The use and development of alternative service delivery channels in Jobcentre Plus: a review of recent evidence

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# Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ vii  
Authors ....................................................................................................................... viii  
Abbreviations .............................................................................................................. ix  
Summary ..................................................................................................................... 1  

1 Introduction ................................................................................................................. 9  
  1.1 Background of the report .................................................................................... 9  
  1.2 The challenges facing Jobcentre Plus .............................................................. 10  
  1.3 Structure of the report ..................................................................................... 12  

2 Service delivery channels: A review of the evidence ........................................... 15  
  2.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 15  
  2.2 Alternative service delivery channels ............................................................... 16  
  2.3 Channel strategy .............................................................................................. 20  
  2.4 Customer preferences and barriers to uptake ............................................... 33  
  2.5 Levers to influence uptake .............................................................................. 45  
  2.6 Concluding remarks ....................................................................................... 56  

3 Current and future take up of alternative channels by Jobcentre Plus customers ......................................................................................................................... 61  
  3.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 61  
  3.2 Research method .............................................................................................. 63  
  3.3 Main survey findings ....................................................................................... 66  
  3.4 Conclusions ..................................................................................................... 92  

4 Experiences and views of Jobcentre Plus staff ......................................................... 95  
  4.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 95  
  4.2 Current alternative channels ............................................................................ 99  
  4.3 Awareness of alternative channels: In-depth knowledge of functionality .......... 105
4.4 Encouraging the use of alternative channels ................................ 111
4.5 Best Practice in referring to alternative channels .................. 119
4.6 Staff Perceptions of alternative channels service delivery ...... 121
4.7 Looking to the future .............................................................. 126
4.8 Contact centres .................................................................... 136
4.9 Processing centres ............................................................... 146
4.10 Conclusions and recommendations ....................................... 152

5 Key findings and messages from the research ............................ 155
5.1 Introduction ........................................................................ 155
5.2 Key findings ...................................................................... 155
5.3 Key messages ................................................................... 162

Appendix A Quantitative survey questionnaire: Customers .............. 165
Appendix B Qualitative topic guide: Customers ............................... 175
Appendix C Qualitative topic guides: Staff .................................. 185

References ................................................................................. 197

List of tables

Table 2.1 Jobcentre Plus service offering to individual customers by channels ................................................................. 18
Table 2.2 Comparing branches, call centres, kiosks and websites from an organisation’s viewpoint ....................................... 19
Table 2.3 Comparing branches, call centres, kiosks and websites from a customer’s viewpoint ............................................ 21
Table 2.4 Customer channel preferences in banking (percentage of respondents who marked the channel as one of the preferred) ......................................................................... 41
Table 2.5 Authentication mechanisms ............................................ 55
Table 2.6 Cost/benefit analysis alternative channels in public employment and benefit services .................................................. 60
Table 3.1 Sampling error .................................................................. 64
Table 3.2 Sample comparisons with DWP statistics ...................... 65
Table 3.3 Comparisons with Census data for ethnic origin ............ 65
Table 3.4 Discussion group composition ........................................ 66
Table 3.5 Number of times Jobpoints used .................................... 71
Table 3.6 Use of services .............................................................. 81
Table 3.7 Improvements and outcome .......................................... 81
Table 3.8 Which of the following do you have now, or are likely to have in the next 12 months? ........................................... 85
Table 3.9 NOP’s internet user profile survey .................................. 86
Table 3.10 Which of the following do you have now, or are likely to have in the next 12 months (mobile phones)? ................................ 87
Table 3.11 Which of the following do you have now, or are likely to have in the next 12 months (digital TV)? ......................................... 87
Table 4.1 Districts, Contact Centres and Processing Centres ................... 98
Table 4.2 Advantages and disadvantages in moving to alternative channel delivery................................................................. 122

List of figures

Figure 2.1 Households with home Internet access by gross income decile group ........................................................................ 36
Figure 3.1 Sample composition by benefit type ........................................ 67
Figure 3.2 Customers’ journey time to visit Jobcentre Plus office............. 67
Figure 3.3 Awareness of alternative channels (percentage aware) .......... 69
Figure 3.4 Reasons for non use of Jobpoints ........................................ 72
Figure 3.5 Number of times Website used (all Website users) ............... 74
Figure 3.6 Reasons for using Website rather than face-to-face interaction at Jobcentre Plus office .................................................. 75
Figure 3.7 Reasons for non-use of Website ........................................ 76
Figure 3.8 Factors that would increase Website use .............................. 76
Figure 3.9 Willingness to do tasks on interactive machine or Website (combined chart) ............................................................... 82
Figure 3.10 Frequency of checking e-mail ............................................ 89
Figure 3.11 Are you likely to have an e-mail address in the next 12 months? ........................................................................ 90
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Abbreviations

ABA  Benefits Agency
BDT  Business Delivery Target
BM   Business Managers
CMS  Customer Management System
CST  Customer Service Target
DCP  District Control Point
DFD  Deputy Field Director
DM   District Managers
DWP  Department for Work and Pensions
EOT  Employer Outcome Target
ES   Employment Service
FA   Financial Adviser
FCC  First Contact Centre
FD   Field Director
FJR  Fortnightly Jobseekers Review
HR   Human Resources
IAD  Information and Analysis Directorate
IB   Incapacity Benefit
IDTV Interactive Digital Television
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>Income Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</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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<td>JSAg</td>
<td>Jobseekers Agreement</td>
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<td>JSD</td>
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<td>KIT</td>
<td>Keeping-in-Touch</td>
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<td>Key Management Indicator</td>
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<td>LMI</td>
<td>Labour Market Interventions</td>
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<td>LMS</td>
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<td>LSC</td>
<td>Learning and Skills Council</td>
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<td>MFA</td>
<td>More Frequent Attendance</td>
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<td>MI</td>
<td>Management Information</td>
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<td>MMS</td>
<td>Multi Messaging System</td>
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<td>MVFE</td>
<td>Monetary Value of Fraud and Error</td>
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<td>National Audit Office</td>
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<td>Official Error</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRA</td>
<td>Performance and Resource Agreement</td>
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<td>PSA</td>
<td>Public Service Agreement</td>
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<td>PC</td>
<td>Personal Computer</td>
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<td>QS</td>
<td>Quality Support</td>
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<td>Quality Support Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>RE</td>
<td>Refusal of Employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>RBR</td>
<td>Regional Benefit Review</td>
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<td>RPM</td>
<td>Regional Performance Managers</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDA</td>
<td>Severe Disablement Allowance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>Short Messaging Service</td>
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<td>TFG</td>
<td>Target Focus Group</td>
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<td>WFI</td>
<td>Work Focused Interview</td>
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Summary

Introduction

Jobcentre Plus recently commissioned three research projects looking at the use of alternative channels as a means of delivering services to its clients. The three research elements were as follows:

- a review of the literature relating to alternative channels, conducted by GHK International;
- quantitative and qualitative research with Jobcentre Plus customers undertaken by NOP Social and Political; and
- qualitative research with Jobcentre Plus staff conducted by the Centre for Public Policy, Northumbria University.

The purpose of the research was to inform future policy and investment decisions by Jobcentre Plus regarding alternative delivery channels. The evidence from these three pieces of research is presented in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, respectively, of the main report.

To further assist in the use of the evidence, the Institute for Employment Research (IER), University of Warwick, was commissioned to draw together the three sets of evidence into a single report and to provide a synthesis of the key research findings, highlighting key messages for policy and decision-making in Jobcentre Plus. IER was responsible for the Summary and Chapters 1 and 5 of the main report.

The literature review

The review of the literature indicates that any channel strategy needs to consider how many service delivery channels are required, whether intermediaries should be used for service delivery and how much personal contact with customers is necessary. Choices made around these three key propensities will influence the amount of transactions, the cost per transaction, the control over the quality of service, and the flexibility an organisation can exercise in responding to change.
The literature review suggests that there are a number of drivers behind the employment of alternative channels in service delivery. The need to increase efficiency is often one of the main drivers. Although the use of alternative channels in general lowers the cost per transaction, this need not lead to overall cost savings, unless customers use alternative channels as a direct replacement of face-to-face channels.

Other drivers within the private sector focus on keeping up with competitors, meeting customer demand for the service, enabling mass customisation, and creating new markets. Within Jobcentre Plus, the interest in alternative channels is partly driven by the Government’s commitment to e-enabling government transactions. Although mass customisation of services could be attractive to Jobcentre Plus, current legislation may limit the possibilities of applying these techniques. Additionally, attracting customers who would normally not use Jobcentre Plus services is not a primary aim.

Customer channel preferences and barriers to channel take-up are two interrelated issues. The literature suggests that channel take-up is influenced by awareness, access and value to the customer. Awareness of the existence of a channel is a prerequisite to uptake. Earlier research among Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) customers has shown that awareness of the possibility of dealing with government departments online is relatively limited, even among regular Internet users.

Access consists of three elements: physical access to the channel, current ability to use it and ability or willingness to learn new tasks. Physical access to the Internet and information communication technology (ICT) literacy is increasing but still remain a real barrier to uptake. Home access is a particular problem for low-income groups, lone parents and one-person households. Not having home access is perceived as one of the key barriers to the use of alternative channels for transactions where privacy may be a concern.

ICT literacy is influenced by age and educational attainment. Although, the literature contains evidence from commercial organisations that challenge the received wisdom on alternative channel take-up by age and education, it is likely that the relatively low home access and ICT literacy across the Jobcentre Plus client base may depress the uptake of some alternative channels. While inability to learn a new task may be a genuine barrier to some customers, for many who do not use the Internet, the reason is that they do not want to use it.

Even if customers are aware of, and have access to, a channel they will only use it if it offers a more positive value proposition than alternative channels. The value of a channel will depend on the perceived benefits, costs, and risks associated with using that channel. The main benefits of using alternative channels for the customer are linked to timesaving. The literature suggests that the value of using a particular channel will differ by type of transaction and stage in the transaction process. Customers are more willing to perform low-risk transactions or parts of transactions through alternative channels.
The experience of other organisations suggests that Jobcentre Plus could influence the channel choices of their customers in several ways. First, marketing alternative channels or encouraging customers to use them. Second, offering facilities in local offices or through intermediaries like UK Online. Third, increasing the usability of alternative channels and providing training to reduce the influence of skill deficiencies on take-up. Finally, the relative value proposition of alternative channels can be improved by offering incentives for alternative channels, creating disincentives for face-to-face channels and addressing the security issues related to the technology.

Research with customers

Quantitative interviews were conducted by telephone with 371 customers from eight Jobcentre Plus offices in England and Wales in November 2004. Eight group discussions were carried out in the same locations.

Key findings

Customers identified a continuing need for face-to-face contact with staff because staff provided essential practical support, informed clients about relevant services, and provided much needed emotional support. Nonetheless, there were negative aspects of face-to-face contact, for instance when customers had to wait in queues to see Advisers, staff were unhelpful or provided unreliable information or where there was a lack of effective direction to alternative channels.

Awareness and use of alternative channels

Customers were asked about their awareness of four alternative service delivery channels. Awareness was highest for Jobpoints (92 per cent), followed by Warm Phones (67 per cent), Jobseeker Direct (65 per cent) and the Jobcentre Plus website (61 per cent). One in ten clients did not use any of these channels while only one in ten had used all four services.

Most customers had used Jobpoints, often several times. About half first used Jobpoints instead of dealing with a member of staff or adviser because it was quicker. Attitudes to Jobpoints were very positive. They are seen as being user-friendly, queue free, and allowed independent and tailored search. These benefits were offset by the continuing need to go to a member of staff with their printout, while the range of jobs listed was rather limited.

Around 30 per cent of customers had used the Jobcentre Plus website. Over a third of these first used the website because it was quicker than dealing with a member of staff or an adviser in the Jobcentre. Non-use of the website was mostly due to lack of access to the Internet (59 per cent) but one in six said they didn’t know how to use computers. A quarter of non-users of the website said they would be likely to use it if a computer were available at the Jobcentre. The website appealed most to those with Internet access at home while those without home access preferred to use Jobpoints (at a Jobcentre Plus office). Those who had used the website found it user-
Summary

friendly and convenient but these advantages were hindered by the need to retrieve full employer details/job descriptions from Jobcentre Plus staff/Jobseeker Direct.

Just over two-thirds had used ‘Warm Phones’. There was widespread confusion over the function of ‘Warm Phones’ and this, together with a perceived lack of privacy, discouraged their use. A similar proportion of customers had used Jobseeker Direct. This service was highly regarded by those who used it, being seen as convenient and anonymous. Use of Jobseeker Direct was discouraged by perceptions of cost and a view that it did not offer the same degree of support as a face-to-face service.

One in ten clients had no current access to the Internet, a mobile phone, digital TV or other device. Around 60 per cent reported they had some form of Internet access ‘now’ and one in ten reported they were likely to have such access in the next 12 months. Overall, 77 per cent of customers currently had a mobile phone but relatively few had access to a Multimedia Messaging Service or video phone. Nearly half had access to digital TV of one type or another. Over a third of customers had access to e-mail and over half of those who have an email address said that they checked it most days. Just 11 per cent of those without an email address said they are likely to get one in the next 12 months.

Migrating services

Customers were asked about their willingness to undertake a variety of tasks either online using a website or using an interactive machine similar to Jobpoints. Willingness to use these channels was high for most activities, although greatest for job search, job applications and completion of CVs and lowest for new benefit claims and Fortnightly Job Reviews. Generally, there was a greater willingness to do tasks using Jobpoints than the website. The benefits of such services were seen mainly in terms of increased independence and quicker, more efficient, more flexible access to information.

A number of practical barriers to moving services to these channels were identified by customers. These barriers included a lack of customer IT skills, fear of the consequences of mistakes (especially if a mistake resulted in a missed or delayed benefit) and concerns about privacy. Therefore, in migrating services, the different service delivery and IT needs of different client groups will need to be taken into account. Paying regard to these will be essential in providing appropriate encouragements to different client groups.

Research with Jobcentre Plus staff

The research was based on focus groups with frontline local office staff in eight districts, as well as one-to-one interviews with a business manager from a local office in each district. Focus groups were also conducted with staff in three Contact Centres and two Processing Centres, with one-to-one interviews being conducted with Contact Centre Managers.
Main findings

In regard to current alternative channels, staff felt Jobpoints, Warm Phones and the websites worked relatively well, although there was scope for changes to improve efficiency. Key issues were the quality and scope of the service offered, access and resources in local offices and making the technology more efficient and reliable. Staff were focused on, and motivated by, a desire to offer a high level of customer service and for this reason they were negative about Contact Centre delivery in relation to benefits claims. Business Managers recognised that there were problems with Contact Centres but felt there had been efficiency gains arising from a reduction in the number of customer visits to local offices.

