Work Focused Interviews for Partners and Enhanced New Deal for Partners: Qualitative evaluation, Phase One

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A report of research carried out by Insite Research and Consulting on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions
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## Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADF</td>
<td>Adviser Discretionary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEA</td>
<td>Disability Employment Adviser</td>
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<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
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<td>FTA</td>
<td>Failure to attend</td>
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<td>IB</td>
<td>Incapacity Benefit</td>
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<td>IS</td>
<td>Income Support</td>
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<td>IWBC</td>
<td>In Work Benefit Calculation</td>
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<td>JET</td>
<td>Job Entry Target</td>
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<td>JSA</td>
<td>Jobseeker’s Allowance</td>
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<tr>
<td>LMS</td>
<td>Labour Market System</td>
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<tr>
<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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<td>NDPU</td>
<td>New Deal for Partners of Unemployed People</td>
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<tr>
<td>NVQ</td>
<td>National Vocational Qualification</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDA</td>
<td>Severe Disablement Allowance</td>
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<td>WBLA</td>
<td>Work Based Learning for Adults</td>
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<td>WFI</td>
<td>Work Focused Interview</td>
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<td>Work Focused Interview for Partners</td>
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Summary

Work Focused Interviews for Partners (WFIPs) and the enhanced New Deal for Partners (NDP) were introduced in April 2004, requiring partners of working age benefit claimants to attend a mandatory meeting (a WFIP) with an adviser to discuss their work options. NDP is a voluntary programme involving assistance with job search, access to training and information about in-work benefits and Tax Credits. WFIPs and NDP form part of the policy to extend Jobcentre Plus services to all customers, bringing support and provision for partners into line with other groups, such as lone parents.

In April 2004, the Department for Work and Pensions commissioned Insite Research and Consulting to conduct a qualitative evaluation of WFIPs and NDP. The aim of the research was to examine how the policies have been implemented, explore the characteristics of the partner customer group, establish for whom the policies are most and least effective and why, and explore the outcomes and impacts of the initiatives on Jobcentre Plus staff and customers. This report presents findings from the first phase of qualitative research.

Work Focused Interviews for Partners (WFIPs)

WFIPs are triggered at the 26-week point in a new claim, in ‘flow’ cases. For those who had been claiming for longer than this by April 2004 (the ‘stock’ cases), Jobcentre Plus were given up to three years to arrange the process.

Technical problems were experienced early into the initiative and some offices received large volumes of calls from customers worried about being forced into work or having their benefits stopped.

Most partners were untroubled by the WFIP appointment letter and the requirement to attend. Flow partners in particular mostly accepted that it was part of benefit processing, although some negative reaction was generated among carers of benefit claimants and partners already working part-time.
Although the appointment letter mentioned the opportunity to attend as a couple (benefit claimant and partner), this often seemed to have been overlooked or misunderstood. Couples who had attended jointly found it to have been useful.

Reactions to the WFIP were mixed. Most partners found advisers to be friendly and helpful, providing useful information. Dissatisfied customers included those who believed their caring responsibilities precluded them going out to work.

Advisers reported that partners attending WFIPs were an extremely diverse and heterogeneous group. They were perceived as having complex needs and barriers to overcome, usually involving both in the couple. Household factors tying partners to claimants were seen as multiplying problems and constraints. Partners’ decisions about work were tied up with the effects on benefits and were affected by the potential impact on the couple and household. Many advisers were unfamiliar with these aspects of work with partners and found them a difficult group to help. Some advisers also felt more confident about dealing with partners of Jobseeker’s Allowance claimants compared to partners of Income Support or Incapacity Benefit claimants as they felt most similar to the customers they were used to dealing with.

In September 2004, a policy directive reduced interview time from one hour to forty-five minutes. Districts further reduced this to thirty minutes, leading to an inability to conduct In Work Benefit Calculations (IWBCs) at initial WFIPs, which were, therefore, generally happening only if a partner would return for an NDP meeting.

Examples of good practice included: contact with claimants prior to issuing letters to prepare them for WFIPs; courtesy calling partners prior to WFIPs, and; using joint follow up interviews to maximise the value of conducting IWBCs.

WFIPs attended by both the partner and the main claimant were common. Some couples found them very useful, but advisers did not believe that they provided better sessions than single interviews. However, fully addressing the situations of the couple was seen as crucial for many customers in determining the success of WFIPs.

Joint WFIPs appeared to successfully stimulate discussion about work options and there was some movement closer to the labour market among both partners and claimants. The main criticism was of inappropriateness due to circumstances in the home perceived as making work impossible. There was a high demand for flexible, short training courses as a ‘first step’ towards work among partners considering changing their situations.

There were some limited job entries following WFIPs although how far the WFIP had contributed to these outcomes was unclear. In some cases, the impact had been on the claimant rather than the partner – with several moves into work being attributed to the information received directly or indirectly from the WFIP.
Enhanced New Deal for Partners (NDP)

Enhancing the labour market capital of some individuals rather than addressing or overcoming structural and domestic barriers, is what NDP appears to have been doing best, along with facilitating and accelerating moves into employment by those who were already decided and job ready.

However, enhanced NDP was seen by advisers as offering more to partners than the previous New Deal, but still not enough to overcome the issues to be addressed or to attract them into the programme.

NDP was a low priority within Jobcentre Plus offices due to the small numbers of partners participating and the perception that time spent with these customers is ‘unproductive’ compared to other groups. Some staff suggested that eight job entry points towards individual performance targets for a partner were not a sufficient reflection of the time and effort to secure it.

Very few partners had self-referred onto NDP and most of these had minimal contact (often to have an IWBC and discuss options) before leaving. Advisers believed that self-referrals tended to be more job ready and more convinced of the rationale to work than those who entered NDP via WFIPs. Those entering NDP via WFIPs tended to stay longer on the adviser caseload than those who self-referred (with the exception of those on the self-employed route) but even then many appeared to have minimal contact before leaving.

Reasons for joining NDP were predominantly to have an IWBC, to get help with job search and to seek training. Constraints on partners’ time meant that many were seeking part-time work and short, flexible hours training courses.

Many partners accessing NDP appeared to be job ready and some had already secured a job. Many advisers were operating an ‘inactive’ case load system to keep in touch with partners who were interested in working, but not yet.

Most partners expressed positive views of NDP, particularly those seeking help with self-confidence, skills and qualifications, and those essentially job ready with no major barriers to working. Negative views of NDP were expressed by those with caring responsibilities and by partners with no dependent children or very young children, and by those seeking part-time work.

Key factors contributing to successful job outcomes included: active support from the claimant; a favourable IWBC; effective planning; and good discussion of work options within couples. The self-employment support package was well received and appeared to be particularly suited to the needs of partners, addressing both individual aspirations and helping overcome many complexities partners faced.
Partners who had left NDP gave the following range of reasons: employment; an unfavourable IWBC; insurmountable barriers; an inability to cope with the demands of training or work placements; deteriorating health (of the partner or claimant); disruptions in support caused by changes in eligibility; and, inability to secure a job after training.

Financial issues dominated partners’ priorities in considering employment options. IWBCs were critical to decision making and played a major role in moves into employment. However, they were complex and difficult to carry out, allowing room for possible errors and for results to be undermined by factors beyond advisers’ control, such as changes in claimants’ health conditions. Advisers reported that for partners without dependent children, it was difficult to demonstrate the benefits of work, due to eligibility rules of Tax and Childcare Credits, and that in these cases the results of IWBCs were often unfavourable.

An inherent instability characterised the circumstances in which most partners lived and worked, enhancing fears of leaving benefits and adding to the risks of moving into employment.

The major domestic and relationship barriers, which in many ways define the customer group, were generally not being successfully addressed.
1 Introduction

1.1 Work Focused Interviews for Partners and Enhanced New Deal for Partners

1.1.1 Work Focused Interviews for Partners

In April 2004, mandatory Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) were introduced for the non working, non claiming partners of benefit claimants claiming either income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), Income Support (IS), Incapacity Benefit (IB), Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) or, in some instances, Carer’s Allowance. From this date, if the main benefit claim lasts for twenty-six weeks, anyone being claimed for as a dependent partner is required to attend a mandatory interview with an adviser to discuss possible options for entering employment or moving closer to the labour market. The WFIP initiative closely mirrors the requirements placed on Jobcentre Plus claimants to attend a WFI, with a system of deferrals and waivers in place to protect partners for whom work is not a viable option.

Work Focused Interviews for Partners (WFIPs) are also intended to provide partners of benefit claimants with information on the support that can be given to them via the New Deal for Partners (NDP). NDP includes assistance with job search, access to training and information about in-work benefits and Tax Credits. The NDP programme was enhanced and introduced nationwide at the same time WFIPs were introduced in April 2004. The WFIP initiative was designed as a new route onto NDP to boost participation. However, the option remains to self-refer onto the NDP programme at any time.

The WFIP initiative was introduced in all integrated Jobcentre Plus offices in England, Wales and Scotland\(^1\). It is complemented by NDP which is available nationwide.

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\(^1\) As further areas convert to Jobcentre Plus integrated offices, dependent partners in these areas are called in. The completion of the Jobcentre Plus network is scheduled for 2006.
WFIPs are triggered at the 26-week point in a benefit claim. The partners of benefit claimants for whom this trigger point in the claim is reached after April 2004, are referred to as ‘flow’ cases. The partners of claimants whose claims had already been in existence for more than 26 weeks by April 2004 comprise a body of cases referred to as ‘stock’. Jobcentre Plus offices have been given discretion to process stock cases within the first three years of the WFIP initiative.

In May 2005, among dependent partners identified for a WFIP, the breakdown of benefits being claimed by the main claimant was as follows:

- among stock customers, 13 per cent were claiming JSA, 75 per cent were claiming IS and 12 per cent were claiming IB only
- among flow customers, 48 per cent were claiming JSA, 42 per cent were claiming IS and 9 per cent were claiming IB only

There were no stock or flow customers claiming SDA.

1.1.2 New Deal for Partners

The launch of WFIPs in April 2004 was complemented by the enhanced NDP programme. The introduced NDP is available to the same intended client group for WFIPs and participation is voluntary. In addition to assistance with job search and information about Tax Credits and in-work benefits, NDP includes access to:

- the Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF)
- a training allowance for participants of approved training
- the same training and support as available under the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) – that is Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA), contracted occupational provision up to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2, and ‘bespoke’ provision subject to a business case being made by an adviser and accepted
- the New Deal self-employment and test trading option
- a childcare subsidy for partners taking up work of less than 16 hours per week.

A voluntary New Deal programme for the partners of JSA claimants, called New Deal for Partners of Unemployed People (NDPU), had been in existence since April 1999. NDPU was actively promoted and marketed up until 2001. However, take up was low. In 2001, the programme was renamed as New Deal for Partners and extended beyond the partners of JSA claimants to the non-working dependent partners of claimants of IS, IB, SDA and Carers Allowance. The promotion of NDP was scaled back from April 2002. It remained available for partners who put themselves forward, but was no longer actively marketed.

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2 Approximately 80 per cent of IS claimants are also in receipt of IB

3 The only exception is that NDP is available to partners of people claiming Carers Allowance (previously Invalid Care Allowance) whereas WFIPs only apply to Carers Allowance if it is paid with one of the other benefits.
Some partners of JSA customers without dependent children were already included within the remit of Joint Claims. Joint Claims is a parallel initiative, which currently applies to couple claimants born after 1957 who have no dependent children living in the household. Joint Claims is a separate initiative from WFIPs and subject to separate evaluation. JSA claimants whose partners are included in the WFIP initiative are those couples who have dependent children, and couples where the main claimant was born before 1957.

A major policy interest lies in the fact that a large proportion of the children currently living in poverty in the UK are in workless households where income is provided by benefits (JSA, IS and IB). The partners in these households are now eligible for mandatory WFIPs and for voluntary support under NDP. Thus the policies are intended to reduce the number of children living in workless households.

1.2 Evaluation of WFIP and NDP

In April 2004, The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned Insite Research & Consulting to conduct a qualitative evaluation of WFIPs and NDP. The qualitative research is one of a number of strands of research within a national evaluation programme, which includes qualitative and quantitative elements. The aim is to give a comprehensive picture of the impacts of WFIP and NDP and how the policies are working in practice.

The full programme of evaluation research comprises the following elements:

- a quantitative strand incorporating a client survey (sample size 3,000) and impact analysis of WFIP/NDP administrative data
- a qualitative strand incorporating interviews with WFIP and NDP participants and their (claimant) partners and interviews with delivery staff (advisers, administrative staff and managers) conducted over two phases to include a longitudinal perspective
- a series of case studies
- a programme cost benefit analysis

This report presents the findings from the first of two phases of qualitative research. It covers initial issues from the early months of implementing WFIPs and the re-launched NDP programme, their administration and delivery, the perceptions of advisers, the reception by the customer group, and immediate outcomes and impacts. WFIP interviews were undertaken between August and October 2004 and NDP fieldwork between December 2004 and February 2005. The research was thus carried out at an relatively early stage in the initiative and represents early findings.

The second phase of the research will take place in Autumn 2005 to Spring 2006. It will provide a follow-up to the issues raised here, and a longitudinal perspective on impacts and outcomes 12–18 months into the initiative.
1.2.1 Evaluation context

The research was designed to address the paucity of evidence that exists relating specifically to workless couples (see Hasluck and Green, 2005 in References) and to extend knowledge about the circumstances and motivations of the partners of benefit claimants (Arrowsmith, 2004). It aimed to assess the effectiveness of WFIPs and to explore participation on the enhanced NDP programme to establish how well interventions with partners are working and for what reasons.

The research follows qualitative evaluations of the NDPU programme (Griffiths and Thomas 2001) and of the previous NDP programme (Thomas and Saunders, 2002) and numerous evaluations of related initiatives for benefit claimants of working age such as Joint Claims for JSA (see References).

1.3 Policy context

1.3.1 Policy background

The introduction of WFIPs and NDP in April 2004 formed part of the policy intent to extend Jobcentre Plus services on an equal basis to all customer groups of working age. It followed the success of the NDLP and WFIs for lone parents over the previous three years and brought support and provision for dependent partners of benefit claimants more into line with other groups. In particular, it aligned NDP more closely with NDLP.

1.3.2 Policy objectives

The high-level policy objectives for WFIPs and NDP are to:

- reduce the number of workless households
- encourage partners in workless households to achieve a successful and sustainable entry into employment
- help progression to better and/or full-time work for partners already working part-time
- create the conditions for those who are not immediately job ready to make or regain contact with the labour market by assisting them to acquire the skills, confidence and social stability to increase their employment opportunities and to compete effectively in the labour market
- give partners parity with other benefit claimants in accessing Jobcentre Plus programmes
- reduce child poverty.
Operational objectives include:

- extending DWP services and labour-market opportunities to clients who have traditionally been excluded from such sources of assistance, and so make partners aware of the services they can access now and in the future
- providing the opportunity to increase the hours that partners work, their earnings and the general standards of living in households
- making the most effective use of public money, in terms of encouraging partners to move into work
- improving partners’ confidence, sense of wellbeing, self-esteem and attitudes towards work
- increasing the numbers both seeking and moving onto DWP programmes
- improving awareness and knowledge of benefits and routes into DWP programmes, training and work, and any other issues and information important to the client group in helping them to return to and sustain work
- improving the motivation, work skills, experience, qualifications and job-search skills of partners.

1.4 Research aims and objectives

The primary aim of the evaluation is to find out whether WFIPs and NDP are meeting their policy objectives. Stage one of this research (conducted only six months into WFIP roll out and ten months into enhanced NDP roll out) will combine with stage two (to be conducted after 18 months of operation) to explore these further, together with further analysis of outcomes. The qualitative aspect of the research contributes to this aim through information gathering and analysis in four key areas. These are as follows:

- identifying the characteristics of the partners customer group, and their household circumstances, to understand how best they might be approached and supported
- exploring how advisers are delivering WFIPs and NDP and how that delivery might be improved through the identification and dissemination of good practice
- exploring the content and effectiveness of NDP meetings and the range of support and activities covered
- tracking the outcomes and assessing the impact of WFIPs and NDP on participating partners, on claimants in couples, and on the staff who are delivering the interviews.
1.4.1 WFIP research aims
Within these broad aims, the specific objectives of the WFIP element of the research are to:

- provide descriptive analysis of the personal and household characteristics of couples covered by the WFIP initiative, including their:
  - employment histories
  - household circumstances
  - attitudes to working
  - perceived barriers to work
  - attitudes towards Jobcentre Plus and WFIPs
  - experience of support from Jobcentre Plus
- establish for whom WFIPs are most and least effective, and why
- assess the degree to which WFIPs are able to affect attitudes to work as an alternative to living on benefits, distance from the labour market and awareness of Jobcentre Plus and other relevant services
- assess whether WFIPs encourage partners to join NDP and, if so, which partners, why and under what circumstances
- assess the effectiveness of different elements of the WFIP delivery process and identify lessons for improvement in terms of:
  - initial contact
  - timing and frequency
  - deferral, waiver and sanctioning processes
  - the content of interviews
  - whether interviews are conducted jointly or singly
- explore the views of customers and Jobcentre Plus staff on the principle of mandatory WFIPs for this client group.

1.4.2 NDP research aims
The specific objectives of the NDP element of the research are to:

- describe the characteristics of the NDP client group and the reasons for participation
- investigate staff experiences of and attitudes towards the NDP client group, NDP and the NDP process
- examine the content and timing of NDP and how the NDP process works in practice, identifying good practice and any areas for improvement
explore the effectiveness of the different components of NDP and the extent to which they contribute towards successful outcomes

identify partners’ and claimants’ barriers and attitudes to work and assess the impact of NDP on these

explore the views of partners and claimants about NDP and the NDP process and their perceptions of the most useful elements

explore the outcomes of NDP and the reasons for NDP exits and establish for whom NDP is most and least effective, and why.

1.5 Research methodology

The qualitative evaluation of the WFIP and re-launched NDP involves two phases of fieldwork approximately 12 months apart. Each phase comprises two elements: research which addresses the WFIP initiative; and research focused on the NDP programme. This report presents integrated findings from the first phase of research across WFIP and NDP elements.

Phase one involved a total of 120 individual, in-depth face-to-face interviews with WFIP and NDP participants and their (main claimant) partners (60 interviews with 30 couples for each of the WFIP and NDP elements); and 76 interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff and managers. Fieldwork for both aspects of the research took place in the same five Jobcentre Plus districts.

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed prior to analysis based on emerging themes and issues related to the research questions.

1.5.1 WFIP research

For the WFIP element of the research, fieldwork was carried out in five Jobcentre Plus districts: one each in Wales and Scotland, one in London and two in other regions of England.

In depth, face-to-face interviews were carried out with staff involved in the management and delivery of WFIPs, and with WFIP customers and the related main claimant customers.

**Jobcentre Plus staff interviews**

A total of 41 interviews were carried out with Jobcentre Plus staff involved in WFIP delivery. In each district, interviews with the following staff were undertaken at Jobcentre Plus offices:

- a Business Manager/Site Manager
- the WFIP Administration Team Leader
- a member of the administration team
WFIP customer interviews

In depth, face-to-face interviews were also conducted across the five Jobcentre Plus districts with 30 couples in which the partner had participated in a mandatory WFIP. Customer interviews took place at the partners’ homes. In each case, the benefit recipient who was claiming for the dependent partner was also interviewed. Interviews were carried out simultaneously, but separately, in different rooms in the home. By interviewing both people in the couple it was judged that better exploration could be made of the different aspects of decision-making processes, strategic thinking about employment possibilities, and the practicalities of responsibilities such as childcare.

‘Paired’ customers were purposively sampled for interview to ensure the inclusion of a number of defining variable characteristics, as follows:

- the type of benefit being claimed by the claimant (nine JSA claimants; 12 IS claimants; nine IB claimants)
- the status of the benefit claim in terms of whether it constituted a WFIP ‘stock’ case or a ‘flow’ case in relation to the start date of the initiative (16 stock claimants; 14 flow claimants)
- the presence or absence in the household of any dependent children (20 couples with dependent children; ten without dependent children)
- the gender of the partner (22 female partners; eight male partners).

1.5.2 NDP research

For the NDP element of the research, fieldwork was carried out in the same five Jobcentre Plus districts. In depth, face-to-face interviews were carried out with staff involved in the management and delivery of NDP, and with participating NDP customers and the related main claimant customers.

Jobcentre Plus staff interviews

A total of 35 interviews were carried out with Jobcentre Plus staff involved in NDP delivery. In each district, interviews with the following staff were undertaken at Jobcentre Plus offices:

- a Business Manager
- where relevant, an Adviser Manager/Senior Adviser or New Deal Co-ordinator
- Personal Advisers delivering NDP.

Due to low numbers of NDP take up, in some areas, this involved re-interviewing the same advisers who were interviewed for the WFIP element of the research.
Adviser interviews included discussion of specific (anonymised) cases of customers who had joined NDP from April 2004 onwards. A total of 62 customer cases were covered across the five districts.

**NDP customer interviews**

In depth, face-to-face interviews were also conducted across the same five districts with 30 couples in which the partner had participated in NDP. ‘Paired’ NDP customers were purposively sampled for interview to ensure the inclusion of key variables as follows:

- the route onto NDP – whether the partner was recorded as being referred via a WFIP (17) or as self-referred (13)
- benefit claimed by the benefit recipient – JSA (ten), IS (15) or IB only (five)
- whether NDP participation resulted in a job entry (ten)
- presence (22) or absence (eight) of dependent children
- gender of partner: female (22) and male (eight).

**1.5.3 Timescales**

The WFIP fieldwork took place between August and October 2004 while the NDP fieldwork with Jobcentre Plus staff and NDP participant couples took place between December 2004 and February 2005.

**1.6 Report structure**

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

Section two: Describes the main characteristics of the partners customer group

Section three: Explores the way in which WFIPs were being delivered six months into the initiative

Section four: Looks at the impact on partners of participating in WFIPs and at reported outcomes

Section five: Deals with the delivery of the enhanced NDP programme

Section six: Explores issues surrounding the transition from WFIPs to NDP and participation in New Deal by partners

Section seven: Looks at reported outcomes from NDP

Section eight: Summarises the combined findings and presents conclusions on the first phase of the evaluation.


2 Partner characteristics

**Summary of findings:**

- Partners of Income Support (IS) and Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants predominated among those called to Work Focused Interview for Partners (WFIPs) in the first six months and dominated advisers’ perceptions of the client group.

- Advisers were pessimistic about moving many partners into work although some viewed them as an interesting challenge – a lack of familiarity contributed to an ‘uncomfortableness’ among many advisers dealing with partners.

- Having care responsibilities for the claimant was identified as a key barrier – other constraining factors included financial concerns, childcare and skills needs.

- Most partners had previous work experience and many wished to work in the future but felt it to be unfeasible currently – very few had chosen not to work.

- Household and relationship issues exerted considerable influence over partners’ behaviour, but were frequently the most difficult for advisers to address.

- The dynamics of relationships between partners and claimants overlaid all other factors affecting decision making and work related behaviour - typical paradigms involved traditional gender role expectations, attempts to protect individuals’ self-esteem, and the need to maintain parity and balance within relationships and to ensure mutual support.

This chapter presents the views of advisers about the partner customer group – their circumstances, attitudes and concerns – as well as their perceived responsiveness to intervention and advisers’ expectations for achieving successful outcomes with them. The main characteristics of the customer group are described, based on the face-to-face interviews conducted with both partners and claimants, and the ways these were perceived to affect their attitudes to work. The particular complexities deriving from the couple and household contexts within which partners were operating are then discussed, and the ways that these can be major constraining factors on partners’ behaviour are described.
2.1 Adviser views of the partner customer group

The overall perception that most advisers had of partners as customers, and as possible job entrants, was predominantly negative. There was a majority view that a very high proportion of partners were either unable to consider work or simply not interested in considering it:

*I don’t think any of us are happy about [Work Focused Interviews for Partners (WFIPs)] because we find it a very negative client group.*

(Adviser)

Advisers’ expectations of partners were thus generally low:

*The majority of [partners] don’t want anything at present. But for every twenty you see you’ll get one that is interested…And we didn’t expect huge numbers.*

(Adviser)

Advisers reported few problems conducting WFIP interviews. However, they encountered initial resistance from some partners, which needed to be overcome at the start of the interview. Some advisers also perceived a tendency among partners of stock claimants to have settled into patterns of behaviour that were seen as difficult to change. ‘Stock’ partners greatly outnumbered ‘flow’ partners in the early months of the WFIP initiative in all districts:

*They’re the type of client group that are just set in their ways. Some of them have got genuine concerns about going back to work because they care for their partner [the claimant]…But they are a difficult group to crack.*

(Adviser)

Partners were also seen by advisers to be an extremely diverse and heterogeneous group, with a multitude of different possible characteristics and circumstances, which could all be determining factors in how best to deal with them. This diversity was felt to be reinforced by the range of possible benefit claims of which partners could form a part. These findings are consistent with those reported in Arrowsmith, J. A review of ‘What we know’ about partners of benefit recipients. Department for Work and Pensions research report W200, September 2004.

Unfamiliarity with the client group

Advisers’ views of partners were frequently affected by the types of customers and programmes they had hitherto dealt with. One consequence of this was that nearly all advisers were unfamiliar with some aspects of the work with partners, especially in the early months of the initiative; a factor which may have contributed to negative attitudes towards the client group. A number of advisers felt sufficiently unsure about aspects of IB claims and eligibility conditions to have asked for specific training in this area. One adviser admitted that initially she would not carry out an In Work Benefit Calculation (IWBC) for a partner of an IB claimant because she could not be
sure it would be correct (her previous experience as an adviser was almost exclusively with the lone parent client group, the vast majority of whom claim IS).

Similarly, several lone parent advisers negatively contrasted partners with lone parents in terms of their willingness to seek help and enter employment. However, advisers whose main experience was of the mandatory customers on New Deal 18-24 or New Deal 25 Plus often had a more positive view of the New Deal for Partners (NDP) because of the voluntary nature of customer participation.

Although also varying to an extent according to their backgrounds, many advisers expressed the expectation that within the partner client group it would be the partners of Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) claimants they would find it easiest to work with, and from whom they would be most likely to get job outcomes. Advisers partly expected this to be the case because JSA claimants were unlikely to have a disability or serious illness preventing them from working and thus there was less likelihood of their partner having to act as their carer and being unable to work as a result. It was also partly because JSA claimants’ partners were expected to more easily fit the familiar model for Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) of a single one-to-one interview with an individual.

A majority of the client group among stock claimant partners are partners of IB and IS claimants. It was these customers that dominated advisers’ perceptions of the group as a whole in the early months of the initiative. These partners were seen as having complex needs and as having to deal with difficult circumstances involving both people in the couple. However, advisers in one district were of the opinion that WFIPs were working best for partners of IB claimants because they tended to have had no prior contact (or very little) with Jobcentre Plus, and were therefore often unaware of the help available. The WFIP was thus seen as a particularly important vehicle for conveying such information. In particular, the financial impact that being in work might have on benefits was seen as a key area in which couples had little recent knowledge and needed good, up-to-date information5.

In Work Benefit Calculations

In addition to having a lack of familiarity with some of the benefits involved, many advisers also said that they expected a high proportion of partners to be likely to get a negative result from an IWBC. It was thought that for many partners the loss of benefit premiums would mean that many IWBCs would show that it was not worth considering returning to work unless it was full-time and at a relatively high level of pay.

5 During a WFIP, advisers can carry out an In Work Benefit Calculation to explore whether the household might be better off in work compared with staying on benefits, and if so by how much. As later reported, very few advisers were carrying out IWBCs during the WFIP.
...we’ve had a lot when we’ve done the calculation that they’re not any better off, they’re worse off. And if you look at the sort of benefit rate, particularly those who are getting the carer’s premium...well in a lot of cases...they were going to be a lot worse off by coming off benefit...

(Adviser)

Partners with caring responsibilities were felt to face particularly difficult barriers of cost and availability in relation to respite care, even if they were willing for someone else to take over some of their care burden, which many were not.

Within the whole client group, the household factors tying partners to claimants were seen to increase problems and constraints, with the result that partners were seen as not just a varied group, but an intrinsically complex one too. For some advisers this was a challenge to be relished, while for others it rendered the client group a frustrating and time-consuming prospect, with little chance of delivering any job outcomes. These different reactions appeared to be quite stark and clear-cut, and to be determining not only advisers’ perceptions of partners as customers, but also their whole approach to WFIP interviews. As one lone parent adviser explained, in relation to making further contact with customers who might by then be ready to think about working:

*With my lone parents, if somebody shows any interest I’ll say to them, “I’ll set a note to myself and I’ll contact you in a month’s time,” but with the partners I don’t because I really don’t think that I’m going to get anywhere…*

(Adviser)

In contrast, another adviser offered the following opinion:

*There’s very few people you can’t work with at all...you have to go into each one with an open mind. They might be full-time carers, but they might still want to work...you can’t make too many assumptions...There’s very little that can’t be overcome – I don’t dismiss anyone out of hand.*

(Adviser)

To a great extent, advisers appeared to be polarised around the opposing perspectives illustrated by these two examples, with each to an extent becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. Those sharing the former attitude to partners focused strongly on short-term job outcomes and making judgements about the amount of time and effort required with different customers to achieve these ends. Those sharing the latter viewpoint took a broader interpretation of their role, emphasising that with partners ‘you need time’ and generally need to focus on the medium to long-term, rather than immediate job entry:

*Anything that would mean they stay in contact with me, as far as I’m concerned, is an appropriate outcome, because you never know what is going to happen and how things could change...obviously the ultimate outcome is to get people back into work, but if that initial contact isn’t there, how are you going to do that?*

(Adviser)
Advisers taking this latter approach admitted to having had very few job outcomes to date (if any). But they pointed to numbers of partners on case loads, undertaking training and maintaining contact with their adviser as evidence that job outcomes were likely to be achieved further down the line.

2.2 Partner characteristics and circumstances

As found in previous work with the partner customers group, partners form a highly diverse and heterogeneous Jobcentre Plus customer group. By virtue of their indirect relationship to the main claim, they are perhaps less easy to categorise or generalise about than most customers. They are cited as a dependent partner, and can have dependent status under a number of different benefit regimes. Many of the partners interviewed had never had any previous dealings of their own with Jobcentre Plus, and were somewhat unwilling to see themselves as customers – they did not readily define themselves in this way.

2.2.1 Claimant benefit type

The main claimant’s type of benefit had some determining influence over the characteristics and likely circumstances of partners.

By definition, partners of JSA claimants (with the exception of older couples) had dependent children (otherwise they would be required to make a Joint Claim for JSA) Partly for this reason, and partly because of the job search requirements of claiming JSA they were also rather more likely to cite childcare as their main barrier to work than were the partners of other benefit claimants. They were also extremely unlikely to perceive themselves as having health problems or caring responsibilities other than childcare that limited their work options.

The partners of IB claimants were on average slightly older than other partners. This correlated with the fact that a much higher proportion of IB couples were ‘stock’ cases with longer-term claims. Directly related to this older age profile, the age of the youngest child (among those with dependent children) was greater than for other partners, at around ten years old as opposed to about five. Also partly related to age, but also to the incapacity-related reasons for the benefit recipient’s claim, these partners were much more likely than others to see the main restriction on their ability to work to be their caring responsibilities.

Partners of IS and IB claimants also to some extent reflected the nature of the main benefit recipients’ claims. IS cases included situations of disability and sickness alongside shortfalls in National Insurance contributions that would otherwise allow an IB claim to be made. For this reason, IS claimants were less likely to have extensive work histories than IB claimants, and could thus be considered more difficult to help. IS partners were the least likely to have entered work, and much less likely to have vocational or educational qualifications than were IB partners. The partners of IS and IB claimants also had the highest likelihood of suffering with physical and mental health problems of their own in addition to those of the benefit recipients.
2.2.2 Work experience and attitudes

Virtually all partners interviewed had worked at some time in the past, though for most their last experience of the workplace was several, or indeed many, years previously. Those who had never worked either had learning difficulties and/or basic skills needs, or were young parents with babies or toddlers.

Not only had the vast majority of partners worked in the past, but most also said that they would like to do so again. Only a few (all women) said that they definitely did not wish to work and had made the positive choice not to do so. In almost all these instances, the partner’s choice not to work was supported by the male benefit recipient. The exception was a claimant who felt guilty about the strain that caring for him was imposing on his wife. He expressed the wish for his wife to find some part-time work to help her to get out of the house.

Despite expressing their choice not to work, most partners who did so also cited multiple barriers they felt they would face if they were to seek a return to employment. These barriers included physical health difficulties, caring and childcare responsibilities and problems of lack of confidence. In this sense, their apparent choice not to work appeared, to some extent, to be a forced one.

A much more frequent response was for partners to say that they either chose not to work or were unable to work “for the moment”, but that they wished to work in the future. These future intentions typically depended on an improvement in their own or their claimant partner’s health, or the opportunity they hoped would be provided when their youngest child reached school age.

Many of the partners interviewed said that they wanted to work in the future and that they did not feel it was impossible for them to do so, given the right support and conditions. Despite the reservations expressed by certain partners, and the optimism of others given the difficulties they faced, this suggests that a degree of employment potential may exist among some within this customer group.

2.2.3 Partners’ barriers to working

Regardless of stated hopes and intentions, the partners customer group as a whole faced considerable difficulties and barriers to entering work. Barriers covered a wide range of issues, including lack of training and qualifications, difficulties with the English language, lack of confidence and health problems. However, the most prevalent barriers for partners appeared to fall into the following categories:

- caring responsibilities for partners and others.
- perceived financial and labour market barriers
- childcare needs or the wish not to have other people looking after their children
- learning difficulties and basic skills support needs
- their own ill-health or disability.

These are explored further below.
Caring responsibilities

The largest single category comprised partners for whom the main barrier to work was their caring responsibilities. In most cases, care was being provided for the claimant. Often, the illness or accident that had initially led to making the benefit claim had also required the partner to give up work to care for the claimant. Both claimant and partner had thus left employment at the same time, and the partner’s only reason for stopping working was to provide the necessary care and support. In several instances the care burden was described as particularly intense in the early months of a claim, leading to partners suffering health problems of their own, including depression.

Most carers expressed the wish to work but felt it to be impossible given the care requirements of their (claimant) partners. The perceived need to provide care was generally taken as self-evident. However, there was some indication that partners could over-estimate the level of care input strictly required, and could be persuaded by a supportive partner to consider working, even if only part-time, rather than being full-time carers. For example, one claimant interviewed confessed to feeling guilty about the stressful effects on his wife of caring for him, and wished to encourage her to seek some work that would help relieve the burden and get her out of the house for part of the day.

Few partners were aged 30 or under and most were aged 40 or over. The younger partners predominantly perceived difficulties with childcare as a barrier to working, with the restrictions these difficulties were seen to impose decreasing in severity and prevalence with age. In contrast, perceived restrictions to work options for partners caused by caring responsibilities, increased in prevalence with age.

Financial and labour-market barriers

Many partners cited financial and labour-market issues as the main barriers they faced in thinking about working. These partners were essentially of three types. First there were those who perceived difficulties in finding suitable jobs in the local labour market, because of low pay levels, the seasonal or insecure nature of work, or inflexible and unsuitable hours. Secondly, there were those who cited a lack of relevant skills, qualifications and work experience. Thirdly were those partners who could see no gain from working in terms of being better off. This was either because of a perception that the partner’s earnings would adversely affect the claimant’s (and household) income, or the view that remaining on benefits would achieve a better quality of life than working.

