to channel, is the ultimate arbiter of the employer’s recruitment choice. The key objective of the employer is to fill his vacancies. Whatever his preferences, the routes he uses must allow him to meet this objective. For an employer dissatisfied with Jobcentre Plus candidates responding to his vacancy advertisement, the services may be avoided or used minimally, no matter how up-to-date or accessible they are.

For many, the motto will be that any channel will do provided that it works.

9.3 Barriers to use of e-channels

The majority of employers did not see any barriers to using e-channels for all aspects of recruitment. E-channels were perceived as being quick, convenient, up-to-date and in line with current practice. As previously discussed, nearly all were already using electronic methods for other aspects of their business including e-mail and, for most, regular internet use. Indeed, many, especially those with regular recruitment needs, were already using electronic formats for recruitment via internet job boards, their own website and Jobcentre Plus’ electronic systems.

Many respondents anticipated that computer usage was likely to be particularly attractive to younger people who were very familiar with it.

‘In this day and age 99 per cent of jobseekers would look on the internet as well as going in to the jobcentre. I think the internet is a very, very, very big source for people.’

(Employer Direct and EDon, retail, very small)

Use of e-channels were particularly welcomed by those who were expecting their applicants to be e-adept. Their reasoning was that if applicants were unable to navigate electronic media to identify the vacancy advertisement and to respond using appropriate electronic systems, they were unlikely to be able to undertake the job advertised. Additionally, although a minority expressed concern over available help, there was also some expectation that advisers within Jobcentre Plus would be on hand to help candidates who were unable to access advertisements themselves.

A minority of employers, however, did anticipate that there were barriers to recruiting using only electronic media. In particular, those wishing to be totally inclusive would resist moves to insist on electronic application. The awareness that unskilled applicants and individuals with disabilities or special needs are able to seek work through the Jobcentre was mentioned by several employers.
Most employers expected that a mixture of methods would be required.

‘Not everybody now has access to online, or to e-methods, so I strongly believe that you need to have an online and off line marketing strategy.’

(Job Warehouse, agency)

Another barrier was where the employer was personally e-averse or had no computer access. Although this accounted for only a minority of organisations, it strongly indicates that a move to total e-recruitment would mean that, in practice, Jobcentre Plus would no longer be universally available. A larger group, although able to use EDon if necessary, would try to avoid all electronic systems simply because of their preference for personal contact through alternative methods such as phone.

Other objections, for example, a preference for organisations to undertake their own selection procedures, can be met by ensuring that all applicants are directed through the employer’s own routes, possibly via the Apply Direct scheme which many of them are already using.

9.4 Differences by employer type

Overall, there are three key features which affect the approach that an organisation takes to recruitment provision. In order of priority these are company size, personal predisposition to e-technology and industry sector.

The number of recruits required per year has the greatest impact on the approach taken. Employment agencies, although individually these may be small or medium sized companies, tend to fall into the category of the largest organisations since they are involved in recruiting very large numbers of staff.

Compared with smaller organisations, large companies have more formalised recruitment procedures and policies and many will automatically include Jobcentre Plus amongst its recruitment providers in order to achieve objectives of equal opportunities and ensuring advertising for vacancies is socially inclusive. Most have HR departments with dedicated staff responsible for handling recruitment. Larger organisations are also more likely to be using electronic media for many aspects of the business and will therefore be responsive to using automated and electronic methods for all phases of recruitment. Large companies and employment agencies were the main (although not only) users of electronic internet job boards.

However, because they tend to have their own recruitment staff, large companies are less likely to select additional facilities such as CV browsing to suit their laid down procedures. Agencies, on the other hand, although very similar in many ways, tend to have a relatively low number of staff handling many vacancies and this group showed particular interest in the additional facilities offered by the various internet job boards.
At the other end of the size spectrum, small companies mostly had only occasional
vacancies and recruitment was therefore an unusual and unfamiliar task. Typically,
a small company would have developed a recruitment strategy which involved just
one or, at most, two providers such as Jobcentre Plus, local or trade papers and
employment agencies. Recruitment by word of mouth was found almost exclusively
amongst smaller companies. Having found a method that suits them, small
companies will need to be persuaded that alternative provision will be better for
them than the existing procedures. Companies with little or no computer provision
were almost exclusively found amongst the small or very small organisations
although this varied with sector and some small companies used very sophisticated
computing systems.

Marrying in with company size in determining the channels used for recruitment,
the personality of the manager was the second most critical variable in determining
levels of interest in using e-channels for recruitment. In particular, two types of
individual were likely to prefer to minimise this: the first was the computer averse
individual and the other was the personality wanting high levels of personal contact
in their dealings with the recruitment provider. In both cases, their firm preference
would be to use more traditional methods such as telephone for placing vacancies
and, especially in the former case, equally traditional methods for applications.
Personality was also likely to impact on the preferred extent of contact between the
organisation and Jobcentre Plus.

