Evaluation of Basic Skills Mandatory Training Pilot and National Enhancements
Interim report

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

Corporate Document Services
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The other authors all work at BMRB Social Research.
# Abbreviations and acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BET</td>
<td>Basic Employability Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMA</td>
<td>Decision Making and Appeals</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>FTET</td>
<td>Full-time Education and Training</td>
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<td>JSA</td>
<td>Jobseeker’s Allowance</td>
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<td>ND25+</td>
<td>New Deal for 25+</td>
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<td>ND50+</td>
<td>New Deal Fifty Plus</td>
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<td>NDDP</td>
<td>New Deal for Disabled People</td>
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<td>NDLP</td>
<td>New Deal for Lone Parents</td>
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<td>NDP</td>
<td>New Deal for Partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDYP</td>
<td>New Deal for Young People (18 to 24)</td>
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<td>SIBS</td>
<td>Short intensive Basic Skills</td>
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Summary

In response to the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, the Employment Service (ES) (now Jobcentre Plus) implemented a National Basic Skills Programme in April 2001. Under this programme jobseekers who had been unemployed for at least six months or were entering New Deal, were screened for a basic skills need. If a need was identified at the initial screening, customers were referred to an Independent Assessment to further assess their basic skills need. If a need was confirmed, the customer was then referred onto a basic skills training course. There are three main types of provision available: Basic Employability Training (BET); Short Intensive Training Skills (SIBS) and Full-time Education and Training (FTET).

Following evidence of low take up of basic skills provision and non-attendance at the Independent Assessment, a number of small-scale pilots were set up to run between September 2001 and March 2002. These early pilots looked at amongst other things, the impact of sanctions and incentives on participation in the basic skills process. The evidence from these pilots (Peters et al. 2003) indicated that incentive payments did have some effect in attracting customers to attend provision; however, it was less clear whether sanctions had an impact. In order to explore the impact of sanctions on the people taking up and completing basic skills training more thoroughly, an extended 12-month mandatory training pilot scheme was introduced in April 2004.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned BMRB Social Research and PSI, to carry out a longitudinal evaluation of the mandatory pilot and national enhancements. The research commenced in May 2004 and is due to end in June 2006. BMRB Social Research has been responsible for the qualitative component of the research which encompasses three stages: stage one: delivery process study; stage two: a study of views and perceptions in mandatory pilot areas and stage three: a programme and sanctions impacts study. It is important to note, that stage one and two of the qualitative research focused on both the national enhancements
and the mandatory pilots. In addition to the qualitative research, quantitative analysis of the impact of the mandatory pilot is being conducted by PSI\textsuperscript{1}.

In its broadest form, the evaluation aims to measure and assess the impact of the threat of sanctions on customers. However, this interim report focuses specifically on the findings from stages one and two of the qualitative research which explored the process of delivering the mandatory training pilot and national enhancements and views and attitudes towards these over time.

Stage one of the research comprised 100 mapping interviews with advisers and basic skills district co-ordinators and 18 jobcentre site visits (12 mandatory pilot and six in national comparator areas). The site visits included focus groups with advisers; interview observations; and short depth interviews with customers. Stage two of the research included re-visits to the 12 mandatory pilot areas; 60 depth interviews with customers; and 12 interviews with training providers in the mandatory pilot areas.

Key findings

Although an element of discretion was being exerted at stage one by advisers when delivering the national enhancements, by stage two of the research the Fast Track and Independent Assessment were being delivered consistently between and across districts. Initially, advisers found the Fast Track and Independent Assessment difficult to communicate in some instances, but again, by stage two, this problem had usually dissipated as advisers became more confident about delivering the programme.

Overall delivery of the Fast Track and Independent Assessment were said to be operating effectively, particularly the Independent Assessment, with few problems being raised regarding any aspects of the assessment. Importantly, advisers felt the Fast Track and Independent Assessment had been successful in identifying basic skills needs amongst customers, particularly borderline cases which otherwise would have gone undetected; and it was also thought to have raised the profile of basic skills within the jobcentre as a whole.

Basic skills training was sold to customers using a range of tools or a ‘package’ of incentives, which not only included promoting the financial incentives, but also the possible personal benefits they might gain as a result, such as increasing employment opportunities or improving their social skills. Although customers were positive about the financial incentive, it was not felt to be effective in encouraging customers to attend training if they were resistant to the idea. Certainly for those customers who were happy to attend training it was seen as a nice ‘bonus’ and in some

\textsuperscript{1} Initial findings from the quantitative study can found in the PSI interim report entitled ‘Basic skills training pilots: An early assessment of the impact on provision starts and provision completed’ (Kasparova and Wilkinson 2005).
instances it had helped advisers to address the practical barriers raised by customers, such as concerns over the cost of food or travel.²

It seems, therefore, that although an incentive will do little to encourage resistant customers to attend training, it has the capacity to help overcome practical barriers and will make those customers already willing to attend more positive about doing so.

The mandatory nature of training was communicated to customers at the pre-entry-to-training interview. The level of information provided and the emphasis placed on this by advisers varied according to the perceived needs of the individual customer, with more resistant customers being provided with more information than those who appeared willing to attend. Mandation was communicated by the advisers both verbally and in writing using the mandatory referral letter. Advisers tended to place more emphasis on the verbal communication of mandation compared to the written information and the approaches to delivering the letter varied from advisers outlining the content of the letter in detail, to simply giving customers the letter to read. For the most part, customers suggested they recalled being made aware of the mandatory nature of training, although some exceptions were noted.

Although some resistance was expressed by customers, overall, customers generally appeared to understand and accept the mandatory nature of training. This was not only thought to be a result of the explanation they received from their advisers, but was also due to a general awareness and understanding that in order to claim benefits they would be expected, under the rules of Jobcentre Plus, to engage in certain activities, such as training.

Overall, the threat of sanctions was deemed to be effective in encouraging customers to attend training, especially the more resistant customers. Certainly, it was said by advisers and providers to have increased the flow of customers onto basic skills training. However, the threat of a sanction was not effective in encouraging customers to attend training in all cases, rather, it was said to have also resulted in a number of other impacts occurring, such as, customers signing off (in some cases as a result of finding employment), changing benefit (usually following a period of signing off), or being sanctioned. Following a sanction being imposed, customers tended to either comply or ultimately they signed off or changed benefit.

Referral to training was typically said to be a straightforward process: with advisers following recommendations made by the Independent Assessor regarding the type

² Training allowance for mainstream customers is set at £10 and £15.38 for New Deal customers. The Basic Skills incentive of £10 was provided in addition to this. The research discussion focused primarily on the basic skills incentive rather than the training allowance, however, as customers often perceived these payments as being ‘one training payment’, views and impacts regarding the total payment received were often also explored. Importantly, views/impact of the incentive did not appear to vary according to their perception.
of training provision; and the choice of provider usually made in liaison with customers according to the availability and location of the provider. Notwithstanding this, some problems were noted with the accessibility and availability of provision and although the latter had generally been resolved by stage two, accessibility continued to be a problem, particularly in rural areas.

Training provision (BET and SIBS) comprised a range of activities including: inductions, basic skills training, job search, work placements, outings and assessments. Views on training were mixed overall and they were often linked to the perceived impacts of the training. The course content and organisation were generally viewed positively, particularly work placements and job search. However, the level of inactivity occurring on some courses and the wide range of student ability within each class was deemed problematic. The views of customers towards other students also affected how customers felt about the training, for example, customers mentioned disliking the course as a consequence of the disruptive and aggressive behaviour exhibited by other students; and liking the course as it had provided an opportunity to socialise and make friends. Views on the course tutors were also mixed, with some finding tutors to be friendly and approachable and others describing them as ‘condescending’.

Training was said to have resulted in a range of outcomes, including: improvement of basic skills (level of impact varied); improved job search skills; development of soft skills; qualifications in basic skills; increased employability and employment. The development of soft skills was seen as being of particular importance, as it was felt this had the knock on effect on a range of other outcomes, such as increased employability.

Importantly, no discernable benefits or impacts were highlighted by respondents in some cases. Certainly, advisers expressed concern about a lack of improvement to customers’ basic skills’ levels, which they thought was demonstrated by customers (who had been on BS training) returning to the jobcentre only to be re-assessed as having a need. While it was noted that this could in part by accounted for by customers originally entering training at a low level of literacy or numeracy, advisers were worried about the longer term consequences of this, especially how it would impact on their ability to sell the programme to customers who had already attended training and ultimately they feared it would undermine the basic skills programme overall. This and other impacts are explored in more depth in stage three of the research.
1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The national programme of basic skills provision and the mandatory training pilots operated by Jobcentre Plus contribute towards the Government’s strategy to improve adult literacy, numeracy and English language skills in Britain. The Government’s overall strategy is aimed at several priority groups which include: job seekers; other benefit claimants; prisoners; low-skilled employees and other groups at risk of social exclusion. The Government aims to improve the basic skills of 750,000 people by 2004 and 1.5 million people by 2007 (DfES 2001). This aim has been reinforced in the Government’s 2003 strategy for improving skills for employability: 21st Century Skills (DfES 2003).

The Moser report, A Fresh Start, published in 1999, identified that around one in five people in England were not functionally literate and about 40 per cent had numeracy problems. This equates to around seven million adults who cannot read or write at the level expected of an 11 year-old (Level 1). Britain’s skill levels compared unfavourably with other industrialised countries’. An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) survey of 12 industrialised countries in 1997, revealed that Britain had the third highest percentage of adults with literacy and numeracy at the lowest level (OECD 1997, in Hillage et al. 2000) and that around half a million people in Britain experienced difficulties with basic skills as a result of English not being their first language.

Many of the recommendations of the Moser Report were adopted in the Government’s national strategy for improving basic skills: Skills for Life (DfES 2001). The strategy set about tackling the skills problems of those groups where literacy and numeracy needs were greatest. As unemployed people and benefit claimants are at a high risk of basic skills problems and associated disadvantages, the Government specifically targeted them for provision. The aims of the national basic skills programme for job seekers and benefit claimants were twofold: firstly, it aimed to improve the basic skills of this customer group, and secondly, to improve the employment rate of those with basic skills needs and/or no formal qualifications.
The target of improving the basic skills of 750,000 adults by 2004 included 130,000 jobseekers and 40,000 other benefit claimants. The needs of these groups were to be met by the Employment Service (ES) and the Benefits Agency and, following restructuring in 2002, Jobcentre Plus. This evaluation has focused on the basic skills programme delivered by Jobcentre Plus.

1.2 The basic skills programme

1.2.1 The National Programme for basic skills

In response to the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, the ES (now Jobcentre Plus) implemented a National Basic Skills Programme in April 2001. Under this programme jobseekers who had been unemployed for at least six months or were entering New Deal (usually 18 months), were screened for a basic skills need. There are four main types of basic skills needs identified – literacy, numeracy, oracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

If a basic skills need is identified at the initial screening process, customers are referred to an Independent Assessment to further assess their basic skills need. The Independent Assessment consists of a nationally standardised, externally contracted test. ESOL customers with a clear language need bypass the Independent Assessment and access training provision directly.

For inactive groups and those on voluntary New Deals such as New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), New Deal Fifty Plus (ND50+), New Deal for Partners (NDP), New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP), Independent Assessment is optional. However, customers on Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) and mandatory New Deal programmes, New Deal for 25+ (ND25+) and New Deal for Young People (NDYP), can be issued with a Jobseeker’s Direction if they refuse to attend their Independent Assessment. This can ultimately result in benefit sanctions being imposed in the case of jobseekers.

If a need is confirmed (customer is assessed as having basic skills below Level 1) the customer is then referred onto a basic skills training course. There are three main types of provision available:

- **Basic Employability Training** (BET) – targeted at those with the lowest skill level (at or below entry level). Provision is full time and lasts up to 26 weeks;

- **Short Intensive Training** (SIBS). This provision is aimed at those with skills above entry level, but below Level 1. The course is full-time, lasts for up to eight weeks and focuses on basic skills in a work context;

- **Full-time Education and Training** (FTET). This option is only available to NDYP and ESOL customers and lasts for one year and is available to those people below Level 1.

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3 Basic Skills Level 1 is the standard of skill expected on an 11 year old.

4 ESOL customers can undertake either BET or FTET training.
Early pilot research

Following evidence of low take up of basic skills provision and non-attendance at the Independent Assessment, a number of small-scale pilots were set up to run between September 2001 and March 2002. These looked at, amongst other things, the impact of sanctions and incentives on participation in the basic skills process. There were three types of pilot: areas where sanctions alone were applied, areas where incentives alone were applied and areas where both sanctions and incentives were applied. The evidence from these pilots (Peters et al. 2003) indicated that incentive payments did have some effect in attracting customers to attend provision. However, it was less clear whether sanctions had an impact.

Changes to the programme April 2004

Leading on from the pilot, the White Paper, 21st Century Skills (DfES 2003) announced a series of changes to the National Programme for basic skills from April 2004. The most significant of these changes included the introduction of:

- **the Fast Track screening tool** – to be used with all JSA customers at the six-month stage of claim and those joining any of the New Deals;

- **screening for customers on inactive benefits** – basic skills screening to be introduced for customers on inactive benefits when they attend their Work Focused Interview (WFI);

- **the use of the Jobseekers Act to direct customers to Independent Assessment** – advisers to be encouraged to use their powers under the Jobseekers Act to direct customers who are unwilling to attend the Independent Assessment;

- **availability of financial incentives for customers undertaking Jobcentre Plus basic skills training provision** – customers to receive an additional £10 per week on top of their training allowance and £100 on the successful completion of an Entry Level 3 or Level 1 qualification.

1.2.2 The mandatory training pilot

Findings relating to the impact of the threat of sanctions explored in the September 2001 to March 2002 pilot were deemed inconclusive for a range of reasons, including: the size of the pilot areas which were deemed too small; the short timeframe of the pilot; overly complicated pilot initiatives; unreliable management information on which to measure the impact; and as a result of the weak basic skills delivery infrastructure in place at the time.

In order to explore the impact of sanctions on the people taking up and completing basic skills training more thoroughly, an extended 12 month mandatory training pilot scheme was introduced in April 2004.

There are 12 mandatory basic skills pilot districts in total and they are: Bedfordshire; Berkshire; Bolton and Bury; Calderdale and Kirklees; Cheshire and Warrington;
Dorset; Durham; Hull and East Riding; Kent; Lincolnshire and Rutland; South London; and Wolverhampton and Walsall.

The main premise of the mandatory pilot is that customers claiming JSA in the 12 districts may be subject to benefit sanctions if they are referred to provision and either do not attend training or they end provision without completing it (for any other reason than for entering employment). In practice, it was thought that few customers would actually be sanctioned, rather, it was thought the fear of being sanctioned might modify customer behaviour. Thus, the evaluation has been primarily concerned with the impact of the threat of benefit sanctions on customer behaviour, rather than the impact of being sanctioned itself, although this has also been explored.

In addition to the 12 pilot areas, Jobcentre Plus identified ten national comparator areas to operate as control areas. The areas chosen were: Cambridgeshire; City and East London; Cornwall; Hampshire; North London; Northumberland; Shropshire; Staffordshire; West London and Wiltshire. In stage one of the qualitative evaluation, six of these comparator areas were included in the research study.

1.2.3 Evaluation of basic skills programme

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned BMRB Social Research and PSI, to carry out a longitudinal evaluation of the mandatory pilot and national enhancements. The research commenced in May 2004 and is due to end in June 2006.

BMRB Social Research has been responsible for the qualitative component of the research which encompasses three stages:

- **Stage one:** delivery process study;
- **Stage two:** a study of views, attitudes and perceptions in mandatory pilot areas (including a study of providers); and
- **Stage three:** a programme and sanctions impacts study.

In addition to the qualitative research, PSI are conducting quantitative research which looks at the impact of the mandatory training pilots on a range of outcomes including starting and completing provision, benefit exit and job starts.

Whilst the national enhancements and mandatory pilot are two separate programmes, it is clear from conducting the research that advisers in mandatory pilot areas tend to see the two programmes as a fluid process (as a consequence of their simultaneous introduction in April 2004).

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5 Initial findings from the quantitative study can found in the PSI interim report entitled ‘Basic skills training pilots: An early assessment of the impact on provision starts and provision completed’ (Kasparova and Wilkinson 2005).
Figure 1.1 illustrates the delivery process of the basic skills programmes from beginning to end, including both national enhancements and mandatory pilot initiatives. The diagram was developed from descriptions of the delivery process given by advisers who took part in the study, and it is this process that is explored in this report.

**Figure 1.1  The delivery process of the basic skills programmes, including national enhancements and mandatory pilot initiatives**

The report is divided into five chapters: Chapter 1 provides background to the research and outlines the design and methodological approach adopted, Chapter 2 focuses on national enhancements, looking at the delivery process, advisers’ and customers’ experiences and views as well considering initial impacts. Mandatory training pilots are the subject of Chapter 3. As with chapter two, this chapter explores the process of delivering the mandatory aspect of basic skills training, advisers’, customers’ and providers’ attitudes towards, and the initial impacts arising from, this. Chapter 4 considers basic skills training provision; and finally Chapter 5 provides a summary of the key research findings and outlines the main conclusions. It is important to note, that although this report explores the initial impacts of the national enhancements and mandatory pilot, these impacts are qualitative in form and are, therefore, not measurable in a statistical sense, rather they focus on the qualitative effect of the programmes.

### 1.3 Research objectives

In its broadest form, the evaluation aims to measure and assess the impact of the threat of sanctions on customer outcomes. However, **this interim report focuses specifically on the findings from stages one and two of the qualitative**
research which explored the process of delivering the mandatory training pilot and national enhancements and views and attitudes towards these over time. Stage three of the research (focuses on impacts) began in July 2005 and was completed in December 2005. The research aims are outlined in detail below:

Stage one of the research focused on the process of implementing and delivering the mandatory pilot and national programme. Specifically, it aimed to explore:

- the introduction and implementation of the programme;
- the process of delivering national enhancements and the mandatory training pilot;
- initial views of the programme, including any problems or difficulties encountered;
- initial impacts of the programme on: advisers, jobcentre initiatives and customers; and
- suggestions for change or improvements.

Stage two of the research focused on advisers’ and customers’ views of the basic skills programmes, although process developments and any changes introduced to the process were also explored. In particular, this stage of the research considered:

- views on the basic skills mandatory pilot and national enhancements, focusing specifically, on training provision, incentives and sanctions;
- views on the principle of the basic skills mandatory pilot;
- initial impacts of the programme; and
- suggestions for change.

1.4 Research design

1.4.1 Stage one

The process study comprised two parts: an initial mapping stage with basic skills district co-ordinators and jobcentre advisers, and site visits to jobcentres.

Mapping stage

In order to provide an overview of how the programme changes had been implemented and delivered across different jobcentres, a mapping exercise was carried out. This information was also used to inform the design and selection of the site visits to jobcentres.

The mapping stage encompassed 100 telephone interviews with advisers and basic skills district co-ordinators: 50 of these interviews were in mandatory pilot areas and 50 in ten national comparator areas. The interviews were carried out between May and June 2004 and lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes.
The findings from the mapping exercise are incorporated in this report.

**Site visits to jobcentres**

In the second part of the process stage of the evaluation, site visits were carried out across 18 districts; 12 in mandatory pilot areas and six in national comparator areas (Cambridgeshire; Hampshire; North East London; Northumberland; Shropshire; Wiltshire and Swindon).

These areas were decided in conjunction with the DWP and were chosen according to geographic and demographic characteristics, such as type of area, size of jobcentre, nature of local labour market; and experiences of implementation and the procedures adopted.

The site visits were carried out between June and July 2004 and comprised focus groups, observations of adviser meetings and short customer follow-up interviews:

In total, **18 focus groups** were conducted across the mandatory and non-mandatory areas – one in each of the areas visited. The groups were made up of between six and eight respondents, and included New Deal and mainstream advisers; basic skills team leaders; jobcentre and adviser managers; basic skills district co-coordinators; and in some areas, a representative from the Decision Making and Appeals (DMA) team. The use of focus groups ensured that advisers from a range of jobcentres across the district could compare and contrast their experiences of implementation and delivery. The groups lasted approximately 90 minutes.

As part of the jobcentre site visits, **customer interviews were also observed** by researchers: A range of customer meetings were viewed, including six month restart interviews; entry to new deal; Independent Assessment follow-up meetings; and pre-entry-to-training interviews (the latter can be the same meeting).

As a follow on from the observations, customers whose meetings had been observed were asked to take part in a short, ten minute research interview to discuss their experiences, understanding and views of the meeting they had undertaken with the adviser. In this way, it was possible not only to gain a real insight into the delivery of the programme through observation, but it also enabled the researcher to understand the experience from the perspective of the customer. Field notes were made during the observations and the customer interviews were recorded for analysis. Findings from both are integrated throughout this report.

### 1.4.2 Stage two

The second stage of the research focused on views of mandatory pilot and national enhancements. This stage comprised:

- interviews with advisers during re-visits to all 12 mandatory pilot areas;
- 60 interviews with customers who had experience of the programme in five of the mandatory pilot areas; and
• interviews with 12 training providers responsible for delivering the basic skills provision across three areas.

Re-visiting jobcentres

Individual, paired and tri-depth interviews were carried out with advisers across 12 mandatory pilot areas. Depth interviews were used instead of group discussions in this wave, in order to minimise the disruption experienced by advisers. On reflection it was felt that using this approach had methodological advantages, as the in-depth and more confidential nature of the interview enabled advisers to express their views freely and in greater detail.

To ensure consistency (as far as was feasible) the same advisers were included in the second stage of the research as in the first. However, replication of this exact design was not possible in all districts due to staff leaving or changing their roles. Adviser replacements were made in situations where this resulted in less than four/five advisers being interviewed across a particular district, as this was methodologically felt to be a sufficient number of respondents.

The visits to mandatory pilot areas took place between November and December 2004 and the interviews lasted between one and one and a quarter hours.

Customer research

In total, 60 interviews were carried out with customers who had experience of the basic skills programme. These interviews were spread across five mandatory pilot areas: South London, Bury and Bolton, Wolverhampton and Walsall, Bedfordshire and Hull and East Riding.

The 60 customer interviews were purposively selected to include customers who had experience of various stages of the national programme and basic skills sanctions pilot. The customers study was designed as follows:

• 20 Fast Track to Independent Assessment – customers identified with need, those without a need, and those who dropped out at the point of referral;

• 20 Independent Assessment to training – customers identified with need, those without, those who dropped out at this stage, those who were referred on multiple occasions, and those who were sanctioned for not attending training;

• 20 on training – consisting of those on BET, SIBS, FTET courses; customers whose duration of stay on the course varied; and range of course outcomes.

Some difficulties arose in identifying specific groups within this sample, primarily those who dropped out at specific stages or were sanctioned, as this information was not included in the database supplied. Notwithstanding this, the sample achieved included a good distribution of customers from across the three main groups outlined in the design that is: Fast Track to Independent Assessment, Independent Assessment to referral to training; and those who undertook training.
A profile of the sample can be seen in Appendix C of this report.

The research with customers took place between March 2005 and April 2005. The interviews took place in the customers’ homes and each lasted approximately between 45 minutes and one hour.

**Provider study**

The provider study took place between February and April 2005 and comprised **12 interviews with training providers** across three areas: South London, Kent and Hull and East Riding (four interviews in each area). Providers were recruited to ensure a mix of different types of organisation including those from colleges and adult education providers; different size organisations; and those delivering different types of basic skills courses, for example BETS, SIBS, FTET and ESOL. The exact breakdown of this sample can also be found in Appendix C.