Childcare responsibilities

A large number of partners cited childcare barriers of various types, though childcare was rarely identified as the sole obstacle to working. Where childcare was felt to present the main barrier to employment, this was because the youngest child was of pre-nursery age, or partners had made a choice to look after a child (or children) themselves and were unwilling to consider the childcare being done by anyone else.
A lack of trust in and reluctance to use formal childcare was often evident among such partners:

*I just don’t trust anyone to take care of my child, except for myself and my husband...when he’s able.*

(Partner)

Two partners who were working part-time stated that the demands of childcare were the reason for their being unable to extend their hours to full-time working.

**Learning difficulties and basic skills needs**

Several of the partners had learning difficulties and basic skills support needs, alongside a lack of any qualifications, which they saw as the main obstacle to their getting employment. Some of them had never worked. In most instances, they (and frequently also their claimant partners) had had some contact with agencies that had tried to address these issues, but despite sometimes lengthy histories of participation on courses and schemes had never been able to get a job.

**Ill-health or disability**

Many partners of IB and IS claimants also had their own health conditions (both physical and mental) to deal with. In some cases this was related to the older age of couples, and frequently appeared to be the result of similarities between the circumstances, work and life experiences of claimants and partners within couples.

In a number of cases, the health problems of partners could be seen to be a consequence of the underlying problem that had led to the claim being made by the claimant. This was particularly evident in relation to mental health conditions. In several cases, a situation of redundancy for the claimant, or the crisis in their health that had led to them having to leave work, had put such a strain on their partners as to precipitate a breakdown in their health also. Varying degrees of anxiety and a range of mental health conditions among partners were thus not uncommon.

### 2.2.4 Key factors

There were a number of characteristics of partners and their situations, which appeared to have a bearing on their attitudes to work and their behaviour, from job search to engagement in voluntary work, through to employment. The key factors affecting work related attitudes and behaviour were:

- the presence or absence of dependent children
- the age of the youngest child
- whether the partner was a ‘stock’ or ‘flow’ claimant
- the gender of the partner

These factors are considered in turn below.
Dependent children

Among those interviewed with dependent children, most were younger JSA claimants or partners of IB claimants. Although several said that childcare difficulties were the main barrier to working, this was rarely the only barrier they faced and was no more prominent among responses than other issues such as caring, labour market factors and lack of skills or qualifications.

Most of the partners without dependent children were the partners of IS claimants and older JSA claimants. Several reported a mental health condition or physical health problem of their own, and they appeared somewhat more likely to have caring responsibilities than did those partners with children. However, despite this, they tended not to see their caring responsibilities or their own health problems as the main barrier to work, but were more likely to cite lack of skills or qualifications as the most significant limiting factor they would have to overcome.

Age of youngest child

Among those partners with dependent children, the age of the youngest child was important in relation to work expectations and aspirations. Almost all were ‘flow’ cases, and many of the claims had been brought about by the arrival of a baby or a change in childcare needs.

Those with a youngest child aged under five years tended to see childcare as the single most significant barrier to work that they faced, but were also likely to view this as a temporary difficulty. Although none of the partners with very young children were currently working, they tended to have more recent work experience than other partners. Many said that they did not wish to work yet, but intended to work again in the near future when they felt that the age of their child would allow it.

Many of the partners with children aged five years or over had been working part-time prior to their WFIP, or had started to work since. However, those who were not working had been out of the labour market for a relatively long time (typically five to ten years). Those who had not worked for even longer (15 to 25 years) included a high proportion of partners who said that they had made the choice not to work, often in order to look after children, and did not wish to change this.

Partners of ‘stock’ and ‘flow’ claimants

Advisers did not generally perceive the partners of stock and flow claimants to be very different in terms of the barriers they faced or the likelihood of successfully moving them into work or closer to the labour market through a WFIP. However, in some ways the two groups appeared to differ. Some partners were in work, and some were already working part-time when called for a WFIP. All of these were the partners of stock claimants with strategies for working developed over a period of time. A small number of partners who were involved in some form of voluntary work at the time of their WFIP were also partners of stock claimants.
It is possible that the different situation of partners in comparison with claimants means that, unlike lone parents for example, it is actually stock cases rather than flow cases who are easier to move into employment. Flow claims are experiencing an initial crisis of illness or redundancy and thus present a more difficult situation for partners who might otherwise be in work or thinking of entering work. Certainly, as indicated above, several partners of IB and IS claimants with physical or mental health problems described having to leave work themselves to provide care, and for that care to be particularly intensive in the early months.

**Gender**

More male partners than female partners had been in work within the previous three years, and have qualifications. Only a very small number had no educational or vocational qualifications at all. However, several said that their main barrier to work was a lack of skills, or a language or reading difficulty. None of the male partners interviewed said that they had made a deliberate and conscious choice not to work at all.

Only one of the partners in work at the time of the research was male. At first sight this would appear to run counter to some advisers’ expectation that they might find it easier to move male partners into work than female partners. However, the female partners in work were all working part-time, and most of them were already working at the time of their WFIP (as noted above). Several of them described it as having been imperative to find some employment when the male claimant and main income earner had to stop work. In these cases, the WFIP clearly played no role. Indeed, the timing of WFIPs 26 weeks into claims is likely to miss the urgent need in many cases to secure some additional income immediately. The majority of the partners embarked on various stages of becoming self-employed were men.

### 2.2.5 Household perspective

Any attempt to describe the characteristics of partners in isolation from their household circumstances and their relation to the main benefit recipient inevitably fails to do justice to the real complexities that frequently exist. Without this added perspective, much of the real motivation and key influences on behaviour can be missed.

Rarely was it possible to understand partners’ expressed constraints in isolation and without reference to the wider picture. Partners’ decisions about work were tied up with the effects on the other person’s benefits, and were affected by consideration of the potential impact both on them individually and on the working of the relationship. The claimant’s attitude and level of understanding, and the balance of influence and power within the relationship affected understanding of these effects. Explicit and implicit models of household management and role allocation were evident.
There were many strong similarities within couples as regards levels of education, types of work experience and aspirations, and expectations for the future. One consequence of this was a high degree of similarity between the difficulties, problems and barriers perceived by partners and those perceived by claimants. Basic skills needs and literacy or learning difficulties were often evident in both members of a couple.

Barriers perceived by partners were therefore often found to be sustained by the couple’s relationship. Not infrequently, problems and constraints appeared to be mutually reinforced between partner and claimant, because the actions of one necessarily impacted greatly on the other.

Set patterns of behaviour, which present a challenge to advisers even in relation to individuals (for example, long-term stock claimants), are arguably even more difficult to shift with partners. This is because they inextricably involve both members of a couple and have been established over time and ‘negotiated’ by couples to meet their joint situation. This is a key element of what makes up the ‘difficult to help’ nature of the partner client group.

2.3 The ‘couple dynamic’

In many cases, holding the relationship and household unit together through mutual support was a key part of a couple’s ability to cope with the situation in which they found themselves. As a consequence, their perceptions, decision-making and behaviour regarding work, far from being separable and easily open to argument and persuasion by an adviser, were overlaid and strongly affected by this greater priority.

The effects of this ‘couple dynamic’, experienced by advisers and observed in the client interviews with partners and claimants, varied widely in both intensity and obviousness. In some cases, the relationship enabled mutual support, discussion of the needs and limitations of both individuals and joint strategic decision-making to take place. Where the terms of these discussions were explicit and open, advisers found it relatively easy to provide effective information and support where it was wanted.

In other cases, however, relationships were based on a marked inequality of power between the individuals, with one person dominating the couple and essentially imposing their views and preferences on the other. For example, it was evident from interviews with couples that views on the partner’s inability to consider working often emanated from the claimant, who had a vested interest in the partner staying at home. This was observed to be the case particularly where the partner was required to provide personal care and domestic support to the claimant and to look after children. Where it existed, the dominance of such a view had effectively precluded any discussion of options that could perhaps have been worked around the edges of what were nevertheless, at their core, real needs and issues.
Strong views of this type from claimants were frequently echoed by partners, but in contradiction to the aspirations they were simultaneously expressing. In other cases, there were direct contradictions between what claimants said their partners wanted to do, and what the partners expressed on their own behalf. Indeed, a key barrier for some partners was the claimant’s not wanting them to leave the house or go out to work, whether out of concern for their own wellbeing, hurt pride, or from a fear of losing control over the relationship.

2.3.1 Couple paradigms

The dynamics between the individuals in a couple affect partners’ views, aspirations and decision-making, and can be illustrated through a number of the most typical ‘paradigms’ that emerged from client and adviser interviews. While far from being exhaustive, they demonstrate some of the factors and relationships that make partners a difficult client group to deal with effectively.

There was much evidence that traditional gender roles of male ‘breadwinner’ and female ‘home-maker’ still exert a strong influence over many couples. When asked what their ‘ideal’ household situation would be as regards working, both partners and claimants frequently answered that they would want the man to work full-time and the woman to look after the home and children. However, in the majority of cases – where the partner was the woman – this distribution of roles was extremely difficult to achieve due, for example, to the claimants ill-health. Contemplating work for the partner was tantamount to reversing the model entirely. While the female partner was not working, the male claimant bringing benefits into the household was able to remain the main ‘breadwinner’.

In couple A, the main claimant was in receipt of IB through ill-health. Prior to becoming ill, he worked for twenty years as a gas fitter while his partner looked after the home and family, raising five children. The claimant described himself as “old school…the breadwinner.” When the children grew older, his partner worked part-time for many years as a waitress and barmaid, jobs she enjoyed. When the claimant was forced to give up work through ill-health, his partner reluctantly ceased working too. When interviewed, she gave her reasons as the demands of running a home. This was in spite of the fact that since giving up work all but her two youngest children had left home and she had successfully combined working and bringing up children previously. It transpired that although she wanted to work, her husband felt it inappropriate for her to be working while he was stuck at home. Even though on benefits, as the main claimant he remained, as he saw it, ‘the breadwinner.’

The expressed ideal was also rarely attainable, even when the partner was the man and the claimant the woman. Many male partners were not in a position to work full-time, given their caring responsibilities towards the claimant. Even where they were able to consider full-time work, the levels of pay they were able to command in the labour market frequently led to the perception that both individuals in the couple would need to be earning if they were to be significantly better off overall than they were on benefits.
Adherence to traditional gender roles was not always explicit and clearly expressed. Often, its influence was implicit and largely unspoken, with partners’ decisions and actions being underpinned by agendas designed to protect relationships. In these cases, partners appeared to be at pains not to allow the consequences of the claimant’s illness or disability to disrupt the perceived desirable balance of roles within the couple. Whether consciously or not, they sought to protect the claimant’s self-esteem by limiting any training or work activities of their own which might be perceived as constituting a threat to take over as principle wage-earner in the household.

Several partners were observed to be maintaining a careful balance in this regard, weighing the short-term benefits that might accrue from paid employment against the possible long-term effects on the couple’s relationship and stability of the household unit. Such balancing acts were particularly evident in cases of mental illness or breakdown. Here, maintaining an acceptable equilibrium within the couple was also understood to be an important element in ensuring the claimant’s or partner’s recovery and the possibility of their returning to work in the future.

In **couple B**, the main claimant had been in receipt of IB for four years following a mental breakdown brought on by stress at work. Prior to his illness, he had worked for twenty years as a manager in the construction industry. His female partner worked part-time as a nurse as she had done for many years. The claimant’s health had recently improved and he had ceased taking medication for the first time in four years. Keen to get back to work, he had become increasingly despondent at his inability to find employment that would ease him back into work in a way that would not threaten his IB in the short-term. Although the partner had the option of working longer hours, she felt this could serve to undermine further the claimant’s low self-esteem and former role as main provider for the family – “I do feel sorry for him that I am going out to work.” A major concern was that without progress, the claimant’s recovery would be reversed, plunging him back into depression. They felt frustrated that WFIP help, focused on the partner, was aimed at the wrong target.

An important point to note in relation to these quite subtle aspects of couple dynamics is that they would not be readily evident from talking to the partner (or claimant) alone. In a single, relatively short WFIP with a partner alone, much is likely to elude an adviser.

Alongside such considerations of mutual support and couple dynamics were the extensive practical difficulties posed for partners in IS and IB claims by the need to provide a degree of care for the claimant. Partners generally found it hard to quantify this burden of care. Many conditions were said to manifest erratic symptoms which, rather than demanding a constant number of hours of care each day, required considerable variations from one day to the next.
Partners reported, for example, that on ‘bad’ days they might have to provide intense and continuous care support, whereas on ‘good’ days relatively little care would be needed. Some claimants’ assessments of the care support they required were clearly also coloured by perceived domestic support needs of a kind previously provided by non-working partners when the claimant was in employment. Many claimants had difficulty in envisaging taking over some of these domestic activities, to allow their partner to work. In some cases, this appeared to be as much the result of unwillingness to ‘swap’ traditional gender roles as real limitations imposed by ill-health.

Other couples were contemplating the complex arrangements needed to enable the partner to work while juggling their caring responsibilities. Examples included consideration of night shifts, self-employment and weekend work, calling on the help of friends and neighbours for respite care as necessary. Few couples interviewed had managed to put any such strategies into practice however.

As a rule, the burden of care fell most heavily on female partners, because it was so readily compounded with the effects of traditional gender role expectations. It is perhaps a permissible comparison to say that, in many cases, if these female partners also had dependent children they found themselves in a very similar situation to lone parents, but with added care responsibilities and added pressure from their claimant partner. Other research has shown lone parents with care responsibilities over and above those required by their children to be among the hardest to help in that client group. This indicates how difficult advisers may find it to achieve job outcomes from many partners.

The situation of caring partners was further complicated much of the time by feelings of guilt. Partners admitted to feeling guilty for wanting to escape from the often extreme demands of caring, and for wishing to consider their own needs at a time when the claimant’s needs appeared so much more acute. These not uncommon feelings presented an additional barrier to thinking about employment for partners, and an extra hurdle for advisers to negotiate in order to intervene effectively. While ‘guilty’ partners could be either male or female, it was again likely to be female partners who felt this way most acutely. They were concerned that if they went out to work it might be seen as emphasising the ‘failure’ of the male claimant to fulfil the ‘breadwinner’ role.
The male partner in **Couple C** gave up full-time work as an engineering supervisor to care for his wife who claimed IS for a number of serious health conditions. Her care needs were variable and unpredictable, sometimes requiring his constant presence, while coping alone on other occasions. Her condition was generally stable at night. The partner wanted to return to work and decided that by working at night he could continue to provide care for his wife if required during the day. At his WFIP, the partner expressed an interest in re-training as a forklift truck driver to enable him to get a job as a night warehouseman. The adviser sourced a course running locally that could be funded through NDP. However, the three-month course only ran on a daily nine to five basis and he was unable to take up the offer of help. At the time of the interview, the partner had been on active NDP caseload for four months but remained unemployed.

Male partners could also be in the position of shouldering the burden of care for a claimant. However, in these instances fewer complications arose in the WFIP process as a result of gender role expectations. Several male partners had had to give up their own jobs when their wives had fallen ill or could no longer work. In each of these cases, the process of finding a workable employment arrangement for the household was seen as re-establishing a desirable pattern. In one instance, it gave the opportunity for the male partner to replace his wife as main earner, where she was previously the higher earner in a dual-income household. In another, the solution was for the male partner to work nights and accept that when his wife’s condition was bad he would have only a few hours of uninterrupted sleep.

In these circumstances, there had already frequently been a great deal of discussion and joint strategic thinking by the couple about a suitable working arrangement, prior to notification of a WFIP. In one instance, a solution was sought through a career change into self-employment, which would allow the male partner to be at home much of the time in case he was needed for care duties. His adviser was able to pick up on this impetus and offer help towards solutions.

In **Couple D**, the main claimant, a woman, was in receipt of IB and recovering from a depressive illness following redundancy from a teaching job. When her husband was subsequently made redundant from the chemical industry, he became her carer, aiding her recovery by providing domestic help in the home and psychological support. They discussed at length future employment options and decided both could work from home. This solution would enable the couple to earn a reasonable income, while giving the partner the flexibility needed to support and care for his wife. It also afforded the claimant the opportunity to get involved in the business, speeding her recovery further. Prior to the WFIP, the partner had re-trained as a self-employed chiropodist and the claimant had completed a distance learning accountancy course. The WFIP came just at the time the couple were thinking of launching a home based chiropody business. The partner joined NDP on the self-employed option and was test trading at the time of the interview.
There was another aspect of caring that was important for some couples but difficult for advisers to assess, particularly if they were seeing a partner alone for a WFIP. This was less a matter of practical help with day-to-day activities and more a question of simply being there and providing psychological support. It was especially evident in couples where some form of mental health condition was involved and the claimant’s self-confidence was very low. For the partner to contemplate working in such situations was extremely difficult, as their presence in the home was perceived by both people in the couple as essential to the wellbeing of the claimant.

The claimant in Couple E had always been the only wage earner during a 25-year marriage; his wife had never worked. For 12 months he had been unable to work following a mental breakdown. He had no objections in principle to his wife working but was realistic about the prospect of her finding a job when she had not worked for 30 years. More importantly, he admitted to having become dependent on her just being around the house and felt unable to cope when she was not there – “I’ve got to the point at the moment where I’m dependent on her being here and it is actually strange…if she’s not in the house then I’m lost, literally lost…wondering where she is.”

Within longstanding couples it was not uncommon for mutual psychological dependence on the presence of the other to be evident. Neither claimant nor partner was willing to contemplate ‘upsetting’ the status quo, and each needed the other to protect his or her own level of confidence. Intervention on behalf of the partner in such cases was clearly very difficult, though not impossible if both parties could be encouraged to take steps together. In some couples where the main benefit claimant was claiming JSA, progress had apparently been made in moving both claimant and partner simultaneously closer to the labour market. Other cases appeared to present something of a deadlock.
3 Delivery of WFIPs

Summary of findings:

- Work Focused Interviews for Partners (WFIPs) were accorded a low priority by staff compared to other areas of their work, due to the small numbers involved and perceived low status given them by managers.

- Some administration staff and advisers felt they would have benefited from more specific and comprehensive training regarding partners.

- Information sent to claimants was not always passed on to partners, most of whom said their appointment letter was the first they had heard about WFIPs.

- Contact with partners prior to WFIPs was variously undertaken and felt to help reduce first time failure to attend (FTA) – good use appeared to have been made by some partners of the named adviser contacts and telephone numbers on appointment letters.

- Time slots for WFIPs were reduced from one hour to 30 minutes in all districts, but in practice were often much shorter than this – some partners felt ‘rushed through’ and few In Work Benefit Calculations (IWBCs) were being undertaken at WFIPs despite advisers seeing them as crucial elements of the process.

- Two key variations in delivery involved (1) splitting the WFIP and New Deal for Partners (NDP) functions, and (2) using ‘specialist’ advisers (by claim type) for WFIPs.

- Many WFIPs were being attended jointly by partner and claimant though advisers could see both positive and negative aspects to joint interviews.

This chapter explores how WFIPs were being delivered six months into the initiative. It sets out some early delivery issues and problems in the areas of appointments administration, publicity and communications, and waivers and deferrals. A number of key variations in the way WFIPs were being delivered are set out, along with the views and perceptions of advisers as to how different aspects of the initiative were working, and the issues raised by their experience of the customer group to that date. A number of possible elements of good practice are set out on the basis of this and wider interviews with delivery staff.
3.1 Outline of delivery processes

The processes for delivering WFIPs, from initial information and contact through to conducting the interview, have been slightly different for the partners of ‘stock’ claimants than for the partners of ‘flow’ claimants.

3.1.1 Delivery to ‘stock’ partners

The rollout of WFIPs is in line with the national rollout of Jobcentre Plus. Dependent partners in eligible claims of more than 26 weeks prior to the start of the WFIP initiative in April 2004 constitute a ‘stock’ population to be processed alongside more recent ‘flow’ cases. A period of up to three years has been allowed for completing the delivery of WFIPs to stock partners. The timing, pace and intensity of delivery have been left to the discretion of each Jobcentre Plus district.

Typically, contact was made with the whole stock population in each district at the same time just prior to the start of the initiative. An introductory leaflet was sent out to claimants explaining that their partners would be contacted in due course and required to attend a WFIP with an adviser at their local Jobcentre Plus office. A schedule of all stock partners as at April 2004 was then downloaded to administration teams who, in liaison with office Business Managers, could begin to arrange WFIP appointments on a phased basis and book them into the electronic diaries of the appropriate designated partner advisers.

In some districts, contact with partners was first attempted by telephone (typically only one attempt). This was followed up with an appointment letter sent out in the partner’s name, giving a date and time at which they were required to attend an interview. Other districts sent out letters only. The letters gave the name and telephone contact number of the adviser with whom the appointment was booked.

Any appointment problems or rearrangements and all queries or responses to the letter were thus channelled to advisers to deal with. Responses to partners making telephone contact were at the discretion of advisers, who made decisions about waivers, deferrals and possible home visits to those with mobility problems at this point.

Partners were informed in the appointment letter that they could be accompanied to their WFIP if they chose. Interviews were conducted either with the partner alone or jointly at Jobcentre Plus offices. Those who were interested in taking matters further, exploring work options and/or applying for jobs with the help of the adviser were invited to have a further interview and to join the NDP programme. Where appropriate, partners could then be case loaded by an adviser for ongoing help and support.
3.1.2 Delivery to ‘flow’ partners

Delivery of WFIPs to flow partners takes priority over stock cases. The aim of the policy is to achieve no more than a 14-day gap between the 26-week trigger date being reached and the WFIP appointment being set.

First notification of the requirement for dependent partners to attend a WFIP is given to claimants when a new claim is made. New claimants with a dependent partner are also asked at the point of claim to sign a form that gives Jobcentre Plus advisers permission to discuss their benefit claim with their partner at the WFIP. Claimants are also given an explanatory leaflet about WFIPs to take away and discuss with their partner.

At the trigger point, 26 weeks into a claim, the names and details of flow partners are downloaded to a schedule and provided to the administration team or administration officers in each office. Appointment letters are then sent out to flow partners in the same way as for stock partners.

Some districts were making an attempt to contact flow partners by telephone prior to sending out the letter. Appointments were booked into advisers’ diaries for dates not more than 14 days after appearance on the schedule. Understanding of the ‘timeliness’ target for flow WFIPs differed from district to district. Administrative staff variously referred to the required maximum time between schedule and appointment date as ‘five days’, ‘ten days’, ‘two weeks’ and ‘three weeks’. Targets were not always being met, but no major problems were reported once some ‘teething’ troubles had been sorted out.

Again, as with stock partners, responses to appointment letters were directed to the individual advisers concerned, who made decisions regarding waivers, deferrals or home visits. Interviews (single or joint) and any initial NDP follow-up interviews and case load meetings were all carried out in the same manner for flow partners as for stock partners.

3.2 Key delivery variations

Within overall WFIP policy and operational guidance, there was discretion at district or office level as to the detail of delivery practices in a number of key areas of activity. These areas of discretion where variations in practice were found among the five research districts were as follows:

• location and staffing of WFIP schedules administration and interview booking
• methods of contact with partners prior to their WFIP appointment
• timing and intensity of stock processing alongside flow partners
• length of time allocated to WFIP interview appointments
• previous experience of advisers who were given responsibilities for partners, and their other concurrent duties and types of customers
• the numbers of advisers between whom partners work was spread.
In addition to these areas, two variations of practice were arguably outside stated policy and guidance: the allocation of WFIP interviews to non-New Deal advisers, and the conducting of ‘group WFIPs,’ or group information sessions for partners (see section 6.2).

3.2.1 Location and staffing of WFIP administration

The administration of WFIP appointments was generally carried out as a centralised function, with a small administrative team dealing with schedules and sending out appointment letters to partners on behalf of all the Jobcentre Plus offices in the district. The one exception among the five research areas was a Jobcentre Plus district that was also involved in the delivery of IB reform pilots. In this case, each office handled the administration of contact letters and appointment booking for the advisers based there.

One other district had a ‘half-way house’ arrangement, whereby one customer facing office was designated as the administration centre for WFIPs, but only carried out limited functions. The single member of staff responsible divided the schedules by office and sent other offices in the district their lists. However, she only booked appointments for the adviser in the office where she was based. Changes were due in the near future, in line with long-term plans for reorganisation rather than in response to difficulties encountered with current arrangements. The function was scheduled to move to a central office and operate in line with practice elsewhere.

In other districts where the partners’ administrative function was already centralised, it tended to be run from an office where there was no direct contact with customers at the site. This meant that dedicated teams could focus on partners’ administration. However, all such teams were also dealing with the similar administrative work associated with lone parents.

Where administration took place at office level, it appeared to facilitate good, close working relations between administrative staff and advisers, with much sharing of responsibilities and covering for one another. Communication over possible cases for waiver or deferral was also easier in these circumstances. However, office-based administrative staff were particularly prone to being pulled off onto other work. Examples given included cashier services and front-desk duties. As one person described it:

_If my manager says you’re like…on frontline…the rest of my stuff is pushed to the side. As a result I have a massive backlog in both partners and NDLP [New Deal for Lone Parents]._

(Administration officer)

Where problems of this sort existed, they were generally put down to staff shortages and the low priority accorded to WFIPs:

_I don’t have a lot of time to spend on partners because of the staffing levels here – it comes down to my list of priorities; and it has to come down quite far!_

(Administration officer)
It was apparently possible for delays in printing off and processing partner schedules, to cause additional problems through schedules being over-written by subsequent ones.

In all districts, the administration of WFIPs was being handled alongside that for lone parents, with which it has much in common. However, WFIP administration frequently appeared to be accorded a much lower priority. This was partly because of the smaller numbers involved, and partly because it was not given any great status by managers. As one administrative officer put it:

...with [WFIPs] you are definitely not getting the back-up from management...

(Administration officer)

Along with this low priority, assumptions were being made in some districts that if staff could handle lone-parent work, they needed little or no training to be able to deal with partners:

…it [WFIPs] was just dumped on my desk – “and by the way you are doing partners” – I didn’t know anything about it.

(Administration officer)

A huge schedule came in [at the start of WFIPs]…you think, “what am I supposed to do with this?”.

(Administration officer)

Training for administrative staff was highly variable across the five districts. Some staff talked of a full day’s training and good back up for queries on the job, while others reported that they had had no training at all or that it was “very, very basic”:

The guidance that we got from the staff trainer…from district office…that was basically our training.

(Administration officer)

In all districts it was acknowledged that much had to be learned by doing the job and working through problems with whatever support was available:

A lot of it has been trial and error in this district – because we are the booking office there is actually no one to go back to really.

(Administration officer)

### 3.2.2 Customer contact prior to WFIPs\(^6\)

All partners called for a WFIP were sent an appointment letter approximately ten days to a fortnight before their appointment date. This procedure was consistent across districts, and the wording of the letter was standardised. Variation between districts occurred in the type and frequency of other contact with partners by Jobcentre Plus staff, in terms of who made the contact and for what purpose.

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\(^6\) For a customer perspective on this contact, please refer to section 4.1.1
Other contacts with partners prior to their WFIPs were invariably made by telephone and included the following in different districts:

- single attempts by administrative staff to contact each partner prior to sending out an appointment letter, in order to agree a convenient date and time for a WFIP
- two attempts by administrative staff to contact flow partners prior to sending out an appointment letter, to secure quick agreement of a date and time within the understood time limit from the trigger date at which they appeared on the schedule
- routine appointment confirmation calls; an administrative officer from one district office made these calls to all partners due to attend that office, to reduce failures to attend
- ‘courtesy calls’ by advisers in the Incapacity Benefit (IB) reform district to all partners with appointments, to reassure them about WFIPs, provide further information, answer any preliminary queries, reassure partners about the nature of WFIPs and the limits to the commitment required, and to boost attendance rates at first appointments
- calls by advisers to partners identified by administrative staff as possible waiver or deferral cases (from database information or brief telephone contact); this was to make waiver and deferral decisions or conduct a telephone WFIP if the partner had severe mobility issues preventing attendance at the Jobcentre Plus office
- telephone conversations with advisers in the presence of visiting officers at the homes of partners who had failed to attend appointments; this was to agree a further appointment and minimise opportunities for excuses for non-attendance (for example, letters not arriving).

These forms of proactive telephone contact were supplemented in all districts by inviting inquiries and providing encouragement to partners to use the contacts and numbers included on appointment letters. The general practice was for the name and telephone number of the relevant adviser to be attached to the bottom of letters, though in one district the number provided was that of the administrative team.

In several districts, conducting WFIPs by telephone in certain circumstances (such as a partner’s severe mobility problems) was routine, but occurred infrequently. However, one district had a clear policy line laid down and understood that all WFIPs had to be face-to-face.
3.2.3 Intensity of stock processing

Districts were initially given a period of up to two years within which to process all partners of stock claimants. This has since been extended to three years. Although discretion lies with the districts as to how fast and how intensely this will be done, in practice all five Jobcentre Plus districts had made the decision to get stock processing under way as soon as possible.

The main constraints on the process were the speed at which administrative staff could process partner schedules and the availability of advisers’ time. Typically, offices were allocating between a half and one day per week of relevant advisers’ time to partners work. Flow appointments would be booked in first as a matter of priority, then stock cases would be booked to fill the remainder of the allocated time. Despite some early problems with schedules, all five districts said that processing was progressing smoothly four to six months into the initiative.

3.2.4 WFIP time slots

In line with guidance and provided funding, one hour time slots were booked for WFIP interviews. However, by September 2004, five months into the initiative, all five Jobcentre Plus districts had reduced their time slots for interviews to half an hour. These decisions were reported to have been made by District Managers to reflect the average length of time being taken to conduct WFIPs. The experience of many advisers was that the length of WFIPs varied considerably, depending on the reactions of customers:

_They can take ten minutes or they can take 45 minutes to an hour – it depends on the reaction you get from the individual. Some…you can tell within ten minutes there’s no point in proceeding with the interview._

(Adviser)

The decision to reduce time slots was widely supported by Business Managers, although it did not meet with universal approval from advisers. A minority of them expressed doubts about whether a ‘proper’ interview could be conducted in this time with this complex client group. As two advisers expressed it:

_You need time, you have to treat these people differently because they’re not jobseekers, they’re not here volunteering looking for work._

(Adviser)

_In some cases, by the time you reach half an hour you’re just getting going and you don’t really want to stop…I did prefer the hour-long interview because by the time you’ve covered the basics, your half-hour is pretty much up._

(Adviser)

For these advisers, shorter WFIPs interrupted the flow of communication. This was seen as detrimental to the impact that WFIPs could achieve, even in cases where advisers managed to book partners in for a further meeting.
In practice, WFIPs appeared (from what customers remembered) to be lasting on average between 20 and 25 minutes but there were variations from district to district. Advisers in some districts were generally taking the full 30 minutes while colleagues in others were delivering WFIPs typically in 15 to 20 minutes. All advisers agreed that there was considerable necessary variation in the length of WFIPs according to individual partners’ circumstances and attitudes. However, some advisers adopted an approach that routinely kept initial meetings short and relied on a second meeting to go further with interested partners. By contrast, others used an approach that sought to maximise the impact of all WFIPs by persisting even with those partners who expressed an initial unwillingness to work.

A balance needed to be struck between efficient use of diary time, and the judged effectiveness of time spent with customers. Different offices and different districts appeared to have arrived at quite different balances. Factors affecting the balance included the perceived demands on advisers from their work with other client groups, the staffing levels, and the degree to which advisers felt under pressure to achieve job entries.

At the extreme, it was clear that some WFIPs were being carried out in such a short time as to be inconceivable that they could have covered the full range of required information, let alone explored attitudes and options or considered long-term future possibilities. The shortest reported WFIP lasted under five minutes, even though it was a joint meeting.

Several partners said that they had felt ‘rushed through’ their interview and were unhappy that they had not been given more opportunity to ‘talk around’ things. In such cases, advisers appeared to have been totally focused on short-term job outcomes, and to have ended the interview at the first indication that a partner was not likely to produce such an outcome. The partner who reported a WFIP lasting under five minutes summed up its content as being asked:

Are you getting a job? No? Well if you’re going to, let us know first…

(Partner)

Most advisers thought that 30 minutes was about the right length on average for a WFIP, though many said that they would spend longer if they had to and didn’t have another customer waiting. Advisers generally felt that they could not complete a full IWBC in a half-hour WFIP, even if the partner had the necessary information available at that time. Further meetings were booked to carry out such calculations. While some advisers saw this as a disadvantage, others saw it as an opportunity in some cases to get the claimant to attend alongside the partner and to make further progress than was possible with an individual.

The average length of WFIPs suggests that very little use was being made of IWBC calculations in a persuasive fashion with the partners client group.

The limited time spent on interviews may lead to advisers missing the opportunity to move partners closer to the labour market. Some customers’ perceptions of being
rushed through their WFIP interviews also appeared to be damaging to their view of Jobcentre Plus and the likelihood that they would return for advice or support in the future.

### 3.2.5 Advisers’ previous experience

Another area of considerable variation in practice was the allocation of advisers to work with partners and conduct WFIPs. Most frequently, lone parent advisers delivered WFIPs. This was on the basis of the similarities between arrangements for the two customer groups (both being required to attend mandatory WFIPs with the aim of moving them onto a voluntary New Deal programme and into, or closer to, employment). However, in one district none of the advisers seeing partners were lone parent advisers, and many other arrangements were in evidence within the five districts.

For most advisers, the relatively small numbers of WFIPs meant that partners’ work was a minor part – even described as an “add-on” – to their other, mainstream duties. The majority of advisers’ time was spent working with other customer groups. Advisers carrying out WFIPs were variously involved with other New Deal programmes, and in smaller offices were often acting as generic advisers seeing customers from all groups and all programmes. In addition to New Deals, some advisers carrying out WFIPs were involved in JSA Restart interviews and new claims.

Allocation of partners work appeared to be largely a practical matter of finding advisers with some spare capacity. In most cases, advisers were simply told by Business Managers that they would be taking on WFIPs, rather than volunteering for the work. Where advisers had experience of working with partners self-referring to New Deal, they were more likely to be given responsibility for WFIPs. However, it was experience of delivering Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) in general that was considered important, rather than experience of any particular client groups.

In two districts, the procedure for conducting WFIPs and the allocation of advisers were significantly different from practice elsewhere. In the IB pilot district, the larger offices had taken advantage of having a team of specialist Income Support (IS)/IB advisers in place. They had split the responsibility for conducting WFIPs by the benefit type of the main claim. Partners of IS/IB claimants had their WFIPs with specialist IS/IB advisers, while specialist Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) advisers saw partners of JSA claimants. Advisers said they felt this was working well from a delivery point of view.

In another busy urban district, a separation had been made at some offices between the delivery of initial mandatory WFIPs and subsequent work with NDP case loaded partners. The rationale for this separation was that work with caseloads was of a different kind to that required at an initial WFIP. Also, advisers dealing with case loaded partners benefited from not having their workloads overburdened and disrupted by having to conduct WFIPs, many of which were perceived as ‘unproductive’.
In one office in this district, WFIPs were being delivered by a highly experienced senior adviser and New Deal Deputy Team Leader. In another, they were being delivered by a New Claims (non-New Deal) adviser. In the latter case particularly, there appeared to be a danger that WFIPs were being effectively downgraded to an ‘initial contact’ or ‘exploratory’ role only, and that any real work focus was absent unless a partner was case loaded.

The main drivers behind the arrangements in this district appeared to be a perceived shortage of New Deal advisers’ time and the need to increase the throughput of partners to clear administrative backlogs. This district was also the only one of the five to have carried out group WFIPs involving up to six partners simultaneously from some of its offices (see section 6.2).

Ongoing attempts in all districts to maximise efficient use of advisers’ time had led to a number of less radical rationalisations of delivery. One larger office had moved from a spread responsibility for partners across a number of lone parent advisers in the first six months of the initiative to the appointment of a new, specialist partners adviser. This new adviser was going to take sole responsibility for all WFIPs and partner caseloads in the future. Such arrangements clearly depended on the size of the office and the volume of the partners customer group being dealt with, and cannot form a blueprint for delivery everywhere.