Awareness of alternative channels

Staff in local offices were well informed about alternative channels and most local offices were ‘geared up’ for promoting such channels. Two issues had proved problematic: IT literacy and delivery skills amongst local office staff; and lack of an in depth knowledge of alternative channels. Both issues are perceived by staff as a result of inadequate training for staff. Staff who were not IT literate lacked the confidence, skills and competence to encourage alternative channels, while those with basic IT skills did not have the in-depth knowledge of alternative channels and felt unable to provide detailed guidance on functionality.

While both staff and Business Managers identified inadequate training as an issue, Business Managers also identified wider issues relating to the culture within Jobcentre Plus. This was an issue that could not be simply dealt with by more training. The perception of staff is of a fragmented alternative channel strategy with regard to technology, communication and business processes. Such a perception creates a negative attitude amongst staff to alternative channels – in particular Contact Centres.

Encouraging the use of alternative channels

Staff believe that customers are well aware of Jobpoints, Warm Phones and Contact Centres, although not all customers are capable or enthusiastic about using them. Customer awareness is raised through proactive encouragement by frontline staff in local offices, as well as through posters, leaflets and business cards. Alternative channels are now an integral part of new methods of working and dealing with customers, and the local office environment is seen to be conducive to the promotion of alternative channels. Promoting alternative channels is seen by staff as procedural – part of the new way of doing business. Business Managers are proactive in putting in place mechanisms to help staff promote alternative channels, although they feel constrained in terms of resources, bureaucratic process and time.

In terms of barriers to the encouragement of alternative channels, the key issues are the technology, limited resources, training, the target culture and business processes, but also the wider transformation of the organisation and the implications this has for staff. Business Managers also identify cultural barriers in persuading staff to
promote alternative channels. Many staff have been in the organisation for a long time and cannot see the benefits in the current climate. Another constraint on staff is that they perceive the alternative channels strategy to be rather *ad hoc* and ‘cheaply done’ leading to the conclusion that alternative channels lead to a worse quality of customer service.

**Perceptions of alternative channels**

Staff tend to be positive about the benefits of alternative channel delivery. They recognise that alternative channels would create choice for customers, empower jobseekers, improve efficiency and could help provide a better quality service to customer as well as allowing staff to spend more time with the needy customers. Nonetheless, staff have underlying concerns about alternative channels, including their impact on staffing levels at a time of organisational review. Business Managers see the advantages in terms of fewer queues in offices and greater cost effectiveness. Managers also identified disadvantages, including staff demoralisation, less control over business processes, and a lack of feedback and accountability.

Staff see alternative channels as a positive development for customers but recognise that the better educated, IT literate and job ready will benefit most. The longer term unemployed and the harder-to-help clients will always need some form of face-to-face contact to resolve their problems. From a staff perspective, alternative channels development is generally agreeable to staff with the caveat that alternative channels are introduced and implemented with dynamic and robust business processes, systems and technology. There is a perception that for this to happen much greater investment is needed. Staff are not against alternative channels development *per se*, but do have concerns about their own future job roles and security if alternative channels were to be rolled out further.

The key problems in pursuing an alternative channels strategy as perceived by staff are future job insecurity, job dissatisfaction, and the extra burden and impact on staff in local offices. Low staff morale was one of the most important overarching problems identified by staff. Better and clearer communication from senior management on their intentions with alternative channels and wider implications for staff, would help them to encourage alternative channels further and promote the benefits that they bring.

Staff and Business Managers agreed that many areas of business could be transferred to alternative channels. The key issue for them was developing an integrated and interactive platform whereby this could be achieved. Concerns were identified about transferring certain services to alternative channels – in particular more complex benefit claims and fortnightly review cases. A perception exists that there is a line that should not be crossed in terms of migrating services to alternative channels given certain customer needs.
Future development of alternative channels

Staff want to see greater consultation by Head Office about the development and implementation of the alternative channels strategy. Training needs to address basic ICT and delivery skills amongst staff and improve their in-depth knowledge of alternative functionality. Alternative performance measurement is also considered important for encouraging staff to promote alternative channels, along with an interactive and integrated delivery system that staff can believe in, and communicating clearer guidance on alternative channel strategy to staff – and crucially the implications for staff of alternative channel expansion. In addition, local management would like to see greater national marketing to raise customer awareness of alternative channels and their benefits, together with greater flexibility in the business process and a better understanding of the impact of alternative channels development on local offices.

Key messages from the research

The evidence presented in the report suggests that Jobcentre Plus has had a rather fragmented and incoherent approach to the development of its service delivery channels. There appears to have been no unifying strategic purpose to the development of alternative channels. Managers see gains in terms of resource savings and the quality of service. Frontline staff appeared more ambivalent, encouraging the use of alternative channels while at the same time seeing such developments as potentially threatening the quality of services (arguing that face-to-face contact is essential for some activities). Customers appear to receive mixed messages about alternative delivery channels. They are encouraged to use such channels and many do so, recognising the benefits to be derived. Nonetheless, when customers use alternative channels, they report insufficient support from staff who appear to lack detailed knowledge of the systems, while the delivery systems often offer a more limited service than previously and may be unreliable. Many customers feel they lack the skills necessary to use the alternative channels effectively while for the least job ready, such alternative channels may be quite inappropriate.

The development of alternative service has also created challenges. Staff are fearful of the loss of control over, and feedback about, the activities of their clients, as well as feeling that their role in the organisation is being diminished. There is a perception amongst many staff that Jobcentre Plus has not invested in training its staff so they can cope effectively with the new service delivery channels. Where staff lacked competence, they often also lacked the confidence to actively promote alternative channels. Business Managers tend to see the challenges as extending beyond training into the realm of organisational culture. They indicated that the prevailing organisational culture would need to be transformed if Jobcentre Plus was to fully embrace the potential offered by the new delivery channels.
A number of key messages and conclusions emerged from the evidence. These can be summarised as follows:

- there is a need to set out a service delivery strategy that clearly identifies the rationale for alternative delivery channels covering the principles that lie behind such developments, the limits to which services can be migrated to alternative channels and identification of which activities, and which customer groups, are appropriate for which service delivery channel;

- changes will be required to the organisational culture, including consultation with local office staff to ensure a ‘buy in’ and to address staff concerns about their changing role, loss of control and the quality of service;

- there is a need to review business processes to avoid duplication, bottlenecks and undue complexity in service delivery and boost staff and customer confidence in alternative delivery systems;

- national support for the channel strategy needs to be given on two fronts: greater investment in simple to use, relevant and reliable delivery systems and a national promotional campaign to raise awareness;

- increased support for the channel strategy at the local level needs to be encouraged through the provision of guidance to staff as to how to promote particular delivery channels and a basis for differentiating between different customer groups and to invest resources in local delivery of e-services such as internet access points and to develop incentives for customers to use alternative channels;

- it is essential to invest more resources in the training of customers to use alternative delivery channels and to train staff so they can provide real support to customers. There is a need for a common level of competence amongst Jobcentre Plus staff in the use of ICT.
1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the report

Jobcentre Plus developments in alternative channels are relatively new, reflecting developments in, and the diffusion of, new information and communications technology. The focus of Jobcentre Plus channels has, to date, been mainly on job search activity. Alternative channels provide a means for clients to obtain information about jobs, employers and apply for benefits via such means as:

- Jobpoints;
- Jobcentre Plus website;
- Worktrain website;
- ‘Warm phones’ in Local Offices;
- First Contact Centres (contacted by phone);
- Jobseekers Direct Contact Centres (contacted by phone).

In addition to these nationally available delivery channels, Jobcentre Plus has conducted a number of service delivery pilots using such channels such as text messaging, interactive digital television, Jobpoints in supermarkets and local authority offices and access by freephone number.

The main driver of the introduction of alternative channels was, initially, the desire to widen the range of customer services available. Alternative channels were seen as a means of adding to the frontline services and complementing face-to-face contact with Jobcentre Plus Advisers. This emphasis has now changed. The 2004 Spending Review cut Jobcentre Plus funding significantly and created a new focus on efficiency and cost saving. Developing the use of alternative channels is now seen as an important strategy for delivering significant savings for Jobcentre Plus.

Jobcentre Plus plans to invest into the development of alternative channels where efficiency savings can be realised. So far, the take-up of the current alternative channels by clients has been low. Consequently any future channel strategy needs
to demonstrate the potential to shift a significant number of customers away from face-to-face interactions. To investigate the scope for such a shift, and the means by which it might be achieved, a number of research projects were commissioned by Jobcentre Plus. These were:

- a review of the literature relating to alternative channels, conducted by GHK International;
- quantitative and qualitative research with Jobcentre Plus customers undertaken by NOP Social and Political; and
- qualitative research with Jobcentre Plus staff conducted by the Centre for Public Policy, Northumbria University.

The purpose of this research was to inform future policy and investment decisions by Jobcentre Plus regarding alternative delivery channels. To further assist in the use of the evidence, the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick, was commissioned to draw together the three sets of evidence into a single report and to provide a synthesis of the key research findings, highlighting key messages for policy and decision-making in Jobcentre Plus.

1.2 The challenges facing Jobcentre Plus

The drive by Jobcentre Plus to develop alternative service delivery channels, and to encourage a high usage of such channels, is just part of a much wider drive by government to raise the level of competence and use in society of information and communication technology (ICT) and to reform public services. The Office of the e-Envoy, based in the Cabinet Office, was established in 1998 to lead the drive to get the UK online. The primary focus of the Office of the e-Envoy was to improve the delivery of public services and achieve long-term cost savings by joining-up online government services around the needs of customers. The e-Envoy was responsible for ensuring that all government services were available electronically by 2005 with key services achieving high levels of use. The e-Envoy was replaced in 2004 by the e-Government Unit (also in the Cabinet Office). This new unit has a wider remit than its predecessor but its aims include the support of citizen-centred public service reform. The Governments vision for the future is set out in ‘Connecting the UK: the Digital Strategy’ (Strategy Unit/Department for Trade and Industry, 2002).

A major impetus underlying the drive towards e-government was the recognition that the ‘information age’ is having a profound effect on the way individuals live their lives and interacted with one another in a society that is already divided socially and economically. Many commentators have observed that low levels of access to, and take-up of, ICT among more deprived communities has led to a ‘digital divide’ between the ‘information rich’ and the ‘information poor’. There is ongoing debate about the nature and magnitude of this ‘digital divide’. As noted by BECTA (2001): ‘digital divides involve a complex web of interconnected social, economic and cultural factors that cannot be fully captured by a definition that focuses solely on
access or ownership. Population sub-groups such as white working class males in coalfield areas (Shaddock, 1999), ex-offenders, ethnic minorities (Owen et al., 2003), the disabled (Carey, 1999), women (Women Connect, 1999), the homeless, refugees, single parents, the less skilled, the non-employed and those residing in more deprived areas all been identified as being at risk of further exclusion if they do not have ‘access’ to the Internet (Russell and Stafford, 2002). An important age dimension emerges from research on the digital divide, with older people less likely to have access to and use ICT than younger people. Economic and educational factors (which are themselves closely related) have been identified as key determinants of technology ownership and Internet use (Gardner and Oswald, 2001), with those without qualifications, the unemployed or inactive having lower than average levels of PC and Internet awareness and use. Benchmark research amongst a large, nationally representative sample of adults to identify and quantify the groups who use ICT and those who lack access to ICT conducted in 2000 and 2001 confirms that the greatest barrier to Internet use is non-ownership of a PC (Russell and Stafford, 2002). According to the ONS (2003), only 12 per cent of the lowest income decile has home Internet access compared with 86 per cent of the highest earners.

Lack of access to ICT leads to, or reinforces, labour market disadvantage at a number of levels. For adults, computer literacy can be important for re-entering the job market in at least two senses. First, an awareness and ability to use ICT is recognised increasingly as a basic skills requirement in its own right. Indeed, the Government’s Skills Strategy recognises ICT as the third essential ‘Skill for Life’ (alongside literacy and numeracy) and seeks to strengthen the range of free introductory courses available in basic ICT skills such that individuals can access training when and where they need it. Second, ICT skills are increasingly necessary as part of the job search process. While few employers used the Internet for recruitment just a decade ago, most do so now, and not just for professional and high skill jobs but for a wide range of occupations. Employers increasingly expect to advertise job vacancies on-line and to accept applications by e-mail.

The challenge for Jobcentre Plus is how to meet the growing need, and demand, for alternative methods of delivering its services to unemployed people and other benefit claimants who are likely, given the digital divide, to be less likely and less able to take advantage of new ICT. Moreover, the introduction of e-government is likely to gather pace and presents a further challenge to a government agency under increasing resource pressure and a need to meet tight performance targets. The drive to develop alternative service delivery channels is not just a technological or investment challenge, but also a challenge right to the heart of the agency. It raises fundamental questions about the nature of the services on offer from Jobcentre Plus. Just what kind of a service is Jobcentre Plus to provide in the future? Is it right to

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1 While 94 per cent of 16-24 year olds have accessed the Internet, only 47 per cent of 55-64 year olds and 17 per cent of those aged over 65 years have done so (National Audit Office, 2003).
encourage and promote different levels of service to different customer groups, or should all customers be entitled to the same level of service or the service of their choice. The latter question is particularly pertinent in view of the many ‘hard to help’ and disadvantaged customers in the Jobcentre Plus client group. How far is it appropriate to move support for such customers away from traditional face-to-face contacts with staff to alternative – possibly impersonal – alternate delivery channels?

The development of alternative delivery channels also creates challenges to the organisation. The introduction of new technology into any organisation always creates stress and strains for the workforce since such developments usually result in changes to traditional roles and status within the organisation and creates uncertainty about future careers and fears about job security. The introduction of alternative service delivery channels in Jobcentre Plus raises important issues of how well any change is managed, how far staff are willing to accept such change and how staff are prepared for it.

It is tempting to see the development of alternative service delivery channels as simply a means to reduce the costs. It is possible, however, to see such developments as an opportunity. ICT competence is increasingly recognised as an important quality to take to the job market. Alternative service delivery channels based on ICT can be regarded as a vehicle for developing the ICT and related skills of Jobcentre Plus customers that will, ultimately, benefit them in terms of their future employability. The challenge for Jobcentre Plus is that, as will be seen later in this report, the evidence suggests that those currently seeking and receiving the most face-to-face contact with Jobcentre Plus staff, and those most resistant to the use of alternative channels are those whose need for additional life skills is greatest and who would benefit most if they were encouraged or even forced to learn the skills necessary to use the alternatives to face to face contacts.

1.3 Structure of the report

The remainder of this report presents the findings from the three research projects together with a concluding section that draws out the key messages from the research.

Section 2 presents findings from a review of literature concerning the use of alternative channels within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), other public sector organisations and private sector companies. This was undertaken by GHK Ltd. This section explores the rationale and drivers behind multi-channel strategies, assesses the evidence of customer channel preferences, considers the barriers preventing customers from using alternative channels and, finally, identifies the levers for shifting customers towards alternative channels. The review covered a range of sources, including academic papers, newspaper coverage, Internet sources, public and private sector reports, and published and unpublished DWP documents. The review also collected information by means of telephone interviews with DWP and Jobcentre Plus staff, as well as telephone and email interviews with other
employment agencies in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA and the Netherlands. Telephone and email interviews exploring the implications and lessons learned from introducing alternative service delivery channels within other public and private sector organisations in the UK were also conducted.