### 1.5 Recruitment

Respondents were purposively selected by our in-house team of specialist field recruiters, using the sample criteria outlined above and agreed with the DWP. Respondents were recruited from three samples provided by the DWP:

- an Excel database of district jobcentre contacts in mandatory pilot and national comparator areas;
- a table of training providers operating in the three geographical areas chosen for this element of the study: South London, Kent and Hull and East Riding; and
- a Labour Market System (LMS) database extract including contact details of Jobcentre Plus customers who had engaged in the basic skills programme in the five geographical areas selected for the customer research: South London, Bury and Bolton, Wolverhampton and Walsall, Bedfordshire and Hull and East Riding.

### 1.6 Conduct of the research and analysis

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

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

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

Adopting a qualitative approach has made it possible to report on the range of views, experiences and suggestions reported by advisers, customers and providers. The purposive nature of the sample design as well as the sample size, however, means that the study cannot provide any statistical data relating to the prevalence of these views, experiences or suggestions. Further details about our analytical procedures can be found in Appendix A.
2 Delivering national enhancements

This chapter will describe the process of delivering the national enhancements in mandatory pilot and comparator areas; it will consider customers’, advisers’ and providers’ views about this process, as well as exploring some of the preliminary impacts arising from them. It should be noted that this report does not aim to consider impacts in detail; rather these are explored in stage three of the qualitative research and in the quantitative impact study to be carried out by PSI\(^6\).

**Key points**

- Despite irregularities in the delivery of the Fast Track assessment in stage one, the national enhancements were generally being delivered consistently across districts by stage two of the research.

- Advisers initially experienced difficulties introducing the Fast Track and the programme more generally, as they felt uncomfortable broaching the issue of basic skills, however, by stage two these problems had dissipated.

- Once initial backlogs cleared, both the referral and delivery of the Independent Assessment were said to be operating well.

- Importantly, the programme was said to have helped advisers to identify basic skills needs; had encouraged customers to sign off the register and find work; and had raised the profile of basic skills within the jobcentre.

- More negatively, the programme was said to have resulted in customers feeling stressed; it was thought to have increased advisers’ workload and was also thought to have shifted focus away from other jobcentre initiatives.

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\(^6\) PSI quantitative impact report due 2006.
Despite awareness of the £10 weekly incentive and the £100 end-of-course bonus, advisers tended only to communicate the weekly incentive to customers, as the eligibility criteria of the bonus scheme was often perceived as ‘unfair’.

The incentive was said to be a ‘bonus’ for those who were already willing to attend training, but was not thought to motivate the more resistant customers.

2.1 The process of delivering the national enhancements

This section provides a descriptive overview of the process of delivering the national enhancements from the perspective of advisers, customers and providers. It outlines how the national enhancements were communicated and how they were being delivered in practice.

2.1.1 Initial communication of the national enhancements

The national enhancements were generally first mentioned to customers during the entry to New Deal or the six month Restart interview, at the point of introducing the Fast Track assessment. However, in some comparator areas the national enhancements were being mentioned at an earlier stage, for example, at fresh claim or 13-week interviews, if the adviser suspected the customer had a need and might benefit from early referral. This approach was said in one area to have resulted in approximately two-thirds of Fast Track assessments being carried out an earlier stage.

In Calderdale and Kirklees, the national enhancements were first introduced during a weekly Group Information Session held at a local provider’s premises and operated by providers and advisers. The sessions had been incorporated into the pilot and were held in place of the entry to New Deal and Restart interviews. During these sessions, customers were given information about the programme and as part of this they undertook an Independent Assessment. The sessions were said to have been introduced in order to streamline and standardise the process of communicating information regarding the national enhancements.

Approaches to explaining the programme

Approaches to communicating the national enhancement varied enormously within and between districts. It was felt overall that advisers in mandatory pilot areas placed greater emphasis on communicating the national enhancements to customers, compared to those in comparator areas and this was thought to be a consequence of the mandatory nature of training in these areas which meant the national enhancements were potentially of greater significance to the customer. Furthermore, it was felt that being part of the mandatory pilot simply increased the importance placed on basic skills in these districts, which meant basic skills were at the front of advisers’ minds and consequently advisers were more likely to focus on these during the interviews.
Broadly, advisers adopted one of two approaches to communicating the national enhancements to customers: they either explained the programme step by step as the need arose, to ensure the customer understood the immediate implications such as attending an Independent Assessment; or they outlined the complete process in detail upfront, for example, the Independent Assessment and the possibility of attending training. Advisers were keen to strike a balance between providing sufficient information so the customer would understand the process and take it seriously, but not so much that it would potentially confuse or be distressing and in some cases, it was said to have proved difficult to find the right balance.

When communicating the programme, advisers initially used such terms as ‘test’ and ‘passing’ or ‘failing’ when discussing the Fast Track and Independent Assessment. However, following supervisor intervention, advisers adopted more sensitive and positive terms such as ‘checking levels’ using an ‘assessment’ or ‘screener’. Advisers were generally referring to ‘literacy and numeracy’, ‘English and maths’, ‘words and numbers’, ‘essential skills’ or ‘work skills’ rather than ‘basic skills’ as these were felt to be more easily understood and were also thought to link the programme into employability.

2.1.2 The Fast Track assessment process

The Fast Track screening tool is a standardised document designed to test customers’ literacy and numeracy skills. The Fast Track tool is divided into two tasks: the first assesses customers’ understanding of a job description; and the second (which is divided into two sections A and B) looks at basic spelling, grammar and handwriting. A copy of the Fast Track screening tool is shown in Appendix B. It should be noted that in one comparator area, they were piloting a locally designed Fast Track assessment and had two gender specific versions.

Although the Fast Track assessment was generally being carried out universally across and within districts (with the exception of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) customers, who generally bypassed the Fast Track and Independent Assessment and were referred directly to training), there was evidence to suggest this was not being carried out in all cases. Reasons for this included: being overly time-consuming; embarrassing to administer; and in some instances it was also seen as unnecessary by advisers. In these instances, advisers either postponed the assessment to a subsequent appointment, or they did not carry it out at all. When probed, it was suggested that advisers possibly marked these as ‘passed’ on the Labour Market System (LMS), when in fact they were not carried out.

Adviser discretion regarding the Fast Track was more likely to have occurred in comparator areas rather than in mandatory areas, although it was identified in both. Certainly there seemed to be a greater degree of uncertainty over what was required of advisers in non-pilot areas, with some advisers seeing the screener as an optional procedure. It should be noted that by stage two there was little evidence of
discretion occurring regarding the delivery of the Fast Track, although comparator areas were not included in the second stage of the research.

As previously mentioned, in Calderdale and Kirklees, the Fast Track assessment had been omitted from the process completely and customers were instead all undertaking the Independent Assessment during the Group Information Session.

The Fast Track assessment was generally being carried out near the beginning of the entry to New Deal or Restart interview, as the outcome determined the remaining course of the meeting and the LMS required it to be recorded. It was also felt it was best to ‘get it out of the way’, thus reducing any embarrassment felt by the adviser or the customer.

‘I usually try and do that bit straight away, because at the six month interview you’re going to be discussing training, there’s no point in showing somebody a lot of training courses if you’re going to have to go back and start doing the basic skills, if that’s going to have to be the priority, which it probably will be if that’s what they need.’

(Dorset, adviser, stage one)

However, some advisers preferred to leave the explanation and assessment until later in the interview, in order to concentrate on building a relationship and rapport with the customer and to focus on job search activities.

Approaches to carrying out the Fast Track assessment

As with the level of information provided about the national enhancements overall, the amount of information given to customers about the completion of the Fast Track assessment varied. In general, advisers suggested they introduced it without much preamble and explained it as a means of assessing literacy and numeracy and this description was borne out by the research observations.

In circumstances where customers resisted undertaking the Fast Track, advisers tended to supply more information about the policy, for example, they would often explain that it was a new Government initiative brought about in response to concerns about adult literacy and numeracy problems. The universality of the initiative and the absence of adviser discretion in deciding who undertakes the assessment was also mentioned, as this was felt to prevent customers from feeling singled out and simultaneously highlighted the futility of resisting the assessment.

‘The only way we’ve got round it is to say this is mandatory, we’ve been asked to do it with everyone, the only way we can deal with it is to ask them if they could kindly fill the form in for us. That’s the way we’ve had to get round it.’

(Bedfordshire, adviser, stage one)

Both the adviser and customer research studies suggested that customers were generally informed about the length of time they had to complete the Fast Track prior to undertaking the assessment. For the most part, the actual assessment was
said to take ten minutes, although some thought they had been given considerably longer.

The assessment tended to take place at the adviser’s desk, usually while the adviser worked on the computer or moved around the office. This was said to have allowed the adviser to keep an eye on the customer and as suggested, in some cases, to finish the procedure early if necessary.

2.1.3 Providing feedback on the Fast Track assessment

Usually the Fast Track screeners were marked and feedback provided immediately after the completion of the Fast Track assessment, as this enabled the advisers to refer customers to Independent Assessment during this interview if they had a need. More exceptionally in the case of New Deal customers, advisers preferred to leave the feedback until the following session, particularly if they felt the customer had not performed well, as they hoped this would remove the embarrassment of having the assessment marked in front of them.

Feedback was generally limited to telling customers whether or not they were required to attend a further assessment and then backing this up by reference to any wrong answers. A more detailed analysis of the assessment was generally not included. Notwithstanding this, there was a general tendency to try to make customers feel good about their performance by mentioning questions or sections of the assessment in which they had done well.

2.1.4 Referral to the Independent Assessment

As outlined in the previous section, referral to Independent Assessment tended to take place immediately after the Fast Track assessment had been undertaken and feedback given. Advisers made the appointment while the customer was at the desk, generally by phoning the provider, although in one comparator area, advisers were using an electronic procurement system.

According to advisers, customers were told about the purpose of the assessment at the point of referral and customers mentioned being told it was a ‘test’ in English and Maths – although there were misconceptions with some customers believing it to be a course. Customers were also provided with verbal and written details about the appointment and this was reinforced by the customers. Advisers generally went through all the practical details with the customers, for example, the time, place and length of the appointment and in some instances provided written directions or a map. A follow-up interview was also arranged at this point to discuss the results of the Independent Assessment and this was usually booked in for a few days after the Independent Assessment.

At this point in the process, advisers sometimes also raised the possibility of attending training (assuming this had not been previously discussed); particularly if they were concerned the customer might think the Independent Assessment was the end of the process. The implications of not attending the assessment were also highlighted in some instances.
Advisers generally relied on persuading customers to attend the Independent Assessment by outlining the benefits of the assessment and by making customers feel more comfortable about attending, rather than focusing on their responsibility to attend under the Jobseeker’s Agreement. Advisers further encouraged customers by scheduling the assessment on the customer’s signing day so they would have to attend the jobcentre on the day of the assessment (where the assessments took place in the jobcentre) and in some instances, advisers also contacted customers to remind them ahead of the assessment.

The aim was to give customers an appointment within two weeks of referral and this was generally being met, although the increase in referrals under the pilot had led to problems with capacity early on in the delivery. In later stages, appointments were usually processed in under a week.

2.1.5 Attending the Independent Assessment

A range of organisations carried out the Independent Assessment, some of whom also offered training provision. Independent Assessment was equally likely to take place at the provider’s premises or under provider supervision at the jobcentre. The choice of venue varied according to local agreements, which were normally decided according to the volume of customers requiring assessments; availability of space at the jobcentre; and the location of the provider’s premises, for example, whether they were located centrally or not.

The type of working relationship between advisers and providers varied between jobcentres and across pilot and non-pilot areas. Indeed, some advisers had minimal contact with providers, whereas others had developed a closer relationship. Closer relationships tended to have formed in situations where the provider carried out the assessment in the jobcentre, but also where relationships historically existed, for example, as a result of other training provision they delivered.

According to customers, the assessment usually included an introductory talk by the provider on the purpose, length and format of the session in terms of breaks, as well as details of what would be expected during the assessment. However, the level of information received regarding the potential consequences of the assessment (such as referral to training provision) varied, with some customers being provided with this information and others not. Customers said the need to re-visit their adviser in order to receive feedback from the assessments was reiterated by the provider.

The assessment itself was taken in two parts: Maths and English, usually separated by a break for refreshments or, in exceptional cases, conducted on two separate days. Customers’ recall of the length of time the assessment took varied from 20 minutes to half a day. Additional features of assessment procedures included the administration of a skills audit aimed at assessing interest in different employment sectors; refreshments; videos; and even a prize draw for attendance.
2.1.6 The use of incentives

Advisers in both pilot and comparator areas were generally clear that customers would receive an additional £10 incentive per week for attending basic skills training on top of their normal training allowance\(^7\) and benefit. It was suggested by advisers that customers were expected to pay the first £4 of travel out of these allowances, but that any additional costs would be refunded.

There was confusion surrounding the additional £10 amongst customers, with some perceiving this to be money for travel expenses rather than a basic skills training incentive. There was also some confusion exhibited between the training allowance and the incentive payment. In some cases, customers claimed to know nothing about incentives, particularly in the early stages when fewer people had progressed far into the programme. This said, customers mentioned receiving an additional payment of £10, £15 or £15.38 per week. The payment was often expressed as a total figure of £20 for mainstream customers and £25 for those on New Deal. There was although some recognition this payment came from two separate sources.

There was less clarity about the £100 bonus payment amongst advisers. It was thought that while advisers tended to know it was a payment of £100 paid on reaching a certain basic skills’ level, they were not always aware what the expected level of achievement was\(^8\). Moreover, other advisers suggested they were unfamiliar with the details of the bonus package and indicated they would need to check emails or the intranet in order to find out.

The subject of incentives was generally introduced by advisers at the referral to provision stage once a need for training had been established. In some instances, advisers were broaching the subject earlier than this, at referral to the Independent Assessment, but with a light touch and only with customers they felt needed persuading. As will be discussed in Section 3.1.1, advisers were using the financial incentives as part of the overall package to encourage customers to attend training along with such a things as improved personal and employment skills.

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\(^7\) Training allowance for mainstream customers is set at £10 and £15.38 for New Deal customers. The basic skills incentive of £10 was provided in addition to this. The research discussion focused primarily on the basic skills incentive rather than the training allowance, however, as customers often perceived these payments as being ‘one training payment’, views and impacts regarding the total payment received were also often explored. Importantly, views/impact of the incentive did not appear to vary according to their perception.

\(^8\) The bonus payment stands at £100 and is paid to customers who attain a qualification that counts towards the Government’s Public Service Agreement (PSA) target for basic skills. Short Intensive Basic Skills (SIBS) customers are required to pass the new National Test at Level 1 in both literacy and numeracy. Basic Employment Training (BET) customers need to achieve Entry Level 3. Customers can only receive one payment.
Advisers tended to focus on the weekly payments rather than the bonus as these were guaranteed payments. The £100 bonus tended to be mentioned to customers who advisers perceived as having a realistic chance of meeting the required basic skills’ level, as they felt it was unfair to raise the hopes of customers who were unlikely to do so. In these circumstances, advisers tended to either not mention the bonus at all or to give a general indication that there might be a bonus at the end of the course, without providing specific details. The assumption made by advisers was that providers would broach the subject of the bonus with customers as required.

Awareness of the £100 bonus was rare amongst customers and those who were familiar with this tended to be those to whom it applied. These customers generally understood that the bonus was conditional on reaching a certain level of achievement, although none were specific about the level. Interestingly, although customers mentioned being made aware of this via their adviser and provider, the bonus was often associated with the provider rather than the jobcentre.

There was evidence to suggest that providers were also offering their own bonus for attendance, usually consisting of £50 paid at the end of the course, sometimes paid in retailers’ vouchers, but in one case, a weekly £10. More exceptionally, customers mentioned a bonus of £50 linked to getting a job at the end of the course.

2.1.7 Customers’ understanding of national enhancements

In general, advisers felt customers understood the separate elements of the national programme, for example, the Fast Track assessment, the Independent Assessment and the Financial Incentive. In the initial stages it was felt that New Deal customers had a greater understanding than mainstream customers, as they were often more familiar with the principle of assessments and training. However, as the programme progressed, it was felt that most customers were familiar with the programme either through direct experience or as a result of information passed to them by advisers or other customers. This assertion was borne out during the customer research as customers were generally able to explain the main premise behind the programme: for example, they knew the Fast Track was a test designed to measure the skills of people claiming benefits and that the Independent Assessment was a more detailed version of this; and certainly those who had gone on to be referred to training, understood the assessments had been with a view to entering training and possibly increasing their chances of employment.

Notwithstanding this, there was evidence of a lack of understanding amongst some customers. In these cases, customers had difficulty distinguishing between the various stages of the process, for example, between the Fast Track and Independent Assessment and some customers were unable to recall the Fast Track, even when prompted with a copy of the screener itself (some customers remained adamant they had not carried out the Fast Track assessment). This was particularly true in circumstances where some time had passed since the assessment (in excess of six months in some cases), but it was also noted for those who had undertaken
assessments more recently. Despite this lack of awareness, customers did not tend to suggest they had received an insufficient explanation from their adviser.

2.2 Views on the national enhancements

This section considers the views of advisers, customers and providers with regards to the national enhancements.

2.2.1 Views on communicating the Fast Track assessment

During the initial stages, advisers often felt uncomfortable communicating basic skills as they perceived this to be a sensitive and personal subject and consequently they often found it embarrassing to broach the issue with customers.

‘I do feel personally uncomfortable with having to issue this to the customer, to ask them to fill it in, fortunately I’ve not had anybody refusing it and I don’t know how I’d react or even what I’m allowed to do if they do refuse.’

(Hampshire, adviser, stage one)

Advisers found it especially difficult to introduce the programme to certain groups of customers, particularly those who they felt were reluctant to accept the idea of conducting a basic skills assessment, for example:

- older customers – advisers often felt that older customers were more reluctant to take part in training due to their age and in light of the type of employment they sought, for example, manual work;

- customers with qualifications – customers with qualifications, such as university degrees were, in some instances, said to have reacted badly to the idea of conducting an assessment, as they deemed it to be a waste of time and insulting considering their qualifications;

  ‘People who have got a lot of qualifications, etc., tend to be quite insulted when you ask them to fill the form in. But I have had people say to me, “I find this insulting”.’

  (Bedfordshire, adviser, stage one)

- customers with difficulties in learning such as dyslexia or those with an awareness of their basic skills needs – advisers felt that in these cases they were uncomfortable and embarrassed about the difficulties they experienced with basic skills; and

- customers with negative educational experiences – in some cases, advisers were concerned about how the customer would feel and react to the idea of an assessment, considering their previous experience of education and assessments.

In addition to this, advisers often lacked faith in the ability of training courses to provide positive benefits to customers as a result of past experiences, and consequently, they lacked conviction in introducing and, importantly, ‘selling’ the
programme to customers. Moreover, there was also the fear that some customers might react aggressively when faced with an assessment of this nature.

By the second stage of the research, a number of the concerns expressed at the outset had been overcome and advisers generally felt happier broaching the issue of the programme and the Fast Track assessment in particular. This was simply said to be a result of operating and gaining experience of delivering the programme over time. Advisers were also finding the universal aspect of the programme and the lack of adviser discretion helpful in communicating the programme, in that they were able to remove themselves from the decision to deliver the initiative.

2.2.2 Views on conducting the Fast Track assessment

Practical difficulties involved in conducting the Fast Track were mentioned by advisers and they often related to problems with, or concern about, **fitting the additional activities into the allocated interview time**, particular as some suggested the length of the entry to New Deal and Restart interviews had already recently been reduced. There were also concerns expressed about **conducting an assessment of this nature within the open and often busy environment** of the jobcentre, as advisers felt this might be distracting and embarrassing for customers. Despite these concerns, customers involved in this study seemed generally happy about carrying out the assessment at the adviser’s desk, although more exceptionally, customers did mention a lack of privacy and quiet.

Another issue of concern was that customers might become flustered and make silly mistakes as a result of being asked to complete the assessment **without prior warning**. This view was substantiated by customers, some of whom claimed they had performed less well during the test as they felt unprepared and rather ‘put on the spot’.

> ‘I didn’t mind doing the [Fast Track assessment]… ‘cos it went towards my benefit really…I got put on the spot a bit really so, obviously my brain is only, if I got told about it, I’d probably know to get it 100 per cent right instead… just looking at the paper, I’d say it was easy, but it was like early in the morning, I was like half and half awake.’

(Hull and East Riding, customer, stage two)

One practical consequence of the lack of warning was that some customers did not have their reading glasses with them and were either unable to do the test or they struggled to complete the assessment without them. This was also noted in the research observations.

As with the communication of the national programme per se, the difficulties noted regarding the conduct of the Fast Track had generally diminished by stage two of the research, with many of the fears expressed by advisers regarding the practical application of Fast Track not coming to fruition as the process continued and bedded in. However, for the most part, **advisers continued to**
highlight the potential benefit of providing advanced warning of the assessment, in order for the customer to be mentally and physically prepared.

2.2.3 Views on the design and content of the assessment

Overall, the screening tool was liked by advisers, in that it was seen as being a reasonable indicator of basic skills needs, as evidenced by the high proportion of customers referred to Independent Assessment and found to have a need. In particular, it was said to be good at picking up ‘borderline cases’ suitable for SIBS, who might otherwise have been missed by advisers. Despite removing advisers’ discretion, the use of the screening tool was thought to be advantageous as it standardised the assessment process, making it less arbitrary and fairer as a result.

‘I think it is good we’ve got a generic screening tool because before it was like adviser discretion, and the differences between one adviser thinking somebody needed it and another adviser not. So I think it’s quite good that we have got a generic tool that we use, I think that is the positive thing about it.’

(Hull and East Riding, adviser, stage one)

The general structure of the screener was viewed positively, particularly as it was felt to resemble a job application rather than being an abstract set of questions, as this was thought to seem more realistic and relevant to the customer. However the tool was also criticised for having a number of problems and these are outlined below:

• Task one:
  – **Question one** – was felt to be open to interpretation, with some customers including pay and hours here in addition to the benefits listed.
  – **Question two** – was thought to be easy to misinterpret and, therefore, customers were said only have included overtime pay.
  – **Question six** – was criticised for being ambiguous, specifically regarding what constituted ‘afternoons’ and time off ‘in total’, with a number of advisers and customers suggesting that they did not understand the question.

• Task two:
  – **Section A** – it was suggested that the personal information section in task two, section A should be at the beginning of the assessment as it was thought to be a more logical starting point and a more effective way of easing customers into the assessment. Furthermore, as this section was said to easily highlight basic skills needs, it was thought this would help advisers to identify any problems immediately.
Section B – this was the most heavily criticised section by both advisers and customers as a result of its perceived difficulty and the need to get every question right to pass the assessment. A number of advisers suggested they were unable to answer the question in this section correctly and claimed to need a checklist of the answers in order to mark the assessment. The spelling of ‘available’ and ‘immediately’ in question 1 and the punctuation of ‘wouldn’t’ in question 3 caused particular problems, whilst there was felt to be a number of sensible alternative answers to question 4, which asked the customer to fill in the gap ‘I wish to...for the job’.

‘I do feel it’s [the Fast Track] flawed in a couple of respects. I know this has been raised many times in the past [and] nothing’s going to change in the next three months before this pilot ends. I would hope that if this continues in any form we will have a modified version of the screening tool, which is a bit more logical and people don’t fail by getting one wrong in one of the sections. There’s also a couple of the answers that are debateable.’

(Kent, adviser, stage two)

Collectively, these problems meant the Fast Track tool was seen as something of a blunt instrument by some advisers, leading to too many customers being referred who turned out not to have a need. Some advisers also felt the test was unattractive, dull and difficult to read, particularly for those with dyslexia or sight impairment. It was also felt there should be more than one version of the tool to prevent familiarity and rote learning of the answers. Where the locally devised gender specific Fast Track assessments were being used in the one comparator area, they were thought to be working well.

2.2.4 Views on referral to Independent Assessment

Few problems were highlighted regarding the referral of customers onto the Independent Assessment, especially as the system bedded in. Early on there were reports of difficulties contacting providers to arrange the Independent Assessment and also of backlogs occurring as result of the increased flow of customers referred to assessment. However, as with problems relating to the Fast Track, these seemed to have improved as time progressed and, overall, the programme was generally felt to be running smoothly, with appointments being made within a couple of weeks and most customers attending. An 80 to 90 per cent attendance rate was reported by several advisers.