3.3 Early delivery issues and problems

3.3.1 Appointments administration

Staff administering the setting up and booking appointments encountered a number of problems in the early months of WFIPs. Nearly all of these problems related to ‘teething’ issues at the start of the initiative or had been substantially dealt with by the end of 2004.

The problems were predominantly in three areas:

- technical aspects of processing schedules of partners
- ensuring advisers’ diary availability to meet time requirements for booked appointments
- making initial contact with partners.

A number of difficulties were reported with the schedules of partners’ names passed to administrative staff to process. In some districts, partners’ names were not initially appearing, and in others there were subsequent problems matching partners’ details with those of claimants, as well as inaccuracies in schedules. Some administrative staff felt that their ability to carry out partners work was hampered by lack of specific training, and that the work was simply added to their other responsibilities with little preparation or support.
There was a widespread sense of “learning on the hoof”, with often minimal communication between managers and delivery staff. As one administrative officer described it:

It’s hit or miss, quite frankly, because I have got no contact with other offices that are dealing with partners, I don’t know how any other areas are dealing with it…

(Administration officer)

Uncertainty among some administrative staff was heightened by unfamiliarity with the full range of benefit claim types included in partners work. One administrative officer specifically mentioned the need for additional training on the processes, procedures and eligibility conditions of JSA to aid the processing of partner cases. Uncertainty about the exact differences between IB and IS claims was also flagged up as a training need. This was highlighted by confusion over cases with IS top-up and the apparently inconsistent references on the different computer systems that had to be viewed:

...sometimes it might say IS and we go to check and it says IB...when we go on LMS [labour-market system] it says IB and when you go on [the benefits system] it says IS – so where do you go?

(Administration officer)

The training that administrative staff received was criticised for not addressing the specific requirements of the role in enough detail. One administrator said:

It was OK but it didn’t show up everything – because there’s a lot of things I’m doing now that I didn’t do when I was doing the training.

(Administration officer)

The guidance available for staff to refer to was also criticised on these grounds for being “user-unfriendly”. The main criticisms were that neither the training nor the guidance was sufficiently detailed to cover all eventualities.

There’s not enough of it [guidance] I think…it is] not specific enough.

(Administrative team leader)

Opinions about the usefulness of the intranet were more varied and seemed to depend to an extent on how comfortable people felt about electronic sources of information. One person felt that it was “very useful” and said they used it regularly:

The intranet is very good, especially because there is…a chat room site…which does the WFIPs as well as lone parents, so if you get problems you go on there...

(Administration officer)

However, elsewhere there was some scepticism as to whether the intranet’s potential for sharing solutions and good practice was really being used to the full.
It was also reported that some initial technical difficulties prevented appointments being booked on the system in one district if either claimant or partner had had previous contact with certain services. These problems were quickly identified and ironed out.

The most widespread early problem with appointments booking for administrative staff was the inability to find available diary slots with advisers that allowed them to meet the 14-day target. These difficulties were said to arise where there were too few advisers being assigned to partners work, or where advisers’ availability was being filled up with ‘stock’ cases, leaving no room in diaries for booking priority ‘flow’ cases.

Whichever was the case in a particular district, the problems were reported to have been dealt with by improved liaison with the Business Managers at individual offices and in establishing workable upper limits on the through-flow of stock partners. Indeed, the problem appeared to have arisen from the decision in most areas to make an early start on processing stock partners to try to move them through WFIPs as quickly as possible.

**Telephone contact**

The other area in which administrative staff reported some difficulties in setting up appointments was in the process for making first direct contact with partners. Several districts began with the policy of making an initial telephone call to partners in order to set up and agree an appointment date and time, prior to sending out a letter outlining appointment details. Generally, such telephone contact by administrative staff was limited to a single attempt to call the partner and in many cases it was unsuccessful.

Evidence from customers suggested that only a minority of partners were successfully reached by telephone. Given that several administrative staff confessed to feeling ‘uncomfortable’ about talking to partners – especially carers – it is possible that the practice of talking first on the telephone was not always pursued with vigour. In one district, the policy of making telephone contact was formally ended because of the frequency with which administrative staff encountered language problems with partners for whom English was not their first language, which was reported to have rendered the call at best unhelpful and at worst counter-productive.

### 3.3.2 Initial letters/leaflets

The mail-out of leaflets about WFIPs to all stock claimants in March 2004 caused some problems, simply by virtue of the large number of people being contacted at the same time. It was reported that for a limited period the volume of calls being received occupied some members of staff on a more or less full-time basis. Most complaints apparently came from partners who were carers, and had been so for several years. These partners were reportedly angry and upset at having to attend a WFIP. They felt that their role as carer was being ignored or undervalued.
Despite the volume of responses from stock claimants to the initial letter, it appeared that the information about the content and purpose of WFIPs was frequently failing to reach stock partners because claimants were not passing it on. This was also true for flow partners, many of whom claimed never to have seen the original communication that was sent out in the claimant’s name. The first that many partners remembered hearing about WFIPs was from the appointment letter sent out and addressed to them personally.

The original wording of letters was often perceived as ‘threatening’ rather than ‘helpful’. Most partners appeared to have understood that attendance at the interview was compulsory and that failure to attend could affect benefits. Considerable anxiety was generated among some partners that they would be forced to find a job when they perceived themselves as unable to consider work. Again, the most negative reactions came from carers. The wording of letters has since been modified, but some negative reactions remain.

Inclusion of the adviser’s name and telephone number on the appointment letter appeared to be working well in providing a means for some customers who had concerns to ring the Jobcentre Plus office for reassurance and further information. Some customers appeared to be taking advantage of this contact information to good effect. However, not all customers were believed to have the confidence to do so.

Advisers were generally pleased to make contact with customers in this way and happy to provide the reassurances sought. They believed it was important for the letter to be very clear that failure to attend could affect benefits, even if this generated some reaction and led to their having to field these enquiries.

### 3.4 Adviser views on the delivery of WFIPs

Most advisers perceived the partners customer group to be a low priority for their managers and, accordingly, were likely to attribute it an equally low priority among their responsibilities. The relatively small numbers of partners coming through reinforced the perceived low status of WFIPs and NDP. Partners work generally accounted for no more than 20 per cent of an adviser’s workload, and often less. Many advisers also felt that they had received insufficient training to deal with the complexities of this customer group.

Partners work tended to be allocated to advisers without choice and without seeking volunteers who might be attracted to the challenge it presented. Some advisers carried over negative views of the customer group from previous experience of New Deal for Partners of Unemployed People (NDPU), where even active marketing was perceived to have failed to interest partners in work.

Expectations of NDP entrants and job outcomes for partners were also generally very low, and for most advisers were borne out during the first four to five months of the initiative. In the IB pilot district, WFIPs and NDP were compared unfavourably with the provision and incentives available on the pilot for IB claimants returning to work.
While this was arguably an unfair comparison given the additional resources available to the pilot, it served to reduce expectations of partners.

### 3.4.1 Waiver and deferral decisions

The frequency of waivers and deferrals of WFIPs was difficult to gauge with any accuracy from the qualitative interviews. In one district it was reported that up to half of all partners with care responsibilities for a claimant were having their WFIPs waived or deferred. Advisers elsewhere asserted that ‘very few’ waivers or deferrals were being made at all. Indeed, some advisers felt that too many partners were being called in for WFIPs who should have been waived or deferred on the basis of their care commitments. However, lack of prior contact with partners in certain districts prevented such waivers and deferrals from being made.

In almost all districts, the waiver/deferral process was a purely reactive one. Advisers would make such decisions on the basis of telephone conversations with customers. However, advisers would wait to be contacted, and for partners to raise the issue of whether a WFIP was appropriate or possible for them, before engaging and making a decision. The same applied in those districts where administrative staff were making some telephone contact with partners. Only if customers themselves raised the issue of possible grounds for waiver or deferral was the suggestion then made that they contact an adviser to discuss it, with the adviser informed accordingly to expect a call.

It was policy in most districts that if customers made contact by telephone with administrative staff, they were passed on to an adviser. Deferral and waiver decisions were expected to be made by advisers, although in one district administrative staff thought that they could take action themselves. This had not led to any problems because they reported that in practice such decisions were always taken to an adviser anyway.

Advisers were making waiver and deferral decisions on the basis of telephone conversations with partners identified as having special circumstances preventing them attending a WFIP. Terminal illness of either claimant or partner was a universally recognised criterion for waiver or deferral. Case-by-case judgements were required for those partners with serious health problems of their own or in the household, or those with a 24-hour requirement to care for a claimant. Waiver and deferral criteria for partners were said to be essentially the same as for other WFs, and advisers were comfortable about making those decisions.

In some districts, waivers had been made on the grounds of partners being wheelchair users, though more commonly in these circumstances WFIPs were conducted by telephone.

Most advisers had made very few waivers or deferrals and some none at all. In most offices, the perceived policy line was that partners should attend at the Jobcentre Plus office if at all possible and get to see the new Jobcentre Plus environment. In part because the reasons for a partner’s inability to attend were often related to the
claimant’s health rather than their own, advisers preferred to defer WFIPs far more often than to waive them. One adviser explained that she liked to be positive with customers and felt that a waiver could be too final:

*I don’t like to write people off, if you waive it you are kind of saying to someone: “well that is you on the scrapheap for the rest of your life”.*

(Adviser)

Another adviser reported making deferral decisions (mostly on health grounds) in up to half of cases. Although this was exceptional, advisers were clearly using individual discretion in such decisions. In one district, there had been a recently emphasised policy line to keep waivers and deferrals to a minimum following relatively high levels from some advisers. All advisers did not welcome this management directive.

Several advisers pointed to the numbers of partners attending for WFIPs with serious illnesses or other problems, as evidence that the deferral and waiver system was not working well:

*We’ve had some people who’ve come in who’ve been desperately ill…it’s just been the most heartbreaking thing.*

(Adviser)

Other advisers described making waiver/deferral decisions ‘post arrival’ for partners whom they felt should never have been called in for a WFIP in the first place. There was some speculation as to why these partners were not requesting a waiver or deferral of their WFIP. Suggested reasons included fear of sanctions and the perceived strong wording of appointment letters. Another possibility was that having to make such a request without invitation or prompting was more ‘proactive’ than many customers with low confidence levels felt able to be.

In areas where there was least contact with partners prior to their WFIP appointments, advisers were unhappy about having to make waiver or deferral decisions with the customer in front of them. This had given rise to the idea that some type of ‘sift’ should be carried out (perhaps by contacting customers before schedules were sent out) to avoid these partners having to attend. Several advisers raised the notion of a ‘sifting’ or ‘screening’ process at the front end of the initiative, but there was no clear agreement among them as to how far such a process should extend. Some wished to see the sifting process removing from WFIPs even such customers as partners with very young children. (See section 3.4.6 for further information).

### 3.4.2 Failure to attend

Reported FTA rates ranged from one adviser who had yet to have a single partner fail to attend a WFIP appointment, up to estimates of around half of all arranged WFIPs. Estimates of 25 to 30 per cent were the norm. Everywhere, the “vast majority” were said to attend at a second chance following a reminder letter.
In the IB reform pilot district failure to attend was very low. Suggested reasons were: the ‘courtesy calls’ that IS/IB advisers made to partners of IS/IB claimants a few days before their appointment date; JSA advisers’ practice of explaining the WFIP process to claimants with partners at their six month Restart interviews; and handing out information leaflets prior to sending appointment letters to partners. FTA rates had fallen noticeably after the introduction of these measures.

Even in areas with high FTA rates advisers did not perceive failure to attend to be a great problem; the great majority of partners were said to attend following a first reminder letter.

3.4.3 Timing of WFIPs

Partners of ‘stock’ claimants participate in a WFIP at an essentially random point in time in relation to the claim and their attendant circumstances. Partners of ‘flow’ claimants are called for a WFIP at a point 26 weeks into the benefit claim.

Although arbitrary, the 26-week ‘trigger’ point was acknowledged by advisers to be a reasonably good time for partners to be contacted in many cases. The start of a claim often marked a major shift in the fortunes and income of a household, which required some time to assimilate.

Balanced against considerations for extending the time before a WFIP, many advisers felt that they could help partners and their households sort out and maximise benefit entitlements. This obviously needed to be done relatively close to the start of a new claim. One adviser explained their rationale for sometimes concentrating on benefits and financial issues in a WFIP:

*It takes off an extra pressure... If they’re spending a lot of mental energy on their caring... surviving throughout the day, coping financially, they’ve got less mental energy to look for work. If you can solve some of the other problems then it makes them certainly able to consider these things.*

(Adviser)

3.4.4 Frequency of WFIPs

As policy currently stands, attending a WFIP is a one off mandatory requirement; there is no obligation upon partners to attend further meetings. There was tentative support from a number of advisers for the idea of review meetings or further mandatory interviews for the partners customer group.

This suggestion allowed for the possibility of revisiting customers if their circumstances had changed sufficiently for them to begin thinking about work. Most advisers routinely closed WFIP interviews by inviting partners to re-contact them in the future if they changed their mind and were seeking work. Experience suggested that very few were likely to do so if left entirely to their own initiative. Several advisers

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7 For a customer perspective on the timing of WFIPs, please refer to section 4.1.3
indicated that they would make ad hoc follow-up contact with partners if they judged that they might be receptive at some point in the near future:

Some of the individuals you can tell within ten minutes, there’s no point in proceeding with the interview…others you might think “if we don’t get anything out of this immediately, then we may want to remind ourselves to contact these people in three or six months’ time with a view to following this up”.

(Adviser)

Other advisers said that they would like the opportunity to make follow up contact, but did not feel that they had the time to do so with their current workloads and other priorities.

Most advisers said that the most they could realistically do was to establish some initial rapport with a customer and convince them that help would be available if the customer needed it in the future:

…they’re not going to be quick results, but I think…if you can establish a positive relationship…they’re going to come to you when things change.

(Adviser)

The practice of getting partners to agree to a second meeting, to enable the adviser to conduct an IWBC, was widely used to ensure continuity and establish ongoing contact, even if the customer was not then case loaded. However, this could only be achieved with those partners who showed some degree of interest in work at the first interview. It did not present an opportunity to catch up on changed circumstances with most partners.

3.4.5 In Work Benefit Calculations

Advisers generally felt that the most valuable ‘tool’ they had at their disposal to engage partners and even persuade them of the benefits of returning to work was information on Tax Credits, and its incorporation into IWBCs or ‘better off’ calculations. Some went so far as to describe the IWBC as the ‘key’ to challenging some of the attitudes presented by partners in WFIPs:

I’m always trying to offer them because I always think it’s a good selling point and I think when they see the actual print-out of the wages…it gives them a good idea [of the benefits of working].

(Adviser)

IWBCs particularly worked for long-term stock claims where people had settled into a way of living on benefits and advisers felt that an IWBC could help to challenge and overturn this ‘culture’:

I think there’s a benefits tradition [in this area]…the tradition is once you’re on benefits you need a damned good reason to come off them…

(Adviser)
An IWBC was thought to be the most effective way of providing a reason for leaving benefits, particularly among couples with dependent children. Advisers reported that IWBCs for this group of customers almost invariably indicated they would be better off in work than on benefits. This was not necessarily the case for all customers. IWBCs for couples without dependent children, for example, could show some to be no better off. Households in receipt of additional benefits because of the main claimant’s serious ill-health or disability were another example cited by advisers.

Some advisers said that they tried to do an IWBC with all partners at an initial WFIP, though most said that they could not find the time to do one. The usual available interview slot of half an hour allowed no more than the ‘basics’ to be covered. Most advisers felt that an hour would be needed for a WFIP if it were to include an IWBC (see section 3.2.4). As this length of time was no longer routinely available to them, the usual practice was to get partners to come back if they showed interest or needed an IWBC, and to book an hour for the follow up interview.

Other reasons were given for doing IWBCs at a second meeting as well as the time needed to carry them out. In a majority of cases, advisers found that partners did not have the necessary information to hand at the first interview. Frequently, permission forms had not been signed to allow discussion of the benefit claim, and needed requesting again. Also, in many instances advisers would seek to get both partner and claimant to attend a second interview together. This maximised the benefits of being able to demonstrate the potential impact of working for the whole household, and allay claimants’ fears about the effects it might have on their benefits.

In such cases, the IWBCs had proved to be an effective tool of persuasion. However, in the few reported instances where the household was shown to be no better off or only marginally better off (or indeed worse off), it was felt to have had the opposite effect—advisers had no alternative but to advise such couples to remain on benefits, entrenching attitudes further.

*I’ve done several calculations for partners that are turning out they’re going to be… worse off by taking a job. So therefore that obviously prevents them from —...my advice is ‘you’re going to be worse off, you’ve got to really think about that seriously as to whether or not you want to pursue it.*

(Adviser)

### 3.4.6 Joint WFIPs

The message that WFIPs are relevant to both parties in a household (partner and claimant) did not appear to be getting through in many cases. Most advisers believed that claimants frequently viewed the appointment letter, addressed to their partner, as having nothing to do with them, and partners interpreted the possibility of joint attendance as a question simply of ‘moral support’ should they lack
One adviser was also of the opinion that some claimants deliberately refused to engage with the process because they did not wish the status quo to be disrupted. In these cases, a particular mentality was described as being:

…it’s nothing to do with me…you go and don’t botch it up – come home and everything will carry on as before.

(Adviser)

Nevertheless, some advisers reported that a large proportion of WFIPs were being attended jointly. Estimates for individual offices or advisers ranged from 25 per cent up to 70 per cent. Male partners and the partners of JSA claimants were perceived to be less likely to attend joint interviews than others. Most joint meetings involved the claimant rather than any other third party such as a friend or other family member.

It is likely that more partners would like to attend jointly, but have not understood this possibility from the appointment letter. Indeed, several partners expressed such a view in their interviews (see section 4.1.2). Advisers reported that many joint WFIPs happened for purely contingent reasons. Claimants attended primarily because they had given their partner a lift, or went along to assist with physical mobility, or simply because they knew the location of the Jobcentre Plus office and their partner had never previously attended.

Advisers held mixed views on joint WFIPs, and could often see both positive and negative aspects to them compared with interviews just with the partner. Roughly equal numbers of those taking part in the research expressed preferences for doing joint interviews as for doing individual WFIPs.

Advisers expressing a preference for single interviews predominated in the two districts where greatest pressure was being felt on advisers’ time, and the reason given for the preference was frequently that single interviews were ‘quicker’ and ‘easier’ to conduct. One adviser said that if a claimant came to a WFIP he would not address them at all, but would direct the whole interview to the partner. This was because he would “presume that they [the claimant] are being addressed by our other services”.

The expressed advantages and disadvantages of joint WFIPs were as follows. On the positive side, WFIPs:

- provided the opportunity to address the claimant’s issues as well and offer them help too
- allowed for household issues and income to be better addressed
- ensured that consistent information reached both individuals in the couple, rather than relying on the partner communicating it after the event to the claimant
could range more widely than a single interview and explore all relevant factors in depth

allowed the adviser to act as an ‘advocate’ for the views and needs of each individual (especially those lacking in confidence), be ‘on their side’ and even ‘negotiate’ on their behalf with the other party

could help to address the real complexities that many couples present – “because of the problems these people have, it’s very difficult to focus on the partner alone because the two are so intertwined” (Adviser).

On the negative side, joint WFIPs were said to:

make some partners feel inhibited by the presence of the claimant

be used by some claimants to dominate the discussions to control outcomes (generally because they were concerned about the effects of the partner’s actions on their benefits)

allow claimants to control the flow of information to partners with language difficulties to suit their own agenda, which was often negative towards the partner working

be more likely to stray from the ‘core’ WFIP content and ‘go off on a tangent’

cause additional difficulties for the adviser by presenting two negative responses to deal with rather than one

more easily run out of control – “he’s either talking for her, or she’s talking for him… just chucking a spanner in the works every time…” (Adviser)

run the danger of being dominated by the claimant’s benefits agenda, because it was easy for the adviser to end up talking mostly to the claimant as they were likely to be more familiar with the Jobcentre Plus office and with seeing advisers.

The value of joint WFIPs rather than single interviews depended on the ‘type’ of couple in question. It was widely acknowledged that no one model would suit all couples. The potential range of couple types was considerable – from couples who were positive, communicative and mutually supportive, through to those where one individual was domineering, negative and obstructive. Not all advisers were enthusiastic about taking on the complex relationship issues that were often presented at WFIPs. Many more were still ‘feeling their way’ with joint interviews, which they acknowledged required different skills and handling from conventional one-to-one interviews. A number of advisers expressed a wish for specific training on how to conduct joint interviews.

One possible model for conducting WFIPs, which appeared to have the support of many advisers, was for an initial single interview followed by a longer joint interview, which would include an IWBC. To some extent, this model has been introduced by default through the reduction in time slots for initial WFIPs. This procedural change
has largely precluded carrying out IWBCs at the first meeting and restricted the time that can be spent with each individual if they attend together. Joint interviews were generally agreed to take longer to conduct than single ones.

### 3.4.7 Sifting or screening

There was considerable support from some advisers for the idea of carrying out a preliminary ‘sifting’ or ‘screening’ process with partners. The purpose of such a sift, as they saw it, would be to remove from the body of partners receiving a full WFIP those for whom it could be judged that such an interview would be of no value.

The process was envisaged as an extended waiver and deferral procedure. In addition to identifying ‘missed’ waivers and deferrals which are currently getting through to WFIP appointments with advisers and having to be dealt with face-to-face, it would provide a short preliminary exploration of circumstances, barriers and attitudes to working. On the basis of this, it could then be decided which customers should proceed to a full WFIP and which did not need matters to be taken further. The strong implication was that a majority of the client group would be screened out in this way, allowing advisers more time to deal with those who would benefit the most.

One district had already made a partial move towards greater targeting by splitting the WFIP function from the NDP case loading function and assigning them to different staff. While one of the offices operating in this way had assigned WFIPs to an experienced senior adviser, another had allocated initial WFIPs to a non-New Deal adviser. The explicit intention in the latter case was not to ‘waste’ the time of the caseload advisers with large numbers of unproductive interviews. The implicit assumption was that initial WFIPs could be handled by a non-specialist or less experienced adviser, and a more efficient use of staff resources achieved. The adviser carrying out WFIPs in this latter office clearly viewed his role as passive, with little expectation for him to challenge partners’ attitudes or promote work. He saw it as more of an “exploratory initial contact” than a fully advisory function:

> …not any in-depth help or helping them back to work…a New Deal adviser…has been nominated as the person we refer the partners to who are interested in work.

(Adviser)

Under such circumstances, commitment to the client group was, not surprisingly, weak and there was perceived to be virtually no take-up of NDP:

> I spend as little time as possible to be honest, because I don’t see them as being a productive client group.’

(Adviser)

The issue for advisers who advocated some form of sifting process was to minimise unproductive effort, as they saw most WFIPs as a ‘waste of time’ because of partners’ perceived insurmountable barriers or wish not to work. Advisers who were
most focused on short-term job outcomes and feeling most under pressure to achieve job targets were also the keenest advocates of some form of screening. They argued that not only did partners typically require more intense, lengthy support to get them into work than other customers, but that even if a job outcome were attained it was worth only eight points towards targets (compared with 12 points, for example, for a lone parent job outcome). One adviser went so far as to describe WFIPs as ‘undermining’ the achievement of job targets with other customers.

There would be a danger that low expectations of the partners client group could become a self-fulfilling prophecy if a quick sift removed all but those expressing an immediate wish to join NDP. A further concern would be the elimination of any ‘grey area’ between the two types of partners. Arguably, this ‘grey area’ of undecided, persuadable partners and those willing to look further into future possibilities and options rather than immediate ones, is where much of the impact from WFIPs could be achieved. Certainly, the idea of screening was least popular with advisers who had positive views of the client group’s potential. These were the advisers whose approach to WFIPs emphasised aspects of exploration, persuasion and long-term movement towards the labour market rather than an exclusive and immediate jobs focus. As one expressed it:

*I see them [partners] as a rich seam…but you have to mine a bit deeper.*

(Adviser)

For these advisers, the benefit that partners got from WFIPs was not expected to become apparent in many cases until some time in the future. One adviser estimated that “about half” of all the partners she saw said that they were not ready for work yet, but might be in the future. If these people were to be sifted out because they did not currently wish to work, much would be lost from the WFIP initiative.

### 3.5 Aspects of effective delivery

Judgement as to what is currently effective in terms of delivering WFIPs was made difficult by the small numbers of cases being dealt with, and will depend on future analysis of administrative data for confirmation. Nevertheless, many delivery staff had quite clear views about what they believed was working for them, and what they considered to be elements of good practice.

The following are the main aspects of WFIP procedures emerging from the first phase of fieldwork that were seen as contributing to efficient communication and effective delivery. While none of them was being universally practiced, each received

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9 Job entry points are rated according to the policy priority of the client group involved, with the points contributing to an individual and overall office performance target. Twelve points are awarded for a job entry from the highest category of clients. Job entries for partners are currently awarded eight points.
positive support from at least some administrative staff, advisers and managers at local Jobcentre Plus offices:

• making contact with partners prior to their WFIP interview, by giving telephone contact details of named advisers on letters from administrative staff, ‘courtesy’ calls by advisers, and appointment confirmation calls by administrative staff to minimise FTA

• use of Jobcentre Plus contacts with claimants to prepare the ground for WFIPs prior to sending out appointment letters

• judicious use of joint WFIPs and joint follow-up interviews to maximise the impact of IWBCs through full input of information and the involvement of both individuals affecting household income

• a willingness by advisers to spread attention to the claimant as well as the partner and to engage with the complexities of the ‘couple dynamic’ within households

• allocation of partners work to ‘specialist’ advisers by claimant benefit type (JSA or IS/IB) to capitalise on detailed benefits knowledge and familiarity with the claimant customer group

• use of the intranet for posting problems, questions and solutions arising from day-to-day operation of the initiative.

In addition, there were strong advocates for the practice of separating responsibility for initial WFIPs from any subsequent caseload work with those who were interested in working or preparing themselves for employment. The arguments for this practice were largely in terms of its efficient use of advisers’ time, whereas the arguments against it were more to do with quality of service and concerns about the extent to which the persuasive and challenging potential of WFIPs might be lost. In terms of the policy aims of the initiative, it would not necessarily appear to constitute good practice.
4 WFIP impacts and outcomes

Summary of findings:

- Most partners accepted the need to attend a Work Focused Interview for Partners (WFIP), though some reacted negatively because they felt the letters received did not recognize the realities of their situation.

- Partners reacted positively to the Jobcentre Plus environment, most found their advisers friendly and helpful and said they would consider returning.

- Some partners reported being hurried through their WFIP and treated impersonally – some opportunities may have been missed in this way.

- Negative reactions to WFIPs came mostly from partners who were carers or were already working part-time or had very young children.

- Those most positive about WFIPs were those who had been able to explore their longer term options and those who had received advice about training.

- Some claimants felt the WFIP would have been more appropriate for themselves than for their partner.

- There was evidence that WFIPs had helped stimulate discussion of work options within some households and increased partners’ confidence even where employment remained a somewhat distant goal.

- There was high demand for training, especially short, non-vocationally specific courses to be undertaken within part-time hours and fitted around caring and childcare.

- Job entries directly from WFIPs were scarce – entries to New Deal for Partners (NDP) included partners pursuing self employment, who were very positive about the role played by their WFIP adviser, as were some of those who had since entered work.

This chapter presents partners’ experiences of participating in the WFIPs process, including their perceptions of what had and had not worked for them in their circumstances and how they viewed advisers and Jobcentre Plus. It goes on to look at the outcomes of their participation and to assess the impacts that had been made by different elements of the process on movement towards the labour market, entry to NDP and participation in training activity. The effects on claimant partners are also presented. (Please note that NDP job outcomes are considered in section 7.)
4.1 Partner experience of the WFIP process

4.1.1 Response to letters

The majority of partners (and claimants) were untroubled by the appointment letter. Most expressed no more than curiosity about what exactly the WFIP would entail, and went along to the interview in that spirit:

> I suppose I was more inquisitive than anything – let’s find out what this is all about.

(Partner)

‘Flow’ partners were less likely to have reacted adversely to the letter. Most simply accepted that it was part of the process of claiming benefits and did not feel threatened by a compulsory interview. Almost all partners (including stock partners and carers) said that advisers had allayed any fears they might have had early on in the WFIP.

Most adverse reactions to receiving appointment letters were from ‘stock’ partners who could not understand why the status quo of their benefits situation appeared to be being questioned. Many such customers found the wording of the letter “harsh” or “severe” in tone rather than helpful. To one partner “It seemed like a threat.”

Several admitted to feeling alarmed and anxious that they would be forced to work when they saw this as unfeasible. Some claimants were also concerned about possible effects on their benefits. The threat of benefit sanctions for non-compliance was a particular fear for some:

> If you lose money from the social, you have a heck of a job to get it back, because it has happened to me [before].

(Claimant)

The feeling that the letter did not address the reality of partners’ situations generated much reaction. One person was concerned that she was seen as a “scrounger” who was not working when she could or should be doing so. Another was upset because it was her husband (the claimant) whom she felt needed help most and was looking for work, but the letter targeted her. Such reactions were more marked among partners of Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants where formal contact with Jobcentre Plus was less frequent than for Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) claimants.

Partners already working (usually less than 16 hours) failed to see the logic of them being called in for an interview when their unemployed partner was not:

> I am the one going to work and I have to go to the Jobcentre

(Partner)
One partner, “forced back to work so that we could survive,” felt aggrieved at the implication in the letter that she should do more. To another partner, the official nature of the letter read as “cold” and “threatening” and led her to feel that Jobcentre Plus was “only interested in their agenda – they weren’t interested in me”.

The angriest reactions, however, came from partners who were carers and felt insulted that the letter appeared not to give any recognition to these caring responsibilities, which meant that they were unable to consider work. In many cases, they thought that Jobcentre Plus must have details of their caring duties and could not understand why this was not reflected in the letter. One person in this position suggested that a different letter should have been sent to those in her situation.

Although several partners rang the adviser to get more information about why they were required to attend, others admitted to being too nervous to do so. Moreover, despite feelings of anger or anxiety, no one appeared to have been put off from attending their appointments, though many apparently carried their negative feelings with them to the interview:

_I felt a bit angry but I just went to get it out of the way – I didn’t want to make a fuss._

(Partner)

It was also clear that in many instances the reactions described stemmed from either very partial readings of the letter or from misunderstandings about its meaning. In one case, the words ‘Work Focused Interview’ provoked the response:

_I don’t need a letter from the Jobcentre telling me to get interviews for jobs otherwise they’ll cut my benefits off. You know I really found that very hurtful and quite upsetting._

(Partner)

4.1.2 Joint interviews

The opportunity to attend the WFIP jointly and to be treated as a couple was another message that a number of partners seem to have overlooked or misunderstood from the wording of the letter:

...it [the letter] didn’t say anything about him coming along...it didn’t say anything about that. It doesn’t say you can bring your partner.

(Partner)

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10 For an adviser perspective of delivering jointly attended WFIPs, please refer to section 3.4.6
Some couples said that they would have attended together, had they realised that they could.

I went on my own because only I was invited. It never said anywhere on the form to bring your partner with you.

(Partner)

One couple, unclear as to whether or not they could attend jointly, contacted the local office to clarify the matter. Having then attended the WFIP together, they felt it had been extremely useful:

I think we rang them up and asked them if they want both of us, because we presumed that we’re both not working they’d want to see both of us…whatever you’re going to discuss he was only going to come home and tell me anyway, so if you’re there, you can make the decision…if it [the IWBC] came up with anything…I’m happy that we went together.

(Partner)

4.1.3 Timing of WFIPs

For partners of ‘stock’ claimants, the WFIP comes at an essentially random point in time in relation to the claim. The understandable reaction of some ‘stock’ partners to being called for a WFIP was “why now?” After several years of being a dependent claimant it was not evident to them why they now had to attend an interview about work.

Partners of ‘flow’ claimants are called for a WFIP 26 weeks into the benefit claim. Among ‘flow’ partners there was little consistency as to whether the timing was seen as appropriate. Some felt that it was as good a time as any for a WFIP, though several were still waiting upon developments in the state of the claimant’s health and felt they could not effectively engage with discussions about work until they had a clearer picture of what the future would hold for them.

4.1.4 Perceptions of advisers and Jobcentre Plus

Most partners found their WFIP advisers to be personable, friendly and helpful, and were pleasantly surprised that they were not put under any pressure to do anything they did not wish to do.

Basically she said ‘what can I do to help?’ She told me everything that was available and how they could help which was absolutely superb.

(Partner)

The approach taken in WFIPs contrasted favourably with prior expectations, and sometimes also with previous experiences of Jobcentre Plus staff. Several customers

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11 For an adviser perspective on the timing of WFIPs, please refer to section 3.4.3
commented particularly on the ‘conversational’ style of their interview, and valued the opportunity it provided to discuss in some detail their situation and possible options regarding work.

Nevertheless, some partners made critical remarks about WFIP advisers, and there appeared to be a marked split of opinions between those with positive views and those with negative ones. The main criticism levelled at advisers was that WFIPs had been ‘cursory’ and that partners’ time had been wasted because no attempt had been made to engage with the detail of their situation. A sense of being ‘rushed through’ generated much of the adverse feeling. Part of this was perhaps no more than a desire for further attention, but in some cases it was clear that opportunities had been missed because advisers had failed to take a lead from customers’ concerns and interests.

_I wanted to ask about if I could go back to college, but I was like rushed off...I was a bit flabbergasted to be honest, you know, the way he spoke to me._

(Partner)

One specific aspect of some partners’ dissatisfaction at being dealt with too quickly and too superficially was the perception that their WFIP had been carried out in an impersonal and mechanical way. One customer described it as being conducted “tick-box fashion”. Some partners also felt that their advisers were inexperienced and not very knowledgeable about WFIP and NDP. This may reflect uncertainties at the start of the initiative, but perhaps also the low priority accorded the client group and a need for improved specific training for advisers carrying out WFIPs – as recognised by advisers themselves.

These contrasting positive and negative responses to WFIPs did not seem to be easily related to any local policies or approaches, but rather to personal variations in the experience and approach of different advisers.

Customers’ reactions to the Jobcentre Plus environment they encountered when attending their WFIP were broadly positive, with the great majority saying that they found the environment “modern”, “spacious” and “welcoming”, and that staff were generally “friendly,” “personable” and “very helpful”. Those who were able to draw comparisons with their previous experience of Jobcentres considered Jobcentre Plus to be “a lot better” and “a lot more comfortable”. Another described the new environment as “more corporate” and in stark contrast to previous experiences.

Perceived changes to both decor and staff behaviour made for a “relaxed atmosphere” in which advisers were said to be “professional”, “more approachable” and “more welcoming”. One partner said of the staff in general that they “seemed to put themselves out to see each individual”. For some, this new ambience helped banish former negative associations between Jobcentre Plus and unpleasant feelings such as “waiting for hours, feeling so low and...being in difficult circumstances.”
Although no customers mentioned having a problem with open plan offices, some advisers felt that this was not always the most appropriate environment in which to carry out WFIPs when very personal issues might need discussing. A private interview room was usually available if a partner made a request for one, though in advisers’ experience they rarely did so.

This overall generally positive impression of Jobcentre Plus contributed to many partners saying that they would be happy to revisit the office and their adviser if they needed help or advice about work in the future. Indeed, some advisers saw the ‘enforced’ exposure to the Jobcentre Plus environment as a key element in the long-term development of good customer relations and one of the most important aspects of the impact of WFIPs. They thought this was of particular importance given the longer term nature of most partners’ work aspirations, coupled with the lack of any mandatory six or 12 monthly review meetings for this client group.