Section 3 presents the results of quantitative and qualitative research with Jobcentre Plus customers. The research was undertaken by NOP in two stages. Stage one was a quantitative survey with almost 400 Jobcentre Plus customers from eight Jobcentre Plus offices in England and Wales. Stage two involved qualitative work in focus groups with customers from the survey and additional recruits from the same areas. The focus of this research was customers’ experiences of, and attitudes towards, current and future use of alternative channels in delivering Jobcentre Plus services.

Section 4 of this report deals with findings from qualitative research conducted by Northumbria University with Jobcentre Plus staff. The main element of this research was based on data collected from focus groups with frontline local office staff in eight Jobcentre Plus districts, as well as one-to-one interviews with business managers in local offices. Focus groups were also conducted with a mixture of staff in three Contact Centres and two Processing Centres, with one-to-one interviews being conducted with Contact Centre Managers. The focus of the research was on staff experiences of alternative service delivery channels and their views about possible future development of such channels.

Finally, Section 5 reviews the evidence from the three preceding sections and highlights the main findings and seeks to draw out the implications and key messages for future Jobcentre Plus policy and operations.
2 Service delivery channels: a review of the evidence

2.1 Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to present a literature review that, alongside the evidence from the Jobcentre Plus customers and staff, to help to inform future investments into alternative Jobcentre Plus delivery channels.

The objectives are to:

- explore the rationale and drivers behind multi-channel strategies;
- assess the evidence of customer channel preferences;
- understand the barriers preventing customers from using alternative channels;
- identify the levers for shifting customers towards alternative channels.

The study presents evidence that is available with regards to channel strategies, customer preferences, barriers, and levers within both the private and public sector.

This study is based on:

- a review of academic papers, newspaper coverage, Internet sources, public and private sector reports, and published and unpublished DWP documents;
- telephone interviews with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus staff. In total, ten interviews were conducted;
- telephone and email interviews exploring the implications and lessons learned from introducing alternative service delivery channels within other employment agencies, specifically in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA and the Netherlands. In total six interviews were conducted;
- telephone and email interviews exploring the implications and lessons learned from introducing alternative service delivery channels within other public and private sector organisations in the UK. In total, four interviews within the private sector and five interviews within the public sector were conducted.
This section will firstly define and examine the different channels that are relevant to Jobcentre Plus, identifying the key characteristics of each channel. Next, it will discuss the key considerations in defining and adjusting a multi-channel strategy to align with the organisational goals in general.

Following these generic sections, the report will firstly examine the key drivers for multi-channel strategies in public and private sector organisations. It will then move on to explore customer preferences and barriers to uptake. Finally, the report will discuss the levers organisations can use to influence customer channel choices.

2.2 Alternate service delivery channels

2.2.1 Service delivery channels

A variety of service delivery channels are used within both the private and public sector. These include:
- face-to-face channels;
- telephone channels;
- internet channels;
- tied and independent intermediaries.

Most broadly defined, e-service delivery channels are all channels that allow service delivery via telephone communication systems (Aladwani 2001). Within this definition, alternative channels include:
- call centres;
- Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems;
- Natural Speech Recognition (NSR) systems;
- kiosks;
- Automatic Teller Machines (ATM);
- internet websites;
- email;
- Interactive Digital Television (IDTV);
- Simple Message Service (SMS);
- Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS);
- Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) services.

However, many organisations refer to alternative channels to denote only those channels that are based on applications that rely on the Internet (www.webopedia.com). In this case call centres, IVR systems and NSR systems are
not included. SMS and MMS are included because these can only be generated in large volumes using an Internet-based application.

In the private sector, significant attention has been paid to the introduction of Internet channels, but developments have not been confined to this medium. For instance, Tesco has tested video links between its stores and bank staff as an alternative service delivery channel; Lloyds conducted a pilot with Digital Television services with 250 households in Hull; and Lloyds and Abbey National have both been experimenting with branches and kiosks in supermarkets. (Note in these cases that although partnerships between banks and supermarkets have flourished, the Digital Television and video link services piloted have not been continued).

Governments have also acknowledged the need for e-enabling their services. The speed at which this has been occurring differs. In the World Market Research E-government ranking (2001), the UK Government ranked fifth in the world following the US, Taiwan, Australia and Canada.

The Prime Minister announced on 30 March 2000 that all UK Government services to the Citizen and Business should be available electronically by 2005. Exclusions are made for those constituent parts of a service/process that cannot be made electronic at present, owing to technical capability, legislative, or policy reasons. The monitoring regime is based on measuring the extent to which Departments’ key commitments – as outlined in their Public Service Agreements (PSA) and Service Delivery Agreements (SDA) – are electronically enabled.

Specifically in the case of Jobcentre Plus, the organisation currently uses four types of service delivery channels:

- face-to-face;
- telephone;
- kiosk;
- internet.

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**Kiosk: Lessons learned from the NHS (Slack and Rowley 2004):**

**Information needs:** A lack of assessment of information needs prior to the implementation of kiosks can lead to a mismatch of the service offer and the customer’s needs.

**Anonymity:** Information seeking behaviour is adjusted according to the degree of anonymity during the process. The degree of anonymity is in part influenced by the location of the kiosk.

**Kiosk location:** Location influences the frequency of use. Kiosks in shops and supermarkets were used more than those in hospitals and surgeries. This reflects the need to analyse what type of information people want to access, where, and when.
The services offered to Jobcentre Plus customers through the current channel mix are summarised in the following table.

### Table 2.1 Jobcentre Plus service offering to individual customers by channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Service Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Face-to-face</strong></td>
<td><strong>Jobcentre Plus offices</strong> provide an integrated work and benefit service by offering benefit advice and claim forms, assigning personal advisers to customers where appropriate, identifying applicable Jobcentre Plus programmes and services, and helping with general job search enquiries. Within the offices, customers can also use the kiosks and warm phone facilities. Jobcentre Plus offices are open on weekdays from 8.30am to 6pm. The service is free of charge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Telephone</strong></td>
<td><strong>First Contact</strong> call centres provide a first point of contact for those who need to make a new benefits claim. <strong>Jobseeker Direct</strong> call centres offer information on the latest job vacancies and how to apply for them. Where possible operators contact the employer on the spot and arrange an interview. Lines are open weekdays from 9.00am to 6.00pm and Saturdays from 9.00am to 1.00pm. Calls are charged at local rates, but clients can use the ‘warm phones’ in their local office free of charge. Customers can call their local <strong>Jobcentre Plus office</strong> during working hours with questions about benefits or for information on work-related issues and job vacancies. Jobcentre Plus offices are open on weekdays from 8.30am to 6pm. Calls are charged at local rates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kiosk</strong></td>
<td><strong>Jobpoints</strong> enable customers to search for vacancies on the Jobs Bank by type of work and area. When a specific vacancy is selected from the list that meet the entered criteria, the kiosk provides the full job title, job reference number, location, hours and wage as well as a brief description of the job content, information on how to apply and any additional criteria related to the job. Customers are given the opportunity to print this information. The use of Jobpoints is free of charge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internet</strong></td>
<td>The <strong>Jobcentre Plus website</strong> provides information about benefits to people of working age, training and how to apply for a job. It also enables customers to search the Jobs Bank online by type of work and area. The website enables customers to save jobs they have found under favourites, which can be accessed again by entering a username and password. The service is available 24/7 and is free of charge, although customers have to access the internet to use it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.2.2 Channel attributes

Whilst both public and private sector organisations are experimenting with a wide range of service delivery channels, including SMS and Digital Television, the literature review and the interviews suggested that branches, call centres, kiosks, and websites were still the cornerstones of service delivery.

The following tables draw together findings from the literature to compare the attributes of these channels from the viewpoint of the organisation and customer respectively.
Table 2.2 Comparing branches, call centres, kiosks, and websites from an organisation’s viewpoint

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>Call Centre</th>
<th>Kiosk</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Content</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low to medium dependant on policy</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low to high dependant on design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average length of interaction</td>
<td>Medium to long depending on type of transaction</td>
<td>Short to medium depending on type of transaction</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Short to medium depending on type of transaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct costs</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low to moderately low</td>
<td>Moderately low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing needs per customer</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderately high</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records contact</td>
<td>Records by staff</td>
<td>Standardised records by staff</td>
<td>Electronic records, usually a transaction cannot be matched to a particular customer</td>
<td>Electronic records, if customer identification is possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The amount of information Jobcentre Plus needs to convey to its customers varies from simple vacancy information to complex legislation regarding benefit entitlements. The length of interaction will be directly linked to the complexity of the transaction. Although there are incentives to minimise costs and staff time, some transactions may be too complex to be delivered through non-face-to-face channels. The need to keep track of the transactions a particular customer makes will again vary by type of transaction.

The customer’s view on the attributes of different channels may differ from that of the organisation. For some, there may be something of an inherent tension between an organisation’s objectives (efficiency and effectiveness) and the customer’s views, for example around ease of use. Recognition of these tensions is critical in designing an effective channels strategy that combines organisational goals with customer take-up. Table 2.3 compares the attributes of branches, call centres, kiosks and websites from the viewpoint of the customer.

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2.3 Channel strategy

2.3.1 Multi-channel strategies

Making channel decisions is still a very *ad hoc* process within many organisations. The channel mix is often not the result of a deliberate channel strategy, but rather the outcome of an incremental decision-making process.

In part this is an unavoidable consequence of the way technology evolves. As one interviewee put it:

> ‘The development of e-channels is organic. The challenge is to keep up with the developments and gain some market share along the way.’

(Private sector)

The organic nature of service delivery channel development sits uncomfortably with the need to produce clear objectives. Therefore Jobcentre Plus may not be able to be as nimble and flexible in its channel strategy as some private sector firms.

Multiple channel strategies can be structured to some extend. The three key elements in any strategy are (Coelho and Easingwood, 2003):

- the number of channels used;
- the use of intermediaries;
- the amount of personal contact.

The first issue addressed is the number of different channels that are to be offered to customers.

Some public employment and benefits services have deliberately limited the number of channels. One public employment and benefits service now delivers its services through its website, call centres and offices only. It discontinued the use of kiosks, due to the fact that the technology was outdated. It replaced kiosks by customer computers in the offices. These computers offer access to the website, but also to a programme that is very similar to that previously provided on the kiosk.
Table 2.3 Comparing branches, call centres, kiosks, and websites from a customer viewpoint³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>Call Centre</th>
<th>Kiosk</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of personal contact</strong></td>
<td>Face-to-face contact with staff, usually possible to speak to same person for several transactions</td>
<td>Telephone contact with staff (unless IVR or NSR System), not possible to speak to same person</td>
<td>Contact with staff usually not possible, although telephone or live video services could be integrated</td>
<td>Access to staff through e-mail, online response forms or back-up call centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ease of use</strong></td>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>Easy, IVR or NSR systems require a limited amount of knowledge</td>
<td>Relatively easy, requires less knowledge than websites</td>
<td>Requires relatively large amount of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location and privacy</strong></td>
<td>Public space, privacy level varies depending on design space</td>
<td>Mostly contacted from private space, such as home or office, privacy high</td>
<td>Public space, privacy level varies depending on design space</td>
<td>Contacted from private or public space. Security concerns around transmitting information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range of information</strong></td>
<td>Wide range of services with background information</td>
<td>Can include wide range of services with background information</td>
<td>Limited, targeted</td>
<td>Can include wide range of services with background information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ability to record transactions</strong></td>
<td>Not possible</td>
<td>Not possible</td>
<td>Possible if print record available</td>
<td>Printing or electronic records usually possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response time</strong></td>
<td>May involve waiting/queuing</td>
<td>May involve waiting/queuing</td>
<td>May involve waiting/queuing</td>
<td>Instantly available, although speed may vary by type of connection and site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost</strong></td>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Cost of call</td>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Cost varies from point of access. For home access hardware, software and an internet connection is needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of assistance</strong></td>
<td>Staff can provide hands-on assistance</td>
<td>Staff can explain verbally how to perform a task</td>
<td>Dependant on location</td>
<td>Self-help facilities and often email or back-up call centre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Secondly, the organisation will need to make a decision regarding the extent to which it will make or buy distribution activities itself or outsource these services to intermediaries – the level of channel integration. In banking for instance, several of the large retail banks have teamed up with supermarkets like Tesco or Sainsbury. These services provide an alternative for bank-owned branches. Both within the public and the private sector, many organisations externalise the risk of, for instance, kiosks by leasing them or providing services through third party kiosks.

Within public employment services, there has been a push towards privatisation. The Australian Employment and Benefits Service, for example, created Job Network in 1998. The network consists of about 200 private, community and government organisations. This changed the role of the Government from direct provider to purchaser and regulator.

Thirdly, the organisation must decide the level of personal interaction it wants to have with its customers, which will in turn influence the mix of channels that are offered. Using multiple channels may increase sales, diversify business risk, reduce distribution cost and improve market information. On the other hand, the introduction of a multi-channel approach can also lead to channel conflict, damage to the brand image and customer confusion.

One private sector interviewee stressed that any new channel should fit the organisation’s image, both in terms of the type of channel and the quality of service it provides. Introducing too many channels or channels of poor quality might put customers off using the service at all. A public sector interviewee added:

‘Providing the same service through every channel is as important to protecting the organisation’s image as the overall level of service that is provided.’

(Public employment and benefits service)

A web designer indicated that launching an inadequate Internet channel might have an effect on the take-up rate long after the initial problems have been solved. He argued that people in general visit a website once, decide whether it is useful for them and based on that judgement either visit it regularly or never visit it again. If this is true, ‘getting it right the first time’ is indeed of crucial importance.

‘Bad experiences with previous government e-channels are making it more difficult to convince customers we are offering something worthwhile this time.’

(Public sector)

A public sector interviewee indicated it should be clear to the customers which channels they can use for which transaction. Offering too much choice in channels for a single transaction can be confusing and will in general cause the customer to revert back to well-known channels.
The number of channels, degree of integration and amount of personal contact in the channel mix influence four major channel outcomes (Coelho and Easingwood, 2003):

- sales;
- costs;
- control;
- flexibility.

**Sales**

The effect that adding channels to the channel mix will have on sales depends on whether the new channels enabled the organisation to satisfy the needs of customers more appropriately. In the context of public employment and benefits services, ‘sales’ can be seen as transactions or job entries.

Evidence from Australia suggests that the use of all self-help facilities apart from kiosks is decreasing (NFO Donovan Research, 2002). The greatest fall was in the use of computers (from 40 per cent in 2000 to 13 per cent in 2002). The reasons given for not using a facility were:

- access to the facility at home (37 per cent);
- access the facility elsewhere (18 per cent);
- do not need to use facility (17 per cent);
- use the facilities at a Job Network Agency (16 per cent);
- not looking for work (13 per cent);
- do not know how to use the facility (five per cent).