Customers who were more amenable to the idea of improving their basic skills, recalled feeling positive about the idea of attending the Independent Assessment once its potential benefits had been explained to them, for example, that it would help to identify their needs.

‘I went ‘cos I wanted to go. Just to find out what is my weakness, why couldn’t I get a job, I really wanted to go, and the way she was telling me about, to do this test and everything, I just said yeah, why not, just have a go, and see if I do need more help and that. So I went. Yeah, ‘cos I really, I don’t wanna be in benefits for rest of my whole life.’

(South London, customer, stage two)
In contrast, there was evidence of customers attending because they understood the assessment to be compulsory rather than because they wanted to attend and in some instances, customers felt they had been coerced into attending.

‘Well to me they bullied me into it really…They have got you by the short and curlies, you go or you get your money stopped. I think it was just a waste of time myself, if you can’t read and write it is not good sticking you on tests.’

(Hull and East Riding, customer, stage two)

Views about using the Jobseeker’s Direction

Advisers were keen to emphasise the positive benefits of encouraging customers to co-operate voluntarily with the programme, preferring to use the Jobseeker’s Direction only as a last resort. The persuasive approach was felt to be more effective both in terms of getting customers to attend the Independent Assessment as well as encouraging them to engage with the rest of the process, as it was deemed to be less forceful and less provocative.

Advisers indicated they were careful to carry out all aspects of the Independent Assessment referral to the letter, both verbally and in writing, in case customers had to be referred to a decision maker. However, there was concern expressed regarding the number of referrals being dismissed by the Decision Making and Appeals (DMA) team because of incorrect paperwork, which advisers suggested could result in them having to make multiple referrals, which in turn generated more paperwork and increased their workload.

2.2.5 Views on the Independent Assessment procedure

The Independent Assessment itself was also felt to have bedded in and be working well across the districts. Providers believed the experience of the Fast Track assessment had helped to prime customers regarding the possibility of having a basic skills need and thought this made the Independent Assessment process run more smoothly. The customer research indicated that customers did generally understand what was required of them during the Independent Assessment and suggested they felt suitably prepared for the assessment (unlike for the Fast Track assessment). However, there were requests for additional information to be given in advance about the nature of the questions included in the assessment.

There were exceptional cases of advisers questioning providers’ assessments as they did not align with the Fast Track assessment and their own views on customers needs, particularly with borderline SIBS customers. However, there was less evidence of this as time progressed.

The system appeared to have worked equally well whether administered at the jobcentre or at the providers’ premises and advisers identified advantages of holding sessions in both venues: Primarily, familiarity of the jobcentre was said to have resulted in a number of benefits for customers, including feeling more comfortable during the assessment and experiencing fewer problems finding the venue, both of which were thought to have resulted in increased attendance levels.
In contrast, advisers felt that the providers’ premises had the advantage of conveying a greater sense of independence, which resulted in customers feeling less like they were being watched by advisers; and in some instances, they were also said to be better equipped to provide the customer with more detailed information about the training courses. **Where customers were given the choice, it was said by advisers that they favoured the jobcentre, however, customers involved in this study tended not to express a preference.**

Although the process worked well, **some administrative problems were noted**, for example, customers turning up for appointments to find they were not on the provider’s list and providers not turning up for appointments with customers at the jobcentre. One customer claimed to have completed two Independent Assessments as the paperwork for one had been lost and this was subsequently said to have been found by the training provider.

**The size of the assessment group and the other participants undertaking the Independent Assessment were, in some instances, an issue for customers,** particularly if they felt out of place or different in some way, such as being older or younger than other attendees. Where customers had undertaken the assessment alone or in a small group, this was generally favoured as the quiet and privacy it offered was thought to create a more suitable environment to work in.

Customers were overwhelmingly positive about staff conducting the assessment, as they were said to be ‘friendly’ and ‘helpful’ and were said to have done their best to put them at ease, for example, answering any questions they had about the process.

Details on the feedback received following the Independent Assessment are outlined in Chapter 4.

### 2.2.6 Views on the incentives

The use of incentives was generally felt to have been trouble free in the practical sense, in that most payments had been received correctly and on time. This said, there had been a few problems reported by advisers, such as slow payment of the £100 bonus early on in the pilot in one district, and isolated instances of slow payment of the weekly benefit in two other pilot areas.

Customers who were reasonably happy to attend training clearly appreciated the extra money they received as a result of the financial incentive, according to both advisers and customers. The incentive was seen as a ‘bonus’, viewing it as a reasonable amount rather than something to get ‘excited about’. It was described as ‘handy’ and they liked that it helped with travel and other expenses such as lunch. Notwithstanding this, the incentive was not seen as being effective in persuading customers to attend training if they resisted. The impact of the incentive payment is discussed in more detail in Section 2.4.2.

Advisers in districts outside the mandatory pilot area were often rather more negative than those in pilot districts when interviewed early on in the research, as
they felt the incentive was all they had at their disposal, whereas in pilot areas it was part of a package of tools including mandation.

The £100 bonus was viewed rather differently, with advisers feeling strongly that the criteria for receiving it were unfair as it was based on achievement rather than effort, only rewarding those who achieved a specific level, regardless of effort. Furthermore, the fact that people would be starting from different baselines meant that some customers would be in a better position to receive the bonus and this was thought to favour those who started with a higher level of skill. The criteria were also felt to have been very narrowly laid down to reward only improvements in literacy and numeracy as opposed to other areas such as confidence or increased motivation.

‘I didn’t feel that was fair. Because what they were saying was, you could attend three weeks out of that twenty six and get your pass and you’d get the hundred pounds, but say someone attended every single week and put all that effort in and they didn’t obtain that pass they wouldn’t get anything. So I couldn’t see how that was fair really.’

(Hull and East Riding, advisers, stage one)

Unlike the advisers, there was little evidence to suggest reservations amongst customers regarding the fairness of the bonus, although the limited knowledge of the bonus package meant it would be difficult for customers to draw these conclusions. Customers saw the bonus as a worthwhile sum in its own right, enough to act as a reward for hard work by paying for a night out for example.

‘A nice little bonus and it’s something, it’s a pat on the back, it’s to say “go out and have a meal and get drunk for the evening, or do what you like, but do it on us for a change”’.

(South London, customer, stage two)

2.3 Impact of the national enhancements

Although this study primarily aimed to explore the process of delivering the national enhancements and to consider respondents’ views of these, some of the initial impacts arising from the introduction of the national enhancements were also very briefly considered, particularly where they had affected respondents’ views of the programme. It is important to note, that a more detailed exploration of impacts is set to be explored in stage three of the qualitative report, as well as in the PSI quantitative impacts study. Initial impacts are outlined in the following sections.

2.3.1 Impact of Fast Track and Independent Assessment

In this first section we consider the initial impact of the Fast Track and Independent Assessment on advisers and customers.
Impact on advisers

According to advisers, the introduction of the mandatory Fast Track and Independent Assessment had resulted in a number of impacts. Specifically, it was found that the Fast Track assessment and the Independent Assessment:

- **provided advisers with a clear and systematic process for identifying a basic skills need in customers.** The Fast Track assessment and the Independent Assessment were thought to have helped advisers identify basic skills needs, as well as providing a quick and easy step-by-step systematic guide to doing this;

  ‘Yeah, I think it is, because if you said to somebody “do you have any problems reading and writing?”, the majority of them will say “no”, but then if you got them to do that basic skills assessment, it would become obvious so I think the fact that you’ve got to do it is good.’

  (Bedfordshire, advisers, stage two)

- **increased the focus and importance placed on basic skills more generally.** It was felt that the introduction of the national enhancements had made advisers generally more aware of basic skills as an issue and, therefore, they were more focused on this throughout the course of their job;

- **eroded advisers’ discretion when dealing with customers.** The flip side of the introduction of a standardised process is that, initially, some advisers felt their adviser discretion had been reduced and that the system had become inflexible. There were circumstances noted where advisers felt it would have been appropriate to use discretion with customers, for example with former executives/professionals, or older customers, who they did not believe either had a basic skills need or would benefit from the training provision offered. Furthermore, removing adviser discretion was said, by one adviser, to give the impression that advisers were no longer allowed to ‘think for themselves’;

- **shifted focus from finding work or engaging in other jobcentre initiatives to focusing on basic skills.** Advisers suggested that the basic skills’ programme had worked to shift the balance away from other jobcentre activities, such as job search and vocational courses to focusing solely on basic skills, which was not always deemed to be the most appropriate course of action for customers by advisers. Basic skills was also seen as taking precedence over other barriers to work that customers may have, such as poor interpersonal skills or personal hygiene issues.

As evidence of this, advisers in stage one cited a negative shift in job targets. They argued that job targets had taken a ‘nose dive’, as customers who would otherwise have been going on to Gateway to Work were now attending basic skills training instead. Furthermore, they expressed concern about the longer term impact of the basic skills programme on referrals to other initiatives such as New Deal training options and other work-based learning programmes.
'Our referrals to things like our Programme Centres and other training courses, etc. have virtually dried up because everybody’s been pushed down into a basic skills route, and I don’t know whether that is any, it should have been at the forecast this would happen, but it’s happened and now we’ve got providers who are trying to provide programme centre facilities and can’t get the people in because we’re pushing them down the basic skills route, we’re not getting their referrals. So it has a huge knock on effect on lots of the programmes that we’ve got.’

(Durham, adviser, stage one)

More positively, the possibility of the basic skills programme improving job targets in the longer term, as a result of improved skills levels and job search activity undertaken during training was acknowledged:

• **Potentially jeopardised the relationship between the customer and the adviser.** It was felt that the need to communicate and deliver the national enhancements early on in the interview (and the time this took), meant there was no time preceding this to develop a relationship or build rapport with the customer. Moreover, it was thought that the process of delivering the Fast Track and Independent Assessment to customers had the potential for causing conflict between customers and advisers, as customers might feel unhappy about completing the assessments. This was seen as a particular issue for New Deal advisers who would need to continue working with those customers not found to have a basic skills need.

‘I don’t get the opportunity to build that rapport and I think it follows on from what’s gone on. My initial interview was all about rapport building. Trying to find out quite early what their issues were and sometimes you know you’d find out something that’s going to affect the whole of the thing at that first interview. I don’t do that any more. Before it was “Hi, I’m…, I’m going to help you and I really want to do this and I’d love to get you into a job and all of this”, and it’s all changed, “Oh hello, you’ve come into New Deal, just do this please”.’

(Dorset, advisers, stage one)

• **Increased the workload of advisers.** The increase in workload as a result of the introduction of the Fast Track and Independent Assessment was highlighted across districts during the initial stages. Specifically, advisers suggested that the Fast Track, Independent Assessment, follow up interview, Jobseeker’s Directions and DMA referrals had all impacted on workload.

• **Placed additional time pressures on advisers during the main Restart or New Deal entry interview.** In addition to workload, delivery of the process was also thought to have resulted in increased time pressures, for example, it was said to add between ten and 20 minutes to the initial interview length. As a consequence it was felt that other aspects of the initial interview, such as job search suffered.

It should be noted, these perceived problems were often less marked by stage two of the research than they had been in stage one.
Impact on the customers

As would be expected, impacts varied according to the type of customer, with those who were more resistant to the idea of basic skills training being more likely to experience an impact at this stage. The impacts experienced by customers included:

- **increased anxiety.** A key impact identified by advisers was that the Fast Track and Independent Assessment caused certain customers anxiety and stress as result of their unhappiness at, and resistance to, completing the screener or attending the Independent Assessment. As certain customers were more likely to resist the process, such as older customers, it follows that it was these customers who tended to mention feeling anxious or stressed as a result;

- **signing off the register.** Another reported impact was that some customers were said by advisers to be signing off the register instead of completing the Fast Track assessment or attending the Independent Assessment. Advisers felt this was likely to be occurring as a result of customers signing and working or because their resistance to the programme encouraged them to find employment. It is of course difficult to assess the true reasons for this phenomenon, as customers rarely explained their reasons to advisers and customers of this type were not included in the study (as explained in Chapter 1);

Advisers saw this movement off the register as being a generally positive impact, particularly if these customers were suspected of working or it had encouraged them to secure work. Nevertheless, there were concerns expressed about what was happening to the people who disappeared off the register and how they were managing financially. Stage three of the research aims to identify customers who left the programme prematurely, in order to explore in more detail the reasons underpinning their behaviour;

- **helping customers to acknowledge a basic skill needs.** As previously mentioned, the basic skills Fast Track screener, and in some cases the Independent Assessment, were thought to have focused, perhaps for the first time, on a basic skills need that customers had up to this point concealed. Although this did result in some negative impacts such as stress, it was also thought to be beneficial in that it helped the customers to acknowledge the problem and assisted them on the road to overcoming it. Also, it was said to overcome previously unnoticed barriers to work, for example, customers with a borderline need that may not have been picked up or acted upon without assessments.

2.4 Impact of incentives

Having looked at the initial impacts of the Fast Track and Independent Assessment, we now turn to the impact of the incentives package: the financial weekly allowance and the end-of-course bonus of £100. For an overview of the policy please see Chapter 1.
2.4.1 Impact of the weekly allowance

The weekly incentive was felt to have helped advisers to ‘sell’ the idea of training to customers, however, it was not viewed as an overly effective tool in encouraging customers to attend or complete training. It was felt that those who resisted the idea of basic skills training would not be swayed by it, although those who were willing to attend might feel even more positive about doing so as a result and see this as an incentive.

‘It’s no incentive if that’s what they thought it would be. I don’t think they’re [customers] bothered. They’re more interested in the fact that they’ve had to do something they don’t want to do…Yes, but I think that comes down to the different categories. So if people genuinely want help then I think the money can be an incentive.’

(Hull and East Riding, adviser, stage one)

The incentive’s inability to effectively persuade customers was partly attributed to the level at which the incentive was set, which was felt to be insignificant in relation to Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), especially once travelling expenses up to £4 were taken out. When asked, customers suggested that the incentive would have to be much higher to make an impact on behaviour, for example, customers mentioned £30 to £35 per week in addition to their benefits and training allowance.

In contrast, others felt that the incentive would be ineffective regardless of the amount offered as customers resented the time they would be required to spend on provision and a financial incentive was not thought to address this. For this reason, the incentive was thought to be less effective for those referred to BET, as it was not seen as a particularly good reward for spending 30 hours a week for 26 weeks on a course, in comparison to eight weeks for those referred to SIBS. However, it was seen as going some way to recompensing customers for attending a 26-week course, in that it ‘softened the blow’ and encouraged customers to feel more positive about being on the course.

The incentives were thought to be ‘enabling’ in terms of dealing with any potential barriers to attendance mentioned by customers who were generally happy to attend, such as specific concerns about travel expenses.

‘It helped especially with bus fares and things like that if you went on the chance to go to a firm and do a day with somebody or whatever…It were just £10 extra in your pocket.’

(Bolton and Bury, customer, stage two)

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9 Although this might suggest a degree of deadweight, it is difficult to say conclusively whether or not customers would have attended without the incentive and certainly what impact the incentive had on their decision to remain on the course.
It seems, therefore, that although an incentive will do little to encourage resistant customers to attend training, not receiving an incentive to cover travel costs or to compensate for attending training might act as a disincentive even amongst those who were broadly happy to attend.

Based on the accounts of customers, it appeared that the incentives were also unlikely to encourage customers to remain on a course in circumstances where they wanted to leave early. In contrast, advisers did feel the incentives might have more of an impact in encouraging customers to stay on the course than they did in encouraging them to attend in the first place, as they believed that once customers got used to having the extra money they would want to continue receiving it.

2.4.2 Impact of the end-of-course bonus

As previously noted, not all customers were aware of the end-of-course bonus, as advisers tended to only mention this in circumstances where a person might realistically obtain it.

Views amongst customers regarding the £100 bonus varied regarding whether they believed it had made an impact or not. Where an impact was reported, customers said the £100 bonus was seen as something to work towards, although customers tended to believe they would have worked to achieve their qualification regardless of the bonus. It seems that the bonus is exactly that, a nice reward for gaining a qualification, rather than an incentive to attend in the first place. It may, however, work to encourage customers to remain on a course in order to gain the qualification and with it the bonus. However, customers also often suggested it had made no impact, particularly if they did not believe they stood much chance of passing the exams required to get it.
3 Delivering the mandatory training pilot

This chapter explores the mandatory training pilot. It looks at the process of delivering the pilot and also considers advisers’, providers’ and customers’ views towards this. Specifically, it looks at how the mandatory aspect of training and sanctions are communicated to customers and their understanding of this; it considers advisers’ and customers’ awareness and knowledge of the sanctioning regime; and also reports on advisers’ experiences of issuing a sanction. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the initial impacts of the mandatory pilot as concluded from the qualitative research. The impact of the mandatory pilot is explored and measured quantitatively as part of the PSI research10.

Key points

- Advisers said they informed customers of the mandatory nature of training, however, the nature and the depth of the information varied.
- Rather than simply using mandation as a threat, basic skills training was sold using the full range of tools available. Mandation was seen as the ‘last resort’. Much emphasis was placed on the verbal communication of mandation and it was generally seen as the most important and effective form of communication.
- Customers were generally accepting of the mandatory aspect of training, and this was said to be linked to a general understanding of Jobcentre Plus rules. This said, some customers expressed resistance.

Continued

10 Findings from the quantitative study can found in the synthesis report alongside the qualitative results from stage three of the BMRB research. The synthesis report is due to be published in June 2006.
- Initial findings suggest the threat and the application of sanctions were having a positive impact on initial and the continuation of attendance at provision. However, the threat of sanctions had also encouraged customers to secure employment; sign off; or move onto inactive benefits.

- The pilot was also said to have increased the flow of customers onto training and providers believed they were experiencing much higher volumes as a result.

- Advisers tended to agree with the principle of sanctioning per se, as it was felt to have a number of advantages, not least that it was deemed effective in encouraging attendance at training. However, basic skills training was not deemed to be appropriate for all those with a basic skills need and the principle of ‘forcing’ customers to attend training was questioned.

3.1 Communicating the mandatory training pilot

The mandatory aspect of training and sanctions was generally communicated to customers at the point of referral to provision, such as the pre-training interview\(^1\), although the mandatory nature of training had, in some instances, been mentioned in a general sense during earlier meetings, for example, at the point of referring the customer to Independent Assessment.

The mandatory aspect of training was communicated in two ways, using verbal explanation and using written material, such as the mandatory referral letter. Experiences and views of both these mediums are outlined in this section of the report.

3.1.1 Verbal communication

The nature of the verbal information provided to customers by advisers at this stage varied. Across all districts and jobcentres, advisers were categorical that the mandatory nature of training was communicated to customers, for example, they told customers that it was a ‘compulsory’ programme. In addition to this, some advisers were also providing information on the sanctioning regime, such as information on the possible length of the sanction; the benefits affected by a sanction; and details of alternative benefits that could be claimed should a sanction be imposed, for example, hardship allowance or a crisis loan. Information regarding reconsideration or appeals procedures were not said to have been mentioned until a sanction referral was made.

\(^1\) Pre-entry-to-training meeting and Independent Assessment follow-up were often the same meeting. In these cases, the Independent Assessment follow-up meeting booked in prior to the Independent Assessment evolved into a pre-entry-to-training meeting when the Independent Assessment result suggested a training need existed.
Customers’ recall of their pre-entry-to-training meeting appeared to support this assertion, as customers were generally able to recall a verbal discussion with their adviser regarding the mandatory aspect of training. In addition to this, customers often mentioned mandation being reiterated by providers at their training induction and this latter explanation was often seen as being central to their understanding. In some cases, friends and fellow students were also said to have provided information. Conversely, there were instances where customers were unable to recall this discussion and did not believe they had been informed about their obligation to attend training.

**The degree to which mandation was emphasised by advisers also varied:** with some advisers being upfront about mandation and outlining it in detail; and others adopting a more discreet approach to communication. This said, overall the approach adopted tended to be relatively gentle with a light touch at this stage.

Variations in adviser approach were not generally said to be the result of a coherent district or jobcentre policy, rather differences occurred on an individual basis according to the general approach adopted by the adviser and also based on the perceived needs of particular customer types, with more resistant customers (or those perceived as such) generally being provided with more detailed information. In some instances, advisers suggested they would not mention sanctions overtly to customers they perceived to be compliant.

Typically advisers presented mandation as part of the customers’ general contract with the jobcentre; in the spirit of the Jobseeker’s Agreement, for example, they emphasised that the customer was signing on to demonstrate availability for work and not just to receive benefits. Advisers also made it clear that mandation was not discretionary and applied to everyone regardless of race, religion, education, and age. Advisers were mindful of the basic skills needs of customers, and tried to use plain language such as saying ‘having your money stopped’ rather than ‘sanctions’, although it was said that advisers did use these terms and this was also noted in observations. Customers tended to recall advisers mentioning ‘having money stopped’, but the term ‘sanction’ was also recognised in some cases.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, **basic skills training courses were very much sold to customers using the full range of tools available to the advisers, rather than simply using mandation as a threat.** Advisers described having a ‘package’ of incentives to encourage customers to attend training, that included: emphasising the potential employment benefits of attending training; improving soft skills; gaining the required skills to help with their children’s education; and receiving a financial incentive or reward. **Mandating customers to training, or using sanctions as a threat, was generally seen as a back-up to be used when customers were more resistant, as a last resort.** However, the success of this approach was thought to depend on the level of resistance posed by the customer and mandation was used as a threat for resistant customers.
Views on verbally communicating mandation

The ease with which advisers communicated the mandatory nature of training was thought to be dependent on their experience and skill, in the same way as the communication of the national enhancements. The more experienced advisers were not only said to have the necessary skills to communicate this, but they were also said to feel more confident when doing so. This is borne out by the fact that advisers in this study found the process of communicating this information easier by stage two, when they were more familiar and experienced in the process. Furthermore, in stage one, New Deal advisers often found it easier than mainstream advisers and this was thought to be a result of their experience of communicating mandation as part of the New Deal programme. Using sanctions as a threat was, in some instances, seen as a failure on part of the adviser, as it was felt advisers should be able persuade customers to attend training using other means, such as the personal benefits, if they were sufficiently skilled.

Aside from levels of skill and confidence, advisers mentioned other reasons for feeling uncomfortable about communicating mandation, including:

- disagreeing with the principle of mandation per se;
- querying the appropriateness of basic skills training, particularly for those customers who it was felt would benefit more from vocational training; and
- the geographical inaccessibility of the training provider, which was said to result in long travelling times for some customers.

Much emphasis was placed on the verbal communication of mandation by advisers and it was generally seen as being the most important and effective form of communication, over and above the written information provided. Verbal communication was favoured as it was deemed to be less heavy-handed; it was seen as an easier medium through which to absorb and understand information; and it was felt more appropriate as a result of the poor literacy levels of some customers.

It was felt to be important for customers to have a clear understanding of the mandatory aspect of training, as it was thought to make the ongoing process more straightforward as customers knew they would have to attend the training. Furthermore, advisers felt it enabled customers to make an informed decision about whether to attend or not.

3.1.2 Written communication

In addition to verbal discussions, advisers also provided customers with written information regarding mandation, usually in the form of the mandatory referral letter. Although the letter was generally delivered to customers, as with the verbal communication, the emphasis placed on this letter by advisers and the method of delivery varied.
Findings suggest that where it was being used the mandatory referral letter was either being delivered during the pre-entry-to-training meeting, or it was sent in the post at a later date. There was evidence of a departure from the use of the mandatory referral letter in some areas, according to advisers. It was suggested in one area that advisers were using their discretion and choosing not to issue the letter, and in another, an alternative locally constructed letter was being used instead.