Overall, sector tended to be the least important of the three key variables although
it was of particular relevance in some regards. Generally, as regards recruitment,
sectors varied depending on their level of computer sophistication, the proportion
of unskilled or semi-skilled staff and their staff turnover. Thus, particular sectors such
as hospitality and tourism/travel tended to have high staff turnover and particular
seasonal requirements for staff. Behaviour in these sectors therefore tended to more
closely resemble a larger organisation than was in fact the case. Employment
agencies were the extreme case of an organisation behaving as a larger organisation
because of its similar recruitment requirements.

As noted earlier, the occasional employer with limited computerisation were all very
small with fewer than ten employees.

It should be noted that there were no clear regional differences. However,
experience varied according to the approach of the local Jobcentre Plus office since
it was evident that some were more proactive than others in engaging with their
users. Sometimes employers would be dealing with more than one local office and
find that one was more amenable or proactive than the other.

In summary, therefore, the number of recruits required was the most important
variable in deciding the extent to which an organisation might be amenable to
adapting a higher degree of e-capability in its recruitment procedures with other
factors impacting on this main element.
10 What changes should Jobcentre Plus make?

This study has explored all issues relating to recruitment provision in companies of all types. However, the primary focus has been to examine attitudes towards the channels which Jobcentre Plus currently uses to provide its services to employers and the changes that would be welcomed by users and non-users alike.

As a primary conclusion, it is evident that within Jobcentre Plus’ offering to employers, channel usage is of secondary concern compared with other issues. The main features which reduce the number of suitable vacancies (i.e. unskilled and semi-skilled) being placed with Jobcentre Plus are the lack of candidate screening, which is essential for some employers, and the anticipated availability of large numbers of candidates who are, critically, appropriate and eligible for the posted vacancy.

Employers do not want to spend time dealing with inappropriate applicants who lack necessary experience or qualifications or ‘time wasters’ who they perceive as completing applications and attending interviews only to retain their benefits. With few exceptions, employers do not anticipate that jobseekers currently in employment will be accessed via the Jobcentre Plus network and they would welcome any changes that would remedy this situation.

However, although not a primary concern, for a minority of employers channel usage is a factor in their selection of a recruitment provider. For Jobcentre Plus, this means retaining a variety of services so that those who do not like e-channels will have the option of personal contact through Employer Direct.

From the perception of employers, Jobcentre Plus would benefit from a vigorous marketing campaign, aimed at both current and lapsed users and at non-users. Many non-users just do not think of Jobcentre Plus when embarking on recruitment rather than making a positive decision not to use the service. Furthermore, not all employers are aware that the service is free and many non-users have no familiarity with the changes that have taken place in recent years and their image of Jobcentre
Plus is grounded in the past. Many are unaware of the computerisation that has taken place and the typical expectation is that job vacancies are on postcards pinned around the walls. A targeted campaign could dispel these false perceptions and encourage a larger number to at least give the service a try.

Amongst users, too, a range of false perceptions and lack of awareness were evident from the interviews undertaken. As with non-users, many users have not kept abreast of the changes made in recent years and retain an outmoded image of Jobcentre Plus and the service that it can offer.

In particular, there is limited familiarity with the three key notification services and, especially amongst infrequent users, lack of knowledge of the brand names used. Most importantly, if Jobcentre Plus wish to encourage employers to move from Employer Direct to EDon or, for larger users, to Job Warehouse, this will be greatly assisted by a marketing campaign to alert users of the services. Even amongst the limited number of Employer Direct users that were included within this study, several expressed an interest in moving to the on-line version which they had been unaware of before the interview.

A number of changes to each of the services were discussed by employers, primarily geared at reducing the time taken in dealing with notification and with applications and in improving the reliability of the technology. While there was acknowledgement amongst users of the significant strides made by the service in recent years, it was suggested that Jobcentre Plus technology should be improved to rival the standards of the best internet job boards. However, this need not mean introducing all of the additional facilities that such boards offer. There was some interest in these facilities such as CV browsing, automated responses and on-line application submission but these were not generally considered to be vital to the Jobcentre Plus service and should be considered only after the more fundamental changes have been implemented.

Many changes were mentioned by small numbers of employers such as an improved post code search facility, better templating and an ability to input general rather than specific locations for employers recruiting nationally. Resolution of some of these minor issues would have a big impact on user satisfaction with the service.

The service for which the greatest number of changes were suggested was Job Warehouse which has been abandoned by a significant number of employers who have tried the system. Although there were some criticisms of the time taken to upload individual vacancies, the feature that was most strongly disliked was the need for jobseekers to go through an additional portal in order to access the vacancies. This feature has discouraged several users within this study and the service would be much more widely acceptable if this feature were altered.