Evidence from one public employment and benefits service suggests that the discontinuation of kiosks may have decreased the interaction with a certain part of the customer base. Although the computer delivered an appropriate service for a large part of the customer base, some customers who did use the kiosks are not able or willing to use a similar programme on a computer.

The level of personal contact in the channel mix can have an influence on sales or transactions through the way it affects the kind and level of service that is provided. Evidence for example suggests that in banking, sales of ancillary banking products such as mortgages are higher in face-to-face channels than in channels that do not offer the same level of personal contact (Howcroft 2001).

Because of its effects on sales, organisations in general prefer to have more face-to-face contact with high value customers. In banking, the most profitable customers, i.e. young, high-income households, also tend to be the customers who prefer alternative channels to face-to-face channels. Unprofitable, low-income customers...
on the other hand are more likely to prefer the more costly face-to-face channels (Howcroft 2001). Note that, although this is a problem for banking, this self-selection might actually be beneficial for Jobcentre Plus, where low priority customers are redirected away from more expensive office based services.

The telephone as an alternative service delivery channel: the case of First Direct

In 1989, the Midland Bank was facing an efficiency challenge. Like its competitors, it faced high overheads and bad debt due to the Third World debt crisis. Revenues and market share were both decreasing and customers were turning away from the bank due to the poor quality of service delivery. Market research conducted for the bank showed that 51 per cent of customers would prefer to conduct their transactions over the phone and that the people who preferred this service were mostly up-market customers. Further research into the preferences of this high-value customer group showed that what they were looking for in a service offering was speed, convenience, value for money, and quality of service (MacLachlan, 1995). Instead of trying to reposition its existing branch network, the Midland Bank took the radical step of launching a branchless bank within which all transactions were conducted through telephone, mail, direct deposit and ATMs. The novelty of First Direct however was not only its use of non-face-to-face channels, but also the fact that all structures and processes are built around the needs of the customer, rather than those of the organisation itself.

After the success of First Direct, most UK banks moved into telephone banking in 1993 – 1994. Most of these second movers adopted a copy-cat strategy of simply adding telephone banking to the existing branch network with the aim of reducing costs. But since the movement of transactions to telephone-service was usually not accompanied by adjustments in the branch network, a decrease of the cost/income ratio often did not materialise (Talmor, 1995). Success was greater amongst second movers who introduced telephone banking as a Greenfield development or part of a wider restructuring plan. For instance, the Co-operative Bank combined the introduction of the telephone channel with educating customers to use the telephone system and cutting branches. Administrative tasks were centralised, so that branch staff could focus on customer service. (Costanzo et al., 2003)
Costs
The direct costs per transaction are in general higher for channels that offer more personal contact. A public sector organisation indicated that, in their case, the average cost of a face-to-face transaction is £63, compared to £7 for a telephone transaction and a few pence for a website transaction. Alternative channels will however only lead to overall cost savings if they are used as direct replacements rather than supplements to traditional channels (Howcroft, 2001).

The relative success of private companies that offer online services only, compared to those that offer online channels next to face-to-face channels, seems to suggest that having an elaborate branch network encourages customers to use alternative channels as ‘add-ons’ rather than substitutes to traditional channels.

For organisations with extensive branch networks, the potential to achieve overall cost savings through the use of alternative channels seems to be larger if these channels are introduced as a separate brand in a Greenfield investment or if they are introduced as part of a wider restructuring plan (Talmor, 1995).

In banking, some firms have combined the introduction of alternative channels with a reduction of the number of branches. In many public employment and benefit services, the introduction of alternative channels has also been accompanied by a move to restructure the branch network. Often this was accomplished by reducing the number of branches in rural areas. Such restructuring was enabled by the alternative channels strategy, which meant that the service offer and potential access to the service remained the same – the difference was only the means or route by which it was accessed.

For example, Jobcentre Plus maintains a network of offices in affluent areas with relatively high if not full employment. If one assumes that the potential client base of such offices is those most likely to be ICT literate, with access to the Internet at home and least likely to experience long-term unemployment, then it would be possible for Jobcentre Plus to fulfil its universal coverage service promise not through a physical infrastructure but through encouraging the use of alternative channels. This offers the potential to save on location costs while maintaining the service offer. These savings could be redirected to areas of greater need/demand, delivering efficiency savings in the true sense of the concept.

Another way to reduce costs is by using intermediaries. Direct channels tend to require a large capital investment, which in turn generates significant annual fixed costs. The use of intermediaries generated a source of variable costs and externalises the risks and costs associated with new technology development. Many organisations have experimented with using third party kiosks for service delivery.

Several public employment services have also chosen to deliver services through private sector and community organisations. Within Australia, this model has resulted in a substantial reduction in cost compared to the provision of services through a centralised public employment service (Department of Employment and Work Relations, May 2002).
Alternative service delivery channels: the experience in recruitment

In 2000, only 68 per cent of firms used the Internet as one of their recruitment channels. In 2004, that figure had increased to 98 per cent (Wingham 2004).

The major advantages of online recruiting are:

- low costs;
- speed of response;
- time saving within the organisation.

B&Q reduced its cost per hire by 30 per cent by using online recruitment. By using the Internet as its sole recruitment channel, Woolworth reduced its cost per hire by 70 per cent. Time to hire decreased from eight weeks to as little as two days and administration time was reduced by 40 per cent.

Online recruitment has not led to large savings in all organisations. The magnitude of savings seems to be dependant on the size of the organisation, with bigger organisations likely to benefit more, and the availability of other channels, with organisations using online recruiting only reporting the largest savings (Smethurst 2004).

The disadvantages of the use of Internet include (Wingham 2004):

- irrelevant applicants;
- low-quality candidates;
- time-wasters.

The ease of applying online leads to more unsuitable applications. This in turn increases the need for screening, cancelling out part of the potential savings. The use of Internet also increases the risk of multiple mailings by the same candidate and forged applications (Savvas 2004).

Including a self-selection dimension to the online recruitment process can, in part, mitigate these drawbacks. Marks and Spencer for instance question their candidates on their eligibility to work in the UK, their mobility, their education, and their willingness to work weekends and other shifts. If the candidate meets all these requirements, they are asked to complete three online tests, a verbal reasoning test, a numerical test, and a ‘talent screener’, which examines a candidate’s motivators and career ambitions.

Another way organisations can decrease the amount of irrelevant applications is by providing more detailed, better quality information about the organisation as a whole and the specifics of a vacancy on their websites (Czerny 2004).
Control and flexibility

The level of control an organisation has over service delivery mainly depends on the proximity to channel members and the performance standards and procedures.

One public employment and benefits service indicated that the primary reason it chose to limit the amount of channels it uses was control over service content. In their view, it is easier to ensure each channel provides the same service if the number of channels is limited.

The extent to which intermediaries are used also influences the level of control and coordination. For instance, if Jobcentre Plus customers use the Internet through libraries and UK Online centres, Jobcentre Plus cannot control the level and quality of help they receive from staff at these locations. If Jobcentre Plus offers computers in its own offices, the standard of customer service that is provided can be controlled more easily.

The investment in alternative channels can increase the organisation’s ability to react to changes in the external environment. Coelho and Easingwood (2003) suggest that many companies invest in Internet channels, not to increase current profits, but to prepare themselves for the future. A clear example of this is the online shopping service offered by chains like Tesco and Sainsbury. While current business volumes are low via the online service, the opportunity to learn from the experience and establish the brand name provides enough potential to justify the investment.

Experiments with digital television and SMS services are viewed in a similar way by many organisations. One interviewee noted:

‘Currently the technology is too basic and the cost too high to seriously consider digital television as a potential channel. But we are conducting small pilots, so that, if the channel takes off some time in the future, we are prepared for it.’

(Public sector)

The use of intermediaries may also increase flexibility. In fully integrated structures, managers may find it difficult to change internal practices, terminate inefficient programmes and fire inefficient employees. Using intermediaries externalises some of these problems.

A public employment and benefits service outside the UK indicated this was one of the reasons for the success of the privatisation of part of the service.

‘The private companies and community groups we work with now are simply much more flexible. If they decide it is a good idea to attract customers by providing free ice cream on a hot day, they can simply do so. Just imagine the amount of paperwork needed to do something like that in a large public sector organisation.’

(Public employment and benefits service)
Segmenting the customer base

Within the private sector, channel strategies will often differ per customer segment. The customer strategy is determined by the value the segment represents to the firm (Council of Financial Competition 2004a).

For instance, a large South African bank segments its customer base into affluent, middle, and mass-market customers. With regards to the affluent customers, the firm aims to increase its customer base and retain existing customers. It defines the customer strategy for this segment as maximizing customer satisfaction and building relationships through assisted channels. This in turn led to a channel strategy that is based heavily on high-contact, high-quality service through face-to-face and telephone channels.

At the other end of the spectrum, the firm’s customer strategy with regards to the mass market is to maximise volume and minimize cost by mitigating customers to self-service channels. The channel strategy for this segment is based on directing customers to the most economic channels such as self-service centres, ATM’s, and the Internet. These channels offer basic services at low costs.

Only after having determined the channel strategy, will the firm start looking at take-up rates, barriers, and levers for shifting people into the channels outlined in the channel strategy (Council of Financial Competition 2004a).

Customer segmentation: an example from Australian banking (Council of Financial Competition 2004a)

Darja Bank (pseudonym) segmented its customers by value and developed three distinct branches versions, each specialising in a subset of customer activities, specific to the net worth and needs of local customers. The levels of service that are available at each type of branch are as follows:

- full service centre: Provides a full range of services with a dominant focus on sales and complex relationships;
- partial-service centre: Offers standard transaction services and non-specialised product sales;
- automated centre: ‘Electronic service points’ offer basic services to customers in ‘high-traffic’ areas.

A similar approach may hold benefits for Jobcentre Plus. The purpose of Jobcentre Plus is to contribute to the Government’s aim of targeting poverty, reducing worklessness, and promoting growth and opportunity. Determining customer value on the basis of these objectives is complex. A Jobcentre Plus interviewee indicated:

‘The point system we currently use is probably the best proxy we have for neediness.’

(Jobcentre Plus)
The current point system may create a useful segmentation of the customer base according to ‘customer value’, but, if they are to be used to develop tailored channel strategies, these categories will need to be segmented further on the basis of demographic and behavioural traits.

For instance, one public employment and benefits service targeted its first e-applications specifically to fit the needs of groups who like to use these channels. The first applications available online were student services such as student loans, allowances and bursaries. This guaranteed a high uptake and allowed the organisation to learn about online service delivery. The interviewee pointed out:

‘Whilst the efficiency gains in other areas are less measurable, providing student services online has definitely led to cost reductions by reducing the need for seasonal staff.’

(Public employment and benefits service)

The same public employment and benefits service found that the willingness and ability to use Internet-based channels was influenced by age and income level. Uptake rates of alternative channels amongst the older population and those with low incomes were consequently expected to be low. The interviewee indicated that the organisation has therefore deliberately not developed ‘apply online’ options for pensions and jobseekers’ benefits.

Another option is to segment the customer base by customer need. This can be done by formally assessing a customer’s needs and abilities at set points in the process or through informal assessment by staff members each time a customer comes in.

One of the interviewed public employment and benefits service pursues this strategy by instructing staff to point customers to the channels they feel are appropriate. The advantage of this method over a formal assessment is that the ability of the customer can be assessed more frequently and is adjusted for the particular transaction they need to perform. Also, informal assessment by office staff does not require large time investments.

On the other hand, assessment by office staff is more subjective than a formal assessment by specially trained advisors. Within a system based on informal assessment, the level of service is more likely to be influenced by factors like workloads or staff attitudes in individual offices.

Drivers

Electronic commerce, or the exchange of products (tangible and otherwise) and payments via telecommunication systems is one of the fastest growing areas of business worldwide (Aladwani 2001).
In general, the desire to adopt service delivery channels based on advanced technologies is driven by the need to respond to both external and internal pressures. The main drivers for introducing alternative delivery channels are:

- keeping up with competitors and protecting reputation;
- meeting customers demand for the service;
- enabling mass customisation;
- creating new markets by attracting new customers;
- increasing efficiency.

*Keeping up with competitors and protecting reputation*

Within both private and public sector interviews the need to keep up with competitors was mentioned as a reason to embark on alternative channel investment.

‘Our competitors are offering top-notch e-channels, if we don’t match that, we will simply be left behind.’

(Private sector)

One contact in banking indicated she felt that one of the main drivers for online banking in the early days was the fact that a competitor bank introduced it. With regards to e-government, one of the interviewees said:

‘We have the reputation of being a very modern government. There is a certain amount of pressure to defend that reputation.’

(Public sector)

Jobcentre Plus’ core customers, i.e. those receiving working age benefits, have little choice but to transact with Jobcentre Plus. In a way, they are a captive audience. The services offered by other organisations, like recruitment agencies or other government departments, may however influence customer expectations and satisfaction with the services offered.

*Meeting demand for the service*

Several of the interviewees indicated that, in their experience, customers do not actively ask for alternative channels. The idea that there is a demand for these channels is derived from take-up rates of services that are offered through these channels by other organisations.

‘Organisations who offer a similar product face-to-face have seen their market share decrease, whilst ours is increasing. You would expect that makes them think.’

(Private sector)

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4 Based on Aladwani 2001, Daniel and Storey 1997, and interviews.
The use of alternative channels makes it possible to increase the time frame in which services are offered.

‘Our contact centres are open from eight in the morning to ten o’clock, seven days a week. This is the kind of service customers want, but we would never be able to offer that through branches.’

(Private sector)

Virtual Branches: the case of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce

The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) combines being a virtual bank with offering customers the convenience of physical branches by offering Internet pavilions in supermarkets. These ‘virtual branches’ feature Internet banking kiosks, automated teller machines, and onsite customer service representatives. Apart from the opportunity to check accounts, they also offer telephone banking services, Internet bill payment services, online mortgage application services, and competitive savings rates. Customers are also able to open an account by simply presenting two forms of identification to the customer service representatives on site.

The use of ‘virtual branches’ has been a great success. Customers feel they are receiving a service similar to what they would receive in a branch, but at a more convenient location. CIBC’s senior vice president for electronic banking commented: ‘Banking is no longer about bringing the customer to the bank but, rather, bringing the bank to the customer’.

Enabling mass customisation

E-channels provide a cheap way to customise communications and service delivery, for example as seen on the Amazon website where users are greeted by name and told what similar products other buyers have purchased. One private sector organisation indicated they use usernames and passwords to identify their customers. This allows them to provide a customised website, which has direct buttons to the tasks that customer uses most often. It also enables the company to display personalised greeting messages each time the user enters the site. However, it should be noted that the researchers were informed that legislation limits the potential for Jobcentre Plus and other Government agencies to use these types of techniques.