Customers’ recall of receiving the letter was low overall. In some instances customers were unsure if they had received the mandatory referral letter or not, often as they found it hard to differentiate between the paperwork given at meetings. In other cases, customers had no recollection of a letter and some were categorical in their belief that they had not received it; suggesting they would still have a copy on file if they had.

**Approaches to delivering the letter also varied** (where it was delivered face to face), with some advisers outlining the content of the letter in detail and others paying it little attention. In these latter cases, advisers generally drew the customer’s attention to the letter and then gave it to them to take away and read. Time constraints were given as the main reason for this approach.

Where the letter was outlined in detail, advisers suggested they either:

- **read it aloud** to the customer to ensure they understood the content. It was approached in this way in cases where it was felt customers might experience difficulties reading the letter themselves. However, advisers expressed concern this method could attract attention to the customer in the jobcentre and make the situation potentially embarrassing;

- **talked through the letter with the customer**, emphasising what they deemed to be the main points, such as the customer’s obligations and the consequences of failing to meet these;

- **asked the customer to read a specific section** of the letter to themselves while at the desk, often highlighting these sections with a fluorescent marker for example, before asking customers whether they had understood.

Explanations and delivery of the letter were, in some instances, said to be interlinked with the verbal discussion itself and involved the adviser talking to the customer about mandation more generally but using the letter as a prop to assist with the discussion. In contrast, other advisers suggested that it was distributed alongside the delivery of other paperwork, for example, in some New Deal interviews it was completed as part of the Action Plan. This approach was said to have been adopted in order to be less direct and might account for some of the confusion expressed by customers regarding the mandatory referral letter and other paperwork they received.
Those who thought they did recall the letter, varied in their ability to recollect details of the content and were often uncertain about the nature of the content. In cases where customers were able to recall details, they suggested the letter said they would be attending training and that if they did not attend, they would lose their benefit. It was described by one customer as an early written warning.

**Views on providing written communication**

Advisers generally believed that delivery of the mandatory referral letter should occur in conjunction with a verbal explanation in order to ensure its effective communication. Using the two mediums together was thought to be an effective approach, a ‘double whammy’ as one adviser suggested, to assist customers in their understanding. The letter itself was thought by advisers and customers alike to ‘hit the spot’ (where it was recalled) in terms of its message and language and it was thought to make the point very clearly and precisely. Notwithstanding this, the letter was seen as being ‘heavy handed’, particularly the wording which was said to be ‘harsh’ and ‘blunt’. It was seen as being unnecessarily complex and couched in hard to understand and legal-sounding language.

Advisers thought it was important to provide customers with a written synopsis of their obligations, which could use as a reference as required. They highlighted the need for this document to be suitable for customers with basic skills needs. By way of recommendation, they called for an easy to understand booklet or pamphlet outlining the key aspects of training and mandation that could be provided at the referral meeting.

The existence of a written document was also seen as important in order to provide supporting evidence of the customer’s agreement to attend training, should a Decision Making and Appeals (DMA) referral be necessary as a result of a failure to attend or misconduct. In addition to providing practical details, this was felt to be the main role of the letter.

### 3.2 Response to the communication of mandation

Findings from both the adviser and customer studies suggest that customers generally accepted the mandatory aspect of training at the point of referral and this was said to be linked to their understanding of the rules associated with claiming benefit, that is, that in order to claim benefit they were required to adhere to the rules of Jobcentre Plus (see Section 3.3).

In some instances, customers said they disliked or became angry as a result of (what they saw) as being forced into undertaking a course, although they usually accepted the reason underpinning it and conceded they may not have attended if the course had not been mandatory. Advisers also mentioned there being a core of customers who were resistant to attending training and who, in some cases, had to be referred several times. It was suggested by advisers that these customers were often likely to know more about the mechanisms behind sanctions,
such as the reasons likely to be accepted by decision makers (such as sickness or domestic emergencies); the number of times they were able to use these reasons; and the existence of hardship payments. There were also extreme cases noted where customers became outwardly angry or aggressive at the prospect of being referred to a mandatory training course.

Advisers often felt the mandatory nature of the training made it easier to deal with situations where customers demonstrated resistant such as this, since they had no discretion over the decision to refer. They tended to remind these customers of the consequences of failure to attend and to emphasise the fact that they would simply be re-referred with a loss of benefits every time if they refused.

3.3 Awareness and knowledge of mandation and the sanctions regime

3.3.1 Customers’ understanding and knowledge

Advisers generally believed that customers had a clear understanding of the mandatory nature of basic skills training as a result of the verbal and written communication they received from their adviser and findings from the customers’ study support this. Customers were generally aware that training was ‘compulsory’; that they could be sanctioned if they did not attend training or they left prematurely; and that if they did so, they would be re-referred to training by the jobcentre. One respondent undertaking a Basic Employability Training (BET) course suggested she had been told about mandation so frequently by her adviser and the training provider, that ‘she could hear it in her sleep’.

Furthermore, it was felt that in some cases, customers already understood and indeed, assumed that jobcentre training would be mandatory, as they had come to understand this as being part of the way the jobcentre operated and, as mentioned previously, also saw it as part of their contract with the jobcentre. Customers who had previously been on New Deal were said by advisers to be more likely to understand the concept of mandation prior to their basic skills referral, as they already had some understanding of the idea of an obligation to undertake assessment and training in return for additional benefits under the New Deal.

‘There’s no choice, you have to do it, everybody knows when the jobcentre down here gives you a course, you have no choice but to do it…Any type of course, it doesn’t matter what course or what it involves, you have got no choice in the matter, there is a choice, you either do it or you’re thrown off, it’s as simple as that…They stop your benefit, your benefit will be stopped, there’s no questions asked.’

(Bedfordshire, customer, stage two)

Despite this understanding, it was clear that awareness and knowledge of the mandatory aspect of training was not universal, as customers interviewed as part of this study, suggested they were unaware that the training was mandatory. It was
also suggested that customers were prone to confusion regarding certain rules relating to mandation, particular regarding part-time work or childcare responsibilities and whether or not these overrode the mandatory process.

Aside from mandation, customers were unable to recall much detail about the sanctions regime. There was mention of the possible length of a sanction, with customers suggesting benefit could be stopped for between two, four, 16 and up to 26 weeks. Customers also mused on the possible affect of a sanction on other benefits such as Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) and they were often confused about this.

3.3.2 Advisers’ understanding and knowledge

The level of understanding of the sanctioning regime expressed by advisers was variable. However, most seemed aware they consisted of loss of Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) for two, then four, and up to 26 weeks. As with customers, there was some uncertainty as to whether other benefits, such as HB or CTB, would also be affected in addition to JSA, although there was a general view they would not be. Differences in sanctioning rules between New Deal and mainstream programmes were also raised; the differences were said to relate to the length of the sanction but advisers were unspecific.

It was clear from the research that advisers were not always confident in their knowledge of the sanctions regime and some advisers openly disclosed during the interviews either their lack of knowledge or lack of certainty regarding details of sanctions. Despite this lack of confidence in their knowledge, advisers generally felt they were able to provide accurate information to their customers as a result of using the guidance available, such as that found on the intranet or by asking colleagues. Across the board, advisers were confident they would be able to access guidance easily if and when required.

3.4 Experience of sanctions

Advisers’ experiences of referring customers to DMA as a result of basic skills differed, with some advisers having referred customers to the DMA a number of times, for example four or five times and others who had no experience of referral at all. As a qualitative research study, this report cannot and does not seek to provide statistics on the referral of sanctions, although it was clear referrals were not being carried out on a regular basis and this appears to reflect the initial policy intent (see Section 1.2.2).

A range of customer types were said to have been referred to DMA by advisers, however, the 18 to 24 year old group was highlighted as being particularly likely to be referred for a sanction compared to others. Advisers were unclear regarding the reasons for this, although they suspected this group might see sanctions as less of a threat as a result of the fact that they often lived at home and were financially supported by their parent/s.
Sanctions were generally issued consistently between and across districts, with customers being subject to a benefit sanction if they did not comply with the rules. However, it appears that in certain situations advisers exercised a level of discretion, primarily in cases where the reasons given for non-attendance were deemed to be plausible. For example, in cases where customers experienced transport problems or were unable to find the training providers’ premises. In these instances, customers were not always referred for a sanction immediately; rather they were called into the office and reminded of the need to attend.

3.4.1 Reasons for referring customers to DMA

Broadly, customers were referred to DMA for refusing to attend the course; leaving the course voluntarily for another reason aside from gaining employment; or as a result of being asked to leave by the provider. This section of the report outlines and considers these key reasons.

According to advisers, some customers simply refused to attend the training course and were referred for a sanction as a consequence. It was suggested that this tended to be customers referred to the 26 week BET course rather than those referred to the Short Intensive Basic Skills (SIBS) (eight weeks) and this was thought to be a result of a general reluctance to attend training, as well as a consequence of the length of the course which was perceived to be too long by customers. A more thorough exploration of the reasons behind refusal to attend training will be carried out as part of stage three of the qualitative research.

Customers who voluntarily left the course early tended to do so as a result of:

- **ill health** – Psychological problems such as panic attacks or depression, were said to have resulted in non-attendance at training. Customers who experienced these problems suggested they often found it difficult to travel to training or to leave the house while experiencing these symptoms and, consequently, did not attend. The outcome of this varied: In some cases, customers discussed the situation with their adviser and either switched to Incapacity Benefit (IB) or were excluded from a DMA referral in agreement with the Disability Employment Adviser or customers were referred to the DMA and received a sanction as a result;

- **dislike of approach and manner of training staff** – A dislike of the training staff was given as a reason for leaving the course voluntarily; one customer said they left the course following an incident where the course tutor became angry with them for switching off the computer incorrectly;
dislike or lack of commonality with other course attendees – Customers said they stopped attending training as they felt uncomfortable around other course members. This often occurred in cases where they felt different to their peers in some way; for example, they were not of the same age, sex or ability. One customer felt that everyone else on his BET course was more intelligent than him, so left even though the provider was keen for him to continue. Furthermore, some customers found the behaviour of other customers difficult to cope with or upsetting, particular if they were aggressive;

discontentment with the training course in terms of quality of provision, such as organisation, structure and content of the course. A more detailed exploration of customers’ views on the impact of training is outlined in Chapter 4.

Providers prided themselves on their professional ability to deal with customers who would sooner not be there and there was minimal evidence of them asking customers to leave, although instances were highlighted by advisers and customers. Customers were said to have been asked to leave the course by the training provider as a result of non-attendance and poor timekeeping. Customers cited domestic responsibilities, such as child care, as a reason for non-attendance. One male respondent said he had taken two weeks off after his child was born, which had ultimately resulted in a sanction. In these cases, customers often returned to the course following the sanction. Disruptive and aggressive behaviour were other reasons cited for being asked to leave the course, for example, one customer suggested they had been asked to leave the course as a result of their aggressive behaviour whilst on the training work placement.

3.4.2 Decision making and appeals

Advisers highlighted some problems with the process of referring customers to decision makers and the decision making process itself, which they believed resulted in overall delays to the process; increased workload; and a lack of trust in procedures. It should be noted these issues were not discussed with the DMA team as part of the research and, therefore, are only considered from the perspective of advisers. The main problems identified were:

DMA staff rejecting referrals made by advisers on the grounds of the wording used. Advisers explained the wording used in the paperwork needed to be very specific or it was not accepted by DMA. This was thought to make the referral process more time-consuming and ultimately increased adviser workload;

sanctions decisions made in favor of customers. Advisers felt that the DMA team often found in favor of customers when the adviser believed they should not have. It was suggested that customers knew how to take advantage of the system by using excuses that knew would be accepted, such as caring for children or illness and that the perceived leniency of the DMA team was said to foster this mentality. Advisers believed this caused them to have to re-refer customers who would not adhere to the rules and it worked to undermine the programme;
- the **level of paperwork**. Advisers said that DMA referrals resulted in advisers having to complete a considerable amount of paperwork as well as having to answer a number of questions, both of which were found to be time consuming.

### 3.5 Impact of the mandatory pilot

It should be noted that this study did not aim to explore impacts in detail, rather these will be the subject of stage three of the research. However, this section briefly looks at the initial impacts arising as a result of the mandatory training pilot, primarily the impact of the pilot on customers and on providers who carried out the training. The qualitative data suggests that the threat of, and the application of sanctions were having an impact on initial attendance and the continuation of attendance on basic skills provision.

#### 3.5.1 Impact on customers

It was felt, overall, that the threat of sanctions was instrumental in encouraging and ultimately persuading customers who did not want to attend training to attend. Clearly, there were customers who would have willingly attended training with or without the threat of sanctions as this study shows; however, in cases where customers would not have voluntarily attended, the threat of sanctions was thought to have been successful in persuading them to do so according to advisers, customers and providers.

**Even in the case of very resistant customers, the threat of sanctions was said to have made an impact in some instances.** A number of reasons were identified for customers’ resistance to attending training; these ranged from customers perceiving the course to be irrelevant and a waste of time, to thinking they would be unable to cope with the work. It was felt that the threat of sanctions was generally sufficient to overcome these worries.

**However as the research demonstrates, the threat was not always sufficient and was, in some situations, followed up with a referral to DMA and in some cases, a sanction was imposed.** Sanction referrals and indeed sanctions themselves resulted in a range of impacts, with customers tending to ultimately comply with jobcentre rules or else sign off or change benefit.

**Aside from encouraging customers to attend training, the threat of a sanction was said to result in a number of other outcomes**, including customers:

- becoming more resistant;
- securing employment;
- signing off the register; or
- moving onto an inactive benefit (although this usually came after the customer signed off for a period).
The figures outlined in the *Basic skills mandatory training Pilot* report (Kasparova and Wilkinson June 2005) state that 29 per cent of customers referred to provision ended their claim on this day and this appears to reinforce this premise.

The type of customers who continued resisting despite the threat of a sanction were generally said to be either older customers, or those for whom a sanction carried less of a threat, as in the case of those who did not receive JSA (where their partner was working full-time) and those who received financial support from elsewhere, such as from their families or friends.

### 3.5.2 Impact on providers

As a result of the increased flows which were thought to have occurred as a result of the mandatory pilot, providers believed they were experiencing much higher volumes of customers entering the courses. One BET provider said that their weekly starts had increased ‘five-fold’ since the implementation of the basic skills pilot, from five starts a week to 25. As a result of the increase in numbers, providers suggested they had to either take on extra tutors to manage this or train existing staff in basic skills. It was reported that some providers experienced difficulties recruiting staff and a shortage of tutor training places made it difficult to train-up existing staff. Furthermore, providers also reported expanding their training premises to cope with the increased numbers, as well as making changes to the way courses were structured in order to accommodate extra numbers. For example, one provider reported bringing in new administration and paperwork systems for their basic skills tutors to make the process more efficient.

### 3.6 Principle of sanctions

Overall, advisers tended to agree with the principle of sanctioning per se. It was felt to have a number of advantages, not least that it was deemed to effectively encourage customers to attend training, but also as a result of a number of the other impacts already mentioned, such as encouraging customers to sign off the register. On the whole, customers also accepted the principle of sanctions as they felt it was reasonable for customers to be expected to tackle any barriers to employment, including basic skills, in return for JSA. However, these tended to be the views of the least resistant customers, some of whom suggested they would have attended training regardless.

‘So doing this because it’s mandatory, then it gives them that edge to go, do it, and at the end of it get a job, then that’s one less person unemployed, so I think it’s good, yes.’

(Bedfordshire, customer, completed training)

Despite the general acceptance of the practical need for sanctions, customers nevertheless often felt it was a shame the threat of sanctions had to be mentioned overtly. They thought people would be more likely to feel good about attending and would benefit from the course if they felt they had volunteered, rather than feeling
they had been coerced. In some instances, advisers also questioned the principle of ‘forcing’ customers to engage in a course they were unwilling to attend, as not only was this deemed to be ‘unfair’ but they queried the effectiveness of teaching unwilling students, who might be disruptive during classes. This was echoed by providers. Advisers also often felt it was unfair to expect a customer to attend training where the quality of the provision was in question or where it required the customer to travel long distances.

It was suspected that confrontation between the customer and adviser regarding mandation might have wider, negative ramifications on the adviser/customer relationship and they felt this might impinge on the ability to work effectively with the customer following training – this was primarily highlighted by New Deal advisers.

Moreover, some advisers, particular those in areas of high social deprivation and unemployment, experienced difficulties accepting that basic skills was necessarily the best course of action for the customer and were not always convinced it should be prioritised over other actions, such as vocational training or securing employment. This was especially true for customers with borderline basic skills needs and some older (50 plus) customers. In some instances, advisers called for exclusions to the sanctioning regime, specifically for older customers for whom they felt the process was likely to be harder and less likely to pay off, as well as for those who had realistic alternative plans, such as undertaking vocational training, from which they might benefit more. The relevance of improving literacy and numeracy skills in order to gain employment was also questioned by customers; for example, one customer who was seeking work as a mechanic did not believe these skills would be advantageous in finding work.
4 Training provision

This chapter explores basic skills training provision from the perspective of customers, advisers and providers. It looks at the initial step of referring customers to provision; it explores training provision itself; and finally, it briefly considers the initial impacts of training on customers. Findings from both stages one and two of the study are included throughout this chapter.

Key points

- Discussions regarding the type of provision were minimal, as advisers tended to follow the recommendations made by the Independent Assessment provider. Decisions about the choice of provider were generally taken by the adviser in consultation with the customer.

- The training referral process was generally seen as being straightforward, this said, two main problems were highlighted by advisers: the accessibility of training and the availability of courses.

- Lack of availability of training places was thought to have been a result of the flow of customers referred to provision at the start of the pilot, which was higher than anticipated.

- Training courses comprised an induction; basic skills training; job search activities; work placements; outings and events and assessment.

- Advisers and customers had mixed views on the quality of training provision. Providers were understandably more positive about the training and often promoted the high standard of the courses they ran.

- Training was said to have resulted in a number of outcomes, including: improving basic skills, gaining qualifications; continuing in training; improving job search skills; developing soft skills; obtaining work and increasing employability; and leaving training prematurely. It should be noted, that in some cases, no tangible impacts were noted.
The experiences of those who took part in this research study tended not to relate to Full-time Education and Training (FTET), so for the purposes of this report we will only be focusing on Basic Employability Training (BET) and Short Intensive Basic Skills (SIBS) training courses. Experiences of referring customers to SIBS courses were minimal in stage one of the research, however this had increased by stage two.

4.1 Referral to provision

Referral to training tended to take place during the Independent Assessment follow-up meeting/pre-entry interview\(^\text{12}\) during which the adviser would provide feedback from the Independent Assessment and if the customer was found to have a basic skills need, they would be referred to training at this point. During this meeting advisers discussed the:

- **type of training provision** the customer was being referred to, such as BET or SIBS;

- **training provider** they would be referred to in the area. Multiple providers operated in some areas and, therefore, a choice could potentially be made between different providers in these cases;

- **course content.** Customers were provided with basic information on the content of the course they were being referred to;

- **financial incentives** provided for attending training (discussed in Chapter 2); and

- **mandatory nature of training** (discussed in Chapter 3).

The referral process was generally seen as being straightforward and there was minimal evidence of any change in the way it was undertaken by advisers between stages one and two of the research.

4.1.1 Choosing the type of provision

In most cases, discussions regarding the type of provision were minimal, as advisers tended to follow the recommendations made by the Independent Assessment provider. This approach was consistent between stages one and two. Advisers said the process was usually ‘cut and dried’, as the assessment results clearly showed what level the customer has achieved in literacy and numeracy, and consequently, the type of provision required. The results were generally said to be illustrated by ticks in boxes on the front of the form returned to the adviser by assessors. The ticks denoted the customer’s basic skills’ level in literacy and

\(^{12}\) It varied according to whether two separate meetings took place. This tended to depend on whether it was realistic to fit in another appointment before the training start date.
numeracy, highlighting whether they had achieved Pre-entry Level, Entry Level 1, 2 or 3, or Level 1.\(^{13}\) Rather than receiving a breakdown of results, in some areas, advisers were only provided with the recommendation.

**Advisers were generally happy to follow the recommendation, as they felt they lacked the expertise to question those made by the independent assessors.** Independent Assessment providers were seen as specialists in this area and advisers trusted their decisions. As one adviser explained:

‘I don’t feel qualified enough to kind of cast doubt on their recommendations. The company we’ve been working with we’ve been working with for years and I trust their judgement and their ability so we wouldn’t want to cast doubt.’

(South London, adviser, stage one)

In instances where advisers had received more detailed feedback, this was sometimes being used by the adviser to help explain the choice of provider to customers. For example, they used the form to show the customer what level they were at and what level they should be aiming for; and they used this to encourage them to participate in the training.

‘Then when the customer comes back I get the assessment results out and go through them and show them the scores that the assessors have given in literacy and numeracy. Then I get my file out and I say well your literacy is at this point and your numeracy is at this point, you should be at that point, so you are either one or two steps below. When you actually show it to them and say this is why you’re going on that course, to get to that level, they understand it, rather than me saying you’ve got to go on this course to improve your literacy and numeracy…They seem more positive about having to go.’

(Bolton and Bury, adviser, stage two)

**Advisers were generally of the view that Independent Assessment results matched well with the type of provision they perceived the customer as needing and, therefore, generally felt customers were being referred to the most appropriate course.** They made this judgement based on their experience of the customer, the Fast Track assessment, as well as from feedback from both customers and providers.

‘I can probably count on one hand the numbers of customers who’ve started provision that’s been inappropriate and they’ve had to change…There’s probably been five across the whole district where they needed to have swapped provision.’

(Bolton and Bury, adviser, stage one)

\(^{13}\) Recommendations made were said to be based on the lower of the two levels given for either numeracy or literacy, with Entry Level 2 or below indicating BET and Entry Level 3 indicating SIBS; and the advisers would go with that recommendation.
However, in some instances advisers felt the choice of provider was unsuitable, either because they felt there was a ‘mismatch’ between customers’ skills and the course they were referred to (referred to BET when they were more suited to SIBS or vice versa); or as vocational training was felt to be more appropriate for the customer in comparison to basic skills training. Adviser discretion was occasionally being used in these situations, for example, referring customers to SIBS training instead of the recommended BET where the scores were very close. Also, there were examples of advisers working with the provider to tailor training for customers in cases where they thought it would be inappropriate, for instance, where they thought vocational types of training would be more suitable or where the customer had a borderline need.

‘They’d got somebody referred on basic skills because they were obviously a couple of marks into that category, but it was so obvious that this person does not need basic skills, but they got that score and of course that’s what they’ve been referred for. So what they’ve tried to do internally of course is more placement wise and more work wise because they don’t need basic skills training, but they’ve got that mark.’

(Hull and East Riding, adviser, stage one)

As might be expected, customers rarely had any input into the type of the provision they undertook. However, in cases where the adviser was using discretion, such as that outlined above, then they would check whether the customer was happy with what they were proposing or give the customer the option.

### 4.1.2 Choosing the training provider

While recommendations regarding the type of provision were given by the assessors, the decision about the choice of provider was generally taken by the adviser in consultation with the customer. However, this was limited by the fact that in some areas there was only one BET or one SIBS provider from which to choose. Where more than one provider was in place, the adviser would generally liaise with the customer about the choice. Decisions were usually based on the location of the provider, for example, whichever was geographically closest to the customer or easiest to get to. In contrast, there were instances of advisers choosing not to consult with customers, although they did often try to pick the most conveniently located trainer where possible.

‘There was choices in which learning centre you could go to, within the Wolverhampton Borough, there are four, they are located quite close to each other, within the town here. I just chose one that was geographically best for me.’

(Wolverhampton, customer, stage one)

Rotational systems were also used within jobcentres when referring customers to providers, in order to be equitable and spread customers equally across providers. These systems were usually informal and based simply on advisers’ sense of whose
turn it was, although in other areas more formalised procedures were operating, whereby all customers starting in a particular week would go to one provider, the following week would go to the second provider and then the third.