Two comments from partners capture the potential power of fostering good customer relations and encouraging partners to return for help when the moment is right for them:

*Just the knowledge that there’s someone trying to help with the situation, it goes a long way, yeah it does…*  
(Partner)

*I can tell you now what I thought: somebody’s trying to give you something rather than take it off you!*  
(Partner)

### 4.1.5 Reactions to Work Focused Interviews

Partner’s reactions to WFIPs were as mixed as their responses to individual advisers.

The main criticisms of WFIPs involved perceptions that the interview was inappropriate and therefore a waste of time because of circumstances at home, which meant that work, was not a feasible option. Childcare and other caring responsibilities figured highly among such reasons.

Some negative reaction came from partners already working part-time. One such partner with a small child to look after, in addition to caring for a sick husband, expressed some resentment at having to attend a WFIP:

*I had to take time off work to go to a WFI…I said look I have a part-time job I work 16 hours, I’ve got a husband who is disabled with physical and mental problems and I have a small child and a house, when would you like me to work some more?*  
(Partner)

Other partners complained that the WFIP was too short and “scripted” with no real empathy for their situation. Some felt it missed the target, prevented them from
discussing what they wanted to discuss most and dashed high expectations of support and assistance. Many of these criticisms were closely tied into a personal dislike for an adviser’s particular approach.

On the positive side, partners who felt that the non-work aspects of their circumstances and their longer-term options had been taken seriously showed the most appreciation. Several partners who had had a joint WFIP accompanied by the main claimant were particularly impressed that the interview had taken a view of the family as a whole and had discussed the entire household situation. Asked what aspects of their interview they had found most useful, partners emphasised receiving information about what help and support was available for future use, clarification of options, and the stimulation of more strategic thinking. Practical help with training, and information on training and educational courses, also figured prominently among those with a positive view of the WFIP process.

Partners expressing a more neutral response to their WFIP included several whose main feeling was relief that they had not been put under pressure to get a job or do anything they did not wish to do. Other partners with no strong feelings either way expressed mild interest in the information they had received, but were somewhat detached from it on account of having no current or future plans to work.

Claimants who attended WFIPs with their partners often said that they had appreciated the opportunity this provided to discuss their own situation and its bearing on the partner. Frequently, claimants simply appreciated the attention given them by the adviser because they were keen to work and had previously had little or no contact with or support from Jobcentre Plus. A number of claimants thought that the WFIP would have been more appropriate for them than for their partner. In some cases, advisers had effectively been able to respond to this and give most attention to the claimant if that appeared to be the most appropriate way forward.

4.2 Movement towards the labour market

In addition to the small number of cases where partners had moved onto NDP or into training, there was considerable evidence of WFIPs successfully stimulating discussion and review of work options within couples and households. This resulted in greater confidence about a possible future return to work, even though individuals generally still remained at some considerable distance from the labour market.

Whether WFIPs were successfully moving partners closer to the labour market was difficult to assess, though informed discussion between partner and claimant provided the first step towards effective decision-making. Many partners and couples claimed an increased knowledge and awareness of the help and support available to them, as well as expressing the intention to use it at some point in the future. Improved motivation, self-confidence and optimism were also regularly asserted, and in some cases there appeared to be evidence of activity following on from the interviews. Activity was reported as follows:
• starting active job-search or intensifying existing job-search
• job-searching in new and different ways
• using job-search and job-application techniques discussed with an adviser
• investigating educational and vocational courses, for example by sending off for leaflets and prospectuses from a local college
• making use of Jobcentre Plus facilities and resources.

Partners were much less likely to perceive their WFIP as having had any impact where it had failed, for whatever reason, to fully address the situation of the main claimant or that of the household as a whole. However, partners occasionally described a situation where the WFIP had allowed them to stand back from the needs of the claimant for a while and focus on their own needs separately to gain a new perspective on the situation as a whole. In some cases, this was evidently liberating and a positive experience, though clearly only the first stage towards possible employment.

Employment for most partners was a relatively distant goal, even for those who had positive attitudes and aspirations in that direction. Whether they were waiting for their youngest child to reach a certain age, or for the condition of a sick partner or child to stabilise, or for their own health to improve, many felt themselves to be in a position of unavoidable inactivity as far as employment was concerned. However, WFIPs carried the potential to assist partners to think beyond their immediate situation and get them to focus on the small steps that might be taken with a view to future options for work.

The problem facing advisers was that these outcomes could appear very small for the effort required, for example, to grapple with relationship difficulties, serious health problems and life crises threatening to swamp everything else and prevent any movement or change. Only some advisers were willing or able to make the effort and investment of time required. Furthermore, many advisers did not think it sensible or appropriate to get involved in relationship or domestic problems. As a result, some opportunities to engage with partners may be being missed. However, there were undoubtedly real concerns among advisers of reaching the limits of their perceived remit and legitimate competency in taking on issues such as these.

4.2.1 Participation in training

Advisers saw persuading customers to undertake educational and vocational training courses of various types as constituting an important element in moving people closer to employment. Advisers’ experiences with partners with respect to training illustrated further the nature of the client group and, in particular, how far removed many of them were from engaging in the labour market.

Advisers reported a high level of demand for courses among those partners who were beginning to consider the possibility of changing their situation. However,
most of the training available through Jobcentre Plus providers was deemed to be unsuitable because most partners were such a distance from the labour market. Many such courses were said to involve full-time attendance or long hours and a requirement for customers to undertake job search. Advisers generally saw these as unsuitable:

*The 30-hour [training] scenario…or 26 weeks…doesn’t really suit [partners]…you have to do job-searches with providers [many partners] don’t want that because they’re…genuinely…not ready for a job yet. It might take them a couple of years to be job ready so being pushed into job-search isn’t for them…I know it puts them off.*

(Adviser)

Advisers identified a demand for shorter, non-vocationally specific courses that could be undertaken within part-time hours and fitted around caring and childcare commitments. Such courses could form the first small step for partners away from the situation they were in, facilitating a mental ‘break’ with the past:

*I suggest part-time courses…because it’s a stepping-stone…to retain their sanity and their individuality.*

(Adviser)

Generally, these courses were not part of Jobcentre Plus provision, being run in local colleges or community centres and often free to the partners of benefit recipients – information gratefully gleaned from WFIPs by many partners.

Although advisers identified developmental courses of this kind as particularly suited to partners, and as being in demand, they did not form part of support currently available under New Deal for Partners (NDP). For this reason, they were experiencing difficulties in monitoring whether customers attended or successfully completed them. With no time available to make follow-up contact, and no mandatory review meetings with partners, advisers had no way of finding out if progress was being made. Any results achieved from such courses, although potentially a strong measure of movement towards the labour market, were generally lost from Jobcentre Plus monitoring. So although advisers were convinced that such courses formed a necessary pre-condition for movement towards employment, and continued to assist partners to take them up, they were unable to monitor or support them effectively or to take any credit for outcomes.

Many advisers saw a need for greater variety of local training provision and more flexibility in delivery of courses so that partners would be able to access them. One particular case involved a male partner seeking to work night shifts in a warehouse so that he could continue to care for his disabled wife during the day. He identified the need for a forklift driver’s qualification, but the adviser was unable to source any such training delivered at night, which was the only time he could do it. Once again, the complex nature of support required by many people in the partner client group was apparent.
4.2.2 Entry to NDP from WFIPs

The partners who had moved onto NDP from their WFIPs reported a considerable amount of employment related activity. All but one were very positive about their adviser and felt that they had received significant support from them. One had started job-search on NDP and another two had intensified what had previously been somewhat desultory and half-hearted job searching. Two were undertaking self-employment training with a specialist provider, while another had started a more conventional skills training course on NDP.

At the time of this first phase research, these partners were variously between one and four months distant from the point at which they had attended a WFIP. None had yet entered a job. One was due to start test trading as a self-employed person within two weeks. More information about partners choosing to enter NDP is set out in sections 6.1 to 6.3.

4.3 Direct job entry from WFIPs

Advisers reported that the number of partners entering work following a WFIP, whether via NDP or not, to be very small. Although some job entries were being attained, the great majority of partners were said to be either unable to work or not to want to work or were unconvinced that it was a feasible option. Some advisers said that they had already met or exceeded their job targets for partners. However, most said that they were struggling, and several had yet (at the four to five-month stage in the initiative) to get a single job entry from this customer group. Advisers typically put this down to what they said was the predominant attitude within the customer group of simply not being interested in or able to consider employment.

A small number of partners said that they were not interested in working either now or in the foreseeable future. However, a far greater number expressed the wish to work in the future. For now, though, they had chosen not to work because they wanted to look after children, for example, or they felt that work was currently not feasible because of the poor health of the claimant. Many stated they would be keen to consider employment if and when these circumstances changed. Advisers who were particularly strongly focused on immediate work prospects appeared not to be making this distinction.

4.3.1 Part-time work

Some partners were in employment at the time of the WFIP research. Most of these were female partners of stock claimants and were working part-time. Most of them had been working at the time of being called to a WFIP, and part-time work was a relatively long-established part of their households’ economic survival strategies.

Several of the female partners working part-time said that their hours were constrained by the need to look after children. One had joined NDP to seek to extend the number of hours she was working. She felt the time was right to do this as her
daughter was now of an age where she no longer needed to be at home for her so much of the time. Several months after her WFIP, however, she had still not found a job that would allow her to extend her hours as she required.

A partner who had started work since her WFIP had found a part-time retail job independently and without further contact or support from an adviser. However, she said that the WFIP “did make me think” and that she had used job search facilities at the Jobcentre Plus office immediately after her WFIP interview. She had been disappointed by the response from her adviser when she explained that she only wanted to work part-time to start with:

*She [the adviser] told me, “I can’t help you unless you work more than 16 hours a week”.*

(Partner)

Evidence of WFIPs directly contributing towards job outcomes was thus sparse. Although advisers could cite circumstances of partners whom they had helped into work, the numbers were acknowledged to be very small. Of the partners interviewed, those who were working had been working (part-time) before their WFIP, or attributed only indirect influence from the WFIP adviser in the decision to seek work.

### 4.3.2 Self-employment

The one area that emerged as indicating some influence and success for WFIPs was moving partners into self-employment support. A number of partners were pursuing the New Deal self-employment option to get back into work. One was already nominally self-employed, but the business was not making a profit so he was still eligible as a dependent partner on his wife’s claim. He had discussed with his adviser options for extending the range of services he was offering, and expressed optimism for expansion and eventual profitability. The other partners were considering self-employment and had all joined NDP to pursue the option further. Two of them were undergoing self-employment training through NDP, while the other was firstly exploring some employment options, which might suit him better, by talking through possible ideas with the adviser.

Several partners saw self-employment in various forms as the ideal solution to the difficulties of combining caring responsibilities with income earning. The possibility of working from home and thus being available to provide care for the claimant partner, should specific needs arise in the course of a day, was what they were seeking. It was seen as particularly appropriate if care needs were sporadic or unpredictable, or where a key perceived need of the claimant was simply to have the reassurance of the partner’s presence. Others were using the opportunity afforded by working from home to combine self-employment with childcare responsibilities.

Advisers were keenly aware that self-employment is never an easy option, and that they needed to let such options be driven by customers’ own ideas, opportunities and motivations. Perhaps for this reason, those partners pursuing a self-employment route tended to be from couples who had previously engaged in lengthy discussion
about work possibilities and had a well-developed strategy for moving forward. They also appeared to be partners with higher levels of education and qualifications than many Jobcentre Plus customers and recent work experience, and were previously accustomed to a relatively high level of household income.

In some cases, part of the aim and attraction of self-employment for the partner was that it would allow the claimant to participate within the business as well, to whatever extent was feasible, given their ill-health or incapacity. This ‘joint venture’ approach was evident from some other partners too. However, in cases where the claimant was the main protagonist in plans for self-employment, and WFIPs were not attended jointly, advisers frequently missed this avenue of exploration. They focused too narrowly on partners’ individual work situations, and failed to develop discussion in the WFIP to include the dimensions of the couple and the whole household.

### 4.3.3 Main claimant outcomes

Interestingly, among couples, some five months into the initiative there was more evidence of main claimants having entered work since their partner’s WFIP, than of the partners having done so – all male claimants. One of these claimed that his decision to return to work was directly the result of having attended his partner’s WFIP. Specific mention was made of the adviser’s friendly, supportive approach and attitude, the usefulness of the In Work Benefit Calculation (IWBC) carried out based on a job offer the claimant was considering, and the effect on the net overall household income that would result from Tax Credits.

In other cases, the partner’s WFIP was also credited with considerable influence. In one instance the influence was indirect because the WFIP was not attended jointly. Nevertheless, discussion within the couple after the WFIP was described as providing a spur to serious discussions about work options that led to the claimant returning to work.

In another case, the WFIP was attended jointly and set in motion a series of events for the partner (taking up a college course and then intense, motivated job-search) that encouraged the claimant also to think about work possibilities. After help via referral to a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA), the stock Income Support (IS) claimant started work under the ‘permitted work rules’.

Jointly attended WFIPs clearly played an important part by providing the basis for thinking about the household as a whole and the effects of working on both parties in the couple. In a further case, the WFIP provided the information for developing a more holistic view in subsequent discussions between partner and claimant, and set in motion a process of mutual support and motivation towards employment.

Understandably, some long-term stock IS/IB claimants currently had very little contact with Jobcentre Plus. Jointly attending their partner’s WFIP thus provided an opportunity for discussing their own situation with an adviser. There is currently no
requirement for these claimants to attend a Work Focused Interview (WFI). In some households, the partner’s WFIP appointment letter had caused resentment because it was the claimant rather than the partner who was considering work options or even actively seeking work at the time. In particular, if advantage was not taken of the opportunity to attend a joint WFIP, claimants felt that they were being ignored (see also section 4.3.1):

*I am really getting quite bitter now, because I’m trying to find something and the system is just not working for me.*

(Claimant)

*She [the partner] was annoyed – she knows I am trying to find work and she’s getting called in…*

(Claimant)
5. Delivery of Enhanced New Deal for Partners

Summary of findings:

- Enhanced New Deal for Partners (NDP) was seen by advisers as providing more to offer partners but was not felt to be attracting many people onto NDP who would not have joined or found employment anyway.

- NDP was perceived to be unproductive in terms of job entries compared to the effort that had to be made with many participants and the Jobcentre Plus target culture appeared to work against partners seen as difficult and time consuming.

- Several advisers argued that a job entry for a partner should earn 12 points as for a lone parent.

- Most advisers were opposed to any split in adviser functions between Work Focused Interviews for Parents (WFIPs) and NDP caseloads.

This chapter looks at delivery of the enhanced NDP programme, including comparisons with previous partner provision, and assessment of the impact of the new programme on partners’ perceptions and behaviour. The operating context for delivery of NDP is discussed in terms of the target culture driving adviser priorities and choices, and the issue of split adviser roles, first raised in relation to WFIPs is explored further in the NDP perspective.

5.1 Comparison with previous NDP

Advisers were asked to compare the enhanced NDP programme with the previous programme. However, even most advisers who had been in post for over a year had seen too few partners to comment. Indeed the numbers of partners self-referring onto NDP in many areas were said to have been so low that frequently an adviser would have seen no more than one or two customers a year, and in some cases none at all. For this reason, even those advisers who had held responsibility for partners prior to April 2004 often could not recall any customers they may have seen under the previous NDP programme. Comparisons were thus difficult to make.
The small number of advisers who were in a position to make comparisons perceived the enhanced NDP to be an improvement over the previous programme. It provided them with additional support that they could offer to partners to assist them in moving towards the labour market and into work, and as such was welcomed. In making such comments, nevertheless, advisers generally had negative views about the previous NDP, which they saw as little more than a nominal programme and an insignificant aspect of their work.

The point was also made that, even though there was now more that they could offer to partners in the way of help and support, they judged that the enhanced programme was not, of itself, attracting people onto NDP who would not have otherwise joined. Positive views of the enhanced NDP were therefore tempered by the perception that its persuasive power was low and it was not generating job outcomes for customers.

Enhanced NDP was introduced to offer the same type of support to partners as was available to other Jobcentre Plus customers, particularly lone parents. In spite of this, however, several advisers felt the programme still to be lacking in what they referred to as “effective incentives” for those partners considering work and training options. This in part appeared to be the result of a perception that partners were a ‘hard to help’ customer group, with multiple employment barriers and additional personal and financial constraints to overcome. It was reinforced by advisers’ experience of how difficult it was to persuade partners at their Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) to go on and participate in NDP. The ‘hurdles’ to be overcome by partners, in making such a transition from mandatory interview to voluntary participation in New Deal, were perceived to be greater in number and considerably ‘higher’ than for many other customers – lone parents for example.

5.2 Adviser views of enhanced NDP

There was a widespread view among advisers that NDP was a small and “unproductive” programme, accorded relatively low priority by them and their managers. Similar low expectations of NDP as previously of WFIPs were found to be prevalent. The small numbers of positive outcomes (job entries) being achieved were likewise reinforcing negative perceptions of the amount of time and effort required to deal with this customer group. Several advisers had yet to achieve a single job entry by a partner from NDP, after seven months of the new programme.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, (in many areas partners work had been allocated to lone parent advisers) frequent comparisons were made between advisers’ experience of NDP and their experience of New Deal for Lone Parents NDLP. This was invariably to the detriment of NDP and the partners customer group.

Rather than comparing enhanced NDP to the previous programme for partners, advisers placed it alongside their experiences with other client groups to which they were delivering WFIs under the roll out of Jobcentre Plus. Indeed, the context of
Jobcentre Plus and the changes inherent in the roll out of WFIIs to increasing numbers of different customer groups, formed the backdrop for all work with partners. This wider context to a great extent overshadowed any consideration of changes over time in the programme and support aimed at this specific group.

The clearest example of this was found in relation to adviser training. Most required training for partner advisers was seen as \textit{generic} rather than \textit{specialised}. Such training was seen as a question of attaining operational expertise in delivering WFIIs and ‘selling’ provision to customers, rather than of acquiring specialist knowledge of partners and developing targeted approaches to meet the specific needs and circumstances of that particular group. These dominant perceptions fed directly into the way NDP was found to be delivered.

5.3 Meeting Jobcentre Plus performance targets

Business managers were generally very clear about their priorities and described the main driver behind their decision making activities as being the need to meet key Jobcentre Plus performance targets. Primary among these for each office was the overall Job Entry Target (JET). This target is expressed as a points value, with different priority client groups ‘scoring’ different numbers of points on entering a job. Different ‘types’ of customers are categorised (and points weighted accordingly) in line with Ministerial priority and according to input expected to be needed from advisers to move them into a job. In the highest priority groups (for example, lone parents) a job entry is worth 12 points. The job entry for a partner is currently worth 8 points. Each office will have an overall target to meet in the year. This target is further broken down to sub-targets, which relate to individual programmes and customer groups, and advisers have their own personal targets that directly contribute to their office target. Thus, each office will have a specific target for points to be achieved from placing partners into employment.

It was meeting the overall job entry target that managers viewed as critical. Subsidiary targets would be delivered where possible but were clearly not seen as crucial. The smaller the contribution of a subsidiary target to the overall total, the lower its effective priority was seen to be. One business manager said:

\begin{quote}
If I hit my headline target then the rest don’t matter, I’ll get no more than a slapped wrist if I don’t meet them’ – I will try, but I’m not that bothered if I don’t get it.
\end{quote}

(Business Manager)

Managers confirmed that the weighted points system effectively ensures that available resources get aimed at the highest priority groups. However, there was a perception among many managers and advisers that the value of a partner job entry did not accurately reflect the level of effort required to achieve it. Some suggested that partners should be included in the higher (12 points) category. Some advisers asserted that the amount of time input required to get a job entry with a partner was
actually greater than for most other customers. In terms of effort they proposed that they should spend their time with other customer groups, such as lone parents.

From the point of view of advisers, it was the *absolute* numbers of job outcomes that were important, not the conversion rate from WfIs or New Deal into jobs. The small numbers coming through NDP were thus affecting their perceptions and behaviour. Several managers reported the lack of job entries from NDP to be having a de-motivating effect on advisers.

Advisers who persisted in applying considerable time and effort to getting partners into work, frequently said they did so “*despite*” its detrimental effect on their personal performance assessment. These advisers felt personally committed to helping those with particularly difficult problems to overcome and complained of a tension between the pressures of business targets and their commitment to good customer service. The logic of a targets driven system, therefore, was found to be working against the success of NDP. In addition to reinforcing perceptions of the ‘difficult’ nature of the partners customer group, it was also felt by some to be undermining customer service and adversely affecting adviser morale.

### 5.4 Split adviser roles

One of the most important variations in delivery between different districts was identified as the move in some areas to separate the role of conducting WfIPs from the role of helping partners who have moved onto NDP and caseload (see section 3.4.6). This split role arrangement for dealing with partners appeared to be gaining momentum by the time of the NDP element of evaluation fieldwork. A greater number of advisers expressed support for some such arrangement than had done so previously. Most, however, continued to argue against it on a number of grounds including that it:

- introduced a lack of continuity for those partners who moved onto NDP
- presented the ‘case load adviser’ with the need to re-establish rapport and personal understanding with the customer
- could involve repetition of effort and information gathering
- could result in losing the opportunity to ‘persuade’ partners of the feasibility of working (especially if a non-New Deal adviser conducts the WfIP).

Evidence as to whether these fears were being borne out in practice was inconclusive. In one district some offices had instigated a split in roles and others had not. There appeared to be no difference in performance between offices that split the role and those that did not. One of the offices operating the split role was reportedly the best performing office in the district in terms of conversion rates from WfIPs to NDP. However another office that had split the partner adviser role was understood to be performing poorly on the same measure.
The key factor in these cases may not have been the split roles but the type of adviser conducting WFIPs and their level of experience, as these varied greatly from office to office. Where non-New Deal advisers were conducting WFIPs there were a number of reported instances in which partners had attended an initial NDP meeting with a different adviser under the impression that this meeting too was mandatory. As these customers had no wish to work, the meetings were unproductive and abandoned at an early stage, once the misunderstanding became clear. Advisers who had dealt with such ‘misdirections’ clearly felt they represented a further waste of their time.

Evidently, boosting the numbers of NDP entries is not in itself a guarantee of additional job entries. A thorough and effective initial WFIP would appear to be the best guarantee of attaining a successful outcome from NDP. This was also felt by many advisers to be particularly important because:

- the ‘grey area’ between partners definitely wanting to work, and those definitely not wanting to work was seen to be “very narrow”, and

- with no follow-on review meetings for partners, the WFIP was the only opportunity to engage, inform and persuade them regarding the benefits of work. For this reason, there was a degree of support from several advisers for the idea of increasing the mandatory elements for partners – essentially for having a further mandatory interview at a point 6 or 12 months after the first WFIP.
6. NDP entry and participation

**Summary of findings:**

- New Deal for Parents (NDP) did not have a high profile or clear image in partners’ minds and few were entering the programme from Work Focused Interviews for Parents (WFIPs).

- Advisers reported confusion among customers about the nature and conditionality of NDP.

- Many partners recorded as self-referrals to NDP had participated in a WFIP in the recent past that had influenced their decision making and behaviour.

- Many NDP entrants left rapidly after obtaining an In Work Benefit Calculation (IWBC) and there was considerable evidence of efforts by advisers to ‘capture’ job entries for NDP.

- Main reasons given for entering NDP were: to have an IWBC; to get help with job search; to access training opportunities (especially self-employment support), and to access Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF) and Job Grants.

- The self-employment option appeared particularly well suited to the complex circumstances and barriers faced by many partners.

- The WFIP/NDP intervention was most effective for partners who were already considering their training and employment options.

- Partners’ overall views of NDP were strongly conditioned by the outcome of their IWBC as this was the key gateway to achieving their desired outcome.

- Advisers were widely operating systems of ‘inactive’ case loading to keep in touch with partners expressing interest in working in the future but not immediately.

- The most helpful elements of NDP mentioned by partners were: IWBCs; Tax Credits information; self-employment support; training; financial assistance, and; adviser support and encouragement.

- For partners without children it can be difficult to demonstrate the benefits of working because of Tax Credit and Childcare Credit eligibility rules, which favour couples with dependent children.
This chapter explores partners’ entry to and participation on NDP both from their own perceptions of the process and its helpfulness to them, and from the point of view of advisers’ perceptions. The issues surrounding transition from WFIPs and self-referral are discussed along with partners’ reasons for joining NDP and discussion of which types of partners appear to be accessing the programme most successfully. The pattern of contact with advisers on NDP and the content of NDP meetings are presented, as well as the perceptions of partners as to what where the most helpful aspects of provision for them

6.1 Entrants to NDP

As noted in the previous section, advisers reported only small numbers of partners choosing to go onto the NDP programme and this was borne out by interviews with customers. Furthermore, most of those who were flagged on the Labour Market System (LMS) as having entered NDP had only seen an adviser on one occasion following the WFIP, and had not been case loaded. Typically, this additional meeting was to allow an IWBC to be carried out. When the calculation showed that the partner would not be better off, or would not be sufficiently better off to persuade them to seek employment, they left the programme.

NDP did not seem to have a high profile or clear image in the minds of the majority of partners. Many partners reported minimal contact with the NDP programme despite being identified on LMS as participants. Indeed, several partners were somewhat unsure of whether or not they were or had been on NDP at all. Most customers viewed NDP in terms of the specific help they were getting rather than the programme under which it was being delivered.

A number of advisers reported confusion among customers about the nature and conditionality of NDP. Some partners were said to be under the impression that if they joined the New Deal programme and then did not get a job, the main claimant’s benefits would be sanctioned.

6.1.1 NDP entry via WFIPs and self-referrals

Entrants to the NDP programme can either be by self-referral or via the mandatory WFIP route. Although advisers reported that most entrants were coming via WFIPs, administrative data show a split in favour of self-referrals. Partners who attend a mandatory WFIP and then go away, discuss options with their (claimant) partners, consider the advice and information they have been given, and then return for a further appointment several weeks (or in some cases, several months) later (perhaps even in the meantime having found a job), will be identified as having exited the WFIP with no outcome. When they subsequently attend an adviser meeting, they are treated by LMS as having entered NDP as a voluntary self-referral. Especially where returns are fairly rapid, advisers view these ‘return’ customers as entrants to NDP from a WFIP and point with some justification to the role the WFIP has played in getting the partner moving towards work and taking practical steps to achieve it.
Advisers reported that genuine self-referral, where partners simply hear about NDP and self-refer by walking into a Jobcentre Plus office ‘off the street’, was extremely rare. Several cases recounted by advisers were of largely “accidental self-referrals” by, for example, individuals dropping in for advice about training and being found to be the partner of a claimant, even though they had not previously heard of NDP or thought of joining. Even among those entries to NDP that can be considered to have happened relatively independently of the WFIP process, most were said to have come via other Jobcentre Plus processes and contacts.

Several offices reported having made conscious efforts to identify claimants with partners and to have actively encouraged them to come in and see an adviser. Most offices were also routinely checking the status of anyone asking for vacancies help and using the job-points, to ensure that any customers who were the partners of claimants could be ‘captured’ for the NDP programme, and any job outcomes included against the Job Entry Target (JET).

While there was widespread evidence of such efforts to ‘capture’ job entries for NDP by categorising people as self-referrals, there was considerable variation in the lengths to which such efforts were reported to go. One partner’s account of the offer of ADF support they received was:

*If you find a job come back here first [i.e. as a self-referral to NDP] and we may be able to give you some money for clothes.*

(Partner)

A small number of participants described being persuaded into work by financial incentives and offers of help including ADF and Job Grants, but later found themselves in financial difficulties.

Most advisers reported having had only single figure numbers of partners on their NDP caseloads in total since the start of the WFIP initiative in April 2004. Please refer to the forthcoming quantitative report for further evidence. There was some uncertainty among advisers as to how and when they were supposed to be marking entry to NDP on the LMS system, which indicated variability in practice across districts. Some areas regarded the first voluntary meeting following a WFIP as entry to NDP, whereas others said they did not always do so. There was also a reportedly high level of exits among partners following a single initial NDP meeting. In many cases this was attributed to an ‘unfavourable’ IWBC result.

6.2 Group information sessions

A number of areas were using group sessions for partners as part of the WFIP process, and there were examples described of some movement onto NDP from among those participating. Success was claimed for such methods in helping to overcome partners’ feelings of isolation and lack of self-confidence, and thus in helping to persuade them to take up NDP.
It is impossible to say whether any successes using such methods were primarily the result of conducting group sessions, or whether there were other determining factors at work. None of the NDP participants reported having taken part in such a group. The motivation for carrying out group information sessions appeared also to have been at least as much a question of administrative convenience as of meeting customer needs. It should be noted that group information sessions are not recognised as WFIPs and thus offices should still be conducting individual WFIPs to meet the agreed policy and Childcare Credit eligibility. (see section 3.4.6).

6.3 Reasons for NDP entry

Partners who entered NDP gave a variety of reasons for having chosen this course of action, including:

- wanting clarification of the financial viability of working by having an IWBC
- seeking help with job-search and vacancies
- wanting access to training opportunities
- wanting access to self-employment (training and test trading)
- looking for support and confidence-building and the opportunity to discuss options and issues further with an adviser
- gaining access to ADF payments/job grant
- seeking to escape difficult home circumstances
- thinking it was mandatory/wanting to show willing
- needing benefits advice (for partners who had chosen not to work).

6.3.1 In Work Benefit Calculations

Partners most frequently said that they joined NDP for an IWBC. Generally, they understood that this was an opportunity to get an authoritative and informed view of the viability of working in their circumstances, and discovering how much financially better off they could expect to be as a household than if they remained as a dependent partner on a benefit claim.

By no means all those entering NDP for an IWBC had done so expecting a positive result from the calculation, but they were keen to confirm what they suspected to be their situation. For this reason, several partners had made an immediate exit from NDP because their IWBC showed that they would not be sufficiently better off to persuade them back into employment:

> If [my husband] was working full-time and I did twenty hours, [we] would qualify for childcare. But by the time we paid our childcare and our rent and everything, we was worse off. So we just thought...it just wasn’t at the time worth going into anything and we just left it.

(Partner)
All other partners joining NDP specifically to have an IWBC had entered work – half of them by finding their own jobs and half with the help of an adviser.

Many partners entered NDP solely to gain information on job vacancies and to get adviser assistance with job-search activities. They were mostly customers coming to NDP via a WFIP, who had previously either not had the impetus to seek work actively, or had lacked information as to how best to go about it. Many had been considering the possibility of working for some time prior to their WFIP and happily took up the option of NDP in the expectation of being ‘fed’ suitable vacancies by an adviser. They tended to be slightly older partners (in their 40s) with correspondingly older children, and some were male partners.

6.3.2 Access to training

A number of partners joined NDP to find out about and access training opportunities. Several partners giving this reason for entry had no qualifications and were looking to develop themselves. Others held relatively low-level educational or vocational qualifications and were looking to learn new skills or to update skills after a period out of the labour market. In general, partners entering NDP to access training tended to be well motivated and to have taken the initiative themselves. Most were self-referrals onto the programme.

Partners often saw training as a way of testing their ability to spend time away from the home, and away from caring and childcare responsibilities. Several were specifically seeking part-time training options that they could fit around other commitments. Although one partner interviewed found the demands of training too much to cope with and had to leave, most had found courses and hours they could manage and were either persevering with training or had already moved into jobs.

6.3.3 Access to self-employment

A separate and relatively large group of partners had joined NDP specifically to get support and training for self-employment. As a group they tended not to have been out of the labour market more than a few years, to be relatively well educated and to hold higher-level qualifications, including degrees. Several had been earning good salaries prior to the circumstances that led to the household being on benefits (for example, illness, redundancy, mental breakdown). Male partners appeared to be more likely to enter NDP for access to self-employment support than for other reasons. In these respects they could be said to be somewhat untypical of the partner customer group as a whole.

Most partners pursuing a self-employment route came onto NDP following a WFIP. Several of them indicated that this meeting with an adviser was the first time they became aware that Jobcentre Plus could provide support and training related to self-employment. In one case, the option of self-employment had been raised by the adviser in response to the partner’s account of their circumstances and work
aspirations, and it had been enthusiastically pursued thereafter. However, most partners had been thinking seriously about self-employment as an option prior to being called to a WFIP, but the WFIP had allowed these thoughts to become concrete possibilities and led to action.

Self-employment was often seen as a workable solution to a complex set of circumstances and barriers. A number of partners seeking self-employment were seriously constrained by caring responsibilities, and saw the demands of caring for their (claimant) partner as the main barrier to employment that they faced.

Working from home was also seen as potentially fitting well with childcare demands. One partner with four school age children, who had herself been forced to give up work through ill-health, thought self-employment would be particularly suited to her circumstances:

_I fell ill and couldn’t work for absolutely ages after my last child…After I was starting to get better I thought…I want to…set up my own business…to give me the flexibility to be able to be based at home when needed for the children…If I had to go into paid employment in an office – it would have been a bit of a nightmare._

(Partner)

6.3.4 Confidence building

Seeking personal support and building up self-confidence was given as the key reason for joining NDP by another significant group of partner participants. As might perhaps be expected, these were predominantly WFIP-route entrants and were almost all women. They also tended to be younger on average than other participants (in their late 20s and early 30s).

Several partners giving this reason for joining NDP said that they had very few or no other constraints or barriers to working apart from a lack of self-confidence, though this was frequently accompanied by a long period away from the labour market and lack of knowledge and understanding as how best to go about finding a job. Advisers had frequently managed to find training opportunities (especially short term courses) linked to work placements for these partners and NDP appeared to be working successfully to overcome their fears and concerns and bring them closer to the labour market.

6.3.5 Access to ADF and Job Grants

Another main reason given for joining NDP by a significant number of participants was that it provided access to financial help in the form of ADF payments and Job Grants. Many partners joining for his reason were self-referrals who had entered NDP at a point where they had already found a job independently. Many knew about the assistance available, because of a prior WFIP (sometimes several months previously), and had contacted an adviser with this purpose in mind. Advisers, keen
to capture a job entry towards performance targets in this way, had actively encouraged such customers to avail themselves of all the support to which they might be entitled.

Partners entering NDP for this reason tended to be younger than the average age for the partners group as a whole, and either to have no dependent children or to have young children – many younger than school age.

6.4 Who is participating in NDP?

The research looked at three groups of partners that were thought might behave differently from others regarding entry to NDP as a result of their particular characteristics. These were: partners who had no dependent children; male partners; and the partners of JSA claimants.

6.4.1 Partners without dependent children

Partners, both with and without dependent children, were participating in NDP. There was no indication that a lack of dependent children made partners either more or less likely to join the programme. Of those on NDP who did not have dependent children, a high proportion were older people (aged over 47 years) who were the partners of JSA claimants.

Partners without dependent children who were on NDP fell into two distinct groups as regards the barriers they saw themselves to be facing in considering employment. One group cited caring responsibilities as their main constraint. The other group cited the typical problems experienced after a lengthy period out of the labour market, a lack of relevant skills and recent work experience. A few cited particular personal circumstances which they perceived could deter employers from employing them, such as having a criminal record, suffering drug addiction problems or a mental health condition.

The reasons given by those without dependent children for entering NDP were primarily ‘financial’ ones. Most were either seeking proof from an IWBC of the viability of them working, or were looking to access Job Grants, ADF or supported test-trading plus a training premium on the self-employment route. Although a few had successfully moved into jobs, there were several who had had results from an IWBC showing them no better off in work, who had subsequently left the programme. This picture supports the view put forward by some advisers that it was harder to demonstrate the benefits of working for partners without children. This was because of Tax Credits and Childcare Credits eligibility rules, which favoured couples with dependent children.