Creating new markets by attracting new customers

E-channels can help reach customers that previously could not be reached. Several interviewees mentioned the fact that it enabled them to provide services to customers in rural areas. One private sector organisation indicated that alternative channels were introduced specifically as a way to reach customers in areas where the company had few or no branches.
For Jobcentre Plus, the use of alternative channels, especially for job search, may mean the organisation is now serving more customers who would normally not visit jobcentres (i.e. employed people or people from overseas). However, the extent to which Jobcentre Plus should regard attracting additional customers as beneficial can be questioned. On the one hand, additional users would create additional competition for Jobcentre Plus target customers for the job vacancies displayed. On the other hand, one of the appeals to employers to encourage them to place vacancies would be the widest potential reach to jobseekers.

However, whilst Jobcentre Plus may not be motivated by increasing the customer base, improving the access to its services by those in rural areas or with mobility difficulties (either physically, such as Incapacity Benefit (IB) clients, or due to transport difficulties) would be a benefit.

**Increasing efficiency**

In each of the interviews, increasing the efficiency of business process was mentioned as a key factor.

Evidence from banking seems to suggest that achieving overall cost-savings is easier for new players. For traditional suppliers with expensive branch networks, cost-savings did not occur unless the new channels were introduced as a direct replacement for branches (Howcroft 2001).

In other organisations, branches and face-to-face contact are still seen as the cornerstone of service delivery. (Marketing, 26-05-2004; Booz Allen Hamilton, 2003). Even if this means overall costs are not decreased, the introduction of alternative channels can still lead to efficiency gains. As one interviewee indicated:

‘Self-service has not necessarily led to fewer branches or less staff, but it has freed up staff time to provide better service, which in turn increased customer satisfaction.’

(Private sector)

Although the overall costs have not necessarily been improved, the effectiveness of the service has increased. On the whole this has led to a positive change in the cost/benefit ratio.

### 2.4 Customer preferences and barriers to uptake

Customer preferences and barriers to uptake are largely overlapping issues. The take-up rate of a channel is influenced by:

- awareness;
- access;
- value to customers.
Awareness of the existence of a channel is a prerequisite to uptake.

The likelihood that a customer will use a channel that he is aware of is influenced by the level of access he has to the channel. The level of access is determined both by the ease of physical access to the channel and the ability to use it.

Even if customers are aware of and have access to a channel, they will only use it if it offers a positive value proposition.

2.4.1 Awareness

One of the main reasons both private and public sector interviewees mentioned for low uptake rates was a lack of marketing. Sometimes this is a deliberate move:

‘It is possible to communicate with us through email, but we are not actively promoting the service yet, because our current business processes could not deal with the volumes that is likely to create.’

(Private sector)

In other instances, the lack of awareness is due to a non-deliberate marketing failure. A report by Andrew Irving Associates (2003) shows that awareness of the possibility to deal with government departments online among DWP customers is relatively limited, even among regular Internet users. Therefore, using the Internet to transact with any government organisation is not something a large part of this customer group would routinely consider. This suggests that addressing the issue of awareness is key to the success of alternative channels within Jobcentre Plus.

One public employment and benefits service deliberately did not create awareness amongst its customers when it introduced a contact centre. Instead it automatically forwarded calls to its offices to the new contact centre. This way, customers do not need to make a conscious choice to call a contact centre instead of an office and they do not need to remember a new telephone number. Although the organisation involved reported a relatively high customer satisfaction with the telephone service, this strategy could potentially damage customer satisfaction if customers, who intended to call a local office, are not satisfied with the service they receive in a contact centre.

2.4.2 Access

Access consists of three elements:

- physical access to the channel;
- current ability to use it;
- ability or willingness to learn new tasks.
Physical access

Physical access is a basic prerequisite for uptake. The ease of accessing a channel is generally assumed to influence the frequency of use.

One Jobcentre Plus interviewee indicated rural areas tend to use the telephone service more than urban regions, because there are fewer Jobcentres and travelling to them on public transport can be time-consuming and expensive. It remains to be seen if a similar trend is occurring with regards to other alternative channels.

Rural areas tend to have weaker broadband network coverage than urban areas. The quality of the network may influence uptake in these areas (DMR Consulting and NOIE, April 2003; Gartner, 16 June 2003). A Jobcentre Plus interviewee indicated that in rural areas without a broadband connection, the use of kiosks is impossible.

Physical access does not only differ by geographical area but also by type of technology.

With regards to the Internet, the National Statistics Omnibus Survey 2004 shows that the percentage of households with home Internet access has increased from ten per cent in 1998 – 1999 to 52 per cent in the period from April to June 2004 (provisional data).

The percentage of households with home Internet access differs per type of household (National Statistics Omnibus Survey 2004):

- 37 per cent of one person households (under state pension age);
- 35 per cent of lone parents;
- 69 per cent of couples with children; and
- 56 per cent of couples without children (under state pension age) had home access in the period from 2002 – 2003.

The percentage of households with home Internet access also varies by income group. Figure 2.1 shows that the percentage of households with income access has grown substantially for all income groups. The relationship between income and home access has become more linear over time. This indicates that, where in 1998-1999 access remained relatively low until the fifth decile group, the difference in access between groups one and two, two and three, and three and four is now much more pronounced.
Home access is not the only possible Internet access point. Research however does suggest that home Internet access increases the frequency of use.

The National Statistics Omnibus Survey 2004 found that, of those who used the Internet in the three months prior to being interviewed:

- 82 per cent accessed the Internet from home;
- 42 per cent from their workplace;
- 25 per cent from another person’s home;
- 12 per cent from their place of education;
- ten per cent from a public library;
- nine per cent from an Internet shop.

It also found that, of the 40 per cent of the UK population who had never used the Internet, 37 per cent attributed this fact to a lack of access to the technology.

A private sector interviewee indicated that his department only looked at the percentage of customers with home Internet access. This was based on the idea that people who are only able to use the Internet at work or in a public place, such as a library or Internet café, are less likely to use it for privacy-sensitive transactions. The ability of other people to look at the screen while a customer is conducting a transaction was mentioned as the main reason for this, but technological security concerns may also play a role.

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**Current ability**

The ability to use alternative channels is influenced by language skills and ICT literacy. One education provider indicated language could be a barrier to uptake. The organisation introduced a call centre service in several languages and the take-up rate of this service seems to confirm this assumption. Research for the Australian Employment Service (NFO Donovan Research, 2002) however showed no clear differences in channel choices of jobseekers born in English speaking countries and jobseekers born in non-English speaking countries.

Low ICT literacy can be a barrier to the take-up of channels based on this technology. The National Statistics Omnibus (2004) found that, of the people who have never used the Internet, 37 per cent attribute this fact to a lack of knowledge or skills. A DWP report (BMRB Social Research 2002) showed that 26 per cent of the general public indicate they are concerned about using the Internet or e-mail to deal with benefits or government departments because they feel they lack the knowledge or know-how necessary to use the technology.

One way of estimating the ability of people to use ICT-based channels is to look at official training. Eurobarometer research (2001) shows that in 2001, 45.9 per cent of the UK population had undertaken training in the use of computers and 17.8 per cent in the use of the Internet specifically.

Another way to estimate ICT literacy is by approximating ability by experience. The National Statistics Omnibus Survey 2004 shows that, in 2004, 60 per cent of the UK population has used the Internet at least once.

Ability presumably increases by frequency of use. The Eurobarometer (2002) shows that, of UK residents who use the Internet:

- 47 per cent use it every day;
- 25 per cent use it several times a week;
- 14 per cent approximately once a week;
- eight per cent approximately once a month;
- five per cent use it less than once a month.

Although caution needs to be applied when interpreting these results as a proxy for ability, it can be argued that those who use the Internet less than once a month or, to a lesser extend, those who use it approximately once a month, might find it difficult to use a channel based on this technology.

If use is employed as a proxy for ability, the previously discussed physical access data seems to suggest ICT literacy levels are lower among low income households, one person households and lone parents. The frequency of use is also connected to age, type of employment and educational attainment.
The National Statistics Omnibus Survey 2004 shows that:

- 91 per cent of the 16 to 24 age group;
- 78 per cent of the 25 to 44 age group;
- 65 per cent of the 45 to 54 age group;
- 50 per cent of the 55 to 64 age group;
- 19 per cent of the 65 and over age group have ever used the Internet.

Eurobarometer (2002) found that older people who use the Internet tend to use it less frequently than their younger counterparts. Grougiou and Wilson (2003) suggest that older people also tend to find it more difficult to deal with IVR systems.

Although these findings are relevant to Jobcentre Plus, it needs to be noted that the effect of age seems to be most marked for people aged 65 and over, who would not normally be considered as part of the customer base.

Caution should also be applied in generalising these results. Both public and private sector organisations reported some older customers are using alternative channels quite extensively. Interestingly enough one interviewee noted:

‘It is a myth that the grey market is not online. In fact we are experiencing more success with customers over 65 than with the 50 to 65 age group.’

(Private sector)

The organisation assumed that this success might have something to do with the fact that pensioners have more spare time. Some pensioners may be choosing to use that time to learn how to use computers and the Internet – ‘the silver surfers category’.

Apart from age, Eurobarometer (2002) found that the type of work and the level of educational attainment also influence Internet usage. It shows that:

- manual workers and those without a job tend to use the Internet less frequently than the employed and self-employed;
- those who have been educated to the age of 15 and, to a lesser extent, those who have been educated to the age of 16 to 20, tend to use the Internet less frequently than those who have been educated to the age of 21 and above.

A DWP Report (BMRB Social Research, 2002) seems to confirm the importance of educational attainment. It finds that 31 per cent of those with school or college qualifications indicate they would be very likely to apply for benefits online if this option was offered, while only 11 per cent of those without any qualifications consider this very likely.

The National Online Recruitment Audience Survey (NORAS) confirms that online jobseekers tend to have a higher than average educational attainment, with 60 per cent educated to degree level or above.
According to research by recruitment firm Reed, the web is more effective for the recruitment of relatively high-skilled people and those that use ICT in their work such as professionals, secretarial staff, middle management, graduates, and IT staff.

Nevertheless, there are examples that run counter to these statistics and comments. British Gas has been very successful recruiting plumbers and fitters through the Internet, even though this group does not traditionally use the Internet in their working day. B&Q and Woolworth also have had considerable success with online recruitment, with the latter of the two companies now recruiting exclusively online (Smethurst, 2004).

**Kiosks: experiences from public employment and benefits services**

The interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff indicated that kiosks are generally perceived to provide a positive contribution to service delivery within the organisation. However, many public employment and benefits services have either not introduced kiosks at all or discontinued their use. One interviewee marked:

‘*We have had a long look at kiosk over a number of years. There clearly are a few benefits to them, but we have not been able to find a viable business case for the investment.*’

(Public employment and benefits service)

Within another public employment and benefits service, kiosks were used in the past, but customer computers in the offices have recently replaced them. An interviewee added:

‘*The technology was out-dated and replacing them with customer computers that also offer Internet access seemed the logical thing to do.*’

(Public employment and benefits service)

Most interviewees indicated that the main advantages of kiosks over customer computers are:

- they are easier to use than computers;
- customers like using them; they do not feel they are using a computer;
- the transaction time is shorter, allowing more customers to use a single machine.

The main advantages of customer computers over kiosks are:

- they offer (limited) Internet access as well;
- they can offer programmes in different formats to serve different needs (for example offer the programme formally available on the Kiosks as well as access to the website);
- customers learn how to use a computer, potentially increasing their employability.
Ability or willingness to learn new tasks
If the current ICT literacy of customers is a barrier to uptake, the evolution of take-up rates of ICT-based channels will depend on the ability of customers to learn how to use them.

The ability to learn new tasks will differ from customer to customer. Grougiou and Wilson (2003) indicate that older people are on average less able to learn the skills that are necessary for the use of e-channels. This might also be true for people with learning disabilities or a low educational attainment.

Some public employment and benefits services try to tackle this problem by organising special training programmes for those people who are unable to learn how to deal with alternative channels by themselves.

While inability to learn a new task can be a real barrier for some customers, evidence suggests a number of people are simply not willing to learn a new task. The National Statistics Omnibus Survey 2004 (July 2004) shows that 48 per cent of all people who do not use the Internet indicate they do so because they do not want to use it or have no interest in it.

A DWP report (BMRB Social Research 2002) indicates that unemployed people prefer to use face-to-face channels in part because they are accustomed to receiving service through this channel. These suggest that customer inertia might be influencing uptake.

Value to customers
The value a certain channel will represent to customers will depend on:
- benefits;
- costs;
- risks.

Benefits
In order for people to use alternative channels voluntarily, there need to be benefits connected to using these channels.

‘People cannot be persuaded to use websites unless they offer a service that is at least as good, if not better, than the service available through other channels.’

(Private sector)

Of those people who do not use the Internet, 14 per cent indicate they do so because they feel the Internet offers no benefits to them (National Statistics Omnibus Survey, 2004).
E-channels can provide a more convenient and faster service to customers. But the potential benefits do not always materialise. For instance, online channels are potentially available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. However, customers will only be able to access the service at any time if they have home access.

The value of potential benefits may vary from customer group to customer group. For example, the public employment service in Australia has found that the online channel was particularly popular among busy families. Research showed they tended to prefer to transact with Centrelink between eight pm and eleven pm (DMR Consulting and NOIE, May 2003). If longer opening hours are as important to unemployed people remains to be seen.

Another benefit could be the ability to get service without having to travel to a branch. With regards to Jobcentre Plus customers, this benefit is likely to be greater for customers who normally travel with the sole purpose of going to a Jobcentre and increases as the distance to the nearest Jobcentre increases. The advantage does not fully materialise for customers need to travel to, for instance, a library or UK online centre to use the e-channel. The advantage disappears completely if customers use the kiosks in the Jobcentre Plus office.

With respect to the use of IVR systems in call centres, a potential benefit to the customer is that it increases the chance that the first staff member they speak to is able to help them with their query. A private sector interviewee however indicated that there is a trade-off between getting the required information to put people through to the right person and creating a simple and easy to use system. He argued that customers tend to get agitated if they are presented with more than three or four options or a lengthy description of each option.

Evidence seems to suggest that the perceived benefit of channels also differ per type of transaction. Research by Booz Allen Hamilton (2003) shows that, in banking, customers tend to like to use the telephone and, to a lesser extend, Internet channels for gathering information. The majority of customers still prefer to go to a branch for the sale-stage of the process.

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<th>Table 2.4</th>
<th>Customer channel preferences in banking (percentage of respondents who marked the channel as one of the preferred channels)</th>
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<td>Manages fund</td>
<td>9 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Australian research (DWR Consulting and NOIE, May 2003) suggests that the Australian public mainly uses governmental websites to gather information, while telephone and face-to-face contact is used when clarification is needed. This has increased the complexity of the issues staff in call centres and offices need to deal with, consequently increasing the time per transaction in these channels. Training staff to deal with these complex issues is seen to be vital for service delivery.