### 4.1.3 Course content

Details of the course content and the provider were also covered as part of the referral process, although generally not in much detail. Typically, the adviser would give the customer practical information, such as where the provider was located (including directions and maps); details on the course duration; and confirm the start date and time. In terms of the course content, the information given was minimal; advisers would usually say the course included literacy, numeracy and job search. Advisers usually told customers the provider would give them more information about the course during their induction.

Customers often suggested they would have like to have received more information on the provider and the course content before they started in order to give them a clearer understanding of what to expect. As one customer in Bedfordshire explained: ‘I didn’t think the course and what it entails was explained clearly enough at the meeting’. It was suggested this information might have helped to prepare customers for the course mentally and practically, as well as having the knock-on effect of reducing anxiety about attending. Certainly, those customers who attended a pre-course meeting at their providers suggested they felt less concerned as a result (see Section 4.1.4).

Advisers often recognised that they had limited knowledge about the content of courses and as a consequence, said they were unable to expand on the nature of training provision. Ideally, they suggested they would have liked to gather more information about provision but, despite offers to attend training from providers, advisers often found they were unable to do this due to time constraints.

> ‘I don’t really know what the actual courses involve once they start. It’s something I’ve been meaning to do, go round and visit providers and maybe sit in on a session, just to get a bit of an idea, as I think that would help me in explaining it to the customers. I don’t really know a great deal about it.’

(South London, adviser, stage two)

### 4.1.4 Pre-training interviews with training providers

There were instances of advisers arranging for customers to attend a pre-training induction interview before the course started and these were in addition to the formal inductions encountered once they officially enrolled on the course. The pre-training interviews took place at either the jobcentre or the training provider’s premises and they were usually at the discretion of the provider and adviser. One customer, had told her adviser about bad school experiences and as a result, they had arranged for her to attend a pre-training induction in order to familiarise herself with the provider.
Providers typically told customers about the course content and also any other aspects of the course, such as work placements and outings. Customers who had attended these meetings felt they had been useful, not only for the information gained but also because it helped to orientate them in the environment.

### 4.1.5 Difficulties experienced with referrals

Although the processes involved in referring customers to provision were generally straightforward, two main problems were highlighted by advisers: the accessibility of training and the level of availability of courses.

#### Accessibility of training

Across the districts, the location of training providers was often identified as being a problem, as they were not always deemed to be easily accessible to customers. Advisers often mentioned the need for customers to travel long distances to training and suggested that some customers travelled for up to 90 minutes each way. While this problem was more common in rural areas or larger districts such as Kent, it was not limited to these areas and was also noted in some urban areas, for example, South London.

A number of reasons were given for this by advisers:

- **the geographic organisation of provision.** Customers located in the smaller towns and villages often had to travel to larger towns in order to attend provision;
- **provision not being in place at the start of the pilot,** particularly SIBS provision, which meant that there might only be one provider serving the whole of the district, which in some areas, encompassed a very large area;
- **training courses were often at full capacity,** which meant customers were, on some occasions, required to travel further than would otherwise be necessary to attend a course with capacity. Issues of capacity are considered in the following section.

The problem of accessibility was compounded by the basic skills needs of customers according to advisers, as it was thought this group often found it more difficult, or became more anxious about the need to travel on long and perhaps unfamiliar journeys, as a result of their inability to read signs or maps.

> ‘We cover villages 20 miles away from ******* itself...It’s not just the fact of actually physically getting there and the cost of that travel, it’s if they have a literacy problem and they can’t read they don’t know where they’re going to end up. We have people who do have a genuine fear of using public transport because they don’t know where they’re going to end up.’

(Berkshire, adviser, stage one)

Advisers felt that the inaccessibility of the training provision was unfair on those who were required to travel long distances. Moreover, it was also said to make it more difficult to sell the concept of training to customers who lived a long way from
provision, as not only would they be unhappy about travelling the distance, but it might increase travel costs. In some areas, the advisers and providers were working to try to overcome these travel difficulties for those customers who were most severely affected. A number of approaches were utilised including:

- **organising transport for customers**, for example, in one rural area, providers were approving a mini bus to take customers to training;

- **paying taxi fares** for those in rural areas without access to public transport; and

- **making special arrangements**, such as arranging for the adviser or the provider to collect the customer on their first day and accompany them to the venue.

  ‘The fact that we’ve got quite a bit of transport laid on to get people there these days is really a bit of a bonus because they’re not eating into that £10 or £20 extra for bus fares, etc. I think what the providers have done by putting on extra transport to get people there is a good thing.’

  (Durham, adviser, stage one)

  ‘My advisers have escorted people for the first day or they’ve said, “well come to ***** and then the training provider will meet you and take you to the course”. They won’t get on the train to start with without somebody holding their hand. That’s a lot of advisory time out to do that, you know.’

  (Berkshire, adviser, stage one)

**Availability of training**

Another difficulty mentioned regarding the referral process was the long waiting lists for provision experienced in some areas. During stage one of the research, advisers reported waiting lists in excess of a month, with waiting lists of two months being mentioned in extreme cases. Waiting time for customers referred to SIBS was often said to be longer than for customers referred to BET training, as although the number of SIBS referrals was lower overall, there was thought to have been less SIBS provision in place at the outset.

  ‘Here there have been problems with provision and I’m aware of one provider in particular, who are seven or eight weeks behind because they couldn’t cope with the amount of people coming through.’

  (Wolverhampton, adviser, stage one)

**The lack of availability of training places was generally thought to have been a result of the flow of customers being referred to provision at the start of the pilot, which some suggested was higher than anticipated.** Anticipation aside, advisers and district basic skills co-ordinators explained that no matter how prepared you were for the increased flow of customers, it would not have been possible to put the required amount of provision in place immediately as
a consequence of the capacity of local providers. In fact, they believed that even in situations where this would have been possible, it would not necessarily have been good practice to overly commit in case the need was not as expected.

Lack of availability was said to have resulted in some customers being ‘in limbo’ while they waited for their courses to commence and this was compounded by the fact that advisers were unable to refer them to any other courses during this time. For example, one adviser tried to place their customer on a short two-week Gateway to Work course, but had been told by their supervisor they were unable to do this. Moreover, it was felt that within this time, customers tended to forget they were expected to attend training and the process of communicating this and possibly persuading customers had to be repeated.

‘Initially we did have quite a bit of waiting time with our provider. People after doing the work skills assessment were getting another appointment for a month and after a month everything’s gone hasn’t it. They’ve even forgotten what they’ve been in for after a month.’

(Calderdale and Kirklees, adviser, stage one)

These difficulties had persisted to some degree in stage two, with waiting lists of up to one month being mentioned in one area. This said, the problem of training availability had dissipated over time as a result of more training providers being brought on board; those who were on board having increased their capacity; and the number of customers being referred onto training having levelled off. For the most part, customers included in the study said they starting training within a week or two of their Independent Assessment follow-up meeting.

4.2 Training provision

This section looks at the training provision itself, for example the content of the courses and respondents’ views on this. Much of the information outlined in this section was gathered from stage two of the research as few customers had reached the training phase of the process by stage one. As a consequence of this, this section focuses on mandatory pilot areas rather than the national comparators.

Both BET and SIBS courses were described as being full-time, with customers attending for 30 hours per week. The morning training session generally began at 9.30am through to 12.30pm and the afternoon session between 1:30pm and 4:30pm. Some courses had slightly longer hours on Monday to Thursday and then had a half-day on Friday. There were also breaks throughout the sessions and these tended to be longer and more frequent on BET courses than on SIBS courses. Providers felt breaks were important for customers to stop them feeling overwhelmed by the training.
4.2.1 Course content

The broad content of the training did not differ substantially between different districts, providers, or types of provision, such as BET or SIBS. The main activities undertaken were classroom-based basic skills and job search activities, often involving the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Additionally, the courses included other activities such as outings, vocational training, or work experience. Details of the courses are outlined below:

Induction

BET and SIBS courses began with an induction to the training course, which typically covered details of the course content; health and safety; and customers’ responsibilities regarding attendance, for example, holiday and sickness procedures. The induction usually lasted for one or two days on SIBS courses, but might last a week or more on the BET courses. The reason for the extended induction on BET courses, compared to SIBS, was not only said to be a consequence of the length of the course (26 weeks), but also as a result of the type of customers on BET provision whom it was felt by providers often took longer to absorb information.

‘The first week we’ll give them an induction and that induction will include health and safety, it’ll include what to expect to get out of the course, it covers a multitude of things. Quite often with the level of ability it takes us a lot longer to do the induction at the BET level than it would any other level. Because they need reiterating so many times to make sure that they’ve got the facts right. So although it doesn’t sound as if we’re actually covering a lot of things, because it’s covered in depth and many times, it takes us longer. So we can, by doing a weeks induction, it has helped them come to terms with and applying themselves to the course, rather than giving up when they first start.’

(Hull and East Riding, provider, stage two)

Providers also tended to conduct their own diagnostic assessments on customers during the induction to map their support needs, regardless of whether or not they had received the results of the Independent Assessment from the jobcentre. The diagnostic assessment was described as a more in-depth assessment of the learning needs of the customer, which not only provided information on literacy and numeracy, but also focused on areas of development.

Basic skills training

The main component of the courses was the delivery of basic skills training. This was usually delivered using a mixture of tutorials, practical exercises, worksheets and ICT-based activities. Some providers we spoke to gave examples of the sort of exercises the classes would cover: They suggested that literacy classes might involve such tasks as basic grammar, sentence structure, spelling, letter writing, reading, comprehension and, in some instances, creative writing. It was said that numeracy classes might comprise a range of basic mathematical tasks, such as multiplication, division, data collecting, averages, percentages and measurements.
The basic skills ICT resources utilised by providers, included literacy and numeracy software programmes. Customers were also able to use other training programmes, for example, typing programmes used to improve touch-typing skills. Skills for Life workbooks were also available to customers to be used as a supplement to classroom-based lessons and there was evidence of SIBS providers using vocationally oriented packs, for example, numeracy exercises that focused on nutritional values of food and healthy diets, or carpentry packs that included skills such as measuring.

Tuition was predominantly carried out in groups, although some customers said that they received one-to-one tuition on occasions as well as during specific subjects and in tutorials. Courses were typically structured with literacy in the morning and numeracy in the afternoon or vice versa, however, providers said their methods of delivering the classes were quite flexible and needed to be as a result of the differing levels of customer ability.

Some providers said they tried to group the class into smaller groups based on ability, being generally guided by either the Independent Assessment results of the diagnostic test carried out during the induction. They did this to aid with the teaching of the class overall; to minimise embarrassment among customers; and to enable customers to develop at their own rate. Other providers wanted to do this, but were unable to as a result of space or resources, namely the number of tutors available.

Job search

The other main activity in addition to basic skills lessons was job search. The amount of time spent on job search varied between providers and could also change over the duration of the course. Customers usually spent between half a day and two days per week doing job search activities. However, both BET and SIBS providers said that customers usually spent less time on this at the beginning of courses and this would be accelerated towards the end of the course in order to try and secure employment.

Job search activities encompassed writing CVs, covering letters and speculative letters; filling in application forms; and learning and practising interview techniques. In addition, they also spent time actively looking for jobs in newspapers, on the internet, or by visiting the jobcentre. Some providers also discussed employment goals and barriers to work with customers and tried to help identify specific areas of interest.

‘They’ve got all the resources available, they’ve got newspapers that get delivered everyday so, they’ve got the computers to use. Obviously we like everyone to have an up to date CV in their file. We practice application forms. They might want to go down to the jobcentre and see what vacancies are available. So it’s quite flexible on the job search.’

(Hull and East Riding, provider, stage two)
Providers often attempted to combine job search with basic skills training, for example, learning about literacy through the development of a covering letter or learning specific words related to an occupational field and then using these in the customer’s CV.

Work placements

Some BET providers arranged work placements for their customers. Placements were generally part-time and were often arranged towards the middle or end of the course. However, in cases where customers showed a keen interest in undertaking a placement and were able to find a suitable employer, it was possible for them to begin a placement within the second or third week. In contrast, not all customers wanted to undertake placements and even though providers tried to encourage customers, they did not pressurise them into it.

The extent to which providers used placements varied between providers. In some cases providers had systems in place and had dedicated recruiters to organise placements, while others arranged placements on a more ad hoc basis and often left it up to the customer to organise. Importantly, not all providers who wished to include placements as part of their course, were able to as a result of a lack of interest among local employers. Placements tended not to be arranged on SIBS courses because of the length of the course (eight weeks); however, SIBS providers did delivered work-related or vocational training alongside the basic skills training in some instances. One SIBS provider had a workshop on site where customers could undertake mechanics or welding.

Outings and events

It was usual for providers to organise external outings or events for their customers during the course. These were typically arranged on a fortnightly or monthly basis. They were generally focused around a curriculum activity so were seen as educational, moreover, they were thought to provide a break from the classroom and also help to develop a team spirit. Examples of these outings included a visit to a fire station and museum; a shopping trip to the market; a trip to Birmingham for the Chinese New Year; and playing bowls. Visits to the fire station and museum were linked to literacy classes, for example, learning new words, and numeracy exercises were built around shopping and bowling trips. Following the Chinese New Year outing, customers were asked to write a report about their experiences and this was checked for spelling and grammar.

Often, customers were involved in choosing the activities, for example, they could put forward suggestions and providing they were feasible in terms of budget and health and safety, the group would vote on which one they wanted to do.
Assessments
Finally, courses usually involved some form of assessment of basic skills, whether this was examinations for formal qualifications in literacy or numeracy, or an assessment of customers’ basic skills to indicate progress. One SIBS provider said that a requirement of the course was for customers to gain a Level 1 qualification in either literacy or numeracy, if not both. Courses had examinations at the end, or sooner if the customer was felt to be ready; and all customers were encouraged to undertake assessments. Some customers said that they took practice papers or mock exams in preparation for their end of course exams, and portfolios had also been put together consisting of work they had completed during the course.

4.2.2 Views on training provision
Advisers felt the quality of training was essential to the success of the basic skills programme as it was thought that poor quality training could ultimately undermine the programme, as there was little value in customers undertaking training if it did not improve skill levels.

Advisers’ awareness of the quality of provision varied considerably, with a number of advisers having no direct understanding or experience of this, with the information they did have usually coming in the form of feedback from customers. In contrast, there were advisers who had first-hand experience of training from visiting providers and observing classes.

Advisers and customers had mixed views on the quality of training provision. Providers were understandably more positive about the training and often promoted the high standard of the courses they ran. This said, providers were able to identify some of their own failings, for example, they noted problems related to resources. A wide range of positive and negative views were raised by customers, providers, and advisers regarding training and these generally related to the content of the course; the structure and organisation; the method and approach to delivery; and the other students.

The perceived impacts of the course (or lack of them) were also thought to affect respondents’ views of training, for example, increased social interaction; attainment of qualifications; improved basic skills; and increased chances employability were all mentioned as reasons for why customers viewed training positively and the same was true in reverse. The impacts of training are outlined in more detail in Section 4.3.

Course content
Views on the content of the training courses were mixed, with customers expressing both positive and negative views. The overall course content was viewed positively by respondents, not least as it was thought to help improve customers’ employability. The focus on job search was seen as an essential part of the training particularly by advisers and providers, in terms of teaching customers useful job search skills and techniques, such as looking for jobs on the internet. In
In contrast, training was criticised by customers and advisers for placing too much emphasis on other activities such as job search or work placements in comparison to basic skills, which was thought to have resulted in too little time being spent on improving literacy and numeracy skills. It is possible, that as providers operate much of the basic skills work alongside such activities as job search and vocational training in an effort to make the training more interesting and relevant, customers and advisers (who receive feedback from customers) simply failed to identify this as basic skills training. Findings from the provider study suggest that basic skills provision was taken very seriously even if they also placed importance on job search activities. As an illustration of this, one BET provider reduced the number of days that customers could be on placements from four to two days a week, as they believed customers were not having sufficient time in classroom time to get their basic skills qualifications.

Work-focused training (or teaching basic skills in a work context) was viewed positively as it was often said to have taught useful vocational skills. Advisers and providers were also generally very positive about work placements as they add another dimension to the training, which prevented boredom and provided ‘hands on’ experience of employment. However, none of the customers in this study had experience of a work placement, so we were unable to obtain their views. Lack of opportunity to attend a placement was found disappointing by customers who wanted to do this. For example, one customer on a BET course had arranged to take part in a placement during the final six weeks of the course, however, no placements were available at the time and they were, therefore, unable to do this. Those who were offered placements often deemed them to be unsuitable, as they were not in their preferred profession.

Structure and organisation of course

The full-time nature of courses was also viewed positively by providers, as they believed this helped to prepare customers both mentally and physically for full-time employment. It did this by giving them routine, for example, attending provision on a daily basis, at a set time and working with other people as a team. In direct contrast, customers often found the course duration to be too intensive. It was suggested by providers that perhaps the course be structured so customers began on fewer hours and then gradually increased to full-time, in order for them to become accustomed to the training. It was felt this might result in fewer customers leaving training in the initial stages.

Organisational problems were highlighted. Providers often acknowledged these problems and felt they were a consequence of their inability to meet demands created by the high volume of customers referred to the course. Resource problems were generally being dealt with by either employing new staff or training existing ones in basic skills. The problems mentioned included:
• **lack of activity or variation in activity.** Disappointment in the course occurred as a result of a general lack of activity and, in particular, long break periods or time between activities. It was suggested that as a consequence if this, customers often spent time trying to occupy themselves, by playing cards, talking to other customers or reading the paper. Lack of variation in activity was also mentioned, with customers suggesting they engaged in similar activities on a daily basis;

‘Like just doing maths, maths, maths and maths every single day that you go in and going on like Monday, Tuesday, Wednesdays you are doing your maths every single day from first thing in the morning until when you are ready for going home. And on a Thursday you get games out, you know, doing your team building. And then like Friday you will just do your maths. So it is like Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, you are doing maths all week. It is just being at school in your maths lesson every day.’

(Bolton and Bury, customer, stage two)

• **lack of individual attention or tailored lessons.** Customers often felt they had experienced a lack of one-to-one attention and guidance which they felt would have been beneficial. This meant tutors were not always checking or providing feedback on work completed and, therefore, customers were unable to assess their performance;

• **wide variation in customer ability within classes.** This meant some customers found the classes too slow and boring, while customers with lower skill levels were struggling. Although English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) customers were often split into separate groups by providers, advisers and providers, both highlighted the fact that in some instances ESOL and non-ESOL customers were mixed together and were not necessarily engaged in a fully tailored programme. However, this was not seen as a problem from the provider’ perspective, as extra support was being provided and it was thought to be operating effectively;

• **high volume of customers attending training** was said to have put some customers off attending, as they felt the courses were overcrowded and in instances, this made them feel uncomfortable, particularly some of the younger customers. One adviser said that they had received complaints about overcrowding on a course run by a particular provider.

**Teaching methods and the approach of tutors**

Comparisons were drawn between school and the training courses, with customers suggesting it was like ‘being back at school’. This was thought to be the result of the classroom environment and in some cases, the approach and attitude of the tutors, who customers felt treated them like children and spoke to them condescendingly, for example, one customer said they had to put their hand up and ask permission to go to the bathroom during class.
Notwithstanding this, tutors were viewed positively in some instances, customers commented that tutors were relaxed, treated them like adults and were not overly strict. Some of the methods and approaches employed by trainers were also viewed positively as they were seen as being innovative and fun, such as, the use of computer games, digital cameras and outings to sporting activities or museums. Customers liked these approaches to learning as they made a change from the normal classroom routine and they had the effect of engaging customers in the course and making it more enjoyable overall. Providers felt this had a positive impact on the drop out rate.

Mixing with other students

Customers liked the increased social interaction brought about by attending the course, for example, meeting new people and having contact with people on a day-to-day basis. Attending outings and events organised by the providers were also viewed positively for this reason. This view was echoed by the providers, who felt that following a period of initial adjustment, customers suggested they liked being engaged in a regular activity.

‘I think things like the soft skills work well, by which I mean people may come on the course feeling very remote, feeling very alone, feeling unconfident, and actually what I see happening here is people grow in confidence, we build up confidence, group work, making friends, working, helping other customers. Basically people coming into a group atmosphere, seeing other people are in the same shoes and incentivising each other, encouraging each other, I think that part works really well.’

(South London, provider, stage two)

While the social aspect of the course was seen as a positive part of the training, fellow students were often cited as a reason for not liking the course. In particular, the behaviour and attitude of students on the course was in some cases deemed a problem, as customers felt it could be disruptive. For example, it was said that customers often walked in and out of the class freely and were in cases thought to have been drunk or on drugs. It should be said that providers suggested they had a very strict no drink and drugs policy.

Advisers expressed a view that providers might not always have the procedures in place to deal with disruptive customers. Contrary to this, providers included in this study said that they did have procedures to deal with unruly or abusive customers and if the need arose, would: provide them with one-to-one tutoring, discuss any problems or issues they had, limit them to classroom work only, or in extreme cases, refer them back to the jobcentre. However, it was acknowledged that some low level disruption might continue to occur.

Lack of similarities and common ground with other customers on the courses was raised as a reason for not liking training, in the same way as it was for the Independent Assessment. In particular, customers mentioned not liking it when
they were on the course with people from different age groups - both younger and older, as it often meant they had little in common with their peers and this led to them feeling uncomfortable. This was thought to be particularly pronounced for older customers, who advisers felt often signed off courses in the initial stages citing this as the reason.

4.3 Impact of training

In this section, we briefly consider the immediate impact of basic skills training provision on customers from the perspective of advisers, providers and customers. As mentioned in subsequent chapters, this report did not set out to explore the impact of the programme in depth, rather impacts are explored fully in the next stage of the research (stage three).

It is important to note that in some cases, customers were unable to discern any tangible benefits or impacts occurring as a result of their attendance on training, although these were inclined to be customers who left the course prematurely rather than those who completed it. Those customers who had completed the course tended to identify some impacts arising from it, even if these were improvements in softer skills rather than improvements in basic skills.

Customers mentioned a range of impacts resulting from the experience of undertaking the Basic skills training programme and these impacts are outlined in the following sections.

4.3.1 Improved basic skills

Generally, customers who completed their course believed their basic skills’ levels had improved as a result of undertaking the course, for example, one ESOL customer said they had made ‘big improvements’ in their spoken English and understanding of spoken English. However, the improvements made by customers were variable, with some customers reporting substantial improvements in both literacy and numeracy, while others reported smaller improvements in one or other discipline. Variability in impact was said to relate to a number of factors including the customers’ prior level of skill in each discipline; eagerness to learn; and also the quality of the course itself. For instance, one customer said that they did not believe they had done well in maths as a result of not particularly enjoying the subject.

‘I don’t like maths at all, I think that’s why I never passed it, I don’t put my mind into it, I don’t like it at all, I really don’t like maths, because that’s why I think I don’t really pass the test, so I say it’s down to me.’

(South London, customer, stage two)

Another customer felt he had experienced minimal improvements in literacy, as the course concentrated on maths rather than on English.
'I have learned a few things, but like I say, as far as I was concerned originally, I was going there to learn my English, well the sort of things, you’ve got to do a bit of maths. But when I got there it was basically being bombarded with maths and very little English. In fact, you know, with there only being a little teeny bit here and there, it didn’t really do you much good. But I still did learn a few things, you know. I mean I learnt all about verbs and adjectives. I didn’t even know what a verb and adjective were.’

(Bolton and Bury, customer, stage two)

Lack of improvement in basic skills was raised by advisers and they felt this was demonstrated by the number of customers who returned to the jobcentre and were still found to have a basic skills need. Advisers expressed concern that if customers returned from provision without improving their basic skills, they could end up on a basic skills training loop14. While it was noted that this could in part be accounted for by customers originally entering training at a low level of literacy or numeracy, such as at Pre-entry Level or Entry Level 1, advisers were worried about the longer term consequences of this, especially how it would impact on their ability to sell the programme to customers.