There was some evidence that, in the absence of childcare problems, the caring responsibilities and labour market barriers keeping these couples out of work were objectively somewhat harder to overcome than for many couples with children.
Although NDP was reported to have had a positive impact on many of these partners in terms of building their self-confidence and skill levels, this had not in most cases led to them entering employment. Several described resurgent problems at home keeping them out of work or causing them to leave NDP. These problems included: ‘sabotage’ by (claimant) partners unsupportive of the idea of them leaving the house to train or work; deteriorating health of (claimant) partners producing extra caring demands; and major changes in the couple’s circumstances leading to changed eligibility status that had disrupted the continuity of support.

6.4.2 Male partners

Among the small numbers choosing to enter NDP, it appeared that male partners were marginally better represented than female partners relative to their numbers in the partner customer group as a whole. This reflects the gender role expectation of many couples that, where possible, it should be the man that seeks work, while the household and caring role should fall to the woman. Certainly among the male partners interviewed, this assumption, whether explicitly stated or merely implied, was widespread. Male partners participating on NDP also tended to have more recent work experience than many female partners.

Among the cases of NDP participants discussed with advisers, there were markedly fewer males who were partners of JSA claimants and more who were partners of IS claimants. Gender role expectations again appeared to be playing a major part in relation to couples claiming JSA. Unless born before 1957, all partners of JSA claimants eligible for NDP have dependent children.

Where the main claim was being made by the man, there was frequently a strong assumption that if he was to find work, then the female partner would be most likely to stay at home for the children. In those cases where the main claimant was the woman and the partner was the man, there was usually a particular reason why this was so. Either the woman’s employment history was ‘better’ (more recent and/or more extensive) or there were particular circumstances making it less likely that the man would be able to find work. In such situations, therefore, fewer male partners were actively seeking help through the partners programme.

The reason for more male than female NDP participants appeared to be related primarily to benefits eligibility and claiming ‘strategies’. In situations involving recently born babies and maternity leave (or extended maternity leave) it could be financially advantageous for a couple, if both out of work, to switch from the man claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) to the woman claiming Income Support (IS). Advisers in some districts seemed to be advising such a switch of claim to appropriate customers, thus increasing the numbers of male partners. Some advisers also reported that it was not uncommon for workless couples to periodically switch main claimant status to avoid triggering certain consequences of longer-term claims.

Male partners also appeared to be slightly more likely to self-refer onto NDP. One possible explanation for this would be the fact that many male partners said they had
claimed benefits in their own right in the past. This meant that they were more familiar with Jobcentre Plus services and both more likely to have heard independently about NDP and to be less inhibited about making use of Jobcentre Plus facilities.

Although male partners were well represented among those participating in NDP, they also displayed a tendency to stay on the programme for shorter periods of time than many female partners. This short-term involvement on NDP caseloads seemed to be related to a more ‘utilitarian’ approach to adviser services. Compared to female partners, few were actively seeking motivational support of confidence building from the programme – activities typically involving longer-term contact.

6.4.3 Partners of JSA claimants

Advisers perceived the partners of JSA claimants to be more likely than the partners of other claimants to participate in NDP. The widespread expectation was that this sub-group of partners would be more likely than others to expect to be asked about looking for work, and to be of a more ‘receptive’ mentality for a WFIP, by virtue of familiarity with JSA conditionality. As such, these partners were felt by many advisers to be easier to help and to warrant intervention:

They [partners of JSA claimants] are the easier ones because…the [claimant] partner can look after the kids…and that’s quite feasible obviously for them. But if the person who is claiming is already sick and ill…that stops the whole bandwagon really. So I would say JSA, if I had to interview anyone, it would be the JSA ones, but otherwise, is it worth it?

(Adviser)

This expectation appeared to be borne out in the individual customer cases discussed with advisers. The partners of JSA claimants featured disproportionately among the customers discussed, despite the fact that the claimant’s benefit type was not a suggested criterion for selecting cases.

In some instances a further factor appeared to be contributing. Several advisers admitted to being more confident about dealing with JSA partners, compared to Incapacity Benefit (IB) and IS partners, because they were most similar to the customers they had been used to seeing previously. This was not just limited to those advisers previously conducting Restart interviews and dealing with mandatory New Deal programmes but extended, for example, to some lone parent advisers. This greater confidence with JSA partners may both have contributed to greater numbers moving onto NDP from WFIPs, and helped determine advisers’ choices of NDP customer examples to discuss with researchers12.

What advisers recognized in their dealings with partners of JSA claimants was the fact that they were often more amenable than other partners to an approach that

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12 Due to low numbers of NDP participants, some advisers did not select cases to discuss but simply discussed their entire case load of partners with researchers.
focused on the individual customer. They did not demand or require lengthy engagement with issues concerning the couple or the household. In addition to this, most partners of JSA recipients were seen to face fewer employment barriers than other partners. Those barriers they did face were generally familiar ones: childcare issues for younger couples; issues associated with longer-term unemployment for older couples.

These perceptions were confirmed in interviews with partners of JSA recipients. A few mentioned childcare as a barrier to work but none mentioned any caring responsibilities. Apart from a few minor health problems the main difficulties facing these customers were low levels of skills and qualifications, lack of relevant work experience and long periods away from the labour market. Many interviewed said it had been more than five years since they had last been in paid employment.

### 6.5 Transition onto NDP

For a small number of partners, the call to a WFIP and the offer of support into work on NDP came at just the right time for them. Those already thinking about employment for themselves described in very positive terms the effect of relevant, up-to-date information and support, and the opportunity to talk through employment issues with an adviser. In several cases it provided the crucial ‘nudge’ to move them from general, rather vague, consideration of employment possibilities to a clear focus on work and the action required to make it happen.

The fortuitous timing of the WFIP/NDP intervention was generally described in terms of fitting in with partners’ individual thought processes and with discussions within households that had been ongoing for some time. There were few obvious triggers for arriving at a situation receptive to WFIP/NDP. However, improvements in the health of claimants and partners, financial pressure from living long-term on benefits, the changing situation regarding children as they grew older, together with the effects of boredom and the need simply to ‘get out of the house’, all played some part in creating favourable moments for considering work.

In some instances the support available through NDP fitted so well with partners’ own assessments of what they needed to get back to work, that the opportunity it provided was seen as “perfect timing” and partners moved immediately from their WFIP into NDP. Fortuitous timing was particularly evident with regard to partners interested in self-employment:

> As soon as she went in, she was well received, she was given this information that this ND was available for her and it was perfect timing because she’d already started the ball rolling to get the business ready for launch this year.

(Claimant)

Another example was provided by a partner who had already thought through the nature of his circumstances and discussed with his wife the possibility of retraining
and becoming self-employed. He was already engaged on a course to train in the field he had chosen, but as it was coming towards the end he was looking for specific help and training in the ‘mechanics’ of running his own business. Resigned to the need to find some part-time work that might allow him to pay for a course in a year or two’s time, he was delighted to discover that NDP could offer him such training free of charge and support him through a test trading period. He moved immediately onto NDP caseload and soon after began self-employment training. The intervention of WFIP/NDP allowed him, in his estimation, to move into self-employment as much as two years sooner than he had thought would be possible.

Similarly, partners already actively looking for training or employment, or at least actively considering their options, found WFIP/NDP fitted in well with their thinking and actions, and they also moved directly from WFIPs onto NDP. Getting help with arranging suitable training, job search or job applications were the main things such partners initially sought from participating in NDP (sometimes the only thing).

The other group of partners moving rapidly from WFIP to NDP, was that comprising the relatively large number who, unsure of the viability of them working, wanted to know whether they would be better off in work than on benefits, and if so by how much. The time slots available for WFIPs and the sometimes lengthy process of getting permission from claimants and gathering all the relevant financial detail together, meant that IWBCs were rarely, if ever, taking place without a second meeting. This meeting was usually booked as an initial NDP meeting. To ensure momentum would not be lost, advisers were trying to book these meetings as soon as possible and generally within one to two weeks following the WFIP.

However, a considerable number of partners interviewed who had participated in NDP did not move directly onto the programme from a WFIP. Many took information and ideas away with them to discuss with their (claimant) partners prior to committing themselves to joining NDP. While for some this process was relatively short and they re-contacted the adviser within a few weeks to arrange a further meeting, for others it was a much longer gap. Partners who found the information from the WFIP interesting, but who were clear that they could not start work immediately, sometimes delayed several months before they decided to join NDP. These were customers who would re-enter the LMS system as ‘self-referrals’ after such a gap, despite the fact that the process had clearly been started or contributed to by their WFIP.

The few partners interviewed who had seen a different adviser for their NDP meetings from the adviser who had conducted their WFIP were mostly of the opinion that, to avoid repetition and the need to re-establish trust and a good relationship, they would have preferred to continue seeing the same person, even after fairly lengthy gaps in time, had this been possible.

### 6.5.1 Active and inactive case loading

Many partners were interested in working not at the particular time of the WFIP/NDP...
intervention but at some point in the future. Advisers were attempting not to lose contact with these customers by inviting them to get back in touch at a later date and providing them with contact details to enable them to do so. Although there were felt to be many partners genuinely waiting on a change in circumstances before being able to make decisions about work, advisers recognised that expecting them to take the initiative and to call back unprompted was unlikely to prove very productive.

In some districts, advisers were ensuring that they had an effective process for ‘inactive case loading’ by keeping details about partners who said they might want support at a later date, and contacting them by telephone after three or six months or at a time when they had said they expected to be ready to take action. This inactive case loading involved partners who had participated in an initial NDP meeting and some who had only attended a WFIP. The existing LMS system was said not to easily support such a practice. As a consequence, advisers were keeping paper records of circumstances and contact reminder dates in parallel with computerised systems.

Considerable autonomy appeared to be given to advisers by their managers in how they kept in touch with partners and followed up those who might at a later date participate in NDP and enter work. As one Business Manager expressed it, good follow up “depends on effective case load management.” The need expressed by some advisers to ensure a formal follow up procedure was felt all the more acutely because of the current lack of any programmed review meetings for the partner customer group.

6.5.2 Contact patterns on NDP

Partners interviewed about their participation in NDP had been involved on the programme for varying lengths of time, from one week to six months. Many had had only a single meeting following their WFIP, others up to twenty meetings. Those following the self-employment route on NDP had typically had meetings with an adviser prior to each stage of the training and support programme and were expecting to have at least one further meeting at the end of their 26 weeks of test trading. Partners engaged on lengthy training courses or in test trading tended to be those recorded as staying longest on adviser caseloads. For example, the whole process for the self-employed will typically run to nine months or more.

Length of time spent on caseload was not, therefore, necessarily an accurate indicator of the amount of time spent with an adviser. Depending on availability of provision, much motivational work and activity designed to build self-confidence was also carried out by contracted training and placement providers, rather than advisers themselves.

The intensity of contact with partners on NDP varied and was to a great extent determined by the individual circumstances of the customer. It was also dependent upon the ‘style’ and preferences of advisers. Some clearly preferred to deal face to face with customers whenever possible, others made greater use of the telephone and of contact by letter. Much job search support was conducted by telephone, with
suitable vacancies discussed and then posted out to customers and later chased up again by telephone.

The pattern of contact with customers on NDP was typically for a concentration in the early weeks. This was partly due to the exploratory work required early on, around work options, aspirations and barriers, and partly also to the need to conduct IWBCs face-to-face as a preliminary to any further action. More intense contact was then typically made just prior to a customer starting a job. At this time advisers concentrated on sorting out Tax Credits and ensuring that the customer benefited as much as possible from available support, such as ADF and Job Grants payments.

This broad pattern of contact was similar for all partners on NDP, but there was evidence that those entering the programme from a WFIP were tending to stay longer on advisers' caseloads than those who had self-referred. This was certainly the perception of many advisers, and was confirmed in the customer cases discussed with them. One reason for this was the greater proportion of WFIP route entrants who were involved in training, although there were also a small number of partners who had self referred specifically in order to access a particular training course.

With the exception of those on the self-employed route, NDP participants who had self-referred onto the programme were perceived to leave more rapidly. Advisers saw this as evidence that self-referrals did not need to be convinced of the rationale behind working, and tended on average to be more job ready than WFIP route participants. Indeed, many of them joined NDP when they already had a job lined up to go to.

6.6 Content of NDP meetings

The actual content of NDP meetings with partners clearly varied greatly according to individual circumstances. Initial meetings very frequently involved carrying out IWBCs. Later meetings tended to deal with financial support matters and administration during the transition to work.

6.6.1 Partner perception of most helpful NDP elements

Some NDP participants were of the opinion that the programme had not been of any help to them at all. Perhaps not surprisingly, they included many partners who had since returned to the same position they had been in prior to taking part, namely as non-working dependants on a benefit claim. For the most part they were women with no formal qualifications, and several were trying to return to work after raising a family and had been out of the labour market for extremely long periods of time (15 to 25 years). One had never previously worked. Although all said their (claimant) partners were supportive of them seeking employment, several still saw their caring and childcare responsibilities as constraints, and one had health problems of her own. Most were seeking part-time work through NDP. Those who had entered work had found their own jobs and did not feel that NDP had made any helpful contribution.
There was an element of thwarted aspiration in the views of NDP held by these partners. One had given up pursuing employment when her IWBC showed that she would be no better off in work. Another had reluctantly started working less than 16 hours a week because the IWBC had demonstrated that full-time work was not a viable option. In a third case, the partner claimed that the IWBC calculation had been incorrect, and that although he had started work he was worse off than before.

Many of this group of partners had also had negative experiences with providers that had shaped their view of the programme. One had dropped out of a basic skills course, another, who had not been in paid work for 20 years, was referred by a provider to a work placement with no prior training or support. Unable to cope, she left after three days. A third partner was referred to a provider of childcare training. Four months later she had still not been contacted about a start date and had begun looking elsewhere for advice and support.

Among participants who had found NDP helpful, the following elements of provision were singled out for mention:

- IWBCs
- information about Tax Credits
- self-employment training and support
- other training
- ADF support
- Job Grants
- adviser support and encouragement/confidence building
- job search help
- CV preparation

These elements are discussed further below.

*In Work Benefit Calculations*

Central to the thinking and motivation of partners were financial issues, the balance of benefit to the household from working, and the crucial role played by IWBCs in understanding this. These aspects were also crucial to the approach of most advisers, affecting their ability to persuade customers and to overcome some widespread fears and uncertainties over the viability of working. Advisers did not always have full confidence that work would necessarily pay for the partners customer group. Nevertheless, if a partner showed any interest at all in working they would invariably invite them back for a further meeting in order to carry out an IWBC.

Because WFIPs were being booked for 30-minute slots in advisers’ diaries, there was not sufficient time available to do an IWBC at these meetings. Having a calculation
carried out was thus a key reason for partners to attend an initial NDP meeting. In addition to the time constraint, advisers described practical problems preventing them from carrying out IWBCs at WFIP meetings. Problems included the difficulty of obtaining claimants’ permission to discuss claims, and the unlikelihood that all the required information would be immediately available.

Advisers also saw a number of practical advantages to carrying out IWBCs at a subsequent meeting. This arrangement allowed for preliminary discussions (by couples) about their working options, and provided an opportunity to involve the claimant, either by telephone or by inviting them to attend the follow up meeting along with the partner.

IWBCs and Tax Credits were by far the most frequently mentioned elements of NDP that customers found helpful. These elements were often linked together in customers’ minds, and reflected a widespread concern about the effect of working on the claimant’s benefits, coupled with a fear of ending up worse off by disrupting the status quo. In many cases it was above all else the reassurance provided by an IWBC that working was a viable option that allowed partners to move on into jobs.

Partners on NDP particularly valued IWBCs because so many of them had chosen to seek only part-time work due to constraints on their time from caring and childcare responsibilities. All but one of the partners citing an IWBC as the most helpful element of NDP provision were women wanting to work part-time. Another reason for the ‘high profile’ of IWBCs in partners’ minds was likely to be the fact that several participants had joined NDP with a job lined up and the specific intention of having a calculation done based on that job.

In a great many of these cases the partners had found themselves a job independently and only at that point accessed NDP services and support to confirm that they would be better off and to benefit from any additional help on offer, including ADF payments and assistance with administrative paperwork related to Tax Credits. Partners’ overall views of NDP were strongly conditioned by the outcome of their IWBC as this was the key gateway to achieving their desired outcome.

**Self-employment support and training**

The other much mentioned aspect of NDP support which partners found helpful was the training to which the programme gave them access. Good experiences on training courses led to very positive views of NDP even when they had not yet resulted in employment. Partners were particularly appreciative of short courses with very flexible required attendance hours. Such provision, however, was not always available and advisers in some districts confirmed a shortage of this type of provision that they could access for partners.

Among those with the most positive views of NDP, and the help they had received, were partners who had decided to enter self-employment. In all areas there were well-established providers offering a ‘package’ of self-employment training and support including ideas development, accounting and business planning, and test
All those working towards self-employment were enthusiastic about the training and support, and rated access to it as the most important and helpful aspect of NDP for them.

*Job search, ADF and Job Grants*

A small number of partners said that the most useful aspect of NDP for them had been the support they had received with job search, CV preparation and applications to vacancies. These customers were typically unqualified and saw their main barrier to working as being the length of time they had been out of work. Some had successfully moved into work and had accessed ADF support and Job Grants, which they also mentioned as helpful aspects of NDP in their case.

Other mentions were made by individual NDP participants of the encouragement and confidence boosting skills of advisers, the usefulness of having childcare paid for whilst training, and the impetus that had been provided by NDP as a “spur to action” that had tipped the balance in the direction of practical steps towards seeking employment.
7. Outcomes from NDP

Summary of findings:
- Most participants held broadly positive views of New Deal for Parents (NDP), especially those seeking to increase their self-confidence, those with skills needs and those perceiving themselves to have no significant barriers to working.
- Negative views were expressed in particular by: those without dependent children; those with very young children; carers, and; those seeking part-time rather than full-time work.
- Exits from NDP were attributed to: starting work; abandoning efforts because of unfavourable In Work Benefit Calculation (IWBC); concluding that barriers could not be overcome, and; being unable to cope with the demands of training.
- Most partners entering employment had found their own jobs – key factors for those entering employment were: support from the claimant; a favourable IWBC, and; prior discussion of options within the household.
- NDP is having only limited impact in cases where partners face multiple barriers originating in relationship and household circumstances.
- The inherent instability of partners’ circumstances played an important role in explaining high rates of non-job related exits from NDP and the insecurity of employment even once it was achieved – fear of the risks involved was a factor for many partners.

This chapter looks at partners’ expressed views about NDP and the reasons of those not still on the programme for having exited. The context within which those that had left for jobs had done so is explored and suggestions made as to how the programme is operating and why.

7.1 NDP customer satisfaction

Most partners held broadly positive views of NDP, although levels of expressed satisfaction were not particularly high. Positive views strongly correlated with the degree to which outcomes had been achieved through the programme which customers saw as successful and meeting their needs and/or expectations. In this...
sense they provided a ‘proxy’ measure of what was seen to be working well within NDP and what was working less well, as well as an indication of which customers the programme had been better or worse at dealing with.

Partners were more likely to express positive views of NDP if they:

- were seeking to deal with issues of self-confidence
- perceived their main barrier to be a lack of skills or qualifications or a criminal record
- had their own limiting health issues to deal with
- perceived themselves to have no significant barriers to working.

Partners were more likely to express negative views of NDP if they:

- were without dependent children
- had pre-school or early school-aged children
- had barriers relating to care responsibilities for the claimant
- were looking for part-time rather than full-time work.

There are a number of possible reasons for these apparent strengths and weaknesses.

Couples without dependent children benefited less from Tax Credits arrangements than those with dependent children. Many of those with caring responsibilities were caring for claimants who were receiving premium disability and carer’s benefits payments, thus reducing the likelihood that work for the partner would leave the household better off. Those restricted by other duties and responsibilities to seeking only part-time work, were similarly greatly reducing the likely amount by which an IWBC would show that they would be better off. Much dissatisfaction with NDP may thus have arisen from the intrinsic difficulties facing a great many in the customer group and a lack of sufficient financial incentives within the programme to overcome them. This reinforces the view that it was financial issues that dominated partners’ priorities in considering employment options.

Dissatisfaction among partners with younger children on NDP reflected the added difficulties of reconciling the childcare needs of this age group both with work and often also with caring. It is important to recognize that many of these factors overlapped and inter-related in individual cases. As with the many caring partners who were dissatisfied with NDP, this suggests that the programme is managing to have only limited impact in cases where partners face multiple barriers, and especially when those complex, multiple problems originate from within the couple relationship and the household.

In contrast, NDP appeared to be best at addressing self-confidence issues among customers, and at dealing with other individual needs such as the need to redress a lack of relevant work skills or a lack of qualifications, or to overcome the negative
impacts of having a criminal record. Despite being presented as a programme aimed at and focused on the *household* rather than the *individual*, it would appear that in practice NDP operates least well in these areas, and operates most effectively at an individual level and on issues that can be addressed one-to-one with an adviser. The admitted reluctance of many advisers to delve very deeply into couple and household issues could thus be seen to be as much an implicit recognition of the weaknesses of the programme as it is a reflection of advisers’ personal preferences and professional experience.

The last sub-group of partners expressing satisfaction with NDP comprised those who perceived themselves to have no significant barriers to working. They were, therefore, by definition among the more job ready of the customer group as a whole. They included many who found their own jobs independently of an adviser and accessed NDP immediately prior to starting work. In this way they were able to benefit from help with ‘oiling the wheels’ of a move already substantially underway. These and other instances of job capture for NDP are likely to represent the outcomes with the least additionality for the programme.

Enhancing the labour market capital of individuals, therefore, rather than addressing or overcoming structural and domestic barriers, is what NDP appears to have been doing best, along with facilitating and accelerating moves into employment by those who were already decided and job ready.

### 7.2 Reasons for NDP exits

A large minority of the partners interviewed were still participating in NDP at the time of the research and will be followed up in the longitudinal phases of the qualitative evaluation. Those who had left the programme, gave the following reasons:

- starting work
- abandoning the idea of work because their IWBC was unfavourable
- reaching the conclusion that their barriers could not be overcome
- being unable to cope with the demands of training.

Those leaving to start work were going into both full-time and part-time employment and most described having found their jobs independently of NDP. Those describing an unfavourable IWBC calculation left the programme rapidly after minimal contact. Some were unable to cope with the demands of training courses or were disappointed in what providers were able to offer them in terms of courses and placements. Others reluctantly arrived at the conclusion that the constraints on them working were too great to overcome and drifted away from NDP, exiting after a period of non-contact with the adviser.

Advisers further described instances in which they believed non-supportive claimants who did not wish their partner to work or to undertake training were undermining
their efforts. In one, possibly extreme, case an adviser described getting a female partner onto a course and in line for work only to find that her car (her only means of transport) “miraculously” started developing a series of apparent faults that prevented her from attending. In this case the adviser was aware of serious problems within the couple’s relationship that she was unable to address despite arranging mentoring for the partner.

It appeared that much in the way of resistance, and even ‘sabotage’, by claimants toward their partner’s participation in NDP, was probably going unnoticed. Several advisers commented on the high rate of ‘no shows’ to arranged NDP meetings and frequent unexplained disappearances of partners from off their caseloads. This phenomenon was contrasted with other customer groups, especially lone parents. Other exit reasons in cases described by advisers (as opposed to partners directly interviewed) included:

- inability to get a job following the completion of training
- forced exits brought about by deteriorating home problems (frequently involving health and caring issues)
- disruption caused by changes in claimant or partner status and eligibility that affected continuity of support.

In the latter situations, policy and guidance states that continuity of support and eligibility should not be disrupted by changes in a couple’s status once a partner has embarked on NDP. However, many advisers were either unaware of this or sufficiently unsure of procedure for disruption to occur anyway. Such problems often seemed to affect people pursuing the self-employment option, possibly because of the longer elapsed time (training and test trading) within which changes could occur.

7.3 Self-employment

Among the most enthusiastic participants on NDP were those partners receiving support to move into self-employment, most of whom were test trading at the time of the research.

Although these partners were found generally to be atypical of the customer group as a whole (better educated and with longer and more recent work experience) what was clear was that the self-employment option under NDP was particularly well suited to their needs as partners and was able to address simultaneously their individual needs and aspirations as well as some of the complexities of their household situations, care responsibilities and childcare arrangements. Factors repeatedly referred to as helpful included: control over hours worked; flexibility of hours; the opportunity to work from home and to be at home if needed by partners or by children; the value of test trading in reducing the risks of coming off benefit; the possibility of also involving the claimant in small ways in the running of the
business; and even the therapeutic value of such unpressured and incremental involvement for claimants suffering from mental health conditions.

7.4 Job outcomes from NDP

At the time of the first phase of NDP research, as expected, many participants were still case loaded on the programme as there had been only a relatively short period of time within which they could have worked their way through to an employment outcome. It is important, therefore, to recognize that in talking about job outcomes we are dealing with a relatively small number of examples. Any identification of significant trends, in terms of which customers are achieving employment, will only become apparent through the quantitative elements of the evaluation. Even in qualitative terms it was difficult to build a robust picture of which types of customers are achieving job outcomes and why. More information will be available from the second phase of research, including information on the important dimension of job sustainability for partners.

7.4.1 Contextual factors

Among those who had achieved job outcomes at the time of the research, there were a discernable number of key factors that appeared to be widely shared and making a significant contribution to this success. Foremost among these were:

- having the full and active support of the claimant in the couple/household
- obtaining a favourable and timely result from an IWBC, and
- being able to build on prior discussion and planning about employment options and implications.

Support from the claimant did not always manifest itself in terms of jointly attended meetings. Advisers frequently kept in contact with claimants by telephone, keeping them informed and party to discussions informally – for example by taking advantage of the claimant answering the telephone when a call was being made to the partner. The active involvement of claimants in discussions with their partners between meetings with an adviser were often more important and more productive than actual attendance jointly at meetings in the local Jobcentre Plus office.

Where such engaged discussion had also taken place prior to the Work Focused Interview for Parents (WFIP)/NDP intervention, partners were in a better position to benefit from advice. The fortuitous timing of the intervention against a background of such discussion in many cases allowed for rapid progress towards a job outcome.

7.4.2 The importance of IWBCs

IWBCs played a major role in most instances where partners had moved off NDP into employment. However, the process was not a straightforward one in a lot of cases. Not only were IWBCs said to be critical to decision making for this customer group,
but they were at the same time more complex to carry out than for other customers, more likely to show little or no benefit and potentially more prone to errors and to being undermined by external circumstances beyond the adviser’s control.

Most advisers were of the opinion that carrying out calculations for this customer group could be especially complex and time consuming. Not only was it generally difficult to get all the required information and financial detail from the partner alone, because much related to the benefit claim of the other person in the couple, but the context for understanding the results also depended on the circumstances, opinions and attitudes of both partners. It was felt to be particularly problematic trying to account for possible short and medium term changes in the claimants’ circumstances; for example accounting for movements in and out of training. Advisers described having to routinely carry out several IWBC calculations for each customer in an attempt to cover all likely permutations, and to keep abreast of changing priorities and the outcomes of couples’ discussions.

These complexities raised anxiety for some advisers, who were acutely aware of the critical importance of ensuring that IWBCs were comprehensive and accurate. Given that many customers were making major decisions on the basis of IWBCs, it was not surprising that the most negative reactions to NDP came from partners who either felt “misled” by the outcome of their IWBC, or perceived that it had not adequately covered all aspects of the changes involved in leaving benefits for work.

A number of couples interviewed reported that the results of their IWBC had been misleading or simply wrong. After the partner (or claimant, or both) had moved into work they had found themselves worse off than before, despite the IWBC having shown they would be better off:

We’re much worse off…before we used to have our rates paid…and we don’t get free school meals any more and so that’s four children at school, it’s quite a bit…and now I have to pay £120 for them to go to school on the bus…Because we get…Working Tax Credit, we can’t get any other help…I think he’ll keep the job because he does like working and he doesn’t have to go and sign on any more…it’s annoying that we can’t get the help that we had before.

(Partner)

Some advisers recounted situations in which partners had in the past moved into jobs or increased their hours of work, only to find themselves worse off. They were having to use all their powers of persuasion to convince such partners that things would be different this time around:

She [partner] had tried to increase her hours the year or so before and they had ended up worse off, it hadn’t worked out for them. He [claimant] was wanting to go self-employed but wasn’t quite ready, he was thinking about it. When she first came in she wasn’t quite ready in any help…she felt that because it hadn’t worked for them previously when she had tried to increase her hours it wouldn’t work again.

(Adviser)
In some instances, reductions by employers in the number of hours promised, or the loss of jobs through redundancy, had shifted the parameters or undermined the assumptions under which the IWBC was originally carried out.

_Initially [retail employer] said it was a permanent contract but then [the takeover firm] stepped in and said there was no such thing. So I’d hoped then I’d get a permanent contract all year round but [the new employer] said ‘no,’…so it was a bit of kick in the rear really because we’d done what they wanted_

(Respondent)

Many partners reported having had IWBCs that showed they would be worse off in work, and which had thus effectively ended their moves to find a job.

_They didn’t work out a solution for us at the time…we thought…there would be some way around it, where you would be better off going to work. But obviously we’re not._

(Partner)

This appeared to support the view of most advisers that partners make up a particularly complex and difficult client group, and that there may be significant numbers who should not be included in the WFIP/NDP initiative. Those said to be particularly difficult to help included; partners of long-term stock claimants on means tested, premium level disability benefits, whose earnings would largely be deducted pound for pound, and; partners in couples with no dependent children who would not benefit from Child Tax Credits.

### 7.4.3 The instability of partners’ circumstances

Many of the factors complicating IWBCs for partners, and potentially undermining results from them, were also evident in relation to the nature of job outcomes being achieved. More evidence will become available from the second phase of the research relating to how sustained partners’ job outcomes are. However, there was already an indication from first phase interviews of considerable turbulence affecting those who had already started work. A successful job outcome from NDP was often far from being the ‘end of the story’.

Some of the instability derived from partners’ involvement in situations of poor health. Almost by definition, claimants with serious health problems were not in a stable state. At any given time they were either improving or deteriorating. Sometimes these changes could be rapid and unpredictable. In several cases a ‘flare up’ in the claimant’s health condition had meant that their partner had been forced to give up a recently acquired job and return to being a dependent on their benefit claim. In another case, an IWBC for a couple had shown a net benefit from working, but was based on the partner working full-time and the claimant working part-time. When the claimant was forced by ill-health to abandon their part-time employment, their partner’s full-time job was insufficient to cover the household expenses, and they were left worse off than before.
[The partner] has gone back to work full-time, we’re actually worse off than we were before because previously we were getting help with the mortgage and the Community Charge. Now...we have to pay that because I’m not on IS any more, just IB...I must admit we’re struggling at the moment because they don’t take into consideration the outgoings...You see the idea was for me to go back to work initially part-time...but my health hasn’t been brilliant lately, so that’s stopped me.

(Claimant)

Some partners who found themselves in this position had remained in work nonetheless. Their reasons for doing so were partly a discovered preference for working over “doing nothing at home”, and partly a concern at the difficulties they expected to encounter if they tried to return to benefits.

The other major factor contributing to the instability partners experienced was the state of the labour market and the nature of the jobs to which they had access. Several partners had achieved successful job outcomes from NDP only to lose them shortly afterwards. In one case, both partner and claimant had lost jobs following the take over of their employer and redundancy on a ‘last in first out’ basis.

Many couples were acutely aware that jobs can be insecure. This was especially perceived to be the case with regard to those ‘entry level’ jobs into which most of them would move. There was considerable caution, therefore, about leaving the security of benefits and an expectation among many that, once they left, they would experience difficulties re-establishing a similar position to that previously held vis-à-vis benefit entitlement, should their job come to an end for whatever reason. Reasons cited as to why they would be disadvantaged in such a situation included: having once again to satisfy eligibility criteria; and the time taken over the processing of certain benefits (notably Housing Benefit). Certain partners claimed to have had direct experience of such difficulties in the past:

\[I\] want something that’s permanent because it does throw spanners in the works doing seasonal work trying to sort out the benefits. Last summer the Council took...six months to sort out my [housing] benefit. By that time I was laid off! It was a long time waiting to know what you’ve got to pay.

(Partner)

Concern about the risks involved in moving into work thus appeared to be borne out in some cases. While the transition from benefits into employment was acknowledged to have been improved and supported, the perception was that the route back into the benefit system, if needed, had not become any easier than before. The ‘fear factor’ in contemplating work was felt to be particularly acute for partners, given the many complex aspects of their situation that could adversely affect them and lead to a return to unemployment.
8 Summary and conclusions

A complex and diverse client group

The partners client group was found to be highly diverse and to contain within it individuals with a multitude of different barriers to work, from mental health conditions and physical illness and disability, through to basic skills deficit, lack of confidence, few or no qualifications and no recent work experience. This is in line with the findings reported in Arrowsmith, J. A Review of ‘What we know’ about partners of benefit recipients. DWP Research report W200, September 2004 (see bibliography).

Couple constraints

In addition to what might be called ‘individual’ barriers such as these, partners were, by definition, intimately tied in to the situation and circumstances of the other member of the couple – the main claimant – and subject to additional constraints as a result. The status of dependent partner on another’s benefit claim was in many instances a statement of commitment to caring for the main claimant (their spouse, or partner in an unmarried couple), or an implied commitment to other household roles such as looking after the home or caring for children.

In most cases, therefore, it was extremely difficult for advisers to address partners’ barriers and work related issues in isolation from the main claimant’s circumstances and attitudes. Often, the dynamics of relationships between partner and claimant reinforced resistances, attitudes and perceptions and introduced further factors affecting an adviser’s ability to make an effective intervention. Set patterns of behaviour, especially among longer term ‘stock’ partners, were all the more difficult to address or shift because they involved both parties in the couple, and were often influenced by ‘traditional’ expectations of gender roles. Behaviour aimed at protecting relationships, as well as the self-esteem of both partners, underlie many attitudes to working.
Advisers’ training, experience and commitment
For these reasons, and because of the range of different benefit claims that could involve partners, there was little conceptual or operational coherence to the customer group as a whole, and advisers experienced partners as ‘difficult’ clients with complex problems.

Few partners attending a Work Focused Interview for Parents (WFIP) were job ready. The challenge this presented has placed emphasis on the crucial importance of individual advisers’ levels of commitment, which in turn appears to have emphasised differences in experience among advisers. Many had found it difficult to engage with partners and hard to build up expertise when the numbers being seen were so low. Differences in advisers’ approach and experience had been made more evident by a lack of specific training in areas identified as including: benefits eligibility and conditions; the complexities of the personal circumstances that partners present with; and joint interviewing.

Advisers’ approaches
The complex nature of the client group’s difficulties had also led to a sharp contrast in advisers’ approaches. Some advisers had taken up the challenge of the complexity of partners’ situations and adopted an approach that involved taking extra time with them to explore and understand the full couple and household context within which decisions were being made. They accepted that much preparatory work would be required, and that often there was likely to be a long road prior to any job outcome.

Those advisers who had adopted such an approach appeared to have a personal preference for engaging with such difficulties and working long-term with people at some distance from the labour market. The rationale from advisers who took this latter approach was primarily that, without such engagement, the only outcomes likely from the client group would be from the very small minority who were already – through fortunate timing – job ready. They saw their approach as providing the added value for the WFIP initiative.

Perceived economy of returns
Many advisers, however, had concluded that for the time and effort spent on them, partners provide a poor return in terms of the hard outputs against which advisers are judged and managed: job outcomes. Particularly when they perceived themselves to be under pressure from these targets (and from factors such as staff shortages in some districts), advisers were making comparisons with other client groups they dealt with and acting accordingly. As one lone parent adviser unequivocally expressed it:

Any time I’ve got I tend to try and spend on the lone parents because I get more out of them than I do with partners.