Customer preference for face-to-face channels for part of the transaction does not mean customers cannot be encouraged to conduct complete transactions on the Internet. For instance in Canada, 84 per cent of all benefit claims are made online. This may in part be caused by the fact that the only alternative option is a paper-based claim.

**Cost to the customer**

Customers will not be inclined to use a channel unless the benefits of a channel outweigh the costs. Within an Australian study (DMR Consulting and NOIE, April 2003), 45 per cent of customers indicated some level of cost savings per interaction by using alternative channels instead of the traditional channels. The average saving per transaction across all users was $14.62 Australian dollars. Savings were larger for businesses and intermediaries than for citizens – 23 per cent of business respondents and ten per cent of citizens claimed to save more than $25 per transaction.

Financial benefits were delivered as a result of time savings, both in terms of the time spent to access a facility and the turn-around time of a transaction. Therefore, the way unemployed people value their time is crucial to the potential for cost savings. Whether Jobcentre Plus customers will experience using alternative channels as less costly will also depend on whether they travel with the sole purpose of getting to a Jobcentre or simply fit their visits in with other activities. If the latter is the case, the cost of travel will not be completely linked to the need to visit a Jobcentre, reducing the cost of the face-to-face option.

**Alternative service delivery channels: the experience in retail banking**

A combination of external forces, such as technological change and competition, and internal pressures, such as demands to reduce running costs and improve the administrative process, drive banks to adopt e-products such as online banking. The major challenges facing online banking according to a sample of IT managers and senior management are (Aladwani 2001: 221):

- Internet security
- Customers’ trust
- The speed of service delivery
- Customers’ information privacy
- Customers’ awareness

Continued
Continuity of service
Spread of computer use
Spread of Internet use
Difficulty of using online banking by some customers
Pricing of Internet service
Internet infrastructure in the country
Cost of maintaining the site
Legal regulations

Even though banks are investing in alternative service delivery channels, the branch has remained central to banking services because (Howcroft 2001; Community Banker 09-2000):

- customers in general prefer to (also) have access to a local branch
- branches increase the market visibility necessary to remain competitive
- branches outperform direct channels in sales of ancillary bank products such as mortgages

Research by Booz Allen Hamilton (2003) shows up to 90 per cent of customer relationships are still formed and lost in branches.

**Risks**

Australian research (DMR Consulting and NOIE, April 2003) identified the ‘fear factor’ as a reason why people are wary about using e-channels. Fear of technology is in part caused by ICT literacy issues addressed earlier. The attitude of customers towards using ICT based channels is also influenced by cultural factors and the security risks associated with ICT applications.

Gartner (16 June 2003) finds that attitudes to technology differ from culture to culture. For instance, the Japanese tend to love technology, making them very willing to use e-channels. Europeans on the other hand have a less positive attitude to technology in general, which in turn affects take-up rates of e-channels. Cultural differences also influence the preference for the type of e-channel. For instance, in Western European countries people tend to be more willing to use SMS than in the USA.

In the UK, general attitudes tend to differ according to the type of technology that is used. The telephone seems to be a generally well-accepted technology. However one interviewee indicated that reaching for instance the Somali minority within the UK through a telephone-based channel was very difficult due to cultural resistance against this technology.

DWP research (BMRB Social Research, 2002) shows that the working age population has a relatively positive attitude towards IVR systems. When customers use a telephone channel to contact government departments, they tend to prefer to
speak to a member of staff after being presented with some IVR choices at the start of the transaction. Although it is less popular, even having a service based mainly on IVR systems or a mixture of IVR and personal contact is preferred to a staff member answering the phone without the involvement of any IVR.

With regards to Internet-based channels, the DWP (BMRB Social Research, 2002) found that one-third of the UK population thinks the Internet is confusing. People who are not working and those with barriers to work are most insecure about using this technology. On the other hand, the aspiration to own the latest technology is also highest amongst people who are economically inactive or unemployed, indicating a general willingness to accept new technology.

With regards to digital television, a DWP report (BMRB Social Research, 2002) shows that customer groups that are generally less enthusiastic about using the Internet for benefits are slightly more willing to use digital television. Caution is required in interpreting these results, since the understanding of digital television is generally low. An expression of interest into the technology is therefore not necessarily based on experience or an informed judgement.

Apart from these general attitudes towards technology, customers will also make a value judgement about the security risk associated with using a channel. Evidence from e-commerce suggests 34 per cent of customers are concerned about the security of online transactions. Inexperienced users tend to be more concerned about security than seasoned online shoppers (Windham, 2000). In part this can be attributed to self-selection, i.e. those who perceive the security risks to be minimal will be more likely to use the Internet for transactions. Windham (2000), however, also finds that more seasoned users have a better understanding of the relevant security issues and are better able to deal with them.

If the experience of Jobcentre Plus customers with using the Internet for transactions is on average low, then security concerns are more likely to play a role in take-up.

Most interviewees from public employment and benefits services highlighted the importance their customers attached to security issues differed per type of interaction. With respect to offering benefits online, one interviewee remarked:

‘If customers are looking for simple information like job vacancies, they do not tend to be very concerned about security. But if you are going to ask them for personal information on the basis of which you are going to determine the value of what is often their only source of income, well that is another matter.’

(Public employment and benefits service)

This draws the attention to the notion that the Internet asks customers to take full responsibility for the transaction. The customer’s willingness to do that seems to be linked to the importance of the transaction to the customer. Evidence from e-commerce (Windham 2000) supports this claim. It shows that customers mainly buy relatively low cost, standardised products like books and music on the Internet. In Canada, benefit claims online have however been a great success, indicating it is possible to convince customers to complete an important transaction online.
2.5 Levers to influence uptake

The main levers that can be used to shift customers from one channel into another are:

- marketing;
- encourage use in face-to-face contact;
- remind customers of alternative service delivery channels;
- provide access;
- increase usability;
- help people to use e-channels;
- offer incentives and create disincentives;
- address security concerns.

These levers are addressed below, but the Canadian example in the text box, illustrates how it is possible for a public employment and benefits service agency to achieve a greater sophistication of alternative channel delivery and overcome many of the barriers identified in the previous chapter.

**Online benefit claims: lessons to be learned from Canada**

Canada introduced online benefits claims two years ago. Apilweb allows Canadians to apply for Employment Insurance online. In September 2004, 84 per cent of all claims are currently received online. The only other option is a paper-based mail application. Customers who need help can fill-out the application in an office, either using a kiosk or paper-based application. Filling out the form takes on average 30 minutes, but can take up to 60 minutes, depending on the complexity of the claim.

To avoid disappointment, a browser sniffer first checks if the customer is using a compatible browser. If the browser is compatible (which is true in 97 per cent of cases), the customer can enter the application.

After entering the application, customers are asked five security questions that are known through national databases (i.e. things like a customers Social Security Number or mother’s maiden name). If there is a sure match on these five questions, the organisation will start to verify the information in the application. If there is a non-match, there will be an intervention to verify the identity of the claimant.

Once customers have answered these, they receive a password that can be used to re-enter the application. Every page that is completed is sent through a firewall and saved. Due to privacy legislation, all incomplete applications are deleted after 24 hours.

Continued
The application then takes the customer through:

- personal information;
- employment information;
- arms length questions;
- availability for work;
- attestation;
- rights and obligations.

If further information is necessary, ‘interactive fact finders’ prompt customers to provide this information.

Once an application is completed it is downloaded onto a legacy system. Claims are automatically distributed to processing offices by postal codes. Some claims can be dealt with completely online. In the majority of cases, local offices will make an appointment with the customer for a face-to-face interview.

Initially, the stability of the platform was a problem. The instability caused customers to be ‘thrown out’ in the middle of the process of applying, which led to customer dissatisfaction. The platform stability has been improved and a password system was introduced, so that customers can retrieve their application if the connection is cut off at any time.

Other barriers are access, awareness, ability to use the service, and fear of change. However, the fact that uptake has increased to 84 per cent, even though there has only been a soft launch (i.e. marketing through offices and Government of Canada website), indicates these barriers are not insurmountable to most customers.

One interviewee indicated:

‘The key lessons that can be learned from our experience is that the application should not take too long to complete and the forms should be simple. That way the risk of errors is reduced and forms can more easily be automated in the future.’

Since February 2004, claimants can also complete their biweekly Employment Insurance reports online through Interdec. Client surveys indicated that 97 per cent of respondents prefer Internet reporting to telephone reporting. Reasons given for this include:

- the telephone report takes five minutes versus 12 seconds on the internet;
- the client can see the question when using the internet;
- they feel they are driving the process;

Continued
it is less stressful; and

- can be accessed at any time.

In September 2004, about 20 per cent of claimants used this online service to complete their reports; the aim is that 30 per cent of reports will be on-line by March 2005.

### 2.5.1 Marketing

As stated before, awareness is a prerequisite to uptake. One way to increase awareness is through marketing. Opinions are divided about the amount of marketing that is needed to make customers aware of a new channel.

Within the Canadian public employment and benefits service, online benefits claims were introduced through a soft launch, i.e. the new channel was only advertised within the service’s existing channels and on the Government of Canada website. This was enough to achieve a take-up of 84 per cent.

Jobcentre Plus also advertises its website on all its communications and within its offices. The opening page of the UK Government website offers a direct link to Worktrain, but not to the Jobcentre Plus site. It is possible to reach the Jobcentre Plus website through www.direct.gov.uk, but it does take at least five clicks if customers use the ‘find what you need’ menu. If customers use the ‘most popular services’ menu, finding Jobcentre Plus can be quite difficult.

One public employment and benefits service revealed the organisation deliberately did not market its employment website as a government site. He noted:

> ‘People do not expect to get good service from a government agency. When users learn we are in fact a government website, they are very surprised.’

(Public employment and benefits service)

A web designer indicated that marketing a website need not be very costly if intelligent use is made of techniques like search-engine maximisation. Searching for key words like ‘unemployed’ or ‘benefits’ in search engine Google (set to UK sites only) does not deliver a link to the Jobcentre Plus website within the first page of results.

Searching for ‘looking for work’ does produce a link to the Worktrain website, but again does not lead to the Jobcentre Plus site. This implies awareness could be increased through the use of relatively low-cost techniques.

Some organisations are convinced that large-scale marketing campaigns are necessary to launch an e-service. Large online recruiters such as Monster are an example of this. One public sector organisation pointed out that they initially did have to spend a large amount of money on marketing the new telephone and
Internet services. By using targeted television commercials, displayed around programmes that core customer groups tend to watch, awareness was increased quite rapidly. The interviewee indicated that, now that the new channels are established, the need for large-scale marketing is greatly reduced.

### 2.5.2 Encourage use in face-to-face contact

Getting people on-line often starts off-line. Members of staff can encourage people to use other service delivery channels such as the Internet, by explaining the merits and addressing the customer’s anxieties about using the channel (Direct.com, 01-2004).

Research for the Australian Public Employment Service (Centrelink) confirms this finding (NFO Donovan Research, 2002). It reveals that the most common way to find out about self-help facilities is through Centrelink staff. The proportion of jobseekers that discovered a facility unaided was higher for touch screen kiosks than for the other self-help facilities.

One of the interviewed public employment and benefits services found that the take-up rate of online services was much higher in some offices than in others. They discovered that, in those offices where take-up was high, staff members were treating the online channel as a preferred channel and actively directed everyone they felt capable of using it to the customer computers in the office.

This is confirmed by the Canadian experience. The take-up rate of online benefits was increased because staff members encouraged customers waiting in the office to try the online service. If customers go to offices for help, members of staff will usually go through the online system with them rather than a separate administrative system.

It needs to be noted that members of staff will only be willing to direct customers to alternative channels if the performance measures reflect this task. Currently, Jobcentre Plus measures performance through job entries. These entries need to be directly traceable to an action of a member of staff. This performance measurement system creates disincentives for staff to encourage the use of alternative channels. As a Jobcentre Plus interviewee explained:

> ‘Jobcentre Plus staff members are inclined to help customers face-to-face, since they do not receive any points for people who find a job through the use of e-channels.’

(Jobcentre Plus)

An alternative measure that would not create this problem could for instance be to look at the amount of people who stopped claiming benefits within the postcode serviced by a certain office. This would encourage staff members to take any necessary step to help customers into work.
2.5.3 Targeted reminders to customers of alternative service delivery channels

Another way to create awareness and increase use is to remind people of the channels that are available to them and explaining how they could use them more effectively.

One interviewee indicated they send information leaflets about alternative channels to all their customers regularly. If the use of a channel can be monitored, an organisation can target its effort more effectively. Another private sector organisation indicated it only contacted those customers it felt would benefit from using a channel more frequently or extensively. Tailored communications are used to remind customers of the specific features of a channel that are relevant to them. For example, if a customer is known to use the Internet site to monitor account balances, they are reminded that they can also conduct transactions on the site i.e. take out loans, arrange a mortgage etc.

However, one organisation that also uses this technique warned:

‘Reminding customers of services is only useful if you remind them of the things they need or want, not the things the organisation needs or wants. In the end it has to be about creating extra value for the customer, else it is just a waste of time.’

(Private sector)

2.5.4 Provide access

Problems of physical access to the technology can, in part, be mitigated by providing access within offices. Public employment and benefits services in general either offer kiosks or computers to provide access to Internet-based channels. Jobcentre Plus also offers a free telephone service in its offices. The Australian public employment and benefits service offers kiosks, telephones, newspapers, photocopiers, computers and faxes to its customers. Over the past three years, the use of all these services, apart from the kiosks, has been falling. 37 per cent of customers who do not use the facilities indicate this is because they have access to them at home.

Access can also be increased through intermediaries. For instance, customers who do not have home access can use the Internet in libraries or UK online centres. This type of provision however does not solve the problem of access completely, since access is still limited to the opening hours of Jobcentre Plus offices or intermediaries.

2.5.5 Increase usability

Customers are more likely to use a channel if it is easy to use. All of the interviewees mentioned usability as an important factor in take-up. Several issues emerged.

First of all, language could pose a barrier to uptake for some customers. An education provider is therefore offering its call centre and Internet services in several foreign languages, including Somali and Punjabi. A pharmaceuticals firm has
employed a similar practice. They offer call centre service in several languages by using their international network. If a caller does not speak a language that is provided on site, he is transferred to a call centre in another location where this language is available. The website, customer information leaflets, and registration forms are also available in several languages.

Secondly, channels need to be designed to serve the needs of the customer, not those of the organisation. For example, one private sector interviewee indicated that their business required so much information to be able to direct a customer to the right person, that the resulting IVR system was unacceptable to customers. Therefore the organisation now uses a system in which ‘first contact’ staff members connect customers to the right person.

Thirdly, the content of an alternative channel has a great influence on its usability. If the content is written in complex language, customers will be inclined not to use the channel. One interviewee indicated that, in his experience, one of the main reasons customers reverted to face-to-face or telephone channels was the fact that they needed help to understand the information that was available online. This issue may be particularly important for Jobcentre Plus, since it is trying to communicate complex information to an audience with an average educational attainment that falls below the UK average.