Adviser usually felt this lack of impact was a result of the attitude and unwillingness of customers to engage fully in the process. This said, some advisers questioned the quality of the provision and felt this might possibly account for the lack of impact. Advisers felt that the training seemed to have a positive impact on younger customers, particularly those who left school early and subsequently regretted it.

4.3.2 Qualifications

The information gathered on the qualifications gained as a result of basic skills provision was quite limited and that collected primarily comes from providers; although some information was also gleaned from customers. Again, qualifications will be explored in more depth in stage three of the research.

A number of customers mentioned undertaking qualifications as part of the course, in one or both disciplines. The level of the qualification gained was usually related to the course undertaken, with customers on SIBS gaining Level 1 qualifications and customers on BET gaining Entry Level 2 or 3. Although, it should be noted that customers were often unclear about what qualifications they had taken or gained.

Aside from being something tangible to take away from the training, gaining qualifications was said to have an important knock-on effect in that it was thought to result in increased confidence levels in customers and this was highlighted strongly by both customers and providers. More negatively, gaining basic skills qualifications was not deemed important by some as they did not believe they would be influential in the types of vocational professions they were seeking work in.

14 That is back on basic skills provision for being re-assessed with a need.
‘I felt like if I got my Entry Level 3 it was my freedom. Yes I thought I have done it now. I felt a little bit proud doing it in a way. You know I achieved something out of it.’

(Bolton and Bury, customer, stage two)

4.3.3 Further training courses

There was evidence of customers continuing on to engage in further training, which they were able to access as a result of their achievements on the basic skills courses. Courses mentioned included a forklift driving course, a counselling course, a security course, and a BTEC IT course. It was not clear from customers whether the basic skills training qualifications had been a requirement of their enrolment on these other courses, but certainly it was felt to have enabled access to further courses in some instances, specifically it was said, as it demonstrated a determination and a willingness to learn. One customer explained:

‘Passing the English and maths shows that I want to learn, that I’m thriving to succeed, so I would say, that helps quite a bit.’

(Hull and East Riding, customer, stage two)

4.3.4 Improved job search skills

A number of customers believed their job search skills had improved as a result of doing the course. They said that they learnt where to look for jobs, how to write a CV and complete an application form, as well as improving their interview techniques. In addition to the job search skills, customers were said to have gained confidence in their own ability and the impetus to put them into practice.

‘It gave me the confidence to, you know look in the paper, see something that I thought I was capable of doing, going straight to the phone, dialling up, and arranging an interview and you know, and going to the interview and then hoping you’re going to get a job out of it.’

(Bedfordshire, customer, stage 2)

However, job search activities undertaken were not always identified as having an impact, primarily as the courses were not said to have taught any skills or methods they had not previously been aware of or taught during other training courses they had attended.

4.3.5 Improved soft skills

Attending the course was thought to have helped customers improve their interpersonal skills as it put them in a situation where they interacted with other students and also worked as part of a team. It also gave them the opportunity to mix with a range of different people, including those of different ages and nationalities. Involvement in the course was also said to have resulted in increased confidence and motivation levels and these were seen by
providers as being a key impact of the course not only because of the personal benefit this had for the customer, but also because of the knock-on impact this had on customers’ ability to improve other skills, such as basic skills job search and ultimately, the combined impact this had on their employability.

4.3.6 Obtaining work

Customers who took part in the study had not generally reached the point of securing employment and were not, therefore, able to discuss this. However, some advisers did have information on customers finding employment after basic skills courses and advisers mentioned having a good rate of job entries leading from the provision. This impact was not universally mentioned. For example, in one area, advisers said that of those customers who finished provision, 35 per cent were going into work. Providers also had figures on the proportion of customers gaining work after finishing their courses, with figures typically between ten and 30 per cent. However, providers said that very few customers kept in touch with them after finishing their courses, so the information gathered was not comprehensive.

Even where employment had not actually been gained it was often felt that the course and in particular the impacts arising from it, such as increased confidence, improved basic skills and job search skills, had ultimately improved the customers’ employability. Work placements were seen as being particularly invaluable by providers as they were said to prepare customers for work and boost their confidence.

‘This gives them the experience of being in work situation, where some of them haven’t been in work maybe 20 years. And it gets them used to being on time, doing a job and feeling worthwhile, gives them a little bit of self motivation’.

(Hull and East Riding, provider, stage 2)

4.3.7 Leaving prematurely because of training course

A number of customers left training as a result of their negative views of the course; typically they mentioned doing this as a result of the inability of the course to engage them; a lack of impact relating to basic skills; a dislike of other attendees or an inability to make friends, and a dislike of the environment.

Drop outs tended to occur within the first few months of the course starting and often resulted in a Decision Making and Appeals (DMA) referral, the customer finding work or changing benefit. In one instance, the customer had dropped out after a month as they found the course very ‘boring’, they stated they ‘couldn’t stand just sitting there doing nothing most of the time, staring at the clock waiting for four o’clock’. In this case the customer found a job instead. Similarly, another dropped out after a month stating they: ‘Couldn’t stick it, was bored rigid, couldn’t stand spending eight hours a day four days a week twiddling my thumbs…They can knock...’
me off the dole rather than me sit here like an idiot’. The customer left the course, looked for work but ultimately claimed Incapacity Benefit (IB).

The story of those customers who leave training prematurely is explored in detail in stage three of the research, which looks in depth at the reasons leading to this occurring; what happened to them following this; and ultimately what impact this had on their current circumstances.
5  Conclusions

5.1  Summary of findings

5.1.1  National enhancements

After some initial uncertainty on the part of advisers, the national enhancements had become part of standard procedure and advisers generally felt comfortable communicating and delivering them. The communication of these procedures was deemed to be effective for the most part, although some customers remained confused about the various stages of the process. The Fast Track tool was generally being used universally, although some discretion was evident. Few problems were raised regarding the practical delivery of the Fast Track, although some problems were highlighted with the content, particularly the difficulty and ambiguity of some of the questions. Referral to Independent Assessment was said to have been operating smoothly once the early backlog had cleared, and the Independent Assessment itself was also working effectively both within the jobcentre and in providers’ premises.

The introduction of the Fast Track and Independent Assessment were said to have resulted in a number of positive and negative impacts for both the advisers and the customer: Amongst other things they were felt to have standardised the process of identifying basic skills and consequently made it easier to recognise a need; they had encouraged certain customers to sign off the register, especially those suspected of working; however, more negatively, they were said to have increased the workload for advisers, shifted focus away from other jobcentre initiatives and had caused some customers to feel stressed.

Advisers and customers felt they had a clear understanding of the weekly incentive, however, awareness and knowledge of the training bonus was more variable, with customers rarely mentioning this. Whilst the incentives were appreciated by customers, especially by those open to the idea of improving their basic skills, they were not seen as a major motivation factor nor were they said to be effective in overcoming serious resistance.
5.1.2 Mandatory training pilot

The information communicated to customers regarding mandation by advisers at the pre-entry-to-training interview varied according to the nature and the depth of the information supplied. Across all districts and jobcentres, advisers generally provided customers with information regarding the mandatory aspects of the training. However, the level of information provided on the sanctioning regime itself differed.

Variations in adviser approach occurred on an individual basis according to the general approach adopted by the adviser and also based on the perceived needs of particular customer types, with more resistant customers being provided with broader and more detailed information. The approach taken by advisers to communicating mandation differed according to how much advisers stressed mandation: while some advisers were very upfront about mandation and outlined it in detail, others adopted a more discrete and gentle approach. Communicating the mandatory nature of basic skills training occurred very much as part of the adviser’s general explanation and discussion surrounding training provision at the referral stage.

Basic skills training courses were very much sold to customers using the full range of tools available to the advisers, rather than simply using mandation as a threat. Advisers described having a ‘package’ of incentives to encourage customers to attend training.

In addition to verbal discussions, advisers also provided customers with written information regarding mandation, in the form of the mandatory referral letter. Findings suggest that the mandatory referral letter was either being delivered during the pre-entry-to-training meeting, or it was sent in the post at a later date. Advisers who delivered the letter during the pre-entry-to-training meeting differed in their approach, with some advisers outlining the content of the letter in detail and others paying it little attention.

Explanations and delivery of the letter were in some instances said to be interlinked with the verbal discussion itself, and involved the adviser talking to the customer about mandation. Advisers generally believed that delivery of the mandatory referral letter should occur in conjunction with a verbal explanation in order to ensure its effective communication. Customers’ recall of receiving the letter was low overall, in particular, customers found it hard to differentiate between the paperwork given at meetings, and were, consequently, unsure if they had received the mandatory referral letter or not.

Findings from both the adviser and customer studies suggest that customers generally seemed to accept the mandatory aspect of training, in as much as in order to claim benefit, they were required to adhere to the rules of the jobcentre.
Advisers’ experiences of referring customers to Decision Making and Appeals (DMA) differed, with some advisers having referred customers to the DMA a number of times, for example, four or five times, and others having had no experience of this. Broadly, customers were referred to decision makers for refusing to attend the course, for voluntarily leaving the course for another reason aside from gaining employment, or as a result of being asked to leave by the provider.

Overall, advisers tended to agree with the principle of sanctioning per se, as it was felt to have a number of advantages, not least of which is that it is effective in encouraging customers to attend training. Customers accepted the principle of sanctions as they felt it was reasonable for customers to be expected to tackle any barriers to employment, including basic skills needs in return for Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA). However, there were some reservations and problems highlighted by advisers and customers regarding the principle of sanctions, primarily advisers simply questioned the principle of ‘forcing’ customers to engage in a course they were unwilling to attend, and in some instances, also doubted the appropriateness and effectiveness of the courses.

Initial findings suggest the threat and the application of sanctions were having a positive impact on initial attendance and continuation of attendance at provision; however, the threat of sanctions also encouraged customers to secure employment; sign off; or move onto inactive benefits.

The pilot was also said to have increased flows onto training and providers believed they were experiencing much higher volumes as a result.

5.1.3 Training

Referral to training tended to take place during the Independent Assessment follow up/pre-entry-to-training meeting, during which the adviser would provide feedback from the Independent Assessment and if the customer was found to have a need, a referral to training provision would be made. During this meeting advisers would also discuss the: type of training provision, for example, Basic Employability Training (BET) or Short Intensive Basic Skills (SIBS); the choice of provider; the financial incentives, as well as the mandatory nature of training.

The role the Independent Assessment provider played in informing customers about training differed according to how much information they provided regarding Independent Assessment feedback and referral to training, this ranged from providing no information to actually booking in the training themselves.

The referral process was generally seen as being straightforward. In most cases, discussions regarding the type of provision the customer would be referred to were minimal, as advisers tended to follow recommendations made by the Independent Assessment provider. While recommendations regarding the type of provision were given by the assessors, the decision about the choice of provider was generally taken by the adviser in consultation with the customer. In contrast, there were instances of
advisers choosing not to consult customers regarding the training provider, although they did often try to pick the most conveniently located trainer where possible.

Details about course content and the provider were also covered as part of the referral process, although generally not in much detail. Typically, the adviser would give the customer practical information, such as where the provider was located. In terms of the course content, the information given was minimal; advisers would usually say the course included literacy, numeracy and job search.

Although the processes involved in referring customers to provision were generally straightforward, two main difficulties were highlighted by advisers: inaccessibly located providers and lack of available training places. The latter was thought to have resulted in customers being ‘in limbo’ while they waited for their course to commence. The problem of training availability had dissipated over time as a result of the levelling out of flow and the increase in provision available.

The broad content of the training did not differ substantially between different districts, providers, or types of provision, such as BET or SIBS. The main activities undertaken were classroom-based basic skills and job search activities often involving the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). BET and SIBS courses began with an induction to the training course, which typically covered details of the course content; health and safety; and customers’ responsibilities regarding attendance, for example, holiday and sickness procedures. The main part of the courses was the delivery of basic skills training. This was usually delivered using a mixture of tutorials, practical exercises, worksheets, and ICT-based activities. Some providers said they tried to group the class into smaller groups based on ability and the groups were generally guided by either the Independent Assessment results of the diagnostic test carried out during the induction.

The other main activity in addition to basic skills lessons was job search. The amount of time spent on job search varied between providers and could also change over the duration of the course. Job search activities encompassed both learning job search related skills, such as writing CVs; as well as actively looking for jobs in newspapers, on the internet, or by visiting the jobcentre.

Some BET providers arranged work placements for their customers. Placements were generally part-time and were often arranged towards the middle or end of the course. It was usual for providers to organise external outings or events for their customers during the course. They were generally focused around a curriculum activity so were seen as educational, as well as providing a break from the classroom, fostering team building. Finally, courses usually involved some form of assessment of basic skills, whether this was examinations for formal qualifications in literacy or numeracy, or an assessment of customers’ basic skills to indicate progress.

A wide range of positive aspects was raised by customers, providers, and advisers regarding training provision and this related to the content and structure of the course, the teaching methods used, the style and approach of the tutors; as well as
mixing with other students. Although advisers and customers highlighted a range of positive views regarding training, they also identified some problems, as did providers who operated the training. For the most part, these related to similar issues, such as: the content, structure, organisation and delivery of the training, as well as to views on other students who attended.

In some cases, customers were unable to discern any tangible benefits or impacts occurring as a result of their attendance on training. Others mentioned a range of impacts: improved basic skills; gaining qualifications; attending subsequent training; improved job search skills; improvement of soft skills; and gaining employment. Some customers dropped out of provision as a result of the quality and ability of training to engage them.

5.2 Conclusions

Overall, the research indicates that both the national enhancements and the mandatory training pilot are operating consistently and effectively across mandatory pilot areas. For the most part, the problems highlighted in stage one had dissipated as processes bedded in and advisers became more confident about delivering the programmes. The national enhancements were being delivered less consistently in the comparator areas, compared to mandatory pilot areas at stage one, and this was thought to be a consequence of the greater emphasis placed on basic skills in mandatory areas (which was filtering down to the delivery of the national enhancements). However, this should be treated with a note of caution, as the comparator areas were not visited a part of stage two and as with the mandatory areas, inconsistencies and difficulties experienced might have reduced over time as the process bedded in.

The introduction of the national enhancements was thought to have raised the profile of basic skills within the jobcentre in both mandatory pilot and comparator areas and advisers also felt they had been successful in identifying basic skills needs amongst customers.

Training was sold to customers using the financial incentive alongside other potential personal benefits. Although customers were positive about the financial incentive and thought the promotion of personal benefits was effective, it was not felt to be successful in encouraging customers to attend training if they were resistant to the idea. In these cases, advisers used the threat of sanctions to encourage customers to attend (and subsequently a sanction referral), but this was usually seen as a last resort. Certainly for those customers who were happy to attend the incentive, it was seen as a nice ‘bonus’ and in some instances it had helped to address some of the practical barriers to attending training raised by customers, such as concerns over the cost of food or travel.

The mandatory nature of training was communicated to customers at the pre entry to training interview. Mandation was communicated by the advisers both verbally and in writing using the mandatory referral letter. Advisers tended to place more
emphasis on the verbal communication of mandation compared to the written
information. Although some resistance was expressed by customers, overall they
understood and accepted the mandatory nature of training. This was not only
thought to be a result of the explanation they received from their advisers, but also
due to a general awareness and understanding of their contract with Jobcentre Plus,
that in order to claim benefits they will be expected to engage in certain activities,
such as training.

Overall, the threat of sanctions was deemed to be effective in encouraging
customers to attend training, especially the more resistant customer. Certainly, it
was said by advisers and providers to have increased the flow of customers onto
basic skills training. However, the threat of a sanction was not effective in
encouraging customers to attend training in all cases, rather it was said to have
resulted in a number of other impacts, such as, signing off (in some cases as a result
of finding employment), changing benefit (usually following a period of signing off),
or being sanctioned. Following a sanction, customers tended to either comply or
they ultimately signed off or changed benefit.

Referral to training was typically said to be a straightforward process: with advisers
following recommendations made by the Independent Assessor regarding the type
of training provision; and the choice of provider usually being made in liaison with
customers according to the availability and location of the provider. Notwithstanding
this, some problems were noted with the accessibility and availability of providers
and although the latter had generally been resolved by stage two, accessibility
continued to be a problem, particularly in rural areas.

Views on training were mixed overall and they were often linked to the perceived
impacts of the training. The course content and organisation were generally viewed
positively, particularly work placements and Jobserach. This said, the level of
inactivity occurring on some courses was deemed to be problematic, as was the
wide range of student ability found in some classes, as it was thought to impinge of
customers’ ability to learn. Views of the other student undertaking the course also
often affected how customers felt about the training, for example, customers
mentioned disliking the course as a consequence of the disruptive and aggressive
behaviour exhibited by other students, as well as liking the course as it had provided
an opportunity to socialise and make friends. Views on the course tutors were also
mixed, with some finding tutors to be friendly and approachable and others
describing them as ‘condescending’.

Training was said to have resulted in a range of outcomes, including: improvement
of basic skills; improved job search skills; development of soft skills; qualifications in
basic skills; increased employability and securing employment. The level of impacts
experienced in these areas varied between customers and this was thought to result
from the skill and attitude of the customer as well as the quality of the training. Soft
skills were generally felt to have been improved across the board and this was
deemed positive by providers, as they believed it had a number of knock-on impacts
on other outcomes.
Importantly, no discernable benefits or impacts were highlighted by respondents in some cases. Certainly, advisers expressed concern about a lack of improvement to customers’ basic skills’ levels, which they thought was demonstrated by customers (who had been on basic skills training) returning to the jobcentre only to be re-assessed as having a need. While it was noted that this could, in part, be accounted for by customers originally entering training at a low level of literacy or numeracy, advisers were worried about the longer term consequences of this, especially how it would impact on their ability to sell the programme to customers who had already attended training and, ultimately, they feared it would undermine the basic skills programme overall.
Appendix A
Analysis

BMRB Social Research are always committed to producing a thorough analysis of the data and set procedures are in place to ensure analysis is undertaken in a systematic and comprehensive manner and that the findings are based on the raw data rather than on a researcher’s impressions. The interviews are all transcribed verbatim and then analysed by experienced members of the BMRB team.

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

Our method involves a systematic process of sifting, summarising and sorting the material according to key issues and themes. We use a set of content analysis techniques, known as ‘Matrix Mapping’, to ensure an optimum synthesis of findings from the verbatim data.

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

The analysis then proceeds by summarising and synthesising the data according to this thematic framework using a range of techniques such as cognitive mapping and data matrices. The thematic matrix comprises a series of subject charts displayed either in Word, Excel or Insight qualitative software. In this case, Excel software was utilised.
The subject headings included in the charts used on this project were as follows:
1 background;
2 awareness and knowledge of the regime;
3 sanctioning process;
4 views on sanctioning;
5 impact of sanctions;
6 principle of sanctions and suggestions for change.

Data from each interview transcript will be summarised and transposed under the appropriate subject heading of the thematic matrix. The context of the information is retained and the page of the transcript from which it comes noted, so that it is possible to return to a transcript to explore a point in more detail or to extract text for verbatim quotation. When all the data have been sifted according to the core themes, the analyst begins to map the data and identify features within the data: defining concepts, mapping the range and nature of phenomenon, creating typologies, finding associations, and providing explanations.

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

The key issues, and the features that underpin them, are then used as the basis for constructing, in this instance, the oral presentation and the written report. Verbatim quotes are also used throughout in order to illustrate and illuminate the findings.

We have used, and refined, our analytical procedures over many years. They are highly respected by our clients and are noted for their ability to extract the maximum information from qualitative data. Our methods are very robust and demonstrably able to stand up to public scrutiny. They have been used, for example, in the analysis of difficult and sensitive topics and have provided the analytical structure for many high profile pieces of work.
Appendix B
Fast Track assessment

Fast Track Assessment

Written

Name:

Results:

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<th>Refer for further assessment if he/she gets:</th>
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</thead>
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<td>0-4 marks in Task 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>or any ticks in Task 2 (Section A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 2, Section A</td>
<td></td>
<td>or 0-4 marks in Task 2 (Section B)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
JOB TITLE: ASSISTANT CARETAKER
LOCATION: BOWATER HOUSE
PAY: £5.20 per hour (overtime at £1 per hour over basic rate)
BENEFITS: PENSION SCHEME, 3 WEEKS PAID HOLIDAY P.A.
HOURS: MONDAY TO FRIDAY 8AM-12, 5PM-8PM
(35 HOURS PER WEEK)
POSSIBILITY OF OVERTIME
REONSIBLE TO: SENIOR CARETAKER

DUTIES:
1. To clean all office areas between 5pm and 8pm
2. To lock all interior and exterior doors at 8pm
3. To unlock all interior and exterior doors at 8am
4. To set intruder alarms at 8pm
5. To turn off intruder alarms at 8am
6. To welcome visitors and issue parking permits
7. To dispose of office waste as required
8. To carry out minor repairs to office furniture as required
9. To check and keep clean all toilet areas
10. To carry out any other duties as requested
Read through the job description and then answer the questions on this sheet. You do not need to write in sentences.

1. What are the benefits that are part of this job?

2. How much, in total, would you be paid per hour for overtime?

3. What word or words in the list of duties mean ‘to get rid of’?

4. Which jobs in the list of duties are about security?

5. How much would you earn in 20 hours at the hourly rate?

6. On Monday to Friday you would be free during the afternoons. How many hours off would this be each week?
Task 2

Section A
Please fill in this section with your personal details.

BOWATER HOUSING ASSOCIATION GROUP
APPLICATION FORM

POST: ASSISTANT CARETAKER

Full Name: …………………………………………………………………………
Address: ………………………………………………………………………
Post Code: ……………………………………………………………………
Date: ………………………………………………………………………

Section B
Please complete the following sentences by circling the correct words.

1. I will be available for work immediately.
2. I was employed by the district council.
3. I wouldn’t be able to work overtime.

Put one word in the gap

4. I wish to ………………… for the job.
Appendix C
Sample profile
Table C.1  Main design advisers stages one and two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advisers – telephone interviews</td>
<td>Advisers – face-to-face interviews</td>
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<td>5. Cheshire &amp; Warrington</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Durham</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Hull &amp; East Riding</td>
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</tr>
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<td>12. Kent</td>
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<td>6</td>
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Continued
Table C.1  Continued

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<th>Stage 1: Advisers – telephone interviews</th>
<th>Stage 1: Advisers – face-to-face interviews</th>
<th>Stage 1: Adviser client: number of observations</th>
<th>Stage 1: Clients – short face-to-face interviews</th>
<th>Stage 1: Adviser revisits – face-to-face interviews</th>
<th>Stage 1: Clients – face-to-face interviews</th>
<th>Stage 2: Providers – face-to-face interviews</th>
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### Table C.2  Main design providers study stage two

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<td>BET/ESOL</td>
<td>18 to 2425+</td>
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### Table C.3  Main design customers stage two

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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>26</td>
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Appendix D
Topic guides
1. INTRODUCTION

- About BMRB and PSI
- Aims of the research – commissioned by DWP
- Stages of the research – three stages: process, views and impacts study
- Length of interview – 30 minutes
- Introduce tape recorder
- Confidentiality
2. DESCRIPTION OF JOBCENTRE – *Very briefly*

- Explore details of the jobcentre catchment area

- **Probe:**
  - Geographical area
  - Rural/urban
  - Socio-economic characteristics
  - Local labour market characteristics

- Explore how area compares to other areas in the region – explore differences/similarities

- Describe the jobcentre:
  - Explore the size of jobcentre – **prompt:** number of staff, clients:
    ~ How does the size compare to other jobcentres in district?
  - Overview of staffing structure/hierarchy:
    ~ Do some advisers carry out multiple roles i.e. NYYP and ND25+?

- Explore what staff are involved in Basic Skills programme – **probe:** mainstream advisors, ND advisers, any others, all staff

- Can they talk through any changes made to the type and number of staff engaged in basic skills since the implementation of the new programme/pilot – explore?