(Adviser)
Many other advisers also operated a similar economy:

[most partners] make it clear in the first five minutes they are not interested in work, for a variety of reasons…the rest of the time [is] unproductive.

(Adviser)

Tackling the perceptions of advisers regarding the partners client group may be an area that could profitably be addressed by policy – particularly if any changes can be made to the context in which these perceptions are being formed.

**WFIP delivery problems**

Apart from some early ‘teething troubles’ in the administration and booking of appointments for partners, most of the delivery problems associated with the WFIP initiative stemmed from the nature of the customer group and from advisers’ and their managers’ reactions to it. In particular, couple dynamics and gender-role expectations lay behind much of the negative reaction from partners and failed communication of information between partner and claimant. Responses to the perceived negativity of the client group had in most districts led to reductions in interview times and in some to calls for a pre-WFIP sift of customers.

However, complaints from some partners of being rushed through interviews provided evidence that perhaps some opportunities were being missed by advisers who were too readily dismissive of the client group, albeit in the interests of pursuing efficiency and good time management. By the same token, other advisers thought that half-hour meetings reduced effectiveness and weakened the potential value of the persuasive elements of the WFIP. In particular, combined with other factors, shorter WFIPs appeared to have ruled out the possibility of conducting In Work Benefit Calculations (IWBCs) at the first meeting.

The problems for the WFIP initiative thus appear to have resulted in large part from a structural contradiction in the conditions of delivery. The policy intention to engage with a difficult client group with complex, long-term support needs has had implications for resource input, especially staff time. Advisers have experienced this as being opposed to their main ‘drivers’ of job outcomes and points targets.

**Self-fulfilment of the low expectations of advisers**

The small scale of primary job outcomes from the initiative, and the low rate of entry to New Deal for Parents (NDP), has reinforced a negative view of WFIPs among many advisers and appears to be fuelling the self-fulfilment of low expectations. Without additional resources of advisers’ time (and perhaps additional financial incentives for partners to enter work, like those under the Incapacity Benefit (IB) reform pilots), the support available to partners – whose hurdles are higher than for most other customers – has not been seen as providing equality of opportunity to them or to the advisers trying to help them.
Support provision available under the enhanced NDP was seen as offering more to partners than the previous programme, but not perceived as enough to overcome the additional difficulties most partners faced. Many advisers had approached partners in the expectation that they would respond comparably to, say, lone parents (an expectation also implicit in policy) and had been disappointed to find that generally they had not done so. Enhancements had not encouraged large numbers of additional partners onto the programme compared to previously.

**Addressing the household**

Despite assertions that NDP is addressed to issues affecting couples and households, there was little evidence that this had been the case in practice. Most advisers expressed a preference for keeping the complicating factors emanating from claimants out of the picture when dealing with partners on NDP. Nevertheless, relationship problems and other aspects of couple ‘dynamics’ clearly over-rode all other factors in many instances. In addition to being frustrated by this ‘interference’ advisers felt reluctant and ill-equipped to deal with it effectively. Joint meetings involving both claimant and partner, whether WFIPs or NDP meetings, were too ad hoc to be optimally effective in most cases.

NDP appeared to work best (at least in terms of achieving job outcomes) with those atypical partners who were most job ready and least affected by couple and household constraints and barriers. Both in terms of programme content and structure, and in terms of adviser expertise and inclination, NDP was seen to operate essentially at the level of the individual. The management and organisational context of Jobcentre Plus (including crucially a strong target-driven culture) was reinforcing this orientation, and arguably contributing to the low priority and low expectations accorded the programme.

**Separation of WFIPs and NDP**

There was growing support among advisers for the idea of potentially excluding certain partners (such as those caring for claimants and in receipt of Carers Allowance) from WFIP eligibility, and for treating the mandatory meeting as a form of rapid ‘sift’ of remaining partners prior to NDP.

However, despite the possible gains in ‘efficiency’ that might be entailed there is an inherent danger that policy objectives would be sidestepped by any such moves. Achieving movement towards the labour market in the longer term could be lost, and the opportunity to encourage and support the small numbers of partners unsure about working but willing to be persuaded, would be greatly reduced. Some saw moves in this direction as only a small step from abandoning the mandatory element altogether and ‘marketing’ to sub-sets of the customer group on a purely voluntary basis similarly to in the past.
The reduction of time-slot allocations for WFIPs, ahead of policy\(^\text{13}\), has already meant that IWBCs take place almost exclusively within NDP. This has effectively ruled out their potential as tools of persuasion with the undecided. The importance partners gave to IWBCs in decision making about work suggests that much of the programme’s additionality may thus be being ruled out too.

**Demonstrating that work pays**

A key aspect to the difficulty of dealing with partners is the fact that in many instances it is harder to demonstrate that work pays for them. Partners of claimants in receipt of premium level and means tested benefits may see only marginal differences in income from working. Also, the older average age of partners and Tax Credits disincentives, reduce the force of arguments that advisers use routinely with other customers, namely that almost any job is worth considering because of the opportunities it may bring for onward progression in employment. Many partners are also only able or willing to seek part-time work, reducing the benefits of working still further.

**Policy considerations**

When considered together, all the many factors that go to make up the complex and difficult nature of the customer group, and the operational conditions under which WFIPs/NDP is being delivered, suggest the need for further policy consideration of the WFIP process for partners and its relationship to the NDP programme. However, it is important to note that the initiatives are currently at relatively early stages of their implementation.

As Jobcentre Plus rolls out to an increasing range of customers, one way of improving WFIPs/NDP may be to approach partners more directly via the main claimant rather than as a ‘free-standing’ separate client group. This could be one way of focusing more substantially on the combined household aspects of their situations that so determine their options, attitudes and constraints. Although any further change to the partner initiatives is likely to be resource intensive and difficult to achieve under current resourcing constraints it is only by taking adequate account of the real difficulties and insecurities many partners face, both domestically and in the labour market, that policy objectives are likely to be met. Stage two of the research, to be undertaken in Autumn 2005 will provide evidence on whether early problems have been overcome with time and whether the limited successes to date have been maintained or enhanced.

\(^\text{13}\) The time allocation for WFIPs has been reduced from one hour to 45 minutes due to resourcing and operational issues. In all the districts involved in the research fieldwork towards the end of 2004, appointments were already being booked into advisers’ diaries for 30 minutes each.
Appendix A
Fieldwork documents

Opt out letter for WFIPs phase 1

Research into Jobcentre help for couples

We are writing to ask for your help.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) wants to improve the help provided to couples. They have asked us to carry out some research about work focused interviews. The research will help to find out whether they meet your needs, and how they can be improved.

Your name has been selected from DWP records as someone who has recently had a Work Focused Interview. It would be very helpful if we could come and talk to you and your partner. Even if either of you is now in a job, or doing something else we are still interested in what you have to say. Your opinions are very important to us. We would like to speak to you and your partner separately, which will take about an hour. Interviews will be conducted by a researcher from Insite. All researchers will carry an identity card.

Insite is a research organisation completely independent of government and political parties. Everything you and your partner tell the interviewer will be treated in complete confidence. No personal views or information will be passed on to the Jobcentre or to anyone outside the research team. The report of the research will not identify any individual or family.
What happens now?

- Someone from INSITE may contact you in the near future, to invite you and your partner to take part in the research.

- Appointments will be arranged at times which suit both of you.

- Interviewers from INSITE will come to your home and talk to each of you about what you think about work focused interviews and what help you might need to get a job.

- We will thank each of you with a £20 CASH GIFT for your time.

If you are interested in helping with this research, please complete the enclosed form, giving your contact details, and return it to us in the stamped addressed envelope provided. One of our researchers will get in touch with you to arrange an interview. Alternatively, you can contact Jo Porter at Insite on 0151 670 1080. Please be sure to fill in your telephone number, or to include your telephone number in any message that you leave.

If you definitely do not want to take part, please tick the relevant box on the form and return it within the next 10 days, so that we know not to contact you again. **Whatever you decide, any benefits you and your partner may receive will not be affected in any way either now or in the future.**

Yours sincerely,

Research Director
Opt out form for WFIPs phase 1

REFERENCE NUMBER: WFIP1

NAME:
ADDRESS:

Please amend if any of these details are incorrect.

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JOBCENTRE HELP FOR COUPLES RESEARCH

I am interested in taking part in the research
and have filled in my contact details below


I do not want to take part in the research


CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: ________________________________
(please include area code, thank you):
(We will not pass your number on to any third party)

BEST TIME TO CONTACT YOU: ________________________________

Thank you for your help. Please return this form as soon as possible in the stamped addressed envelope provided.
Welsh opt out letter for WFIPs phase 1

Ymchwil i gymorth canolfan gwaith ar gyfer cyplau

Rydym yn ysgrifennu i ofyn am eich cymorth.

Mae’r Adran Gwaith a Phensiynau eisiau gwella y cymorth sydd ar gael i gyplau. Maent wedi gofyn i ni ymgymryd ymchwil ynglwn â chyfweliadau ffocws gwaith. Bydd yr ymchwil yma yn ceisio darganfod os ydyw’r cyfweliadau yma yn ateb eich gofynion ac hefyd yn edrych ar sut ellir gwella’r cyfweliadau.

Mae eich enw wedi ei ddewis o gofnodion yr Adran Gwaith a Phensiynau, fel rhywun sydd wedi derbyn cyfewliad ffocws gwaith yn ddiweddar. Byddai’n ddefnyddiol i ni pe gallem ddod i siarad hefo chi a’ch partner. Hyd yn oed os ydyw un ohonoch mewn swydd, neu yn gwneud rhywbeth arall, mae gennym ddiddordeb yn yr hyn sydd ganddo’i w ddweud. Mae eich barn yn bwysig i ni. Byddem yn hoffi siarad ymchwil ar wahân. Dylai hyn gyfrifol i ni.

Mae Insite yn gwmni ymchwil sydd yn gwbwl annibynol o’r llywodraeth a phleidiau gwleidyddol. Caiff pob dim a ddywedwch chi a’ch partner wrth yr ymchwilydd ei ddal yng Ngwbl Gyfrinachol. Ni chaiff barn a gyfansoddwyd personol unigolion ei roi i’r canolfan gwaith nac i unrhyw un arall o’r tu allan i o’r tim ymchwil. Ni fydd adroddiad yr ymchwil yn adnabod unrhyw unigolyn na theuluoedd. Fe gaiff cyfweliadau yr ymchwil eu recordio gyda tâp, a byddent ar gael i aelodau o’r tim ymchwil yn unig.

Beth sydd yn digwydd yn awr?

- Bydd rhywun o Insite yn cysylltu â chwi yn y dyfodol agos er mwyn eich gwiadodd chi a’ch partner i gymryd rhan yn yr ymchwil.

- Caiff cyfweliadau o’r Gwbl Gyfrinachol ei drefnu ar gyfer yr hyn sydd mewn digwyddiad unigolion, a bydd cofnod cyffrous a gwybodaeth personol unigolion ei roi i’r canolfan gwaith nac i unrhyw un arall o’r tu allan i o’r tim ymchwil. Ni fydd adroddiad yr ymchwil yn adnabod unrhyw unigolyn na theuluoedd. Fe gaiff cyfweliadau yr ymchwil eu recordio gyda tâp, a byddent ar gael i aelodau o’r tim ymchwil yn unig.

Petai gennych ddiddordeb mewn helpu hefo’r gwaith ymchwil yma, cwbwlhewch y ffurflen amgaedig gan lenwi eich manylion personol a’i ddychwelyd i ni yn yr amlen amgaedig sydd wedi ei stampio. Bydd un o’r ymchwiliadau cyn gyflwyno i’r ddiwydiannu eich barn a gwben trefnu cyfweliadau. Neu, fe allwch gysylltu â Jo Porter yn Insite ar 0151 6701080. Os gwelwch yna, cofiwch lenwi eich rhif ffôn ar y ffurflen, neu nodi eich rhif ffôn mewn hollw sbryd neges yr ydych yn ei adael.
Os nad ydych eisiau cymryd rhan, ticiwch y bocs perthnasol ar y ffurflen amgaëdig a’i ddychwelyd o fewn y 10 diwrnod nesaf, er mwyn i ni beidio cysylltu â chwi eto. Beth bynnag a ddewisiwch, ni chaiff unrhyw fudd-daliadau yr ydych chwi neu eich partner yn ei dderbyn eu heffeithio mewn unrhyw modd, naill a’i nawr nac yn y dyfodol.
Opt out letter for NDP phase 1

Research into Jobcentre help for couples

We are writing to ask for your help.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) wants to improve the help provided to couples. They have asked us to carry out some research about the New Deal for Partners (NDP). The research will help to find out whether it is meeting your needs, and how it could be improved.

Your name has been selected from DWP records as someone who has recently seen an NDP adviser. It would be very helpful if we could come and talk to you and your partner. Even if either of you is now in a job, or doing something else, we are still interested in what you have to say. Your opinions are very important to us. We would like to speak to you and your partner separately, which will take about an hour. Interviews will be conducted by a researcher from Insite. All researchers will carry an identity card.

Insite is a research organisation completely independent of government and political parties. Everything you and your partner tell the interviewer will be treated in complete confidence. No personal views or information will be passed on to the Jobcentre or to anyone outside the research team. The report of the research will not identify any individual or family.

What happens now?

• Someone from INSITE may contact you in the near future, to invite you and your partner to take part in the research.

• Appointments will be arranged at times which suit both of you.

• Interviewers from INSITE will come to your home and talk to each of you about what you think about New Deal for Partners and any help you received.

• We will thank each of you with a £20 CASH GIFT for your time.

If you are interested in helping with this research, please complete the enclosed form, giving your contact details, and return it to us in the stamped addressed envelope provided. One of our researchers will get in touch with you to arrange an interview. Alternatively, you can contact Jo Porter at Insite on 0151 670 1080. Please be sure to fill in your telephone number, or to include your telephone number in any message that you leave.

If you definitely do not want to take part, please tick the relevant box on the form and return it within the next 10 days, so that we know not to contact you again.

Whatever you decide, any benefits you and your partner may receive will not be affected in any way either now or in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Research Director
Opt out form for NDP phase 1

REFERENCE NUMBER: NDP1

NAME:
ADDRESS:

Please amend if any of these details are incorrect.

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NEW DEAL FOR PARTNERS RESEARCH

I am interested in taking part in the research

and have filled in my contact details below


I do not want to take part in the research


CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: ________________________________
(please include area code, thank you):
(We will not pass your number on to any third party)

BEST TIME TO CONTACT YOU: ________________________________

Thank you for your help. Please return this form as soon as possible in the stamped addressed envelope provided.
Welsh opt out letter for NDP phase 1

Ymchwil i gymorth canolfan gwaith ar gyfer cyplau

Rydym yn ysgrifennu i ofyn am eich cymorth.

Mae’r Adran Gwaith a Phensiynau eisiau gwella y cymorth sydd ar gael i gyplau. Maent wedi gofyn i ni ymgymryd ymchwil ynglwn à’r Fargen Newydd i Bartneriaid. Bydd yr ymchlwil yma yn ceisio darganfod os ydyw yn ateb eich gofynion ac hefyd yn edrych ar sut ellir ei wella.

Mae eich enw wedi ei ddewis o gofnodion yr Adran Gwaith a Phensiynau, fel rhywun sy’n cael ei gweld mewn gwallt ddod i’r Fargen Newydd i Bartneriaid. Bydd yr ymchlwil yma yn ceisio darganfod os ydyw yn ateb eich gofynion ac hefyd yn edrych ar sut ellir ei wella.

Mae Insite yn gwmni ymchwil sydd yn gwbwl annibynol o’r Llywodraeth a phleidiau gwleidyddol. Caiff pob dim a ddywedwch chi a’r partner wrth yr ymchlwil ddal yn gwbl gyfrinachol. Ni chaiff barn a gwybodaeth personol unigolion ei roi i’r canolfan gwaith nac i unrhyw un arall o’r tu allan i’r tîm ymchwil. Ni fydd adroddiad yr ymchlwil yn adnabod unrhyw unigolyn, na theuluoedd.

Beth sydd yn digwydd yn awr?

- Bydd rhywun o Insite yn cysylltu â chwi yn y dyfodol agos er mwyn ei gwybod chi a’r partner wrth yr ymchlwil.
- Caiff cyfweliadau ei drefnu ar gyfer amser sydd yn gyfleus i’r ddau ohonoch.
- Bydd yr ymchlwil yma o Insite yn dod i’r cartref i’i gyfweld y ddau ohonoch er mwyn derbyn eich barn a’r Fargen Newydd i Bartneriaid a’r cymorth sydd wedi ei dderbyn.
- Byddwn yn diolch i’r ddau ohonoch am eich amser trwy RODD ARIANNOL o £20 yr un.

Petai gennych ddiweddereb mewn helpu hefo’r ymchlwil yma, cwblhewch y ffurflen amaegadig gan lenwi eich manylion personol a’i ddychwelyd ni yn yr amlen amaegadig sydd wedi ei stampio. Bydd un o’n ymchlwilwyn gyndweledi a chwi er mwyn trefnu cyfweliadau. Neu, fe allwch gysylltu â Jo Porter yn Insite ar 0151 6701080. Os gwelwch yn dda, cofiwch lenwi eich rhif ffôn ar y ffurflen, neu nodi eich rhif ffôn mewn unrhyw neges yr ydych yn ei adael.
Os nad ydych eisiau cymryd rhan, ticiwch y bocs perthnasol ar y ffurfen amgaëdig a’i ddychwelyd o fewn y 10 diwrnod nesaf, er mwyn i ni beidio cysylltu â chwi eto. Beth bynnag a ddewisiwch, ni chaiff unrhyw fudd-daliadau yr ydych chwi neu eich partner yn ei dderbyn eu heffeithio mewn unrhyw modd, naill a’i nawr nac yn y dyfodol.

Yr eiddoch yn gywir,
WFIP and NDP Topic Guides: phase 1

In-depth topic guides were developed and piloted for use in all interviews – with staff, partners and main claimants and for each of the elements of the research (WFIPs and NDP). The topic guides used in interviews with advisers and with partners and claimants are set out here. Due to the cumulative length of all the topic guides the other guides used are not included in these annexes. Copies are available on request from the Department for Work and Pensions.
WORK FOCUSED INTERVIEWS FOR PARTNERS OF BENEFIT RECEPIENTS

WFIP1 TOPIC GUIDE

FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW WITH PERSONAL ADVISERS

Complete cover sheet. Record interview start & finish time in writing and on tape

Name of interviewee

Address

Telephone number

Date of interview

Researcher

Start time Finish time

Length of interview (minutes)

Interview code

Explain aims and objectives of the evaluation & describe the methodology

Secure permission for tape recording

Emphasise confidentiality and impartiality, and the use of verbatim comments on a non attributed basis

Objectives:
1. To investigate the type of help and support provided to the partners of benefit claimants and how it is being delivered

2. To explore the perceived impact and effectiveness of the help and support in terms of helping either/both claimants and partners to move into work or to make labour market related decisions

3. To examine the outcomes of the introduction of mandatory WFIPs, both for Advisers and customers, to increase our understanding of what works for whom and under what circumstances
Background

What is your official job title?
How long have you been an adviser?
What did you do before this job?
How did you end up advising partners? Was it a positive choice for you?
If so, what attracted you to the job?
Do you feel positively motivated about dealing with partners? If not, what are your reservations/concerns?
When not dealing with partners, what other customer groups do you deal with?
Roughly what proportion of your time would you say you spend with the different customer groups?
Has having responsibility for mandatory WFIs for partners affected the other aspects of your work at all? If so, how?

Training

What training, guidance and briefing did you receive in relation to WFIs for partners?
What was covered and how useful or informative did you find it?
How easy/difficult is the guidance to access?
Could your training and preparation have been better in any way? If so, how?
What additional training or preparation do you think would have been useful?

Management

How is your work with partners currently line-managed?
Do you think this is working effectively?
Who currently has lead responsibility for issues concerning WFIP/NDP in this office/in this District?
Do you have an effective means of airing any specific concerns you may have?
Does an effective forum exist for exchanging experience and ideas about good practice with other advisers dealing with partners?
Do you use the intranet for this purpose, and if so how do you find it?
Are there any issues for you about how LMS (and any other IT system) works in relation to WFIPs?
Have you received any strong ‘steer’ (eg from your Business Manager) about how to approach and handle partners, or what your main objectives should be?
If so, what have been the methods used to convey this message to advisers?
How much flexibility do you feel you have in how to deal with partners?
Are you comfortable exercising discretion in how you deal with partners?
Do the flexibilities available to you include how you choose to deal with not only the partner, but also the claimant and the overall household that they constitute?
Delivery of WFIPs for partners

What is the procedure for setting up appointments for partner WFIPs and who is responsible for this?
Does the procedure work well? From your point of view could it be improved? How?
Do you get any opportunity to talk to partners before they come in for a WFI? If so under what circumstances?

Workload

How many partner work focused interviews are you carrying out in a typical week?
How many partners of claimants do you currently have on your NDP caseload?
Are any of them direct entry customers, or have they all come from mandatory WFIPs?
What proportion have entered NDP by a route other than the mandatory WFI?
Overall, what is your view of the way in which WFIPs are being delivered at the moment?
What would you say are the most positive aspects of WFIPs, and why?
Which aspects of delivery work well/work less well? How could it be improved?
Are there any changes to current practice that you would like to see?

Waiver & deferral

At what stage do you make deferral and waiver decisions – and how?
Do the cases that are passed to you by Admin staff generally warrant a waiver or deferral decision or are Admin staff in your view over cautious?
Have you had to make many deferrals or waivers for partners? Roughly how many per month?
How easy is it to make these decisions? Do you feel you need more help, guidance or training in this?
How does this customer group compare with others in terms of the number of deferrals and waivers you need to make?
What are the most frequent reasons for having to make deferrals and waivers?
Do you think the process is protecting vulnerable people?

Failure to attend

Are partners a difficult customer group to get to come in for a WFI? If so – What do you think could be done to improve matters?
Are there particular types of customers who are likely to non-attend?
(prompts: by benefit type, gender, age etc)
Do you have many no-shows for appointments? More than for other groups? If so, why do you think that is? What are the effects of this on your job and your ability to manage your time?
What reasons do people typically give for not attending an appointment? Are there any reasons you have been given that seem specific to partners as a customer group?)
Sanctioning

Have you had any customers yet whose claimant partner has had to have their benefit sanctioned because they do not turn up for a WFI? If so under what circumstances?
Do you think partners understand the mandatory nature of the WFI and the consequences of non-attendance in terms of sanctions?
How do the partners you have spoken to view the issue of possible sanctions?
What is your own view about sanctions for this customer group?

The partner interview process

How do you see partners as a customer group?
Are WFIs easy to carry out with partners?
Do you think that the timing of WFIs for partners is appropriate? Do partners ever comment of the appropriateness of the timing for them? If so, what do they say?
Do you think they can be helped into work? If not, for what reasons?
Are you confident about carrying out WFIs for partners? Is there any help or support that might increase your confidence?
Are you currently seeing the partners of both stock and flow benefits claimants? If so, in roughly what sort of proportions? Are there any noticeable differences between them?

Joint interviews

Are partners informed that they can come in either individually or together with their claiming partner (the benefit recipient)? How is this done?
Is there much opportunity to discuss the possible benefits (or drawbacks) of a joint interview with the partner before their WFI?
Do many couples choose to come in together? Roughly what proportion?
Have you personally carried out any joint interviews where the benefit recipient was there as well as the partner?
If you have – how did the joint interviews come about?
Do you generally prefer to do single or joint interviews? Why?
What do you see as the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of joint or single interviews?
Do you think joint interviews achieve any particular impacts in terms of moving partners (or indeed benefit claimants) towards work?

If the PA has experience of joint interviews then with the following questions check in each case whether there are any significant perceived differences between individual WFIs and those attended also by the benefit recipient
Venue/context

Where are interviews with partners carried out?
Do you think the venue has any bearing on the way the interviews go?
Is the advisory process with partners different from that with other customers you deal with? If so, in what ways?
Are home visits made in this area to carry out WFIPs in any circumstances? How do you feel about this? Do you have any concerns about it?
Have you carried out any WFIPs by telephone? If so – how did they go? What problems do they cause, if any? Do you feel you can operate effectively over the ‘phone?

Content

How long do you find that each WFIP is typically lasting?
Do you find that the WFIs you carry out with partners differ from one another in any way according to the type of benefit the benefit recipient is claiming (JSA/IS/IB/SDA)? If so, in what ways?
What things do you typically cover in a WFI with a partner?
What things do you focus on most in the interviews?
Do you always talk about NDP? If not, under what circumstances might you omit this?
Do you always talk about Tax Credits? If not, under what circumstances might you omit this?
Are there any aspects of the WFIPs that are particularly difficult or need sensitive handling? If so, what are they?
Do you use action plans with partners? If so, how do you use them and how useful do you find them? Do you think the customer gets any benefit from them?
Do you carry out an in work benefit calculation (IWBC) with all partners? If not, with which ones and under what circumstances do you not do so?
Are IWBCs able to take into account adequately the situations of both the partners in a couple and the whole household context for considering work?
Do you need to liaise with Benefits colleagues in order to carry out IWBCs for (some) partners? If so, how well does this liaison work?

Approach

To what extent do you try to challenge partners’ attitudes and opinions about working? If not, why not? If you do, how do you do this?
Is there anything (such as specific information) that you find is particularly effective at persuading people to review their situation as regards working? (can the Adviser think of a particular example?)
Can you identify the key components of a WFI that contribute to a successful outcome?
Do you think WFIPs change partners’ attitudes to working and claiming benefits at all? If so in what ways?
Customer needs

Is there any particular help that partners need, compared to other customer groups? If so, what is that?
What kinds of questions do you frequently get asked by partners? What about the kinds of questions their claimant partners ask?
What kind of information and support do they seem to want most?
What kinds of concerns do they each typically have?
To what extent do you think WFIPs are currently meeting partners’ needs and wants?
Do you find that you need to involve any other colleagues in the course of dealing with the needs of partners? If so, who? Under what circumstances? And to what end?

Partners’ barriers

What are the most frequently found barriers to working among the partners you see?
How frequently do health related issues form a major concern for these clients? How do you deal with these?
How frequently do caring related issues form a major concern for these clients? How do you deal with these?
What other types of barriers to working have you encountered with partners?
Do the key barriers faced differ in any way according to identifiable factors (such as type of benefit their partner is claiming, their age etc..)?
What steps (short of direct employment support and advice) are you able to take in the course of WFIs for partners to help move customers closer to the labour market?

Outcomes and effectiveness

Objectives

What is your understanding of the reason for introducing WFIs for partners? Do you think they are a good idea?
What do you think is the main objective that you are trying to achieve in WFIPs?
What were your expectations of achieving this through mandatory interviews from your previous experience with other customers?
How do partners differ from other customers in the ways they respond to WFIs?
(prompt: such as lone parents, IB recipients, others?)
Outcomes

How effective do you feel you are able to be with partners at the moment?
How much of a contribution do partners make to meeting your jobs targets?
Does this affect the way you spend your time with them? How?
Do any of the partners you see for a WFI subsequently make contact with you again?
Can you characterise the types of partners (or couples) with whom you have the greatest success – either in moving into work or onto NDP?
(prompt if necessary: with/without children, attitudes to working, benefit type of main claimant, other…)
To what extent do you find partners are interested in part-time working?
Do they see it as a step to full time work, or as an end in itself?
To what extent do you encourage people to seek part-time work? If you do, what sorts of arguments do you use to try to persuade them? (Eg financial, social etc)
What outcomes are you seeing from WFIs for partners apart from entry to NDP and work (for example take up of education or training courses)?
In your judgement are these genuine moves closer to the labour market?
Who are the hardest partners to help in your experience? How do you deal with them?
What do you see as the main challenges and difficulties this group of customers poses?
Do you think you get either better or worse outcomes from joint interviews compared to interviews with just the partner? Why do you think this might be?
Are you confident that WFIPs can address the issues of household income and joint decision making about work?

Summary

What then is your overall assessment of WFIs for partners thus far? What are the key issues for you?
What do you think might make the WFIPs more effective and more productive than they are currently?
(probe: frequency, content, timing, targeting, points system etc)
Is there anything else you would like to add that that we’ve not covered?

Thank respondent for their help and close the interview.
WORK FOCUSED INTERVIEWS FOR PARTNERS OF BENEFIT RECIPIENTS

WFIP1 TOPIC GUIDE

FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW WITH PARTNER

Complete cover sheet. Record interview start & finish time in writing and on tape

Name of interviewee

Address

Telephone number

Date of interview

Researcher

Start time Finish time

Length of interview (minutes)

Interview code

Explain that we are looking at the effectiveness of the work focused interviews being given to the partners of benefit claimants, in order to improve the service offered, and exploring how they feel about their adviser interview and any assistance they may have had from Jobcentre Plus to help them get work

Secure permission for tape recording

Emphasise confidentiality and impartiality, and the use of verbatim comments on an anonymous basis

Objectives:

1. To investigate the type of help and support provided to the partners of benefit claimants and how it is being delivered and received

2. To explore the impact and effectiveness of the help and support in terms of helping either/both claimants and partners to move into work or to make labour market related decisions

3. To examine the outcomes of the introduction of mandatory WFI s for partners to increase our understanding of what works for whom and under what circumstances
Personal details

I would like to start by asking you a few questions about yourself and your circumstances

What is your age? (If not precise then age band)
How do you describe your ethnic background?
Do you have any dependent children living with you?
How many?
What are their ages?
How old is your partner [name]?
Can I ask how long you and your partner [name] have been together?
Are you married?

You had a work focused interview with an Adviser because your partner [name] was claiming benefit and part of their claim related to you. We are interested in your views about the interview and your experience of it. I will be asking you mainly about how you heard about it, what it was like and how you feel about it.

Can you remember that interview?
(if necessary explain what should have happened – mailshot/letter/appointment at the Jobcentre Plus office)

Do you recall when you spoke to the Adviser (between April and July this year)?
Did anyone go with you to the interview? If so, who?
I understand that your partner [name] was claiming [JSA/IS/IB] at that time, is that right?
And is that still the case or has the situation changed at all?

Get details of any changes in relation to benefits claims and work that may have taken place since their WFIP and say you will return to these later in the interview

Work history & experience

The Adviser interviews are about work and what Jobcentre Plus can do to help you if you do start work – so first I would like to ask you about your own work history…

What educational qualifications do you have?
Do you have any work-related, vocational qualifications? (at what level?)
Have you done any training in the past other than that which led to qualifications?
What sort of training? For how long?
Did you complete the course(s)? Why did it/they not result in qualifications?
Had you worked in the past (before the Adviser interview)? If so:
What types of jobs have you done?
Were they full or part-time?
Have you any experience of voluntary work of any kind?
How long ago was the most recent job you had had before your interview? What was that doing? How many hours a week were you working in that job?
Were you doing any (part-time) work at the time of your Adviser interview (WFI)?
If so, what type of work and for how many hours a week? Have your hours changed since then? For what reasons?
Did you consider increasing your hours as a result of the WFI?
Would you consider increasing your hours in the future? Why/why not?
Were you actively looking for work (or more hours) at the time you attended your Adviser interview?
If so:
What sort of work were you looking for?
For how many hours per week were you looking to work?
How were you searching?
How did that go?
Did you have any particular problems or difficulties?
Did you apply for any vacancies? What happened?
Have you worked at all since your interview?

If so, say you will return and talk about this separately, later in the interview

Benefits/Jobcentre history

Have you ever claimed benefits in your own right? Which ones?
So what previous contact have you had with the Benefits Agency, the Employment Service or Jobcentre Plus?
When was the last time that you visited a Jobcentre?
(when, why, how often)
What did you think of them?
(environment, staff, atmosphere)

I would like to turn now in a bit more detail to your circumstances at the time of your Adviser interview (WFI) and anything which at that time might have affected you getting into work (and may still be affecting you)

Barriers to Work

Were there any difficulties that you needed to overcome before you could start a job?
(spontaneous responses)
Health issues & disability

Did you have any disability or health problem that restricted either the type of work you might be able to do or the hours you could work?
If so: how much did you feel that restricted you?
How long had you experienced this problem?
Do you still face this difficulty?
Do you think your health is likely to improve in the future, stay much the same, or get worse?

Caring responsibilities

Did you/do you have any caring responsibilities?
Who did you/do you care for?
What kind of care did you/do you give them?
Roughly how many hours a day did/does this involve?
Did you/do you get any support or help with caring from anyone else?
If not, would you have wanted/want this?
How restricting were/are your care responsibilities on what else you could/can do?
Did/do your caring responsibilities prevent you from working or limit the work you could consider doing?
To what degree?

Childcare (if have children)

What arrangements did you/do you have for looking after your children?
Did you/do you share looking after the children with your partner?
If so, how was/is childcare shared out?
How did/does this work in practice?
Did you/do you (and could you) get help from anyone else if needed?
If not, would you have wanted/want this?

If customer is not currently working:

Would you be able to make acceptable childcare arrangements if one of you was to start work?
What if both of you were working?
Would the need to care for children limit/affect the work you could do?
Would it affect your partner in the same way?
What sort of arrangements would you have to make if you were working?
What sort of childcare would you prefer if neither of you were available?
(prompt if necessary: friend/family, childminder, nursery)
Do you know if suitable childcare is available locally?
Other perceived barriers...

Was there/is there anything else that made/makes it difficult to work?  
(probe if necessary – age, lack of jobs in the area, skills/qualifications, lack of work experience, lack of confidence, transport difficulties etc)

Attitudes to working

If was working part-time at the time of the WFI interview

Did you consider increasing your hours at that time? Why/why not?  
Would you consider increasing your hours in the future? Why/why not?

Do not ask the following section of questions if the customer is already working – go to the section on Experience of the WFI

(Despite any of above) – Would you like to work?  
If so:  
Would this be full-time or part-time? Why?  
What kind of work would you like to do?  
Are you currently looking for a job?  
Do you have an idea of when in the future you might seek work?  
If not:  
Why do you feel you do not want to work?  
What are the main reasons behind your decision?  
Might you look for work in the future?  
Is there anything that could lead you to thinking about working?

Household issues

Ideally, who do you think should work from the household? Why do you think that?  
(if there are any children in the household)  
Ideally, who do you think should look after the children? Why?  
What does your partner [name] feel about the possibility of you working?  
Have you discussed with your partner [name] what your work options might be?  
Do you know how working might affect the overall joint household income?  
Do you think both of you could manage to work?  
Would it be possible for only one of you to work?  
What would each of these two options depend on?  
How would you make a decision about whether or not to work yourself?  
How much would it be an individual decision and how much a joint decision with your partner?)
Experience of the WFI process

Notification

How did you first hear about work focused interviews?  
(Prompt: leaflet, general letter, via partner, only when got appointment letter etc)

Why do you think you were asked to go into the Jobcentre?  
Did you have to go to the interview? Why?

Had you heard of the help available to partners/the New Deal for Partners programme before that?  
If so, what did you think it was about?

Had you at any time previously considered getting help from the Jobcentre regarding the possibility of working?  
How did you feel about receiving the letter? About being required to attend a meeting about work?

What did you think of the wording? The tone? Did it sound helpful?  
Was it clear that the interview was something that you had to do?

What was your partner’s [name] reaction?  
Did you feel that it was an appropriate time for you, in your circumstances, to be thinking about work?

Were you prompted to do anything before your appointment (such as find out more about NDP)?  
If you did seek more information, who did you seek it from? And was the person you spoke to helpful?

Did you discuss it at that time with your partner [name]?  
Can you remember exactly what you discussed or what you decided?

Was it clear that you could take someone along with you to the interview?  
Did you discuss with your partner [name] whether to go to the interview together?

What did you decide to do? Why did you choose to go together/alone?