Finally, the design of a channel influences the ease and speed at which information can be located. With regard to the design of websites in particular, one interviewee noted:

‘A website needs to be designed to fit the way the customer thinks, not the way the organisation thinks.’

(Private sector)

Both private and public sector interviewees indicated they were redesigning their websites to reflect events in the customer’s life, instead of the way the organisation is organised. One public sector interviewee indicated this frequently required working together with other governmental departments who deal with different elements of the same customer event.

Customers in general contact Jobcentre Plus around life events that are related to work, worklessness, and benefits. The mix of channels and their usage can be tailored to specific events like new claims, job search or change of circumstances.

But design does not only influence the ease of finding information but also the download speed. Although the look of a website influences the perceived usability, one interviewee indicated:

‘Looks are important, but particularly if your customers are using dial-up, a lot of ‘frills and thrills’ will really decrease the usability.’

(Private sector)
2.5.6 Helping people to use alternative channels

If people are not able to use the technology associated with a particular channel, organisations can increase take-up by providing help options.

One private sector organisation indicated staff members help customers use the Internet channel through computers within the office. He felt that customers are more likely to use Internet channels at home if a member of staff has showed them how to use it.

One public employment and benefits service trains new customers to use the available channels in group sessions. The interviewee remarked:

‘Most of our customers tend to prefer this method of teaching to one-to-one contact, since it allows them to work through a problem with people in the same situation.’

(Public employment and benefits service)

The extent to which customers require assistance will depend on the kind of technology that is used. Research conducted for the Australia Employment Service (NFO Donovan Research, 2002) showed that eight per cent of jobseekers needed help using touch screens, while 17 per cent needed help using other self-help facilities, such as computers and faxes. The types of help needed were: showing people how to use or start the equipment (65 per cent); help when equipment was not working (27 per cent); help using computer packages like word processing (11 per cent).

2.5.7 Offer incentives and create disincentives

Customers will decide which channel to use based on the benefits and costs associated with this channel. Offering incentives for some channels and creating disincentives for others can therefore influence channel choices.

In banking and retailing, direct financial incentives are offered through, for example increased or beneficial interest rates and prices for customers who use online or telephone channels. For public sector organisations, offering direct financial incentives is often not possible. They can however influence the costs associated with using a channel by providing free access to some channels and requiring payment for others. For example, not providing a postage-free envelope can discourage the use of mail as a channel, while toll-free numbers can increase the use of telephone services. Providing free access to a channel is however not always possible. For instance, toll-free numbers are often not free if they are dialled from a mobile phone, of significance for Jobcentre Plus since OfTEL (2003) indicated that six per cent of the UK population and 15 per cent of unemployed people only owned a mobile phone.

Time can be used as an incentive or disincentive in two ways. Firstly, organisations can influence take-up by adjusting the hours at which a service is available. For instance, providing a telephone or Internet service that is available outside the opening hours of branches may convince certain customers to use non-face-to-face
channels. In Australia, government departments found that the use of their website indeed increased during out of office hours (DMW Consulting and NOIE, May 2003).

Secondly, the time needed to complete a transaction can be used or manipulated. For instance, the one public employment and benefits service chose not to address the long waiting times in offices. Instead, it used this to encourage take-up of Internet services. In the Netherlands, the Government used time incentives to encourage aspiring medical students to apply online. Students that used the online application would receive the result two days earlier than those who used the paper-based version.

Within the private sector, channel options are sometimes limited for certain customer groups. For instance in banking, social banking customers are only offered a basic bank account that can be used in a post office. Mass-market, middle, and affluent customers are offered different channels with varying degrees of personal contact and customisation.

Because a large part of the customer base of public employment and benefits services is a so-called captive audience, the technique of prescribing certain channels can theoretically be used. None of the interviewed public employment and benefits services currently employs this technique, but one interviewee noted:

‘Our Inland Revenue obliges people to fill in their tax return online. If the website turns out to be a very efficient channel and most people are able to use it, we might consider a similar measure.’

(Public employment and benefits service)

2.5.8 Address security concerns

Provide information

One private sector interviewee indicated they produced leaflets providing information about Internet safety features and the use of firewalls and other security-enhancing software. Informing customers about the security issues and providing them with accurate information about what they can do to increase safety, can take away unrealistic fears, whilst making customers vigilant with regards to real dangers.

Provide a guarantee

As one of the private sector interviewees indicated:

‘While in branches staff members are ultimately responsible, the Internet asks customers to take ultimate responsibility for their transactions. This is a scary thought for customers.’

(Private Sector)

The use of a guarantee can in part take away this fear, by shifting the final responsibility back to the organisation.
Guarantees are widely used in the private sector to decrease the influence of security concerns on channel choices. For example, most banks offer a zero liability guarantee on their online banking services. This means the customer will not be held responsible for any funds that are improperly removed from their account through online banking.

*Increase the security of the channel*

The security of a channel depends both on the location of access and the security problems associated with the technology.

A private sector interviewee indicated that the location of access is particularly important for transactions that require the customer to provide detailed personal information. The risk that someone will be able to listen in on the conversation or read the text on the screen will deter some customer from using a channel for such transactions. This problem can occur in face-to-face as well as non-face-to-face channels. An organisation can therefore use it to influence channel take-up by demonstrating how greater privacy can be achieved by not using face-to-face channels. For example, within current Jobcentre Plus offices, most face-to-face contact is set in an open plan environment unless explicitly requested to be otherwise. Using alternative channels may therefore increase customer privacy.

However, if a customer needs to access the telephone or Internet in a public location, this advantage may be diminished. For example, within libraries, computers are usually located in full view to avoid misuse. This reduces the sense of security and privacy associated with using the Internet channels.

Although one interviewee indicated some customers are concerned about the risk of someone listening in on their telephone conversation, security issues associated with technology tend to be greatest for Internet-based applications.

### Security issues: examples from Internet banking

Recently, incidences of Internet banking fraud have been increasing within the UK (The Evening Standard 09-11-2004). Criminals known as ‘phishers’ try to trick customers into disclosing personal, financial or security information, for instance through replica websites. In November 2004, an attack on NatWest forced the bank to suspend the ability to make third-party payments for more than two days. The move affected one million customers in total (Computer Weekly 23-11-2004).

Continued
The banking industry is considering several measures to increase security. These include:

- introducing anti-phishing toolbars for web browsers similar to those currently used by eBay;
- personalising e-mails by including customer names and an agreed code-phrase to help customers identify genuine e-mails from their bank;
- sending SMS messages to customers to confirm transactions;
- providing customers with pads of one-time user passwords;
- introducing software to detect suspicious transactions generated by phishing attacks;
- subscribing to services that monitor the Internet to detect websites that may be attempting to mimic real banking websites.

In the long term, the industry is looking to use two-factor authentication to verify customer identity. Barclaycard is already trialling a system based on low-cost card-readers to generate pass-codes from bankcards (Computer Weekly 23-11-2004).

An interviewee from a public employment and benefits service indicated that the organisation currently offers various online services, including job search facilities and student loan applications. To ensure the safety of the transaction, these services use authentication management systems, firewalls and Intrusion Detection Systems. The interviewee indicated that designing an appropriate authentication system was perceived as the main hurdle to e-enabling other transactions like benefit claims.

Within Canada, benefit claims are already e-enabled. The authentication system that is used for this application is a shared information or challenged response system. The customer is asked to name private facts like their Social Insurance Number a four-digit access code and the maiden name of their mother. This is similar to practice used in banking and other financial services.

Some of the transactions between Jobcentre Plus and its customers require a high level of security and the ability to check the identity of the customer and validity of the information supplied. E-enabling all these transactions would require a system that meets stringent authentication requirements. The following table summarises the range of methods in use.
Table 2.5  Authentication mechanisms\textsuperscript{6}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Key points</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Shared information or challenge/response system | Customers are asked to answer questions. The type of information asked for is either:  
  - Fixed data on file (e.g. date of birth)  
  - Variable (e.g. date and amount of last payment/receipt/claim)  
  - Specially designed shared secrets (where the customer is asked to provide a series of questions and answers to the agency)  
Risk levels: Minimal to moderate.  
Expected implications: customers will need to keep a record of information supplied and keep this secure.  
Examples of current applications: widely used call centres, also used in the application for an Australian Business Number and Canadian benefits claims. |
| Username/password            | Customers are asked to present a username and password. These passwords are valid only with one agency.  
Risk levels: Low to moderate – however it is becoming more widely used in higher risk applications, especially if it is used in conjunction with another authentication mechanism such as shared information.  
Expected implications: customers will need to keep a record of usernames/passwords and keep this secure.  
Examples of current applications: widely used on websites by, amongst others, retailers, travel companies, recruitment agencies. Also used for Internet banking applications in the UK. The Australian public employment service, Centrelink, applies this method for some of its transactions. |
| One-time passwords            | A one-time password is a system that generates unique and different passwords each time an application or service is accessed. It uses a hardware device to generate the unique password. Customers would pre-register and be issued with a username and the hardware device. When a user enters a website protected by a one-time password, they would be asked for the latest password displayed on the device. The agency would know which password is valid at that time for that user. The synchronized password would change periodically.  
Risk levels: Moderate to high.  
Expected implications: Customers will need to safeguard the hardware device and know how to use it. Costs can be high.  
Examples of current Government applications: Online banking in the Netherlands use this method. In Australia, Members of Parliament use one-time passwords. |

\textsuperscript{6} Based on: Australian Government Information Management Office (2004).
Table 2.5  Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Key points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Public Key Infrastructure (PKI)</td>
<td>PKI is a technology and set of procedures that enables users to authenticate their identity, and to securely and privately exchange information through the use of public key cryptography. Customers are issued with a public key, which everyone can see, and a private key, which encrypts a set of information to attest to the authenticity of the sender and the data integrity of the information sent. The customer sends information signed with their private key. The receiver verifies the message by checking the data with the customer's public key. If the message has been tampered with, or if a third party is trying to pose as the user, the receiver will not be able to read it nor validate the signature. Risk levels: Low to high, however PKI is currently used in mainly high risk transactions due to its current cost. Expected implications: Special software will be required and customers will have to undergo an evidence of identity exercise before keys and certificates are activated. Costs will vary. Examples of current applications: Used amongst others by the defence and pharmaceuticals industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biometrics</td>
<td>A representation of a fingerprint, hand, iris-scan or voice pattern is used to identify the user. Risk levels: Moderate to high. Expected implications: customers would need to be comfortable about registering their physical attributes and have trust in the security of this data. Examples of current applications: biometric iris recognition system for international air passengers and crew.</td>
</tr>
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2.6  Concluding remarks

Jobcentre Plus is currently exploring both wider use of the existing non-face-to-face channels and the opportunities for the adoption of a wider range of channels, in particular for specific transactions such as benefit applications and notification of changes to circumstances.

The literature review suggests a number of potential benefits associated with wider adoption of alternative channels and means whereby these can be realised, i.e. persuading customers to shift channels. In addition, the literature does flag up a number of risks specifically associated with technology (design and quality of service delivery), channel conflict and customer confusion, all of which result in under realisation of potential.

The diagram below provides a simplified schematic of the development of alternative channels in government taken from DMR Consulting and NOIE (April 2003). Whilst this was developed with regard to government as a whole it can also be used for
illustrative purposes for Jobcentre Plus. According to the authors, the development of alternative channels in government generally has four stages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Web presence</td>
<td>Access information Download forms E-mail logon</td>
<td>Transaction processing</td>
<td>Capability, leveraging experience and know-how to maximise value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Develop presence</td>
<td>- Re-orientate business/technology thinking skills</td>
<td>- Re-organise people/structures</td>
<td>- Customer-focused organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Develop technology capability</td>
<td>- Build integrated approach</td>
<td>- Re-engineer processes</td>
<td>- Content-centric products/services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- HV/SV transactions and ECAP</td>
<td>- Rm/Mod technology infrastructure</td>
<td>- ‘The new marketing’</td>
<td>- ‘The new marketing’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety gap</td>
<td>Organisational Capabilities gap</td>
<td>Value transformation gap</td>
<td>Equitable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of Jobcentre Plus, current progress appears to lie somewhere just beyond the first stage with aspiration to progress under the right circumstances. The organisation has established a web presence and has made significant investment in the past in technological capability (in partnership with a supplier). Currently there are various initiatives to improve access to information via the web and internally, for administrative purposes, to download various forms. In addition, the use of e-mail is now available for staff throughout the organisation, and there is some limited ability for clients to communicate with the organisation via e-mail and for employers to lodge their vacancies directly onto the Jobs Bank.

There is a view that there is scope for further investment and there are gains associated with a wider adoption of e-channels. But, that investment has to be clearly justified in terms of efficiency savings without compromise to service quality and access for clients. As the diagram suggests, there are a number of additional considerations for the organisation to take on board.

Between each progressive stage for government, the authors identify specific gaps that prevent migration to the next stage. The *anxiety gap* represents fears about conducting business more openly and developing the internal capability to deal with the security and skills issues that come with the introduction of e-channels. The *organisational capabilities gap* refers to the need for organisational learning to create the business and technological skills necessary for the introduction of online transactions. The *value transformation gap* refers to:

---

7 Source: DMR Consulting and NOIE (April 2003).
understanding the value proposition;

developing a framework of usage around life events;

developing means for cross-agency co-operation, governance and accountability;

addressing the legislative and ethical issues from shared delivery models.

The following broadly interprets these points in the context of Jobcentre Plus. The anxiety gap represents fears about conducting government business more openly and developing the internal capability to deal with the issues that come with the introduction of alternative channels. In the case of Jobcentre Plus, this could be seen to refer to very real concerns associated with the financial services dimension of their business, i.e. the accurate and timely payment of benefits to customers. This would involve the transfer of responsibility for applications from clerical processes undertaken by the organisation to the customers themselves, many of whom are the most vulnerable in society. However, private sector financial services and the Canadian employment and benefit services have managed to address some of the tensions between customer service, access and security concerns.

The organisational capabilities gap refers to the need for organisational learning to create the business process and technological skills necessary for the introduction of online transactions. In order for Jobcentre Plus to realise the potential advantages of transaction processing, especially efficiencies, the literature review suggests there will be a need for wider organisational change. For example, cost savings have generally only been realised in financial services when: the introduction of online services has been accompanied by changes to the branch network and service offer; staff buy into and actively promote changes in the belief that the service offer to clients is being enhanced; and staff and customers are equipped with the skills to work with and fully utilise the new service capabilities.

One of the features of current Jobcentre Plus business is the emphasis on audit processes and the limited exercise of discretionary powers (see the Monetary Value of Fraud (MVFE) and Business Delivery Targets (BDTs) and Key Management Indicators (KMIs). These processes have developed over time in response to the need to control and minimise fraud and error. Moving to the next stages of alternative channel adoption may require a re-consideration of some of these key limits and processes, alongside development of reassurances that accountability would not be compromised.