- How are staff NOT involved in basic skills programme made aware of the new programme - **Probe:** what information are they given?

3. DETAILS OF RESPONDENT’S ROLE – *Very Briefly*

- Describe current role in jobcentre – **probe:** overall responsibilities, day to day role.

- Outline responsibilities relating to the Basic Skills National programme/pilot programme – **probe:** overall, day to day

4. AWARENESS OF NEW PROGRAMME – *Very Briefly*

- What does the new Basic Skills Programme entail – **Probe:** Awareness of main stages of process?

  **Prompt:**
  - Fast track screening
  - Use of Jobseeker’s Direction for IA
  - Use of incentives
  - Use of sanctions (pilot areas only)
– What are the main differences/similarities between the programmes (new and old)?
– How well informed do they feel about all the changes to Basic Skills Programme:
  ~ What aspects would they like to know more about; reasons why?

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMME – Key Section
• When was the new programme (either National Programme or Mandatory Pilot) introduced to you/other advisers – was this at the same time?
• How was it communicated; Who communicated it?
• What were you told about the new programme – prompt: details of what new programme was; reasons for introduction?
• Explore any training received by you/other advisers:
  ~ Views on training – positive/negative
  ~ Any further training would have benefited from
• When was the new programme implemented?
• Nature of any problems or barriers experienced during implementation – briefly

6. OVERVIEW OF PROCESS – Key Section
• Describe the Basic Skills programme currently in operation (either new national programme or mandatory pilot programme)

Explore:
– How is new programme communicated to clients:
  ~ At what stage is it communicated?
  ~ Who informs clients of the changes?
– What are clients told about the programme - briefly?
– Explore details of screening process/use of fast track:
  ~ When does this occur – prompt: at six month interview, entry to ND, subsequent meetings?
  ~ How is this organised/approached by adviser?
  ~ Who is responsible for carrying this out?
– Explore referral to IA – how does this process work:
  ~ How is this communicated to client?
  ~ At what stage?
  ~ Explore explanation and use of Jobseeker’s direction
– Explore IA - How is this organised:
   ~ Which organisation is responsible for IA?
   ~ Where do the clients go for the IA?
   ~ When does the IA occur – **Prompt**: immediately after screening, within days of screening, within weeks of screening?

– Explore referral to provision:
   ~ How type of provision decided upon i.e. BETS, SIBS, FTET:
     • How are the clients involved in this decision?
   ~ How is training provider chosen – are their a choice of providers in area?
   ~ How is referral made?
   ~ How communicated to client?

– Explore use of incentive:
   ~ How communicating this to client?
   ~ At what stage is this communicated?
   ~ How is this being used – **Probe**: give example of any experiences?

– Explore threat of sanctions (pilot areas only):
   ~ How communicating this to client?
   ~ At what stage is this communicated?
   ~ How is this being used – **Probe**: give example of any experiences?

– Explore whether programme is fully implemented – how compliant they are:
  ~ If not, where do they fall short and why has this occurred?

– Explore any problems or barriers experienced during the delivery of the programme (National and mandatory pilot)

7. **DETAILS FOR SITE VISIT**

   • Explain site visits and make agreement to be re-contacted if necessary (explain will not be visiting all jobcentres covered in telephone depths)

   • Explain what would need to organise for site visit to check feasibility

   • Whether might be willing to participate as one of our site visits

   • Name of contact

   • Contact details – phone/email

**THANK YOU AND CLOSE**
BASIC SKILLS
TOPIC GUIDE FOR SITE VISITS
FOCUS GROUP WITH JOBCENTRE ADVISERS

Key aims:
- to explore changes to the National Programme for Basic Skills (use of Fast Track screening tool, use of JSA direction for IA, and financial incentives) that have been implemented and delivered across jobcentres; and
- additionally, to explore the introduction of sanctions in the pilot areas.

Specifically it aims to:
- explore advisers’ views on changes made to the Basic Skills National Programme and the introduction of sanctions in pilot areas;
- explore any problems or difficulties encountered;
- explore any impacts these changes have made to advisers, clients and other jobcentre programmes;
- look at the delivery and inputting on MI data; and to
- explore any suggestions for change or improvements.

Refer to summary notes from telephone interview where necessary. Note: not all advisers will have been interviewed before. The * indicate importance of section.

8. INTRODUCTION
- About BMRB and PSI.
- Aims of the research – commissioned by DWP.
- Stages of the research – three stages: process, views and impacts study.
- Length of interview – paired depth one hour; mini group: one hour and 15 minutes.
- Introduce tape recorder.
- Confidentiality.
9. **BACKGROUND**

*Note to researcher: This information will already have been explored during the telephone depths. So just briefly recap on main details.*

- Name
- Describe current role and responsibilities relating to Basic Skills
- Briefly describe the jobcentre and catchment area where they work:
  - Name and size of jobcentre (number of staff, clients)
- How does the jobcentre and catchment area compare to other jobcentres in district?
- Which staff are involved in Basic Skills programme – **probe:** mainstream advisers, ND advisers, any others, all staff?

10. **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME** *

*Note to researcher: can they think back to when the programme changes were first introduced to them.*

- What were their initial views about the programme:
  - Explore any initial concerns they had
  - How were these concerns dealt with:
    - How satisfied were they with outcome?
- How effectively was the programme communicated to all advisers (both those involved in basic skills and those who were not)?
- Recap on any training/information received
- What did they think about the training or information sessions received by advisers:
  - How comprehensive was it?
  - How well equipped to carry out the role did they feel following training?
- Explore any delivery preparation that was carried-out either by the adviser or other staff in jobcentre - **prompt:** systems put in place, setting-up of provision for IA and training, MI systems:
  - Any problems or difficulties experienced; nature of these; how resolved?
11. DELIVERY OF THE PROGRAMME – *Refer to summary notes* **

**Communicating the programme changes to clients**
- Can they describe how and when the programme changes are communicated to the client:
  - Explore any variations between and within jobcentres
  - Explore views on whether this is the correct time
  - How effectively is it communicated?
- How well do they believe clients understand what they are being told about the programme?

**Screening process/use of fast track**
- Can they describe how and when the Fast Track screener is carried out – explore variations:
  - Who is responsible for carrying this out?
  - How is the FT organised/approached by adviser?
- Explore views on the current approach:
  - Nature of any difficulties or problems with this; how resolved
  - Explore views on the correct/best time to carry out the FT
- Explore views on the content and structure of the FT tool – positive/negative aspects and give examples:
  - How accurate is the FT in assessing BS need – *probe:* any examples where working well/less well?

**Referral to IA**
- Can they describe how IA is communicated to client – *probe:* at what stage; who by:
  - How well does this work?
- Any problems or difficulties they have experienced referring clients to IA – *Probe:* client not wishing to attend; IA provision over subscribed; any other – give examples:
  - How have these issues been resolved; views about this?
- Can they describe their experiences of using the Jobseeker’s direction:
  - Explore any experiences of using it – give examples:
    - Any difficulties/problems they have encountered – use examples
  - How do they feel about communicating it to clients; nature of any concerns?
  - How do they feel about using the direction; nature of any concerns?
IA

- Which organisation/s is responsible for IA – explore variations?
- Where is IA carried out – explore variations?
- How well does this work – how independent are they:
  - Explore views about IA provider being same or different to those carrying out training provision
- How well is the IA assessment process working overall:
  - Quality of IA overall
  - Accuracy of assessment to identify need
  - Capacity of organisation
  - Location of assessment
  - Quality of feedback to adviser
  - Any other
- Explore nature of any problems with IA provision supplied

Referral to provision

- Explore views on how type of provision is decided upon – BETS, SIBS and FTET:
  - What do they think about the IA’s role in making this decision – positive/negative aspects of this?
  - How far is the client involved in the decision – explore views on this?
  - How do they feel about the level of their input in making the decision?
- Nature of any problems/difficulties experienced with deciding provision
- How well are clients being matched with the appropriate type of BS provision for their needs – BETS, SIBS, FTET:
  - Any problems identified – give examples
- How well does the referral process when deciding on the most suitable training provider for clients:
  - Any problems/difficulties that have occurred – give examples:
    - Explore reasons for this – probe: lack of provision, location of provision

Use of incentives

- Explore details of the incentives package being offered to clients – probe: amount of additional benefit received, end of course bonus, any other
- How and when is the use of incentives being communicated to clients:
  - How appropriate is the time when it is communicated?
• Explore any experiences of communicating incentives – give examples:
  – What worked well; any problems experiences?
• Explore any experiences of using incentive – give examples:
  – What worked well; any problems experiences?
• What do they think about the level of incentives – **Probe:** how much of an incentive is it?

**Sanctions** (pilot areas only)
• Explore details of what sanctions policy entails - **Probe:** What benefits are stopped, length of time stopped for, procedures at end of sanctioned period, any other
• Explore how sanctions are being communicated to the clients:
  – When is it done?
  – How effectively is this being done?
• How do they feel about communicating sanctions to clients – any problems experienced?
• Explore whether believe clients have a clear understanding of the sanctions they could incur - **Probe:** at IA and referral to provision:
  – Nature of any difficulties and barriers to their understanding; how dealt with?
• Does everyone who is referred to training receive a mandatory referral letter:
  – Any other means they use to communicate mandation
• Explore views on the value of issuing a mandatory referral letter – any problems with this:
  – **Probe:** value of letter considering basic skills needs of clients
• Explore any experiences **of using the threat** of sanctions:
  – How do they feel about using it as a threat?
  – Can they describe any problems they have encountered?
  – Can they describe any times when it has worked effectively?
• Explore any **actual experiences** of using sanctions:
  – How did they feel about using it?
  – Can they describe any problems they have encountered?
  – Can they describe any examples where it has worked effectively?
Compliance

- How far have the changes to the programme been fully implemented?
  
  **Probe:** – how compliant are the adviser:
  
  – If not, where do they fall short and why has this occurred?
  – Any problems or difficulties experienced

12. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION **

- What data do they collect – **probe:** FT, referral to IA, IA, referral to provision, qualifications gained?

- Do clients typically take a qualification on completion of provision:
  
  – What data do they collect on taking a qualification?
  – How does qualifications data get collected?
  – What happens to the information?

- What happens to the information – **probe:** FT, IA, provision, qualifications?

- How is information input onto LMS:
  
  – Who does this?
  – When is this done?
  – How reliably is this done:
    – Is it always done at the same time?
    – Is it always done by the same person?
  – How accurate is the information they are recording?
  – Any difficulties or problems with doing this?

13. IMPACT OF BASIC SKILLS PROGRAMME *

- What impact has the changes to the programme made to jobcentre staff – give examples:
  
  – Any possible future impacts

- What impact has the changes had on other programmes/initiative or requirements in operation in the jobcentre – **probe:** New Deal, other training provision, job targets:
  
  – Any possible future impacts

- What impact has the changes had on clients:
  
  – How do they know this?

- What difference would it make if the changes had not been introduced?
14. **SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE**

*Note to researcher: Draw on any problems highlighted throughout and explore suggestions for improvement.*

- Explore any suggestions for how to improve the changes made to the national programme and sanctions (in pilot areas)

**Probe on improvements to:**
- Communication to client
- Fast Track screening tool
- Referral to IA
- IA; how IA organised; assessment paper
- Referral to provision
- Training provision
- Incentives
- Sanctions (pilot area only)

- What difference would these changes make?
- How can any suggested negative impacts be reversed or possible future impacts avoided?

**THANK YOU AND CLOSE**
BASIC SKILLS
TOUCH GUIDE: STAGE 2
INTERVIEWS WITH JOB CENTRE ADVISERS

Key aims:

• to explore advisers’ continued experiences, views, attitudes and perceptions of the Basic Skills sanctions pilot;

• additionally, to explore advisers’ continued experiences, views, attitudes and perception of changes to the National Programme for Basic Skills (use of Fast Track screening tool, use of JSA direction for IA, and financial incentives) that have been implemented and delivered across jobcentres.

Specifically it aims to:

• explore any further delivery process issues relating to the implementation of the Basic Skills Sanctions pilot and Basic Skills National Programme;

• explore any changes made to the delivery of the Basic Skills National Programme changes or sanction pilot;

• explore advisers’ views, attitudes and perceptions of the Basic Skills Sanctions Pilot and National Programme changes from they experience of delivering the programme;

• explore advisers views on the principle of the Basic Skills Sanctions Pilot and National Programme change;

• explore any impacts these changes have made to advisers, clients and other jobcentre programmes; and

• explore any suggestions for change or improvements.

Refer to summary notes from stage 1 interview where necessary. Note: not all advisers will have been interviewed in stage 1, in these cases, very briefly explore issues if necessary. For other advisers, do not cover information discussed at last interview except when checking for changes. The * indicates the importance of each section.
15. INTRODUCTION
- About BMRB and PSI
- Aims of the research – commissioned by DWP
- Stages of the research – 3 stages: process, views and impacts study
- Length of interview – depth interview 30 – 40 minutes; paired depth 45 Minutes; mini group 1 – 1½ hour
- Introduce tape recorder
- Confidentiality

16. BACKGROUND – very briefly
- Describe current role and responsibilities relating to Basic Skills – explore any changes
- Ask if their jobcentre office is rolled out as Jobcentre Plus
- Any training/information received since last visit – explore
- What did they think about the training or information sessions received:
  - How comprehensive were they?
  - How well equipped to carry out the role did they feel following training?
  - Explore whether dealt with any issues or problems previously identified – explore how

17. DELIVERY: EXPERIENCE, VIEWS, ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS**

Communicating the Basic Skills programme to clients
- How effectively is the programme communicated to clients overall – any changes:
  - How well do clients understand what they are being told about the programme; how do they know this – provide examples:
    - Explore any difficulties clients have; reasons why
  - Explore how comfortable advisers feel when communicating the programme changes (national changes and sanctions) – provide examples
  - Explore how well equipped advisers feel they are to communicate the changes (national changes and sanctions) – provide examples
  - Explore advisers views of customers reaction to the mandatory nature of the pilot and sanctioning for non-attendance (positive/negative)
Screening process/use of fast track – very briefly

- Briefly explore any changes to the way the screening process/Fast track is carried out – probe: timing, communication, approach, organisation:
  - Explore reasons and views on this

- Briefly explore any changes to content and structure of the fast track tool – reasons for this:
  - Explore views on these changes – positive/negative views and give examples

- Explore views on the way fast track is approached and carried out – explore positive and negative views

Probe:

- Correct/best time to carry out the FT – prompt: what stage in the claiming process; what stage in New Deal; what stage during the interview

- The approach and way the tool is used by advisers – prompt: carried out in separate room or at desk; with adviser present or not; starting from front of form or from back

- Explore view on time spent on Basic Skills in the first interview compared to other tasks.

- How effectively is the screening process communicated to the client – any problems with client understanding; how are these dealt with – give examples:
  ~ How aware are clients of the purpose and significance of the screening process; how important is it that clients understand this?

- How do they feel about communicating the Fast track to clients; any ways this has changed and views on this?

- Any problems identified with using the Fast track as a Basic Skills screening tool
  ~ prompt: content of the tool, design, marking system:

- How accurate is the FT in assessing BS need – comparing FT results to IA outcomes

Referral to IA

- Briefly check whether any changes had been made to the way referrals to IA were organised – reasons this

- How effectively is IA communicated to client:
  - Do they believe clients understand what and why they are attending; what it will involve and the possible outcomes – explore reasons?

- Explore any consequences of way IA is communicated to client/adviser/provider – positive/negative
• Any changes made to the IA referral process – reasons for these:
  – Explore views on any changes made – positive/negative
  – Explore consequence of any changes on client/adviser/provider

• Explore adviser view of the referral process; how well is it currently working – **prompt:** contacting provider, booking appointment

**IA**

• Briefly recap on organisation/s responsible for IA – explore any changes; reasons why

• Explore any changes to location of IA – **prompt:** jobcentre, providers, other

• Explore views and attitudes on how well is the IA assessment process working overall; positive/negative views – any changes:
  – Quality of IA overall
  – Provider/s used
  – Capacity of organisation
  – Venue
  – Organisation of IA
  – Quality/method of feedback to adviser
  – Accuracy of assessment to identify need
  – Any other

• Explore advisers’ perception of clients’ experience and views of the IA process – any difficulties/problems identified; any positive aspects highlighted – provide examples

• Explore whether mandatory aspect of BS training impacts on way IA is approached by adviser/provider

**Referral to provision**

• Any changes to way type of provision decided upon following IA (whether choose BETS, SIBS and FTET):
  – Explore views on decision making process; how effective is it; any problems
  – Explore whether any value in adviser/client being more involved in this decision

• * On reflection, how appropriate is the type of training identified for clients – provide examples:
  – Any evidence of clients being referred to inappropriate forms of training – reason for this
  – Anything preventing clients from attending the most appropriate provision – **probe:** lack of provision in area, other
• Explore whether mandatory aspect of BS training impacts on way referral to provision is approached

• * Briefly explore advisers views on the training provision offered in their area – **probe:** any differences according to type of provision – BETS, SIBS, FTET and ESOL; explore any reasons for this and provide examples
  – Prompt: Sufficient capacity, quality of training

**Use of incentives***

• Briefly recap on how and when the use of incentives is being communicated to clients:
  – How appropriate is the time when it is communicated; way it is communicated
  – Any changes to how and when incentives are communicated - explore reason; views and consequences of this

• Explore any experiences of using the incentive to encourage people to engage in process – provide examples; what worked well; any problems experiences

• Explore advisers’ views on incentives

  **Explore:**
  – Views on overall incentive package – payment level, eligibility; process of making payment to client
  – How effective is it as an incentive to attend training/engage in programme – any problems identified:
    – How effective is it as an incentive to remain on training?
  – What difference does having an incentive package make to the: client/adviser/training provider – explore any positive/negative differences?

**Sanctions ***

• Recap on details of sanctions policy – **probe:** What benefits are stopped, length of time stopped for, procedures at end of sanctioned period, any other

• Explore advisers’ views on the current structure of the sanctions – **probe:** length of time, amount of benefit stopped:
  – Any problems they can identify; any positive aspects

• Explore when and how mandatory aspect of training is communicated to the clients – provide examples of how they communicate this – **probe:** verbal and written communication (mandatory referral letter)
Mandatory referral letter

– How do they approach the mandatory referral letter – probe: how do they issue the letter; how do they explain the letter; explore whether read through the letter?

– Do advisers think the mandatory referral letter is adequate/appropriate; have they experienced any problems?

– How effective is the mandatory referral letter perceived to be by adviser/client; explore any other types of communication that are more perceived to be more threatening – prompt: verbal communication?

– Did customer demonstrate a clear understanding of mandatory attendance?

– Did adviser feel that the letter impacts on customers’ behaviour/attitude towards training in any way?

Verbal

– In addition to mandatory referral letter, any other ways mandatory aspect of training is communicated – explore approach adopted; reasons for this:

  ~ Explore effectiveness of this; reasons for effectiveness

– Explore what information clients are given about the sanctions policy – prompt: numbers of weeks sanctioned for; process of implementing sanctions:

  ~ Explore effectiveness of this; reasons for effectiveness

• Explore views on how effectively mandatory element of training/sanctions are being communicated overall:

  – Do clients have clear understanding of what the sanctions are; reasons for them; how they could incur sanctions; how it will impact on them?

  – Explore nature of any difficulties and barriers to the clients’ understanding of sanctions; how these are dealt with

• How do advisers feel about communicating mandatory element of training/sanctions to clients – any problems experienced:

  – Explore how confident advisers feel in communicating this; nature of any problems – any changes and reasons for these

  – Explore how well equipped advisers feel they are in communicating this; nature of any problems – any changes and reasons for these:

    ~ Explore whether anything could make them more equipped/confident

• Explore any experiences of using mandatory element of training/sanctions to encourage participation – give examples:

  – How do they approach this; what do they say; when do they say it?

  – How consistently do they use it – prompt: as required; to all clients?
– How effective is it; can they describe any times when it has worked:
  ~ effectively/less effectively
– How do they feel about using it as a threat?
– How do the clients react:
  ~ Can they describe any problems they have encountered; reasons for this?
• Explore any actual experiences of following through sanctions – give examples of using it:
  – Approximate number of times – whether increasing/decreasing; reasons for this
  – How did they approach it; what did they do/say?
  – How consistently do they use it – prompt: as required; to all clients?
  – How flexible are they in their use of sanctions; how much discretion do they have; is this formally agreed in jobcentre or not:
    ~ Explore views on level of flexibility/discretion; impact this has
  – How do they feel when using sanctions – any problems/concerns?
  – How did client react – provide examples:
    ~ Explore views on way clients react in this way
  – Overall how effective is mandatory aspect of training/sanctions in engaging clients in the Basic Skills process?
  – Any difficulties/problems they have encountered and reasons for these – Probe: administration/paperwork, DMA appeals procedure, jobcentre approach, client reaction:
    ~ Does anything impinge of their ability to operate sanctions effectively?
• Have they had any feedback from customers following the sanctioned period (explore hardship)?

18. **PRINCIPLE OF BASIC SKILLS SANCTIONS PILOT AND NATIONAL PROGRAMME***
• Explore advisers’ views on the principle of Basic Skills National enhancements
• In principle what are their views on:
  – The Fast track screening tool – Probe: using the FT in standardised way/for all clients?
  – The IA?
  – Incentives?
• Explore positive/negative benefits of introducing these enhancements – Probe: clients, advisers, providers, employers, any other; explore reasons for these views – provide examples
• Explore advisers’ views on the compulsory element of: Fast track and IA (NB – Fast Track element of the process is NOT mandatory. BUT ALL screened at six months):
  – Explore any problems identified with this for client or adviser – **probe:** administration etc.
  – Explore any benefits identified/to come out of this
• Explore the principle of issuing Jobseeker’s Directions
• Explore advisers’ views on the principle of sanctioning clients to attend training:
  – Explore **positive/negative benefits** of introducing sanctions – **probe:** clients, advisers, providers, employers, any other; explore reasons for these views – provide examples
• Explore advisers views on principle of sanctioning for non-attendance at skills training – positive/negative (should all customers treated in same way)
• Explore views on principle of sanctioning per se (such as on New Deal); how this compares to sanctioning for BS:
  – What are the differences; Any reason why this is viewed differently?

19. IMPACT OF BASIC SKILLS PROGRAMME*
• What impact have the changes to the sanctions and National Programme made to jobcentre staff; give examples – **prompt:** workload, relationship with clients, personal:
  – What impact has the programme had on the way advisers carry out/behave in their job – **prompt:** putting clients on other benefits?
  – Any possible future impacts
• What impact has the changes had on other programmes/initiative or requirements in operation in the jobcentre – **probe:** New Deal, other training provision, job targets (work first approach*) – any changes:
  – Any possible future impacts
• How well do the programme changes fit with other aspects of the adviser’s role/tasks
• What impact have the National Programme changes had on clients; how do they know this; reasons why – **probe:** FT, IA, training, incentives?
• What impact has the sanctions pilot had on clients; how do they know this; reasons why?
• What difference have changes made overall?
20. **SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE**

*Note to researcher: Draw on any problems highlighted throughout and explore suggestions for improvement.*

- Explore any suggestions for how to improve the changes made to the national programme and sanctions (in pilot areas)
- Explore any suggestions as to how advisers job could be made easier

**Probe on improvements to:**

- Communication to client – **probe:** Initial communication, communication of FT, IA, training, incentives, sanctions
- Fast Track screening tool
- Referral to IA
- IA; how IA organised; assessment paper
- Referral to provision
- Training provision
- Incentives
- Sanctions – **probe:** how would they make the process fairer; how would they improve administration

- What difference would these changes make; how would they make an improvement?
- How can any suggested negative impacts be reversed or possible future impacts avoided?
- Suggestions as to how to get customers to attend Basic Skills training

**THANK YOU AND CLOSE**
BASIC SKILLS
TOPIC GUIDE: STAGE 2
INTERVIEWS WITH CLIENTS

Key aims:

- to explore clients’ experiences, views, attitudes and perceptions of the Basic Skills sanctions pilot;
- additionally, to explore clients’ experiences, views, attitudes and perception of changes to the National Programme for Basic Skills (use of Fast Track screening tool, use of JSA direction for IA, and financial incentives) that have been implemented and delivered across jobcentres.