Arrangement of appointment...

Was an appointment fixed up for you quickly/efficiently?  
Did you feel it was done with sensitivity to your needs and circumstances?

Was your interview appointment deferred (put off) at all? If so, what were the reasons for your first meeting being put off to a later date?

Did you manage to attend your first appointment? If not, why not? How many appointments had to be made before you managed to attend?  
[Interviewer to be aware that some WFI are conducted by telephone or by home visits in cases of severe mobility problems]

Did you understand that sanctions could be placed on your partner’s benefits if you failed to participate?
How did you feel about having to go to the interview in order to carry on getting benefits?

**Visiting the Jobcentre Plus office**

What did you expect the Jobcentre to be like?
What did you base these expectations on?
*(prompt: previous contact, word of mouth from friends, images on TV...)*
If you have had experience of Jobcentres in the past, how did it compare this time?
How did you find visiting the Jobcentre in practice?
Did you feel comfortable being there?
How did staff there treat you? Were they helpful?
Would you be happy going back in the future if you needed to?
How did you get there? How difficult was that for you?
*(If has children)*
Did you take your child(ren) with you? If so, did the Jobcentre make them welcome? Did you find it an acceptable environment for children to be in? Was it difficult to do the interview with them there?
If you didn’t take the children, what arrangements did you have to make for the children to be looked after while you were at the Jobcentre?
*(If is someone’s carer)*
Did you have to make arrangements for replacement care while you were at the Jobcentre? If so, what arrangements did you have to make?

**Expectations of WFI**

How did you feel before the interview?
What did you expect the interview to be like?
Was the meeting what you expected? If not, how did it differ?
Were there any particular things that you expected/hoped the interview would address?

**Content of the WFI interview**

Can you remember how long the interview lasted?
Who did most of the talking?
*If you attended with your partner,* did the Adviser talk most to you or to him/her?
Did you talk most about what you might do or about what your partner [name] might do?
What do you feel the main purpose of the interview was?
Were things explained clearly to you?
Can you remember what was discussed at the meeting?
Did you discuss Tax Credits and/or in-work support with the adviser?
Do you feel you understand what is available better than you did before?
Did the Adviser explain the help that is available through New Deal for Partners (NDP)? What did they say? Was it explained to you that you could go onto NDP at any time?
What sort of things did you discuss about what help was available to you (NDP)?
Did the Adviser discuss work with you? How did you feel about this?
Did the Adviser offer to do an in work benefit calculation for you at that first meeting to work out how much better off you might be if working?
If so, was it for a particular job vacancy or for a theoretical job? What was the outcome? Did it take your partner [name] into account? How useful did you find it?
How do you feel the interview went overall?

**Perceptions of Adviser**

What did you think of the Personal Adviser?
What were they like?

*(prompts: approach, attitude, professionalism, knowledge etc)*

Was he/she as you expected them to be?
If not, were they better or worse? In what ways?
Were you able to talk through with him/her the things that matter to you personally?
What do you feel he/she was trying to get across to you?
Did you feel that was relevant to your own particular situation?
Was he/she able to answer all your questions?
Do you feel he/she listened to what you had to say?
Did the meeting address what you felt were your needs at the time?
Did he/she tell you anything you didn’t already know?
Was there anything that you would have liked more discussion about? If so, what?
Why do you think this was not covered adequately at the time?
Do you remember anything that the Adviser said which surprised you?
Was there anything you felt unhappy or uncomfortable with?
Was there anything you were particularly pleased about?

**Outcomes from the interview...**

How did you feel after the interview?
What was the most useful thing to come out of the interview for you? Was there anything else you felt you had gained from it?
Did the interview in any way change the way you thought about working, or the options you might have in terms of employment? *details*
Did the help and information you got at your interview change your mind about working at all? If so in what way?
Did the meeting make you feel any more confident about what you might do (about work or training etc) than you did before?
What do you feel you got out of attending the meeting?
Did you come away after the interview with a different view in any way about the difficulties you felt you faced if you were to consider working? details
Do you think any of the information you received will help you in making decisions in the future? In what ways?
Do you feel that you left the meeting understanding what help was available to you when/if you wish to start work?
Can you recall what you intended to do immediately after the meeting, and as a result of it?
Since the meeting, have you been able to do this?
Do you think you would have done this anyway – whether or not you had had the interview?
Did you consider getting further help from the Adviser (ie going on to NDP)?
If not, why not? Would you consider it in the future? What would have to change before it might be an option for you?
Did you discuss getting help to move into work (through NDP) with your partner [name]? If so, what did he/she think about it?
Have there been any other outcomes from your interview (apart from work if now in a job) such as education or training courses?
Do you feel that you are closer to being able to work in the future than you were before the interview? If so, in what ways?

If customer had further meetings (entered NDP) after the WFI...

Why did you decide to get further help from the Adviser after the initial WFI (ie to enter NDP)? What first made you to consider doing this?
Did discussing what help/support was available with the Adviser help you to make your decision?
Were there any aspects of the help/support available that you found particularly attractive/helpful?
How many meetings have you had with the Adviser?
Have you had other contact apart from meetings? Such as by telephone, or the Adviser sending you anything through the post?
To what extent has your partner [name] been involved in your Adviser sessions so far?
What has the Adviser been able to do for you so far?
(Probe – referrals to training, job preparation such as help with CV, submissions to job vacancies, etc)
How do you feel about how things have gone so far?
Can you describe the impact, if any, that it has had on you? (eg confidence, optimism, job search etc)
If customer started working after the WFI...

What were your main reasons for wanting to work?
Did you go into work directly from your interview, or did you have further meetings with the Adviser before that happened (i.e., were on NDP)?
How big a role do you think the Adviser interview played in getting you into your job?
What do you think was the most significant help you received?
What was the single biggest factor that had to be sorted out before you could start work?
What was your main concern? Was it borne out in practice?
When did you start work? What sort of work is it? How many hours per week?

**If the job is part-time:** Why did you decide to work part-time hours?
Would you consider increasing your hours in the future? Why/why not?

**If the customer has children:**
What childcare arrangements did you have to make when you started work?
Are they still working effectively?
If not, what problems have arisen in relation to childcare?

**If the customer provides care for their partner or someone else:**
What alternative care arrangements did you have to make when you started work?
Are they still working effectively?
If not, what problems have arisen in relation to care arrangements?
Did you consider the decision about working to be essentially your individual choice, or a matter for joint decision making with your partner [name]?
So did you discuss with your partner [name] what it would mean you started work? Did you discuss what the options might be, and how it might affect the household income?
How did you working affect him/her?
Was he/she happy about you starting work?
If not, what were his/her concerns? Has he/she changed his/her mind at all since?
Did your partner [name] also find work in this period? If so, what type of work and how many hours?
Did the circumstances of your partner [name] change in any other way at this time?
What was the effect on your household income as a whole?
Are you still in the same job?

**If the customer has since left the job, or is now in a different job, ask how long the job lasted, the reasons for leaving, particular problems or pressures faced, and how this has affected their view of working in the future. Also how it has affected their partner.**
Summary

Is there anything else that you can think of in terms of how you were contacted, how your appointment was set up, or how the interview was conducted, that you would have found helpful?

Is there any particular support or provision you would like to see and would be helpful to you that is not available at the moment?

Is there anything else that you would like to say about the meeting that perhaps we haven’t covered?

Thank customer for their help

*Explain we would like to contact them again (possibly just by telephone but possibly for another interview) in about a year’s time to see how they are getting on and if anything has changed in their situation – gain their agreement to re-contact them then.*

*Get them to sign for receipt of their £20 gift on the separate sheet.*
WORK FOCUSED INTERVIEWS FOR PARTNERS OF BENEFIT RECIPIENTS

WFIP1 TOPIC GUIDE

FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW WITH THE BENEFIT RECIPIENT

**Complete cover sheet. Record interview start & finish time in writing and on tape**

Name of interviewee

Address

Telephone number

Date of interview

Researcher

Start time

Finish time

Length of interview (minutes)

Interview code

Explain that we are looking at the effectiveness of the work focused interviews being given to the partners of benefit claimants, in order to improve the service offered, and exploring how couples feel about the adviser interviews and whether they have found support from Jobcentre Plus helpful

Secure permission for tape recording

Emphasise confidentiality and impartiality, and the use of verbatim comments on an anonymous basis

**Objectives:**

1. To investigate the type of help and support provided to the partners of benefit claimants and how it is being delivered and received by them and by their claimant partners

2. To explore the effectiveness of the help and support in terms of helping either/both claimants and partners to move into work or to make labour market related decisions

3. To examine the outcomes of the introduction of mandatory WFI s for partners to increase our understanding of what works for whom and under what circumstances
Personal details

I would like to start by asking you a few questions about yourself and your circumstances

What is your age?  *(Age band if not specific)*
How do you describe your ethnic background?  *Categories*
Do you have any dependent children living with you?
How many?
What are their ages?
How old is your partner [name]?  *(Age band if not specific)*
Can I ask how long you and your partner [name] have been together?
Are you married?

Your partner [name] had a work-focused interview with an Adviser because you were claiming benefit and part of your claim related to them as a dependent. We are interested in your views about your partner doing the interview – and we would like to find out how you see things from your position, and your response.

Can you remember when your partner [name] had that interview?
Did you go with them to the interview?
I understand that you were claiming [JSA/IS/IB] at that time, is that right?
And is that still the case or has the situation changed at all?

Get details of any changes in relation to benefits claims and work that may have taken place for either partner since the WFIP and say you will return to these later in the interview

Work history & experience...

First I would like to ask you briefly about your own work history

What qualifications do you have?
Do you have any work-related, vocational qualifications?
Have you worked in the past?
If so:
What types of jobs have you done?
Were they full or part-time?
How long ago was the most recent job you had?
What was that doing?
How many hours a week were you working in that job?
Were you doing any (part-time) work at the time of your partner’s [name] Adviser interview (WFIP)?
If so, what type of work and for how many hours a week? Have your hours changed since then? For what reasons?
Were you actively looking for work (or more hours) at the time your partner [name] attended her/his Adviser interview?
If so:
What sort of work were you looking for?
For how many hours per week were you looking to work?
How were you searching?
How did that go?
Did you have any particular problems or difficulties?
Did you apply for any vacancies? What happened?
Have you worked at all since the time of your partner’s [name] interview?
If so, say you will return and talk about this separately, later in the interview.
I would like to turn now in a bit more detail to your circumstances and anything that might have affected/be affecting whether you and/or your partner can get into work.

Barriers to Work

What do you think are the main difficulties/barriers that your partner would face if s/he wanted to work?
(spontaneous responses)
Are/were there any difficulties that you need/needed to overcome before you could start a job?
(spontaneous responses)

Health issues & disability

Do you have any disability or health problem that restricts either the type of work you might be able to do or the hours you could work?
If so: How long have you had this? And how much do you feel that restricts/restricted you?
Details if forthcoming

Do you think your health is likely to improve in the future, stay much the same, or get worse?

Caring responsibilities

Do you have any caring responsibilities?
Who do you care for?
What do you do for them?
Roughly how many hours a day does this involve?
Do you get any support or help with caring from anyone else?
Would you want such help? Why/why not?
How restricting are your care responsibilities on what else you can do?
Do your caring responsibilities prevent you from working or limit the work you could consider doing?
To what degree?

**Childcare (if have children)**
What arrangements do you have for looking after your children?
Do you share looking after the children with your partner?
If so, how is childcare shared out? How does this work in practice?
Do you (could you) get help from anyone else if needed?
Would you want such help? Why/why not?
Do you think you could cope with childcare if one of you started work?
What if both of you were working?
Would the need to care for children limit/affect the work you could do?
Would it affect your partner in the same way?
What sort of arrangements would you have to make if you were working?
What sort of childcare would you prefer if neither of you was available? Why?
(*prompts: friend/family, childminder, nursery etc*)
Do you know if suitable childcare is available locally?

**Attitudes to working**
(Despite any of above) – Would you like to work?
**Do not ask this question if the customer is already working**
If so:
Are you currently looking for a job?
Might you look for work in the future?
Do you have an idea of when you might seek work?
If not:
Why do you feel you do not want to/cannot work?
What are the main reasons behind your decision?
Might you look for work in the future?

**Household Issues**
Ideally, who do you think should work? Why?
Ideally, who should look after the children? Why?
How do you feel about your partner working?
What does your partner [name] feel about the possibility of you working?
Have you discussed with your partner [name] what your work options might be?
Do you know how working might affect the overall joint household income?
Do you think both of you could manage to work?
Would it be possible for only one of you to work?
What would each of these two options depend on?
How would you make a decision about whether or not to work yourself?
How much would it be an individual decision and how much a joint decision with your partner?

**Experience of the WFI process**

**Notification**

How did you first hear that your partner [name] would be required to attend a work focused interview?

*(Prompts: when made claim, own adviser, Jobcentre Plus leaflet, preliminary letter, only when partner got their appointment letter etc)*

What leaflets, letters or other material about the partner interview or about New Deal for Partners (NDP) have you seen?
What did you think of them? Were they clear? Did they sound helpful?
Was the interview something your partner had to do? How did you realise this?
Had you heard of the New Deal for Partners programme before that?
If so, what did you think it was about?
What was your first reaction when your partner [name] received the letter telling her/him that they had to attend a meeting about work?
How did you feel about them having to have such an interview?
Did you feel that it was an appropriate time for your partner [name] to be thinking about work possibilities?
Did you discuss it at that time with your partner [name]?
Can you remember exactly what you discussed or what you decided?
Do you know whether your partner [name] was offered the option of having you go with them?
If not, would you have liked this option? Why?
Did you discuss with your partner [name] whether to go to the interview together?
What did you decide to do?
Why did you choose to go together/for them to go alone?
Did you understand that your partner’s [name] interview was compulsory?
Did you understand that sanctions could be placed on your benefits if they failed to participate?
How did you feel about that?
The WFI interview

*Only ask these questions if the WFI was *jointly* attended by the benefit recipient and their partner*

What did you expect the interview to be like?
Was the meeting what you expected?
If not, how did it differ?
Were there any particular things that you expected/hoped the interview would address? Did it do so?
How do you feel it went overall?

**Content of the WFI interview**

Were there any things that were difficult to discuss with both yourself and your partner present?
Did the Adviser ask you any questions?
Did you ask the Adviser anything?
Did the Adviser talk most to you or to him/her? Did you talk most about what you might do or about what your partner [name] might do?
What do you feel the main purpose of it was?
Were things explained clearly?
Can you remember what was discussed at the meeting?
Did you discuss Tax Credits and/or in-work support with the adviser?
Do you feel you understand what is available, in the way of help and support to you and your partner, better than you did before?
Did the Adviser explain the help that is available through New Deal for Partners (NDP) to find work if that was what your partner [name] wanted?
What sort of things were discussed about NDP? Was it explained that your partner [name] could go onto NDP at any time?
Did the Adviser offer to do an in work benefit calculation for you and your partner at that first meeting – to work out how much better off you might be if working?
If so, was it for a particular job vacancy or for a theoretical job? What was the outcome? Did it take both of you into account? How useful did you find it?

**Perceptions of Adviser**

*Only as these questions if the WFI was *jointly* attended by the benefit recipient and their partner*

What did you think of the Personal Adviser? What were they like?  
*probe: approach, attitude, understanding, professionalism, knowledge etc*

What do you feel he/she was trying to get across to you?
Did you feel that was relevant to your own particular situation?
Was he/she able to answer all your questions?
Do you feel he/she listened to what you and your partner had to say?
Did the meeting address what you felt were your needs at the time?
Did he/she tell you anything you didn’t already know?
Was there anything that you would have liked more discussion about? If so, what?
Why do you think this was not covered adequately at the time?
Do you remember anything that the Adviser said which surprised you?
Was there anything you felt unhappy or uncomfortable with?
Was there anything that you were pleased about?

Effects of the interview…

Did your partner’s interview affect you in any way?
How did you/your partner feel after it?
(positive, optimistic, angry, that it was a waste of time, etc)
Did you discuss with your partner [name] what happened at their interview?
Did the interview in any way change the way either of you thought about working, or looking for work, or about the different possible options you might have in terms of employment? details
What do you think your partner [name] got out of attending the meeting?
How do you view your and your partner’s options for working?
Did the information provided at the interview give you and your partner [name] a different view in any way of the difficulties you might face if you were to consider working? details
Have you ever discussed NDP with your partner [name]?
If so, what did either of you think about it?

If benefit recipient has started work since their partner’s WFI…

Did your partner’s interview with an Adviser play any part in you deciding to work?
When did you start work?
What sort of work was it?
How many hours per week?

If the customer has children:

What childcare arrangements did you have to make when you started work?
Are they still working effectively?
If not, what problems have arisen in relation to childcare?
How much of a joint decision with your partner [name] was starting work?
So did you discuss with your partner [name] what it would mean if you starting work?
How *did* you working affect him/her?
Was he/she happy about you starting work?
If not, what were his/her concerns? Has he/she changed his/her mind at all since?
Did your partner [name] also find work in this period? If so, what type of work and how many hours?
Did the circumstances of your partner [name] change in any other way at this time?
What was the effect on your household income as a whole?
Are you still in the same job?

*If the customer has since left the job, or is now in a different job, ask how long the job lasted, the reasons for leaving, particular problems or pressures faced, and how this has affected their view of working in the future. Also how it has affected their partner.*

**Summary**

Is there anything else that you would like to say about the interview process for your partner [name] that perhaps we haven’t covered?

**Thank customer for their help**

*Explain we would like to contact them again (possibly just by telephone but possibly for another interview) in about a years time to see how they are getting on and if anything has changed in their situation – gain their agreement to re-contact them then.*

*Get them to sign for receipt of their £20 gift on the separate sheet.*

*If they ask – the gift is counted as a contribution to capital not earnings, so won’t affect their benefits.*
NEW DEAL FOR PARTNERS

NDP1 TOPIC GUIDE

FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW WITH PERSONAL ADVISERS

Complete cover sheet. Record interview start & finish time in writing and on tape

Name of interviewee

Address

Telephone number

Date of interview

Researcher

Start time Finish time

Length of interview (minutes)

Interview code

Explain aims and objectives of the evaluation & describe the methodology

Secure permission for tape recording

Emphasise confidentiality and impartiality, and the use of verbatim comments on a non attributed basis

Objectives:
1. To investigate the type of help and support provided to the partners of benefit claimants through NDP and how it is being delivered

2. To explore the perceived impact and effectiveness of the help and support under NDP, in terms of helping either/both claimants and partners to move closer to the labour market/ into work or to make labour market related decisions

3. To examine the outcomes from the enhanced NDP programme, both for Advisers and customers, to increase our understanding of what works for whom and under what circumstances
Questions in the first section only to be asked if the Adviser was not interviewed in the first phase of WFIP interviews

Section 1:

Background

How long have you been an adviser?
What did you do before this job?
How did you end up advising partners? Was it a positive choice for you?
If so, what attracted you to the job?
How motivated do you feel about dealing with partners, if at all? If not, what are your reservations/concerns?
When not dealing with partners, what other customer groups do you deal with?

Training

What training, guidance and briefing did you receive in relation to WFs for partners and the new NDP? Did you find it useful/informative at all? Why/why not.
Timing – when did the training take place in relation to the start of NDP? Was this about right?
What additional training or preparation if any do you think would have been useful?
Do you use the guidance for NDP? Views about it. If don’t use it, what do you use?

Management

How is your work with partners currently line-managed, and is this working effectively?
Do you have an effective means of airing any specific concerns you may have?
Do you exchange experience and ideas about good practice with other advisers dealing with partners? How? Would any other methods be useful?
Do you use the intranet for this purpose, and if so how do you find it?
How much flexibility do you feel you have in how to deal with partners?
Are you comfortable exercising discretion in how you deal with partners?
Do the flexibilities available to you include how you choose to deal with not only the partner, but also the claimant and the overall household that they constitute?
Section 2:

NDP Workload

How many partners of claimants do you currently have on your NDP caseload?
Approximately how many partners in total have you had on NDP (initial interviews and case loaded) since April 2004?
Roughly how many of them have been direct-entry partners (self-referrals), and how many came from mandatory WFIs? Do the two groups differ in any ways?
How have self-referred partners heard about NDP? (eg leaflet, friends etc.)
Do you deal any differently with self-referrals compared to those who enter NDP from WFIPs? If so, in what ways?
Do you ever reach your caseload limits? If so, do you have a waiting list? Views about this.

NDP Case-loading

What does it mean in practice to case-load a partner?
Do NDP initial interviews ever happen at the same sitting as the WFI?
Does the timing of WFIP (six months into claim) affect your ability to encourage people onto NDP?
How do you decide whether to case-load someone? How decide whether to try to get them on NDP? How do you ‘sell’ NDP to partners?
How, and at what point, is it marked and flagged up on LMS?
Is it possible to conduct follow up interviews with partners after their WFI but for these not to be called entry to NDP?

Probably marked as NDP initial interviews if just a one off that goes no further.
If so, under what circumstances, and how frequently does this happen?

Delivery of Interviews

How long do NDP interviews tend to be?
Does the length of interviews vary? Why?
Do you have long enough to deal with people as you would like?

I would like now to look at the NDP process in more detail and with reference to a number of actual cases that you have dealt with as an adviser since the new programme was introduced in April 2004...

Advisers to be asked about up to six specific cases (which they will have been asked to select and ‘prepare’ in advance of the interview – ideally one each from each of the following broad categories (and including at least one self-referral, one entrant case loaded from a WFIP, and one who attended an initial NDP interview but took it no further):
(1) Somebody for whom the help under NDP was felt to be particularly well suited – and which led to a successful job outcome.

(2) Somebody for whom NDP was not able to adequately meet their needs, or overcome their barriers, despite a desire to work.

(3) Somebody who was case loaded on NDP for an extended period of time for whatever reason.

(4) Somebody who undertook training on NDP.

(5) Somebody who achieved a positive outcome of movement towards the labour market, even though they did not (yet) start work (eg education/ training/work placement).

(6) Somebody for whom support on NDP was only able to work effectively by taking on board the circumstances of the benefit claimant as well as the partner and dealing with the situation of the entire household, rather than just the individual.

Guide for each individual case discussed:

What happened in this case?

Obtain an overview description of the

• Circumstances of the partner (including whether ‘job ready’ vs. hard to help)

• Support measures undertaken

• Rationale

• Outcomes

Case loading process

How did partner end up on NDP – if adviser did the original WFI, how got them to do NDP?

Did this partner go directly from their WFI into NDP or was there a gap before they re-contacted you? If there was a gap, what was the reason for it?

Was this partner case-loaded? For how long?

How frequently did you have contact with them?

How long did meetings last for?

Was all contact face-to-face – or were other means (such as the telephone) also used?

Joint meetings

Did this partner choose at any time to come in together with their partner (the benefit recipient), or anyone else?

If so, was this just to the first meeting (the WFIP), or to several or all meetings (ie when on NDP too)?
Did you actively try and encourage this partner to bring the main claimant with them? To all meetings? Or only occasionally, for specific purposes? If the latter – to what ends, and was it successful? Did the main claimant’s circumstances affect the way you dealt with this partner? In what way?

**Partners’ barriers/background**

What were the main barriers to working perceived to be by this partner? What did you perceive their main barriers to be? How did you try to deal with them? To what extent were you able to overcome them, or change the partner’s perception of them? Did the type of benefit being claimed by the main benefit customer appear to have any bearing on the partner’s perceptions or how you approached their case? Were there any other important factors that came into play? For example, age…? Was confidence an issue for this partner? If so, did you do anything to deal with this? What & how, with what result? Did the partner have any experience of the Jobcentre previously? Did this make any difference?

**Partner needs/aspirations**

Did they have clear idea of the type of job they wanted, the number of hours, and level of wages? Was the partner aware of their job options? How far were these issues explored? Or did adviser have to discuss labour market opportunities with the partner, and orientate them towards possible options? Was there any particular help that this partner needed? If so, what was that? Were you able to provide it from within NDP? What kind of information and support did they want/ need most? What kinds of concerns did they have? Did you find that you needed to involve any other colleagues in the course of dealing with the needs of this partner? If so, who, why, and to what end? Response/ reaction of this partners to NDP – were they pleased to have an interest taken in them? Why/ why not? [eg grateful for help, surprise at opportunities] Was partner taking part actively in NDP, or ‘going through the motions’.

**Content of NDP**

What did you do with this partner? Why/why not? [see content of NDP from guidance?]
Eg
- explanation of Tax Credits/ in-work support
- discussion of job opportunities/training opportunities

**Action Plans**

Did you use any kind of action plan with this partner? 
If so, how did you use it and how useful did you find it?
Do you think the partner got any benefit from it? How did they react?

**IWBC**

Did you carry out an in work benefit calculation (IWBC) with this partner? Why/why not?
If so, at what stage in your meetings?
Was the IWBC able to take into account adequately the situations of both the people in the couple and the whole household context for considering work?
If not, why not in this case? *(Probe fully – eg Availability of information, confidentiality issues)*
Was there any discussion of part-time working/the hours this partner needed to work to be better off?
Did they work out better off under the calculation? Reaction to outcome by partner.
Did you need to liaise with Benefits colleagues in order to carry out an IWBC?
If so, how well did this liaison work?

**Use of available support**

Was there anything within NDP (such as specific information or specific types of support) that you found was particularly helpful in working with this partner?
If not, what was lacking?
Can you identify what contributed to a successful outcome in this case/or the reasons why there was not a successful outcome? *(Eg aspects of NDP, relations with the partner, partner attitude/ barriers, access to provision etc).*
Was NDP the right New Deal for this person? Or did you feel their barriers would be better addressed by other New Deals eg ND50+ or NDDP?

**Outcomes and effectiveness**

How helpful overall do you think NDP was for this partner?
In what ways were you able to help this partner move closer to the labour market/or into a job?
- Any impact on barriers to work
- Any impact on main claimant
- Any change in attitudes towards work/benefits
- Whether encouraged about prospects of finding a job
- Whether raised awareness of Tax Credits/in-work support
- Whether raised awareness of training opportunities/job opportunities
How effective do you feel you were able to be with this partner?
What limitations did you experience?
How much time were you able to spend with this partner?
Was it as much as you needed?
Relationship/rapport – were you able to build up a rapport with this partner? How?
Did this matter? In what way?
Did you discuss/encourage either full or part-time work with this partner? Why?
If the partner did any training on NDP, what was the rationale for this?
How was this decision arrived at? Was there a particular job goal in mind or was it a more general move towards the labour market?

**Household Issues**

To what extent (if any) did the main benefit recipient influence the way you approached this partner?
Were there any household issues of relevance eg household income, joint decision-making?
In the course of dealing with this partner, did you address the issues of household income and joint decision making about work (as opposed to the individual needs and aspirations of the partner)?

**Summary**

What is your overall assessment of the new NDP thus far?
Can NDP move households out of worklessness?
How is NDP perceived compared to other programmes? Lower/higher priority than eg NDLP?
Should we be helping partners?
What impact is it having on the household, if any?
What are your views on offering other New Deals to partners?
What are the key issues for you?
Is there anything you think might make NDP more effective or more productive than it is currently?
Is there anything else you would like to add that we’ve not covered?

*Thank respondent for their help and close the interview.*
NEW DEAL FOR PARTNERS
NDP1 TOPIC GUIDE
FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW WITH PARTNER

Complete cover sheet. Record interview start & finish time in writing and on tape

Name of interviewee

Address

Telephone number

Date of interview

Researcher

Start time Finish time

Length of interview (minutes)

Interview code

Explain that we are looking at the New Deal for Partners programme in order to improve the service offered, and exploring how people feel about the assistance they have had from Jobcentre Plus under NDP to help them get work.

Secure permission for tape recording

Emphasise confidentiality and impartiality, and the use of verbatim comments on an anonymous basis

Objectives:
1. To investigate the type of help and support provided to the partners of benefit claimants and how it is being delivered and received

2. To explore the impact of the enhanced help and support available under the enhanced NDP programme in terms of helping either/both claimants and partners to move into work, towards the labour market, or to make labour market related decisions

3. To examine the effectiveness of measures under New Deal for Partners to increase our understanding of what works for whom and under what circumstances
1. Introductory Discussion

*Explain that we are interested in their views about the support they got from an Adviser on New Deal for Partners, how useful they feel it was, and whether it could have been done any differently or improved at all.*

*Establish whether they self-referred onto NDP or entered from a WFIP: For example, whether they took the initiative and asked to talk to an Adviser about NDP (self-referred) or whether they enter the programme following a compulsory work focused interview (WFIP route)*

*Check the timing of their period on NDP and that they can remember the period when they were seeing an Adviser.*

*If necessary explain that even if they were not aware of being on the NDP programme it would have entailed at least one, possibly several, voluntary meetings following on from an initial interview which they may have been obliged to attend (unless they self-referred).*

2. Personal details

*Start by asking them to describe themselves and their circumstances, including:*

- Their age, and that of their partner
- Whether they are home owners or tenants
- The number and ages of any dependent children living with them
- The length of time they have been with their partner
- Whether they are married or living together
- Their current situation regarding benefit claims, and whether anyone in the household is working

3. Work history & experience

*For background, ask them about their own work history, including:*

- When they finished continuous full-time education
- What educational qualifications they have
- Any work-related, vocational qualifications they have; when they attained them, and at what level
- If they have done any training in the past other than that which led to qualifications, and if so, what sort of training it was, how long they did it for, if they completed the course and why it did not result in qualifications or a job
- If they have worked in the past (before going on NDP)
- If so, what types of jobs they have done and whether full or part-time
- If they have any experience of voluntary work of any kind
- Would they say they had spent more time in work or out of work in the past
- How long ago was the most recent job they had before going onto NDP
• What that job was and how many hours a week they were working in it
• Whether they were already actively looking for work (or more hours) at the time they first spoke to an Adviser
• And if they were then:
  - what sort of work they were looking for
  - how many hours per week were they seeking to work
  - how they were job searching
  - how their job searching went
  - whether they applied for vacancies or had interviews, and what happened
  - any particular problems or difficulties they encountered

4. Benefits/Jobcentre history
• Check whether the partner has ever claimed benefits in their own right
• If so, which benefits and under what circumstances
• What previous contact they have had with the Benefits Agency, the Employment Service or Jobcentre Plus
• When the last time was that they visited a Jobcentre before joining NDP, what the purpose of that visit was and what they thought of the environment, staff and atmosphere
• Do they now think of the Jobcentre as somewhere to go for help with getting work

5. Barriers to Work (at the time of entering NDP)

Explore whether work was something that the partner wanted to do straight away, what their main reasons were, and if not looking to work immediately whether they had an expectation about when they might work

• What was their perception of the difficulties that they needed to overcome before starting a job? Seek spontaneous unprompted responses
• What did they perceive to be the main difficulty they faced?
• And did they expect the NDP Adviser to be able to help them overcome these difficulties?

Ask specifically about the following areas of potential difficulty/barriers to work

Health issues & disability
• Ask if they have any disability or health problem that restricts either the type of work they might be able to do or the hours they could work
• If the partner says they do have such a problem, establish the degree to which they feel it restricts them, in terms of the type of jobs or amount of hours they feel they could do given their condition
• How long have they experienced this problem?
• Do they still face this difficulty?
• Do they think their health is likely to improve in the future, stay much the same, or get worse?
Caring responsibilities

- Ask if they have any caring responsibilities that restrict their ability to work
- If the partner says they do, then establish who they care for, what it entails, roughly for how many hours a day they are providing care and the degree to which they feel it restricts the amount of work they could do
- Do they get any support or help with caring from anyone else, and would they want this if it was available
- Could anyone else carry out their caring responsibilities for them? If not, why not?
- What does the person they care for think about being cared for by someone else for all or some of the time they need it?

Childcare (if have children)

- What sort of childcare is preferred (*prompt if necessary: friend/family, childminder, nursery*) and do they know if suitable childcare is available locally – would they know how to find out?
- If they are in work, find out what arrangements are in place for looking after their children, and whether these have changed for any reason recently
- Is childcare shared with their partner? If so how is it shared, and how well does this work in practice. If not would it be possible to share it?
- Ask whether they could get help with childcare from anyone else if it was needed, and whether they would want to do so
- Get details of any particular difficulties that may have arisen with childcare since they’ve been in work
- If they are not currently working, find out if they think they would be able to make acceptable childcare arrangements if they were to start work, and what these would be. How do they see childcare being affected by either one of the couple or both working, and do they think the need to look after children would limit or affect the work they could do

6. Decision making & household issues

- Ideally, who does the client think should work from the household, and why do they think that
- Equally, (if there are any children in the household) who do they think should look after the children ideally, and why
- Explore what the effect of the partner going on NDP has been for the claimant (how they felt about and reacted to the possibility of their partner working), and what other effects are perceived to have been caused to the household
- Discussions with the other partner in the couple – to what extent were the implications of working discussed? Including options for arrangements between the two partners, and options for aspects of work such as the number of hours and which hours in the day (shifts, part-time, night work etc)
- Are respondents satisfied that they were (and are) clear about how working might affect the overall joint household income and arrangements?
7. Situation on entry to NDP

Ask respondents to describe their situation regarding work at the time they decided to go onto NDP, including:

- The length of time since they were last in paid employment
- The main reasons for them not being in work at the time they joined NDP
- Anything that made/makes it particularly difficult for them to work (probe if necessary – age, lack of jobs in the area, skills/qualifications, lack of work experience, lack of confidence, transport difficulties etc)
- Reasons for deciding to go (back) to work (or move closer towards working in the future) at that particular time (prompt for changes in circumstances, or new information about benefits/being better off in work, or a change of mind for some other reason)
- The way in which the decision to get back into work/move closer to the labour market was arrived at
- How much it was an individual decision and how much a joint decision with their partner
- If the partner had a WFIP – explore how instrumental/useful it was felt to be in making them decide to go onto NDP; For example, had they previously thought about going onto NDP and/or discussed it with their partner?
- Their main reasons for deciding to go onto NDP
- Whether discussing with the Adviser what help/support was available contributed towards their decision
- The extent to which the Adviser was able to help/offer solutions/options
- If there were any aspects of the help/support available as part of NDP that the customer found particularly attractive or thought would be particularly helpful to them in their situation
- Whether there were any particular problems or difficulties that they hoped NDP might be able to help them with. And if so, exactly what they were.

8. Entry to NDP

- How the customer first heard about New Deal for Partners
- What they thought NDP was about, and if they saw the NDP leaflet, what they thought about it

If respondent heard about NDP at a WFIP:

- Do they think they would have found out about NDP without having had to go to a WFIP?
- What was said about NDP at the WFIP? Was it enough or not enough? Was it clear?
- Had they heard of the help available to partners/the New Deal for Partners programme before the WFIP?
- Had they at any time prior to joining NDP considered getting help from the Jobcentre regarding the possibility of working – if so: when and under what circumstances?
If partner contacted the jobcentre themselves (ie self-referred to NDP):

- How their first contact with the jobcentre come about exactly
- Why they decided to go
- Who they first spoke to
- How long it took before they saw an NDP Adviser

9. Visiting the Jobcentre Plus office

- Expectations as to what the Jobcentre would be like when they went there
- What they based these expectations on (prompt: previous contact, word of mouth from friends, images on TV…)
- If they had experience of Jobcentres in the past, how did it compare this time?
- How they found visiting the Jobcentre in practice
- Whether they felt comfortable being there
- How staff there treated them and how helpful they were
- Would they be happy going back in the future if they needed to?
- How they got to the Jobcentre and how difficult it was for them
- If they took child(ren) with them, and whether the Jobcentre made them welcome
- Did they find it an acceptable environment for children to be in?
- If it was difficult to do the interview with the children there
- If they didn’t take children, what arrangements did they have to make for the children to be looked after while they were at the Jobcentre?
- If the respondent is someone’s carer, did they have to make arrangements for replacement care while they were at the Jobcentre? If so, what arrangements did they have to make?

10. Expectations of NDP

- What they expected the NDP programme to be like
- How it might have differed from their expectations
- Whether there were any particular things that they expected/hoped NDP would help them with

11. Support on NDP

- The total number of meetings had with an NDP Adviser
- Any other contact they may have had apart from meetings (e.g. by telephone, or the Adviser sending things through the post)
- Whether it was always the same person they saw/spoke to
- On average how long meetings lasted
- If they attended any of their NDP Adviser meetings with their partner
  - which ones and why?
  - at whose suggestion did they have joint meetings?
  - how did any joint meetings go?
  - were they different from other meetings? In what way?
  - did they find them more or less useful than meetings on their own? In what respect and why?
Get details of any changes in relation to benefits claims and work that may have taken place since participation in NDP.

- Details of what was discussed at different meetings and what was the Adviser able to do for them when they were on NDP
- Whether Tax Credits and/or in-work support was discussed with the NDP adviser, and whether the Adviser offered to do an in work benefit calculation at any meeting, to work out how much better off they might be if working (if so, at which meeting, was it for a particular vacancy or more speculative, did it take their partner/husband/wife into account, what was the outcome, was it accurate/helpful)
- Whether respondents felt they understood everything that was available to them on the programme
- If there was there anything the Adviser could not help them with

12. Perceptions of NDP Adviser

- What did customers think of their NDP Adviser?
- Was he/she as they expected?
- If not, were they better or worse? In what ways?
- Was it the same or a different adviser to their WFIP adviser (if they had a WFIP)? Did they find this a problem at all? Was the transition from a WFIP to NDP a smooth one?
- Were they able to talk through with him/her the things that mattered to them personally, and was he/she able to answer all their questions?
- Did they feel he/she listened to what they had to say?
- Did the meetings help with what they believed were their needs at the time?
- Was there anything that they would have liked more discussion about? If so, what?
- Why do they think this was not covered adequately?
- Do they remember anything that the Adviser said which surprised them?
- Was there anything they were particularly pleased (or unhappy) about?

13. Outcomes from NDP participation

Establish if they have now left NDP or are still case-loaded. Explore reasons for leaving NDP (such as getting a job, giving up trying, changing their mind, circumstances changing to prevent work etc...)

13a. Job outcomes

Details of what job they went into from NDP, when it started, hours, if claiming Tax Credit, whether they received help with the application etc. If the job was part-time: why they decided to work part-time hours

- Did they consider the decision about working to be essentially an individual choice, or a matter for joint decision making with their partner?
- Did they discuss with their partner/husband/wife what it would mean if they started work? Did they discuss what the options might be?
• Did they discuss how it would affect the household income, or other household arrangements? If so, what?
• Ask how their job affected their partner, whether he/she was happy about them starting work, and if not what the concerns were. Has he/she changed his/her mind at all since?
• Did their partner also find work in this period? If so, what type of work and how many hours? Did the circumstances of their partner change in any other way at this time?
• Overall what does the customer feel has been the impact of them working? Income/time/social/family effects

If the customer is still currently working:
• What has been the difference (eg, social, financial, personal confidence etc.) that the job has made to them and to their household?
• How big a role do they think the support from the NDP Adviser played in getting them into work?
• Perceptions of the most significant help they received
• Anything that had to be sorted out before they could start work, and if so, what, the single biggest factor was
• Any concerns or worries they had about starting work, and what was the main concern
• Whether this was borne out in practice
• If they feel better off now they are in work (either financially or in other ways)
• If their adviser carried out an IWBC prior to getting the job they are in – was it accurate? ie did they end up the same amount better off as the IWBC suggested? If not, views about this
• Customer expectations of sustaining the job

If the customer has children:
• Ask what childcare arrangements they had to make when they started work
• Whether the arrangements still working effectively
• If not, explore what problems have arisen in relation to childcare

If the customer provides care for their partner or someone else:
• Ask what alternative care arrangements had to be made when they started work
• Whether the arrangements are still working effectively
• If not, explore what problems have arisen in relation to care arrangements

If the customer is now working part time:
• Would they consider increasing their hours in the future? Why/why not? Under what circumstances might they consider doing so?
**If the customer has since left the job, or is now in a different job**

- ask how long the job lasted and the reasons for leaving
- Particular problems or pressures faced because of working, and how this has affected their view of working in the future
- Also how it has affected their partner
- Whether they will seek further help in the future from the jobcentre/NDP Adviser

**13b. Outcomes other than jobs**

**If respondent left NDP without going into a job:**

- Reasons for not starting work at that time
- Whether still planning to work – and if so when
- Whether NDP nevertheless helped move them closer to working; do they feel they are more likely to consider working in the future than they were before participating in NDP?
- Do they feel more able to/capable of work? If so, in what way/s and why?
- Details of any training and/or work preparation undertaken on NDP
- Reasons why training did not lead to employment at that time
- Whether there have been any other outcomes from their participating in NDP
- The ways this may have helped them

**14. NDP/Adviser impact**

- Customer’s perceptions as to what was the most useful thing to come out of NDP Any other gains from it
- The impact of NDP – describe what it meant to them personally (prompt if appropriate - confidence, optimism, job search, clear future plans, decision making, work etc)
- Did being on NDP in any way change the way they thought about working, or about the options they might have in terms of employment? details
- Did talking to an Adviser on NDP leave them with a different view in any way about the difficulties the felt they faced if they were to consider working? details
- Do they think any of the information or help received will help them in making decisions about working in the future? In what ways?
- Do they think they would be doing what they are now doing anyway – whether or not they had gone on NDP? Why/why not?

**15. Summary**

- Ask if there anything else they can think of in terms of support from their NDP Adviser that they would have found helpful
- Ask if there is any particular support or provision they would like to see and would be helpful that is not available at the moment
- Anything else they would like to say about participating in NDP that has not been covered.

*Thank customer for their help*
NEW DEAL FOR PARTNERS
NDP1 TOPIC GUIDE

FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW WITH THE BENEFIT RECIPIENT

*Complete cover sheet. Record interview start & finish time in writing and on tape*

Name of interviewee ________________________________
Address ________________________________
Telephone number ________________________________
Date of interview ________________________________
Researcher ________________________________
Start time __________ Finish time __________
Length of interview (minutes) ________________________________
Interview code ________________________________

Explain that we are looking at the effectiveness of the work focused interviews being given to the partners of benefit claimants, in order to improve the service offered, and exploring how couples feel about the adviser interviews and whether they have found support from Jobcentre Plus helpful

Secure permission for tape recording

Emphasise confidentiality and impartiality, and the use of verbatim comments on an anonymous basis

Objectives:

1. To investigate the type of help and support provided to the partners of benefit claimants under NDP and how it is being delivered and received by them and by their claimant partners

2. To explore the impact of the enhanced help and support available under the enhanced NDP programme in terms of helping either/both claimants and partners to move into work, towards the labour market, or to make labour market related decisions

3. To examine the effectiveness of measures under NDP to increase our understanding of what works for whom and under what circumstances
Explain that we are interested in their views about the support their partner got from an Adviser on New Deal for Partners, how useful they feel it was, and whether it could have been done any differently or improved at all from the point of view of the household as a whole.

1. Personal details

Start by asking them to describe their own circumstances, including:
- Their age, and that of their partner
- The number and ages of any dependent children living with them
- The length of time they have been with their partner
- Whether they are married or living together
- Their current situation regarding benefit claims, and whether anyone in the household is working

Your partner [name] took part in the New Deal for Partners programme. We are interested in your views about their involvement – and we would like to find out how you see things from your position.

Can you remember when your partner [name] was on NDP?
Did you go with them to any interviews?
I understand that you were claiming [JSA/IS/IB] at that time, is that right?
And is that still the case or has the situation changed at all?

2. Work history & experience

For background, ask them about their own work history, including:
- What educational qualifications they have
- Any work-related, vocational qualifications they have; when they attained them, and at what level
- If they have worked in the past
- If so, what types of jobs they have done and whether full or part-time
- How long ago the most recent job was that they had
- What that job was and how many hours a week they were working in it
- Whether they were already actively looking for work (or more hours) at the time their partner first spoke to an Adviser
- And if they were then:
  - what sort of work they were looking for
  - how many hours per week were they seeking to work
  - how they were job searching
  - how their job searching went
  - any particular problems or difficulties they encountered
  - if they have worked at all since that time
3. Barriers to Work

*Obtain a bit more detail about their current circumstances and anything that might have affected/be affecting whether they and/or their partner can get into work.*

- Would they like to work?
- What is their perception of the difficulties that they and their partner need to overcome before either or both of them could start a job *(seek spontaneous unprompted responses)*
- What do they perceive to be the main difficulty they face?

*Ask specifically about the following areas of potential difficulty/barriers to work*

**Health issues & disability**

- Ask if they or their partner have any disability or health problem that restricts either the type of work they might be able to do or the hours they could work
- If they say that either of them does have such a problem, establish the degree to which they feel it restricts the type of jobs or amount of hours they or their partner could do given their condition
- How long have they experienced this problem?
- Do they still face this difficulty?
- Do they think their health is likely to improve in the future, stay much the same, or get worse?

**Caring responsibilities**

- Ask if they or their partner have any caring responsibilities that restrict their ability to work
- Establish who cares for who and what it entails, roughly for how many hours a day and the degree to which they feel it restricts the possibility of working
- Do they get any support or help with caring from anyone else, and would they want this if it was available
- Could anyone else carry out their caring responsibilities for them? If not, why not?
- What does the person they care for think about being cared for by someone else for all or some of the time they need it?

**Childcare (if have children)**

- What sort of childcare is preferred *(prompt if necessary: friend/family, childminder, nursery)* and do they know if suitable childcare is available locally – would they know how to find out?
- Any arrangements that are in place for looking after their children, and whether these have changed for any reason recently
- Is childcare shared with their partner? If so how is it shared, and how well does this work in practice. If not would it be possible to share it?
• Ask whether they could get help with childcare from anyone else if it was needed, and whether they would want to do so
• Get details of any particular difficulties that may have arisen with childcare (especially if their partner has started working)
• If they are not currently working, find out if they think they would be able to make acceptable childcare arrangements if they and/or their partner was to start work, and what these would be. How do they see childcare being affected by either one of the couple or both working, and do they think the need to look after children would limit or affect the work they could do
• If neither partner is working – what sort of arrangements do they think they would you have to make if one or both of them was to start?

4. Attitudes to working
• If not working – would they like to work?
• Find out how they feel about the possibility of their partner working, and what they think their partners attitude would be to them working themselves
• Whether they are currently looking for a job, or might in the future (if so when)
• Or the reasons why they feel they and/or their partner do not want to/cannot work
• Ideally, who if anyone does the claimant think should work from the household, and why do they think that
• Equally, (if there are any children in the household) who do they think should look after the children ideally, and why

5. Decision making & household issues
• Explore what the effect of the partner going on NDP has been for the claimant (how they felt about and reacted to the possibility of their partner working), and what other effects are perceived to have been caused to the household
• Do they think that NDP has been beneficial to their partner – if so how – and have they gained themselves in any way?
• Discussions with the other partner in the couple – to what extent were the implications of working discussed? Including options for arrangements between the two partners, and options for aspects of work such as the number of hours and which hours in the day (shifts, part-time, night work etc)
• How do they perceive that they have arrived at decisions about working or not working with their partner – and to what extent were these individual or joint decisions
• Are respondents satisfied that they were (and are) clear about how working might affect the overall joint household income and arrangements?

6. Awareness of the NDP process
• Claimant’s understanding of what prompted their partner to join NDP
• Whether they had heard of the New Deal for Partners programme before and, if so, what they thought it was about
Their feelings about their partner taking part in NDP
Whether they thought it an appropriate time for their partner to be thinking about work possibilities
The extent to which they discussed it with their partner at the time, and what they can remember of those discussions
Whether they were aware that they could go with their partner to see the Adviser and if they would have liked this option, and why
If they did attend any joint meetings, at who’s suggestion was it and why did they decide to go along?

7. Joint interviews

If the claimant attended one or more meetings with the NDP Adviser jointly with their partner, find out how many joint meetings were attended, whether they had particular hopes or expectations from these meetings, and if these were satisfied
How useful they found joint meetings, what they discussed with the Adviser and how involved they felt they were able to be
The degree to which they felt they understood the help and support that was available to themselves and their partner under NDP
If an IWBC was carried out did they feel it adequately took into account the circumstances, needs and aspirations of both them and their partner?

8. Perceptions of NDP Adviser

If the claimant attended one or more NDP meetings jointly with their partner, what did they think of the Adviser?
What did they feel he/she was trying to get across – and was this relevant to their own particular situation?
Did they feel he/she listened to what they and their partner had to say?
Did he/she tell them anything they didn’t already know?
Was there anything that they would have liked more discussion about? If so, what, and why do they think this was not covered adequately at the time?
Was there anything they remember that the Adviser said which surprised them; anything they felt particularly unhappy about or particularly pleased about?

9. Effects of partner being on NDP

Explore any ways in which the partner’s participation on NDP may have affected the claimant, how they feel about the process and what they think their partner got from participation
Have the claimants views of their and their partner’s work options changed?

If either the benefit recipient or their partner has started work since the partner went on NDP

Explore whether their partner’s decision to participate in NDP played any part in either them or their partner deciding to work
Get details of who started work, when, in what jobs, for how many hours per week, and whether they are still in the same job(s)
• How much of a joint decision with their partner was starting work for either of them? What were their main concerns and were they borne out at all?
• The effect on the household as a whole, including wider social and family effects

If the customer has children:
• What childcare arrangements did they have to make when one or other of the partners started work?
• Are arrangements still working effectively, and if not, what problems have arisen in relation to childcare?
• Similarly as regards any caring responsibilities either partner may have

If either has since left a job, or is now in a different job:
• Ask how long previous jobs lasted, the reasons for leaving, particular problems or pressures faced, and how this has affected their view of working in the future.

10. Summary
• Check if there is anything else that they would like to say about the interview process for their partner that perhaps has not been covered

Thank the customer for their help

Explain we would like to contact them again (possibly just by telephone but possibly for another interview) in about a years time to see how they are getting on and if anything has changed in their situation – gain their agreement to re-contact them then.

Get them to sign for receipt of their £20 gift on the separate sheet.

If they ask – the gift is counted as a contribution to capital not earnings, so won’t affect their benefits.
Annex 2: Analysis pro formas

Primary analysis of transcripts from interviews was carried out by the researchers who had conducted the interviews, using the following ‘pro formas:'
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completed by</th>
<th>Area / office</th>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>Previous job</th>
<th>Length of time in post</th>
<th>Rating of this interview for content / interest / importance (0-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Analysis:** Include any key illustrative quotes in the main boxes below, along with analysis. Reference both quotes and the main sites of supporting material for the issue under discussion in right hand column (transcript page numbers)

**Transcript page references:**

**Key bullet point summary of the most important issues to emerge from this interview**

Summary: in what ways has this interview increased our understanding of: how well the WFIP process is working? what problems have been encountered? what improvements might be made? what aspects of delivery are working well?

- 
- 
- 

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|   | **1** Describe the key elements of current role:<br>Has the introduction of WFIPs resulted in any changes in role or staffing arrangements?<br>How have staff reacted to the introduction of WFIPs?<br>How and to what extent do they work with other colleagues and external organisations in relation to partners? |   |
|---|---|
|   | **2** Any training/staff development undertaken for the extension of WFIs to partners:<br>How useful/comprehensive have they found it?<br>Any gaps in training/knowledge that need to be addressed?<br>What means do they have for sharing ideas, experiences and good practice etc (and do they use them)? |   |
|   | **3** How well is the delivery process for WFIPs working:<br>What have been identified as key areas or stages?<br>How well do leaflets/letters work?<br>What reactions had to letters? Is the deferral/waiver procedure working effectively (should there be more/less)?<br>Any process gaps need filling or improvements that could be made? |   |
|   | **4** Reactions of customers (partners & claimants):<br>Extent of failure to attend WFIPs? Reasons?<br>What complaints/feedback from customers?<br>Any typical misunderstandings or misapprehensions about WFIs?<br>Are current approach letters and information leaflets clear and understood by customers?<br>What do customers say they find most useful about WFIPs? |   |

Appendices – Analysis pro formas
5. For which **types** of partners do advisers find that WFIs are most/least useful/successful:
   - What customer characteristics seen as most important in determining how WFIPs go (age, claimant benefits, children, work experience, benefits history?)
   - What factors make people more/less likely to move into work?
   - WFIPs able to address barriers?

6. **Joint attendance** at WFIPs:
   - How prevalent? With whom? For what reasons given?
   - Preference/views of advisers? Pros and cons of joint/single interviews?
   - Approach of advisers to joint interviews?

7. **Content** of WFIPs:
   - How long WFIPs booked for in adviser diaries?
   - How long taking in practice?
   - What covered in WFIPs (always/typically/sometimes)?
   - Any key elements?
   - How useful is guidance on delivering WFIPs? Is it used/followed?

8. **Outcomes** from WFIPs:
   - Jobs to date? Who for (partner or claimant, and under what circumstances)?
   - Outcomes other than work (partner/claimant)?
   - What signs of movement closer to the labour market for those that remain inactive?
   - Any changes in barriers or attitudes as result of WFIP (partner/claimant)?
   - After WFIP are customers more aware of opportunities & support available to them?
   - Is there a need for follow-up, more frequent, or further mandatory meetings for partners? When should these be timed for?
   - How useful WFIPs for those furthest from labour market?
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</table>
| **9** | **How are **harder to help clients** **dealt with:**  
Which types of clients are harder to help?  
Why are they harder to help? What is done?  
Which types of clients are unlikely to achieve a job outcome in the time available and why?  
How are clients for whom a job is not a realistic outcome dealt with? |   |
| **10** | **Overall:**  
What is their experience to date of dealing with the Partners customer group?  
What important issues have emerged?  
What are the key issues around ‘couple dynamic’ and dealing with the whole household rather than just one individual?  
What is working best for whom and why?  
Has there been any feedback from customers? If so what?  
What are the main perceived challenges and difficulties ahead? |   |
| **11** | **Any other important issues** to have emerged from the interview (not previously covered) should be identified here |   |
### WFIP1 CUSTOMERS ANALYSIS PRO FORMA: THE PARTNER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area/office</th>
<th>Completed by</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Rating of this interview for content /interest /importance (0-5)</th>
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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years in relationship</th>
<th>No./ages of children</th>
<th>Attended joint WFI?</th>
<th>Claimant status (eg stock IB, flow IS etc)</th>
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</table>

**Analysis:** Include any key illustrative quotes in the main boxes below, along with transcript analysis. Reference both quotes and the main sites of supporting material for the issue under discussion in right hand column (transcript page numbers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Started work since WFIP? No/Yes (details)</th>
<th>Transcript page references:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Date (approx) of last job held before WFIP, and details | |
|---------------------------------------------------------| |
|                                                         | |

| Any caring responsibilities? Outline | |
|--------------------------------------| |
|                                      | |

| Key barriers faced by client | |
|------------------------------| |
|                               | |
|                               | |

| Key bullet point summary of most important issues to emerge from this interview | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------| |
|                                                                              | |
|                                                                              | |
|                                                                              | |

Client Interview Code
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Summarise qualifications and employment history, and explain the client’s current employment situation</th>
<th>Transcript page references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Describe the effects of the start of the current benefit claim (in which they are a dependent partner) and the circumstances leading to it, on their own and on the household’s circumstances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Explain the difficulties perceived in thinking about work and the current barriers to working (both for them and the claimant) and as given by the partner and as assessed by you on the basis of the interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>What did the partner say in response to the question about their view of the “ideal” employment situation for them and the claimant?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Summarise how they reacted to hearing about the WFI, and it being mandatory with possible sanctions for FTA, including what they thought of any letters/leaflets they received, and how they reported the reactions of the claimant</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Summarise main aspects of their view of the Jobcentre (possibly compared to any previous experience or to expectations), to the staff &amp; how they were treated etc</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What was their assessment of the adviser they saw for their WFIP – and would they consider contacting the adviser again?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>How did they remember their WFIP? (length, content, what discussed, who did the talking and to whom)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>How well matched was the information, advice and support they received at their WFI, to the specifics of their personal and household situation? Did they have a “meaningful and substantive discussion” with the adviser about work options and prospects, based on assessment of their skills, experience, qualifications, barriers and caring responsibilities”?</td>
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<td>Question</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Summarise their assessment of their WFIP and what they saw as the benefit gained from it (for themselves and/or for the claimant). What was the most effective form of help received and why? If help was not perceived to be effective, why not?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>What has been the result, for them and their household, of having a WFIP? (include everything from increased optimism, self-confidence, awareness of support available, NDP, job-search etc through to exploring training, doing a course, increasing hours worked or starting work). What was the client’s perception of the exact role played by the WFIP in this?</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>What is the client’s assessment of where they will be in 12 months time? What is yours?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your assessment of the “couple dynamic” between the claimant and the partner in this household – and how do you think this may be affecting the partner’s behaviour, attitudes, approach to work and work opportunities?</td>
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<td>Any other important issues to have emerged from the interview (not previously covered) should be identified here</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><strong>Interview Summary</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In what ways has this interview increased our understanding of:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What works (for partners &amp;/or claimants) in the provision of WFIs for partners?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What aspects of WFIs for partners lead to better outcomes (and for what individuals under what circumstances)?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## WFIP1 CUSTOMERS ANALYSIS PRO FORMA: THE CLAIMANT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area/office</th>
<th>Completed by</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Rating of this interview for content /interest /importance (0-5)</th>
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<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
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<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years in relationship</th>
<th>No./ages of children</th>
<th>Attended joint WFI?</th>
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</table>

**Analysis:** Include any key illustrative quotes in the main boxes below, along with analysis. Reference both quotes and the main sites of supporting material for the issue under discussion in right hand column (transcript page numbers).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript page references:</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date (approx) of last job held, and details</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Any disability or health problem? Outline</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Any caring responsibilities? Outline</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key bullet point summary of most important issues to emerge from this interview</th>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>If they attended the WFIP jointly with their partner:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Summarise main aspects of their view of the Jobcentre (possibly compared to any previous experience or to expectations), to the staff &amp; how they were treated etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 What was their assessment of the adviser who conducted their partner’s WFIP – and would they themselves consider contacting that adviser again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 How did they remember the WFIP? (length, content, what discussed, who did the talking and to whom – especially extent they were involved)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Was there a “meaningful and substantive discussion” with the adviser about work options and prospects, based on assessment of the skills, experience, qualifications, barriers and caring responsibilities” of both the partner and the claimant?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whether or not they attended the WFI jointly:</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 Summarise their assessment of the WFIP and what they saw as the benefit gained from it (for themselves and/or for their partner). What was the most effective form of help received and why? If help was not perceived to be effective, why not?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What does the claimant perceive to have been the effect of the WFIP on their partner and on the household, of their partner having a WFIP?</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Using also the transcript of the post-interview discussion between interviewers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your assessment of the “couple dynamic” between the claimant and the partner in this household – and how do you think this may be affecting their behaviour, attitudes, approach to work and work opportunities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Any other important issues to have emerged from the interview (not previously covered) should be identified here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In what ways has this interview increased our understanding of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How decision making about work takes place within benefit-claiming households?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How WFIPs affect not just individual partners, but the whole household?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transcript page references

Appendices – Analysis pro formas
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completed by</th>
<th>Area/office</th>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>Previous job</th>
<th>Length of time in post</th>
<th>Rating of this interview for content /interest / importance (0-5)</th>
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</table>

**WFIP1 STAFF ANALYSIS SHEETS**

**Analysis:** Include any key illustrative *quotes* in the main boxes below, along with analysis. Reference both quotes and the main sites of supporting material for the issue under discussion in right hand column (transcript page numbers).

**Transcript page references:**

**Key bullet point summary of the most important issues to emerge from this interview**

- 
- 
- 

**NDP customers discussed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-referred or WFIP route</th>
<th>Caseloaded?</th>
<th>Over what period of time?</th>
<th>Number of meetings?</th>
<th>Outcome? (job/training/other)</th>
<th>Reason for leaving NDP?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</table>

**Appendices – Analysis pro formas**
| 1 | Has the **enhancement of NDP** resulted in any changes in customer behaviour?  
What persuades customers to join NDP?  
How have staff reacted to the changes in NDP? | Transcript page references |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | How useful/comprehensive have they found:  
- **training** to deliver enhanced NDP?  
- intranet site?  
- guidance/workbook?  
Any gaps that need to be addressed? | |
| 3 | What have been identified as **key areas/items** of support provision?  
How well do mandatory work focused interviews **feed in** to NDP?  
How well does the **process of self-referral** work in practice?  
**Gaps or improvements** needed in NDP? | |
| 4 | For which ‘**types of partners**’ do advisers find that NDP is most/least useful/successful?  
What customer characteristics are seen as most important in determining how effective support on NDP can be (age, claimant benefits, children, work experience, benefits history, etc)?  
What factors make people more/less likely to **move into work** from NDP?  
Is NDP able to **address barriers** effectively? | |
| 5 | **How are harder to help clients** dealt with on NDP:  
Which types of NDP clients are harder to help?  
Why? What is done?  
How useful is NDP for those furthest from labour market?  
Which types of clients are unlikely to achieve a job outcome from NDP in the time available and why? | Transcript page references |
|---|---|---|
| 6 | **Overall:**  
What is the experience to date of dealing with customers on NDP?  
What important issues have emerged?  
What are the key issues around ‘couple dynamic’ and dealing with the whole household rather than just one individual?  
What is working best for whom and why?  
Has there been any feedback from customers about NDP? If so what?  
What are the main perceived challenges and difficulties ahead? | |
| 7 | **Any other important issues** to have emerged from the interview (not previously covered) should be identified here | |
## NDP1 Customers Analysis Pro Forma: The Partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area/office</th>
<th>Completed by</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Rating of this interview for content/interest/importance (0-5)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>From MEG</td>
<td>Number of children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis:** Include any key illustrative quotes in the main boxes below, along with analysis. Reference both quotes and the main sites of supporting material for the issue under discussion in right hand column (transcript page numbers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis pro formas</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was case-loaded on NDP? (ie had more than 1 meeting with an Adviser)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still on NDP?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for leaving NDP (job/stopped looking/ circumstances changed etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key barriers that were faced by client at time of starting NDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key bullet point summary of most important issues to emerge from this interview</td>
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<td>12</td>
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</table>

**Interview Summary**

*In what ways has this interview increased our understanding of:*

- how well NDP is meeting customers’ needs and expectations?
- How well NDP is able to address partners’ barriers?
- Whether NDP changes people’s aims, perceptions and attitudes to work?
- Whether outcomes from NDP are additional to what would have happened anyway?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area/office content/</th>
<th>Completed by</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Rating of this interview for content/interest/importance (0-5)</th>
<th>Client Interview Code</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender Age From ME</td>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>Age youngest child</td>
<td>Attended any NDP interviews jointly?</td>
<td>Claimant status (eg stock IB; flow IS etc)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis:** Include any key illustrative quotes in the main boxes below, along with analysis. Reference both quotes and the main sites of supporting material for the issue under discussion in right hand column (transcript page numbers). **Transcript page references:**

- Any disability or health problem? Outline
- Any caring responsibilities? Outline
- Any childcare issues? Outline
- Key bullet point summary of most important issues to emerge from this interview
  - 
  - 
  - 

Appendices – Analysis pro formas
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Summarise qualifications and employment history</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How they felt about partner going on NDP? (how much did they discuss? What was expected? How supportive was claimant of the partners decision?)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>If they attended any NDP interviews with their partner: (Details: content, reasons for going etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Summarise main aspects of their view of the NDP Adviser and the Jobcentre</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>What does the claimant perceive their partner to have gained from going on NDP? What impact on the claimant and the household?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>How has the claimant’s situation changed since partner went on NDP? Has this been because of NDP in any way?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Any other important issues to have emerged from the interview (not previously covered) should be identified here – including any ‘couple dynamic’ issues.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Summary</td>
<td>Transcript page references</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways has this interview increased our understanding of:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• how well NDP is meeting partners’ and claimants’ needs and expectations?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• how well NDP is able to address household barriers?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• whether NDP <strong>changes</strong> people’s aims, perceptions and attitudes to work?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• whether outcomes from NDP are <strong>additional</strong> to what would have happened anyway?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 3: Methodological information

Qualitative fieldwork took place in five delivery districts that were selected for being areas in which the Jobcentre Plus roll out was relatively well advanced. All elements of the qualitative research were carried out in the same selected fieldwork areas and interviews were with a relatively small number of key, informed individuals.

The tables below show the number and spread of staff interviews in each district for each part of the fieldwork.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WFIPs</th>
<th>Job Category</th>
<th>No. interviews per district</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business Manager or other senior manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admin Team Leader</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admin staff member</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benefit claims adviser</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior adviser</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal advisers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NDP</th>
<th>Job Category</th>
<th>No. interviews per area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business Manager other senior manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Deal co-ordinator /Senior adviser</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal advisers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Client samples

Interviews with partners and claimants were conducted in pairs. Both the main claimant and their partner were interviewed at their home, on the same day but separately from one another.

Purposive sampling of ‘paired’ customers was undertaken to ensure adequate coverage of the key groups of benefit claims, of stock and flow customers, and other key variables, six pairs of interviews were carried out in each district, in each part of the fieldwork.

Not all possible sub groups of clients were purposively sampled but their numbers and proportions were closely monitored during recruitment to ensure their inclusion in the achieved sample of interviewees. Where the sample threatened not to cover a key characteristic, action was taken to redress the balance. Efforts were made to ensure that interviews were held with both men and women partners across a broad span of age ranges, some with dependent children and some without and to include people from different minority ethnic groups and with different degrees of disability.

The achieved sample of WFIP participant ‘couple’ interviews is shown in the table below:

### Achieved sample of WFIP1 client interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample outcome (30 pairs of interviews)</th>
<th>total achieved</th>
<th>initial target</th>
<th>variance from target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stocks</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flows</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claimant JSA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claimant IS</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claimant IB</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No dependent children</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From a minority ethnic group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male partner</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a joint WFI</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The achieved sample of NDP participant ‘couple’ interviews is shown below:

### Achieved sample of NDPP1 client interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample outcome (30 pairs of interviews)</th>
<th>total achieved</th>
<th>initial target</th>
<th>variance from target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self referrals</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFIP route</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claimant JSA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claimant IS</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claimant IB</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No dependent children</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minority background</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male partners</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint meetings</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case loaded</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job entry</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Opt out**

Partners and claimants were given the opportunity of opting out of participating in the research. Those not wishing to be interviewed were able to contact Insite by telephone or by letter using a pre-paid reply envelope. To meet the requirements of the Welsh Language commitment of DWP, Customers resident in Wales received a Welsh as well as an English version of the letter, and were informed that they could request the interview to be conducted in Welsh if they preferred.

**Recruitment**

Interviews were arranged and scheduled centrally by in-house recruiters. Respondents were made aware of the researchers’ intention to carry out subsequent follow up face to face interviews twelve months later during the second phase of research.

**Transcription**

All interviews were taped recorded, with the respondent’s permission, to allow verbatim quotes to be recorded and later transcribed and analysed. Once completed, transcriptions were made available to the relevant researcher for interpretation, analysis and write-up.
Analysis

Qualitative analysis was conducted thematically, combining issues raised in the research interviews and providing an explanatory structure based on the strength and frequency of types of responses and reported perceptions and understandings. Because qualitative analysis cannot and should not make claims to representing the population beyond its sample of respondents, the emphasis at all stages was on ensuring that analysis and interpretation was true to the data that had been collected. Hypotheses were tested and new hypotheses put forward to provide input to the processes of policy development that were of concern to the research client. It was intended that some of these hypotheses would provide a guide to future quantitative research which would be of value.

The analysis of the qualitative data was an iterative process extending throughout the research from initial instrument design to final reporting. Topic guides were drawn up around initial hypotheses as to what might be identifiable as significant characteristics of partners and claimants, what might be the factors affecting their responses to the WFIP/NDP intervention, and what might be particularly interesting areas for exploration such as the household dynamic and decision making about work.

Topic Guides covered the following areas of enquiry:

*Partner (and claimant) topic guides*
- Personal details – ethnicity, benefits
- Health, disability and caring issues
- Childcare arrangements, preferences, problems
- Nature and length of relationship and how the household operates
- Perceptions of different aspects of process and services
- Views on joint attendance at interviews
- The household situation, circumstances and decision making within it
- Awareness and understanding of support and provision and NDP
- Reasons for decisions made and rationale for actions
- Attitudes to work
- Recent work experience and training
- Pre-existing and obtained work
- Effects of decisions and changes on household income and arrangements
- Effects of interventions – motivation, optimism, encouragement, changed activity, job search
- Views on the timing of WFIs
- Outcomes other than work – what, why and when?

**Delivery staff topic guides**
- Management and line management arrangements
- Administration of the process, and felt effects
- Assignment of responsibilities within the process
- Expectations and perceptions of the client group (and sub-groups)
- Local flexibilities in the practice of delivery
- Experience in delivering WFIs/NDP to partners
- Delivering WFIs/NDP, problems, issues, good practice

The purposive sampling of partners further aimed to ensure the inclusion of sub-groups of respondents judged a priori to be of potential significance and of policy interest, for example couples without dependent children and couples claiming JSA but with dependent children. Interviews tested initial hypotheses and preliminary analysis identified those which were strongly borne out and those which were to be rejected.

**Preliminary analysis**

Using transcripts of the interviews that they had conducted, researchers carried out preliminary analyses, using analysis proformas structured around the research questions. The completed proformas identified responses, trends and issues of prominence. Copies of the proformas used in preliminary analyses are attached in Annex two.

**Secondary analysis**

Completed proformas formed the basis for a process of secondary analysis, which took place initially through team workshops following the completion of the fieldwork for each element and phase of the research. The workshop format provided two important checks and balances that contributed to the rigour required of the qualitative analysis. First, it brought together a variety of viewpoints and acted as a control over the domination of one perspective. Second, it provided the first opportunity for ‘testing’ interpretations and judgements about issues and themes of importance by continually inviting consideration of counter-evidence from the experience of other interviews and other interviewers.

At secondary analysis stage the interaction of the research team members allowed the identification of new ‘emergent’ issues that were not determined by the initial subject areas and hypotheses embodied in the topic guides, for example the
unexpected benefits from WFIPs experienced by claimants, and the effects of a
target driven culture on the behaviour of advisers and their attitudes to the client
group. Emergent issues, and the themes that they contributed to, were also subject
to the same process of testing and verification through argument and counter
argument as was other evidence.

Following the workshop, analysis proformas provided an efficient method of cross-
checking the prominence of issues through their repetition. The effective ‘grid’ of
salient known and discovered characteristics and responses that the proformas
presented (such as main benefit type, gender, lack of dependent children, attendance
at a joint meeting etc) was also used as an efficient system for pointing further
analysis back to individual or groups of transcripts for more in-depth investigation
and for the identification of verbatim quotes for use in reporting.

Composite analysis

The final stage in analysis was conducted alongside presentation preparation and
report writing, and involved a re-reading of all transcripts and the coding up of
passages and quotes according to the major agreed themes. It consisted in unifying
and structuring the findings, elaborating on emergent issues and themes, and
seeking an explanatory context for observations. At each step of the process
opportunity is made of returning to transcripts in search of potentially contradictory
evidence; these ‘negative feedback loops’ providing the necessary rigour to ensure
truth to the data.
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Griffiths, R. and Thomas, A. New Deal for Partners of Unemployed People: Case studies on delivery. Phase 1, Employment Service Research Report ESR 77, June 2001


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