Specifically it aims to:

- descriptively explore the delivery of the programme from the perspective of clients;
- explore clients’ views, attitudes and perceptions of the Basic Skills Sanctions Pilot and National Programme changes from their experience and involvement in the programme;
- explore clients’ views on the principle of the Basic Skills Sanctions Pilot and National Programme change;
- explore the initial impact of the programme on clients, with a particular focus on the mandatory element of training; and
- explore any suggestions for change or improvements.

Note to researcher: not all clients will have experienced all aspects of the process, for example, some may only have experienced FT. Please see contact sheet for respondent information and use the guide accordingly.

1. INTRODUCTION

- About BMRB and PSI
- Aims of the research – commissioned by DWP
- Stages of the research – three stages: process, views and impacts study (speaking to advisers, clients and training providers)
- Length of interview – one hour
- Introduce tape recorder
- Confidentiality
2. BACKGROUND – very briefly

- Explore personal circumstances: age, family, hobbies
- Explore clients’ current activity

Probes:

- **Employment** – explore type and nature of employment; length of time in role; process of securing work
- **Education/training** – type and nature of education/training; length of course; reason for undertaking course; process of enrolling on course; intended course outcome
- **Unemployed**; type of benefit claiming – prompt: JSA, ND, IB, IS; length of time unemployed; explore employment goals
- **Other** – explore details

3. COMMUNICATING THE BASIC SKILLS PROGRAMME TO CLIENTS

- **Spontaneously** explore clients’ awareness and understanding of the BS programme overall; what do clients know about the BS programme

Probes:

- Explore awareness and knowledge of purpose of programme; reasons for the introduction of BS programme
- Explore awareness and knowledge of national enhancements – probe: FT, IA, incentives
- Explore awareness and knowledge of mandatory training (pilots) programme
  - probe: mandatory referral to training and sanctions
- Explore source/s of information – probe: JC+ adviser; IA provider; training provider, clients, other

4. ADVISER INTERVIEW: SIX MONTH MAINSTREAM OR ENTRY TO NEW DEAL

**Screening process/use of fast track**

Note to researcher: if necessary explain/show the FT screening tool to the respondent. Explain FT is an assessment undertaken during six month or entry to ND interview

- Explore awareness and knowledge of the Fast Track Screening tool:
  - Explore whether heard of the FT screening tool; whether any experience/recall of completing it
  - Explore clients understanding of what the FT tool is:
    - Explore perceived purpose of the FT; reason why they undertake it
    - Explore views on the significance of the screening process; what are possible outcomes leading on from it
- Explore how gained this information on the FT screening tool:
  - Source of information – *probe*: JC+ adviser, IA provider, training provider, clients, other
  - When received information – *probe*: during six month interview/entry to ND; prior to completion; following completion; other
  - Explore the quality/clarity of the information received:
    ~ How well did they understand the information provided on the FT and possible consequences of it?
    ~ Explore anything they did not understand – *provide examples*
    ~ Explore anything they would have liked more information on

- Explore thoughts/feelings on undertaking the FT when initially introduced; whether happy to undertake FT or not – explore reasons for this:
  - Explore any concerns, reservations or resistance:
    ~ How were these expressed to the adviser; what did the client say?
  - How did the adviser deal with concerns or resistance expressed; what approach did they take; whether provided any information:
    ~ How did the client feel about adviser response; explore whether concerns allayed or not – reasons for this?

- Explore whether the client undertook the FT tool:
  - Explore reason/s for *completing* the FT tool – *probe*: to help improve their skills; concern about benefit claim; was compulsory
  - Explore reason/s for *not completing* the FT tool – *probe*: dislikes assessments/uncomfortable with process; belief do not have a BS need; unwilling to attend training; other:
    ~ Explore outcome of non completion – *probe*: signed off benefit; changed benefit; other

- Explore experiences of undertaking the FT; ask the client to *spontaneously* describe undertaking the FT:
  - What were they asked to do; where did they complete the form; how long did they have to complete the form?
  - Did they receive any help or guidance; what instructions or information were they given; what impact did this have?
  - Provide brief description of the content and structure of the fast track tool; explore views on this

- Explore views on the way fast track is approached and carried out by advisers – explore positive and negative views
Probe:
- Length of time provided to complete form
- Where form undertaken – **prompt:** carried out in separate room or at desk; with adviser present or not; other
- Clarity and quality of guidance/information received; how well did they understand what they were asked to do; any additional information they would have liked

Referral to IA
- **Spontaneously** explore what happened following FT screening tool; explore communication between adviser and client:
  - Explore feedback: whether the adviser went through FT form; what information they were given regarding outcome
  - Explore whether client was identified as having a need and referred to IA; how was this explained to them
  - Explore detail of information provided to client about IA if client referred; what were clients told by advisers – provide details

Probe:
- Reason for attending/undertaking IA
- Nature of IA – type of assessment to be undertaken
- Details of the training provider undertaking assessment – details of the organisation; location:
  - Length of time IA would take
  - Possible outcome of IA if identified with need
- Explore whether client understood why they were attending; what it will involve and the possible outcomes – explore reasons.

- **Explore views on being referred to the IA; how did clients feel about being referred to the IA – explore positive and negative views:**
  - Explore any concerns or problems – **probe:** distance to travel; nature of assessment; outcome of assessment; other
  - Explore whether client expressed concerns or resistance to adviser – explore details of discussion:
    - How did the adviser respond to concerns/resistance; any information provided – verbal or written?
    - How felt following discussion with adviser; how effective was the information provided; whether concerns were allayed or not – reasons for this?
  - Any additional information would have liked at this point; explore how this would have helped
Outcome of referral to IA

- Explore outcome of referral to IA; explore whether client agreed to undertake IA or not – reasons for this decision
- Explore whether anything impacted on this decision

**Probe:**
- Information provided by the adviser (verbal/written)
- Desire to improve BS
- Fear of repercussion (impact on benefit claim)
- Compulsory nature of IA
- Directed by adviser using Jobseeker’s Direction
- Other

- Explore whether client would have attended if the IA was not mandatory – reasons for this

- **If client did not undertake IA:** explore outcome in detail:
  - **Directed to DMA:** whether decision allowed or not; whether received sanction; experiences following this – explore in detail
  - **Signed off benefit:** explore experiences following this in detail:
    - How made money – **probe:** whether secured employment, made new claim (whether changed benefit); other
    - Explore impact of signing off benefit for client and family
  - **Changed benefit:** explore whether changed benefit; what benefit changed from and to; process for making this change
  - Other

5. INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT

- **Spontaneously** describe experience of attending IA; talk through experience of undertaking IA

**Probe:**
- When attended; location of the IA
- Nature of IA: length of assessment; types of assessment; nature of questions
- Information/guidance given at IA about assessment by provider – **probe:** about undertaking the IA; possible outcomes following IA
- Feedback on assessment results; whether received any feedback from provider; what understood from this
• Explore clients’ views of the IA experience – any difficulties/problems identified; any positive aspects highlighted – provide examples

• Any additional information they would have liked at this stage

6. **MEETING: FOLLOW-UP/PRE ENTRY TO TRAINING**

**Referral to provision**

• *Spontaneously*, ask the client to talk through details of the pre entry to training/follow up interview; what was discussed at this meeting – **probe:** IA results, referral to training; training provision; other

**Probe:**

• **Discussion of IA results:**
  
  – Explore outcome of IA
  
  – Explore feedback provided by adviser on IA; outline details of this feedback – **probe:** whether discussed details of how IA assessed; type of training courses and how this is decided (BET, SIBS, FTET)
  
  – **If need assessed:** Explore understanding of consequence of this outcome; whether understood would be referred to training

• Explore views on details of assessment feedback; explore clarity and ease of understanding:
  
  – Anything required more information on at this stage

• **Referral to training provider:** explore how training provider decided:
  
  – Explore whether client consulted; provided with any information or choices – explore choices offered
  
  – Explore views on decision making process and level of consultation with client

• **Content of training provision:** explore discussion of type of training provision being referred to; what information were they given about the course:
  
  – **Probe:** length of course; nature and type of course; purpose of course; possible course outcomes

• Explore views on nature and type of course being referred to - positive/negative views:
  
  – Explore whether client identified any value in undertaking a BS course; identified need
  
  – Explore views on: length of course, location of training provider, nature and type of course – provide reasons for these views
7. VIEWS ON REFERRAL TO TRAINING

- Explore overall views/reaction to the idea of attending a BS training course – positive/negative views on this – reason for these views:
  - Explore any concerns or problems identified – reasons for these concerns
  - Explore whether expressed concerns or resistance to adviser regarding attending training – explore details of discussion with adviser

- Explore any information provided by the adviser at this stage – verbal or written:
  - Explore how the adviser responded to concerns/resistance to attend training
  - Explore any verbal or written enticement or threats utilised by the adviser to encourage the client to attend training – probe: benefits of attending training on BS and employability; incentives; mandatory aspect of training/sanction; other

**Explore in detail:**

**Use of financial incentives**

*Note to researcher: incentives set at additional £10 per for mainstream and £15.38p for ND. £100 bonus on acquiring a Level 1 or Entry Level 3 qualification.*

- Explore awareness of financial incentives to attend training; explore whether informed about this by adviser
- Explore knowledge of details of the incentives; what incentive system entails – provide details
- Explore whether client received an incentive – probe: what received; how received; who received from
- Explore views on overall incentive package – payment level, eligibility; process of making payment to client *(if not familiar with incentive, explore hypothetical views on incentives)*
- Explore impact of the incentive on attending training; what difference does having an incentive package make to the client – explore any positive/negative differences:
  - How effective is it as an incentive to attend training/engage in programme – any problems identified:
    - How effective is it as an incentive to remain on training?
    - Any problems with the current incentive package – explore
Threat of sanctions

- Explore awareness of mandatory aspect of training/possibility of sanctions:
  - Explore when and how mandatory aspect of training was communicated to
    the clients - provide examples of how communicated – **probe:** verbal and
    written communication (mandatory referral letter)

**Probe:**

- **Explore mandatory referral letter**

*Note to researcher: show copy of letter to client, to refresh clients’ memory
  if recall is low.*

- Explore awareness of the mandatory referral letter – **probe:** how was the
  letter issued to the client; how was the letter explained; explore whether adviser
  read through the letter during the interview
- Explore what the client understood from the letter; explore whether it clearly
  explained the mandatory aspect of training
- Explore impact of the letter on attending training; what difference does it
  make to the client – explore any positive/negative differences.
- How effective is it as an encouragement to attend training/engage in
  programme – any problems identified:
  - How effective is it as an encouragement to **remain** on training?
  - Explore any other types of communication that are more perceived to be
    more effective/threatening – **prompt:** verbal communication

- **Explore verbal communication**

  - In addition to mandatory referral letter, explore any other ways mandatory
    aspect of training was communicated – explore approach adopted; reasons
    for this:
    - Explore effectiveness of this; reasons for effectiveness
  - Explore what information clients were given about the sanctions policy –
    **prompt:** numbers of weeks sanctioned for; process of implementing sanctions:
    - Explore effectiveness of this; reasons for effectiveness
  - Explore views on how effectively mandatory element of training/sanctions were
    being communicated overall:
    - Did clients have clear understanding of what the sanctions policy entailed;
      reasons for this; how they could incur sanctions; how it will impact on them?
    - Explore any aspects of the policy clients did not understand; any additional
      information they would have liked at this stage
8. OUTCOME OF REFERRAL TO TRAINING

- Explore outcome of referral to training; explore whether client agreed to undertake training or not – reasons for this decision
- Explore whether anything impacted on this decision
  
  **Probe:**
  
  - Mandatory aspect of training/possibility of sanctions
  - Information provided by the adviser – verbal or written information (mandatory referral letter) – provide details
  - Desire to improve BS – provide details
  - Other

- Explore whether client would have attended if the IA was not mandatory – reasons for this

**Outcome of not attending training**

- **If did not undertake training provision:** recap on main reasons for this and explore outcome/consequence of this in detail:

  **Probe:**

  **Referred to DMA:**

  - Outline experience/process of referral to DMA:
    
    - Outline communication regarding referral to DMA with adviser and any contact with DMA staff; what information did they receive?
  
  - Explore whether sanction was allowed or disallowed; outline details – **probe:** how heard about sanction outcome; reasons given for outcome; how well understood information
  
  - Whether received sanction; details of sanction received; how well understood the nature of the sanction/consequence of this
  
  - Explore experiences following the sanctioned period; what did they client do following the sanction – **probe:** comply, live with sanction, sign off, secure employment; whether hardship allowance received; other

  - Impact of the sanction of client and family – provide examples

  **Signed off benefit:**

  - Explore key reasons for signing off benefit:
    
    - Explore advisers’ reaction to this; any information advice provided
• Explore experience following signing off:
  – What did they do when they signed off benefit – **probe:** secure employment; make new claim (change benefits); other?
  – Explore how managed financially once signed off
• Explore impact of signing off benefit for client and family

**Changed benefit:**
• Outline changes made:
  – What benefit changed from and to (whether moved onto IB/IS)
  – Explore reason for making this change
  – Explore process for making this change; outline discussion with adviser

9. **TRAINING PROVISION**

• **Spontaneously** explore clients’ experiences of attending BS training provision

  Explore:
  – Type and nature of course – **probe:** whether SIBS, BET, FTET
  – Detail of course content; what does course entail on day to day basis – **probe:** BS activities, job search activities; work experience, other
  – Length of course; number of hours per week
  – Number of people on course
  – Expected/desired outcome of course – **probe:** improving BS, gaining qualifications, securing employment; attending subsequent training, personal benefits; other

• If course ended/completed:
  – Length of stay on course; explore whether completed course or left prematurely – reasons for this:
    ~ Explore consequence of premature departure; explore whether sanctioned; detail experience of this; how long sanction for; experiences following sanction
  – Outcome of course; what did they gain from training – **probe:** improving BS, gaining qualifications, securing employment; attending subsequent training, returning to jobcentre, personal benefits; other:
    ~ Explore reasons for these outcomes; how far was course responsible for these impacts – provide examples

• Explore clients’ views of the training experience – positive/negative aspects of training; what worked well, what worked less well
• How effective was the course at improving BS – explore reasons why it improved or did not improve BS – **probe:** content of course; quality of provision; attitude/behaviour of respondent or other clients; other?

• Explore impact of mandation; did fact mandated onto training course impact on the client’s experience

  **Probe:**
  – Whether impacted on attitude towards training
  – Whether impacted on behaviour during training
  – Whether impacted on the outcome
  – Any other impacts

10. **PRINCIPLE OF BASIC SKILLS SANCTIONS PILOT AND NATIONAL PROGRAMME**

• Explore clients’ views on the principle of Basic Skills National enhancements

• In principle what are their views on: FT screening tool; IA; Incentives:
  – Explore **positive/negative benefits** these enhancements
  – Explore perceived impact of these on clients – reasons for this

• Explore clients’ views on the compulsory element of: FT and IA (NB – Fast Track element of the process is NOT mandatory. BUT ALL screened at six months):
  – Explore any problems identified with this for client or adviser – **probe:** administration etc.
  – Explore any benefits identified/to come out of this

• Explore perceived impact of this on clients – reasons for this

• Explore clients’ views on the principle of sanctioning clients to attend training:
  – Explore **positive/negative benefits** of introducing sanctions
  – Explore perceive impact of this on clients – reasons for this

• Explore clients’ views on principle of sanctioning for non-attendance at skills training – positive/negative (should all customers treated in same way) – explore reasons for this
11. SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

Note to researcher: Draw on any problems highlighted throughout and explore suggestions for improvement

Probe on improvements to:

– Communication of programme to client – probe: Initial communication, communication of FT, IA, training, incentives, sanctions:
  ~ Any additional information they would like to have received – reasons for this; how would have benefited the client
– Fast Track screening tool
– Referral to IA
– IA; how IA organised; assessment paper
– Referral to provision
– Training provision
– Incentives
– Sanctions - probe: how would they make the process fairer

• Explore views on anything additionally that clients believe would encourage them to attend training aside from incentives and sanctions

THANK YOU AND CLOSE
Key aims:

- To explore providers’ experiences, views, attitudes and perceptions of operating Basic Skills courses.

- More specifically it aims to explore:
  - Providers experiences of delivering Basic Skills training, particularly any changes occurring as a result of the pilot.
  - Providers’ views on the Basic Skills courses they deliver.
  - The impact of the Basic Skills pilot on clients and providers, particularly the mandatory element of the basic skills pilot.

1. INTRODUCTION

- About BMRB and PSI
- Aims of the research – commissioned by DWP
- Stages of the research – Advisers, clients and providers
- Length of interview – one hour
- Introduce tape recorder
- Confidentiality

2. BACKGROUND – briefly

- Explore the local/catchment area – rural/urban, socio-economic characteristics, local labour market
- Explore providers operating in the local area – probe: number of providers, type of service/training offered
3. THE TRAINING PROVIDER ORGANISATION

- Describe the training provider organisation

**Probe:**

- Type of organisation:
  ~ Who organisation run by; type of company
  ~ How organisation funded (in addition to Jobcentre Plus contracts)
- What types of courses the organisation delivers—briefly outline courses:
  ~ What the courses entail; how long run for; purpose/aim of course/s
- Length of time established
- What qualifications do the tutors hold—**probe:** whether hold a Level 4 skills for life teaching qualification; or other
- Explore the provider’s relationship with jobcentre:
  ~ Types of courses run for jobcentre/or those taking jobcentre clients
  ~ Number of courses run for jobcentre/or those taking jobcentre clients—how many contracts and what are they contracted to deliver
  ~ Length of time run course/s for jobcentre clients/or taken jobcentre clients
  ~ Whether received an ALI inspection; explore results of this:
    - Explore whether undertaking any improvement activities

4. OPERATING BASIC SKILLS TRAINING PROVISION

- Outline in detail the Basic Skills courses delivered

**Explore:**

- The type of BS courses operated by the training provider:
  ~ Number of BS course operating
- The nature of the Jobcentre Plus courses run by provider—**probe:** whether SIBS/BET/FTET:
  ~ Aim/purpose of courses
  ~ Contents of courses; what do they involve on a daily basis—**probe:** specific BS focused activities, job search, work experience or other activities:
    ~ Time/focus on BS activities compared to others
  ~ Explore how courses differ (if operating more than one BS course)
Clients attending Basic skills courses

- Provide details/characteristics of clients attending BS training – **prompt:** age, gender, ethnicity, disability, employment history, current employment status
- Number of clients on course/s; how many per course:
  - Explore views on number of clients on course – **probe:** whether right number of clients on course/s; explore optimum number
- Explore the course entry process:
  - Describe referral process; where do clients come from
  - Do clients enter on a roll on roll off system or do they have set start dates?
  - Explore reasons why providers believe clients attend courses – **probe:** want to improve their BS; want to increase employment opportunities; want to secure employment; because they were mandated; other
  - Explore clients’ attitudes to attending BS; whether willing participation or not
- How long do clients remain on course; how does this vary:
  - Intended course duration v actual time
  - Explore reasons for early leavers; what happens to clients who leave early
- Explore whether any experience of clients returning/repeating BS training; reason for this
- Outline any targets set by jobcentre for BS training; briefly explore how feedback to jobcentre

**Note to researcher:** there are standard contracts used by JC+ for BET courses providers are paid 70 per cent for the programme, 20 per cent for a job outcome and 10 per cent for a qualification. For SIBS courses providers are paid 70 per cent for a programme and 30 per cent for a qualification.

Changes to BS courses since implementation of Basic Skills pilot

- Explore any changes to delivery of BS courses as result of introduction of BS pilot April 2004

  **Probe any changes to:**
  - Contracts with jobcentre
  - Number of BS courses operating; number of BS tutors
  - Nature/content of courses – any impact on amount of time spent on BS activities v other activities
  - Aim/purpose of course
  - Volume of clients; flows of clients onto courses – explore details and provide examples; reasons for this
– Outcomes goals or intentions – **probe:** focus on gaining qualifications; securing employment; improving BS levels

5. **VIEWS ON DELIVERING TRAINING**

• Explore providers’ views of BS courses delivered by organisation; what works well and what works less well; any good practices or problems identified – provide examples

**Probe:**

– Content of course; activities undertaken (BS activities v job search, work experience and other)

– Length of course – (8 v 26 weeks):
  ~ Explore whether 8 weeks is sufficient time to allow someone assessed at entry 3 to achieve Level 1
  ~ Explore whether 26 weeks is sufficient time to allow someone to gain an Entry Level 3 qualification

– Types of clients on course; attitude of clients on course – **probe:** strategies to manage clients who were mandated to course; those who did not want to attend; those who behave badly:
  ~ What impact does this have on organisation or other clients
  ~ Engaging these clients in activities
  ~ Explore any good practices/difficulties maintaining these clients on the course
  ~ Explore whether mandatory basic skills provision encourages customers to address their basic skills needs; explore reasons for these views

– Number/flow of clients – **probe:** capacity of organisation to manage delivery; explore any changes since BS pilot

– Availability of BS tutors – **probe:** any changes since BS pilot

– Achieving intended outcomes – **probe:** gaining qualifications; improving BS

6. **IMPACT OF BS PILOT ON CLIENTS**

• Spontaneously explore the impact of BS pilot on clients – positive/negative impacts

**Probe:**

• **Improving Basic Skills**

  – Explore degree to which BS are improved among clients – provide examples:
    ~ Explore variations by client or course; reasons for these
    ~ Explore views on how far mandatory aspect of programme impacts on this improvement of BS and ESOL needs

  – How are BS improved; how do the courses achieve this?
– How do these improvement impact on clients; knock on effect of BS?

**Probe:**

~ Personal benefit (self-confidence, motivation)
~ Increased employment opportunities
~ Facilitates engagement in other vocational courses or training
~ Other

– Explore any detrimental impacts of BS training on skills

• **Gaining qualifications:** how these have changed since BS pilot:

  – What qualifications do/can client take on BS courses?
  
  – Clients’ success in obtaining qualifications – **probe:** approximate per cent of clients who gain a qualification; provide details of qualifications undertaken/achieved
  
  – Explore any barriers to obtaining qualifications – **probe:** barriers from clients, provider, other

• **Securing employment:**

  – Explore any experiences of clients gaining employment as a direct or indirect result of the course

**Probe:**

~ **Explore whether the achievement of a BS qualification improves the clients’ employability**

~ **Explore whether their is correlation between obtaining a qualification and finding work; explore reasons for this; provide examples**

  – Explore types of employment secured; nature of employment – **probe:** part time v full time; temporary v permanent; secure v insecure

  – Explore reasons for securing employment; whether facilitated by providers – provide examples:

    ~ Whether employment secured during or following course; at what stage of course

    ~ Possibly impact of ending course early; detrimental impact on Basic Skills

  – Explore any barriers to finding employment – **probe:** barriers from clients, provider, other:

    ~ Does attendance on BS courses have any detrimental impact on securing employment?
• **Attending training courses**
  – Explore any experiences of BS courses facilitating engagement in other vocational training:
    ~ Reasons for this – **probe:** provides relevant/necessary skills; increased motivation; organised/encouraged/informed by training provider; other

• **Personal benefits**
  - Impact on personal circumstances – **probe:** impact on client attitude, behaviour; confidence, motivation, other:
    ~ Explore reasons for this; how provision facilitated this
  - Explore whether BS training has any detrimental impact on personal circumstances; reasons for this – provide examples

**THANK YOU AND CLOSE**