The value transformation gap refers to creating the capabilities associated with being a customer-focused organisation; with services designed with the customer not the organisation in mind and accessible through a seamless and equitable mix of channels. Bridging this gap requires a multi-faceted approach.

Understanding the value proposition – this applies both to the customer and the organisation. From the perspective of the customer, Jobcentre Plus will need to examine what the benefits of the proposed channel mix are to customers and make
sure these are communicated well. Two critical barriers to the use of alternative channels quoted in the literature were customer inertia, the current service delivery already meets customer needs; and, lack of knowledge of the benefits of shifting to a new channel, the ‘why should I do anything different’ question. The design, implementation, and communication of a channels strategy will have to be clearly articulated with the ultimate user in mind. Concomitantly, the literature suggests that segmenting the customer base is essential, in particular identifying the ‘value’ of the customer to the organisation. In the case of Jobcentre Plus, this is currently most closely reflected in the differential points system for job entries.

Developing a framework of usage around ‘life events’ – or in the case of Jobcentre Plus, specific transactions associated with the progression from worklessness to work. Here the mix of channels and their use can be associated with specific interactions with the organisation and associated transactions – i.e. new claims, job search, change of circumstances, Fortnightly Job Review (FJR)/Adviser interventions, job entry, and in-work benefits. For example, the banking experience suggests that the phone and the Internet are primarily used for information gathering and simple transactions, whilst the branches are preferred for sales. In Jobcentre Plus terms, the office network could be mainly used to support those most in need of assistance and in depth one-to-one guidance. The alternative channels would then be used to deliver services to those requiring least personal assistance (self-help options) and as a means to support the priority client group, for example through preparation for interviews by completing and sending through forms electronically or answering important queries such as ‘what is the progress on my claim’.

There is a need to balance cross-agency cooperation, governance and accountability. In the case of Jobcentre Plus, this would necessitate effective arrangements with Local Authorities Housing Benefit Offices, the CSA, possibly the Pensions Agency, and the Inland Revenue in order to offer an integrated alternative channels service to clients. There would no doubt be significant issues with regard to the read across of records, not least of which would be the extent to which electronic data sharing protocols are really achievable.

As a final point there may be the need for Jobcentre Plus to address legislative changes to fully deploy alternative channels, such as the current articulation of rights and responsibilities of customers, for example with regard to demonstrating ‘availability for work’. Or, more specifically, permitting government Internet based channels to use cookies to enable mass customisation.

To summarise, the literature suggests that the design of a channels strategy for Jobcentre Plus would need to encompass the interplay between client value to the organisation (degree of assistance required), transaction or event to be undertaken and the most appropriate (efficiency and effective) channel to be adopted. Ideally, the exercise will define which type of customer should use which channel for which transaction or part of a transaction.
The realisation of the potential benefits of such a channels strategy would be dependent upon:

- continuous investment in technology;
- re-engineering of business processes and audit processes;
- re-organisation of people and the office network;
- reconsideration of drivers within the organisation (the target structure) and accountability frameworks;
- development of effective frameworks and linkages for cross-government working.

Finally, within a private organisation, the cost/benefit analysis underpinning a channels strategy would only look at the costs and benefits for the organisation itself. A cost/benefit analysis in the public employment and benefits services however should not be as one-dimensional. It also needs to take into account the costs and benefits for the customer, the society, and the government as a whole. Table 2.6 offers a series of benefit criteria that Jobcentre Plus can use in determining the value in investing in a wider channels strategy.

**Table 2.6 Cost/benefit analysis alternative channels in public employment and benefits services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Benefit category</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Agency value</td>
<td>Agency cost&lt;br&gt;Agency efficiency&lt;br&gt;Agency revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customer financial value</td>
<td>User costs&lt;br&gt;User efficiency&lt;br&gt;User revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social economic value</td>
<td>User economic participation&lt;br&gt;Access to public employment and benefits service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Social worth</td>
<td>Employment outcomes&lt;br&gt;Benefits payments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Governance worth</td>
<td>Transparency&lt;br&gt;Accountability&lt;br&gt;Participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 Based on DMR Consulting and NOIE (April 2003).
3 Current and future take-up of alternative channels by Jobcentre Plus customers

3.1 Introduction

The initial driver for the development of alternative channels service delivery within Jobcentre Plus was customer service issues. Alternative channels are still in their initial stages of development with the main provision being job search. Jobcentre Plus wishes to increase take-up of current alternative channel service provision, prior to considering implementing new IT technology. Also, consideration needs to be given to the reduction in Jobcentre Plus funding, resulting in a greater need to develop use of alternative channels to ensure significant savings for the organisation. Following on from this, a decision to invest in alternative channel service delivery will be based on proof that such a shift in delivering client services will be supported and used by the clients themselves.

The Jobcentre Plus Strategy is currently in the process of reviewing the utilisation, costs and benefits of service delivery channels available to Jobcentre Plus individual customers. In order to inform this review, evidence is required from the individual customer’s perspective.

The Jobcentre Plus Analytical Division commissioned NOP Social & Political to undertake a programme of quantitative and qualitative research to increase understanding of Jobcentre Plus clients’ preferences and receptiveness to different channels of service provision and to explore if a business case exists to migrate resources over to alternative channel service delivery.
Jobcentre Plus currently provides the following alternative channels:

- Website – www.Jobcentreplus.org which provides a comprehensive job search database and basic information on benefits and programmes for customers.

- Jobpoints – interactive kiosks placed with local offices and a small number of external community locations (e.g. supermarkets) which provides a search engine for a national database of vacancies.

- Warm Phones – phones located within Jobcentre Plus offices for customers to contact Jobseeker Direct/First Contact Centres free of charge. Facility to allow phone calls to other telephone numbers under office manager’s discretion.

- Jobseeker Direct – contact centre network assisting jobseekers with vacancy details and job searching the Jobcentre Plus vacancy database.

- First Contact Call Centre – contact centre network assisting customers with new benefit claims.

### 3.1.1 Research objectives

The objectives of this research were to:

- explore and evaluate the scope for migrating service delivery from face-to-face contact to more cost effective channels;

- explore clients’ experiences of different service delivery channels;

- explore reasons why some clients are failing to use new channels of service delivery;

- identify ways in which clients can be encouraged to use new channels of service delivery;

- explore whether, and how, staff are directing clients away from face-to-face interaction;

- determine what proportion/type of clients have:
  - access to alternative and e-channels;
  - used alternative and e-channels;
  - not used alternative and e-channels.
3.2 Research method

3.2.1 Quantitative research

A questionnaire equivalent to a ten-minute interview was developed by NOP in consultation with Jobcentre Plus Analytical Division. The interviews were conducted using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) between 2 and 10 November 2004 in eight Jobcentre Plus offices in England and Wales:

- Ayrshire;
- Chester;
- Cornwall;
- Coventry;
- Derbyshire;
- Gateshead;
- Norfolk;
- South-East Wales.

The research areas were selected from Jobcentre Plus offices running the ‘integrated office model’. They were made up of both urban and rural offices and avoided districts that were already involved in research. Jobcentre Plus Analytical Division was responsible for getting agreement to take part from each of these offices in advance of fieldwork. Interviewers were instructed to contact the Jobcentre Plus offices in advance of their visit to check opening times and the best time for them to do their six hour shift. Interviewers were not given quotas but were asked to interview as many Jobcentre Plus clients aged 16 and over as possible during their time at the office. A total of 371 interviews were completed.

3.2.2 Interpretation of the data

NOP interviewed a sample of just 371 Jobcentre Plus clients out of a total population of 4.83 million claimants (DWP statistics, Nov 2004). It cannot be stated with certainty that the figures obtained reflect those collected if all claimants had been interviewed (the ‘true’ values). It is possible, however, to predict the variation between the sample results and the ‘true’ values from knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which such predictions can be made is usually chosen to be 95 per cent – that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value will fall within a specified range.

On this basis, responses to the questionnaire provide data with a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 5.1 percentage points at the 95 per cent level. In practice this means that where 50 per cent give a particular answer, the chances are 95 per cent that the ‘true’ value will fall within the range of plus or minus 5.1 per cent.
from the sample result. Table 3.1 shows the sampling error for the whole sample and key sub-groups different percentage answers

### Table 3.1 Sampling error

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>10% or 90%</th>
<th>30% or 70%</th>
<th>50%+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All respondents</strong></td>
<td>371</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45+</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The achieved sample was checked against the population of Income Support (IS)/Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA)/Incapacity Benefit (IB) clients in England and Wales. Table 3.2 compares findings from the NOP survey with those for the general population. It shows that the survey findings are broadly representative in terms of gender but that they over-represent younger clients and those claiming JSA. However, it could be argued that the survey achieves interviews with clients in receipt of a good spread of benefits and that the achieved sample is representative of those currently using Jobcentre Plus offices and that these are the very clients who are a key priority for the channels strategy.

In addition, when the ethnicity of the achieved sample is compared with census data, it shows that it is broadly representative, although it does rather over-represent white respondents.
Table 3.2  Sample comparisons with DWP statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>NOP survey findings</th>
<th>DWP statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (based on working age statistics)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of claimant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSA</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3  Comparisons with census data for ethnic origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic origin</th>
<th>NOP survey findings</th>
<th>Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-white</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.3  Qualitative research

Eight group discussions were carried out throughout the UK. All respondents were registered benefit claimants using Jobcentre Plus. A total of ten respondents were recruited to each focus group. In total, 45 respondents participated and attendance rates for each group are shown in the table below. Across the sample, 27 respondents were male and 18 female. Nineteen were aged under 35 and 26 were over 35. In each group, a minimum of two respondents were recruited on the basis that they had used the Jobcentre Plus website. The group discussions lasted 1½ hours each and were composed according to the table below:
Table 3.4  Discussion group composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group number</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Respondent age</th>
<th>Attendance rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>Over 35</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cornwall</td>
<td>Under 35</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>Over 35</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>North East</td>
<td>Under 35</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>Over 35</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Under 35</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>Over 35</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>Under 35</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All qualitative fieldwork took place between 2 November and 2 December 2004.

3.3  Main survey findings

3.3.1  Demographics

Six in ten (59 per cent) respondents were male, whilst 41 per cent were female. Three in ten (31 per cent) were aged 16-24, two in ten (22 per cent) 25-34, and a similar proportion (21 per cent) were aged 35-44. Sixteen per cent were aged between 45-54, one in ten (nine per cent) were 55-64 and just one per cent were over 65. The majority of respondents were White British (90 per cent), two per cent White Irish, and a further four per cent were from another white background. Just one per cent was of mixed White and Black Caribbean background, one per cent Indian and one per cent were Pakistani.

As the chart below shows, participants were most likely to be on JSA (51 per cent), with men significantly more likely to report this (65 per cent compared to 31 per cent of women). Sixteen per cent were on IS, women were more likely to be receiving this benefit (25 per cent) whilst just ten per cent of men were on IS. Six per cent of participants were on IB.
As the chart below shows, around half (48 per cent) of clients indicated that it takes them under 15 minutes to travel (one way) to the Jobcentre. Four in ten (38 per cent) reported that it took 15-30 minutes, 12 per cent 3-45 minutes, two per cent between 46 minutes and one hour and one per cent said it took over an hour.

**Figure 3.1** Sample composition by benefit type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jobseeker's Allowance</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Support</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other state benefit</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incapacity Benefit previously</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sickness and/or Invalidity Benefit</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other benefit for people with disabilities</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI retirement pension/Over 80 pension/Old person's pension</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No - none of these</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (371).

**Figure 3.2** Customers’ journey time to visit Jobcentre Plus office

- Under 15 minutes: 47%
- 15 - 30 minutes: 38%
- 31 - 45 minutes: 12%
- 46 minutes - one hour: 2%
- Over one hour: 1%

Base: All (371).
3.3.2 Experience of and attitude towards face-to-face service delivery

Across the qualitative sample, experiences of face-to-face contact with Jobcentre Plus staff were sometimes viewed negatively. The main reasons for this were as follows:

- face-to-face contact involved long and frequent queues, which caused frustration;
- clients often felt they were treated in a condescending manner by staff;
- there was a perception that staff did not always provide accurate and reliable information with regard to either benefits or jobs;
- face-to-face service was seen as lacking privacy;
- it was felt that information and advice was not always offered proactively by staff.

‘It’s depressing, you have to wait for so long, even to be seen, but if you’re late, they stop your money straight away.’

‘I prefer to use the machines, the staff look down on you.’

(North East, Under 35)

‘Sometimes, you’d think the money was coming out of their own pocket.’

(Scotland, Under 35)

There is a common view among respondents that Jobcentre Plus staff do not provide consistent and effective direction to alternative and e-channels. This may involve not telling clients about relevant alternative channels (e.g. Jobcentre Plus website) or not fully informing clients as to the functions of particular channels (e.g. what Warm Phones may be used for).

Nevertheless, clients identified a continuing need for face-to-face contact with Jobcentre Plus staff. Staff were seen as providing necessary practical support to many clients, particularly when filling in long and complex forms. Staff were also perceived to be an essential conduit for information about relevant services and played an important role in directing clients to relevant services.

‘They do tell you about all the benefits that you’re entitled to that you don’t know about.’

(Scotland, Under 35)

‘I had a very good adviser and he spent an hour and a half with me, filling in forms. You’re a person then, rather than a number.’

(East of England, Over 35)
Furthermore, interaction with Jobcentre Plus staff played an important role in the social routine of clients who felt isolated or vulnerable. Some clients admitted to developing quite strong relationships with staff members, particularly where they had consistent access to one adviser, and this relationship was seen as providing them with emotional support and reassurance during the job searching process.

‘There’s an adviser I go in and see every week and I can stop and have a chat with her about stuff. She’s very good and she’s helped me out a lot personally as well.’

(Cornwall, Under 35)

3.3.3 Awareness of alternative channels

Jobcentre Plus clients were first asked if they were aware of various ways to access Jobcentre Plus services. The chart below shows the findings.

Figure 3.3 Awareness of alternative channels (percentage aware)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Percentage aware</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Points</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm phones</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobseekers Direct</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobcentre Plus website</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (371) multi-code.

Awareness was highest for Jobpoints, with a large majority of nine in ten (92 per cent) reporting awareness. Men and 16-24 year olds were significantly more likely to be aware of Jobpoints (95 per cent and 97 per cent respectively) than women (88 per cent) and older respondents aged 25 and over (91 per cent). Around two-thirds (67 per cent) of the total sample were aware of Warm Phones. Again, men were more likely to report awareness, with, around seven in ten (72 per cent) reporting this, whilst only 59 per cent of women indicated the same. Sixty five percent were aware of Jobseeker Direct, as with the other services, awareness was highest amongst men (70 per cent compared to only 59 per cent of women).

Just over six out of ten (61 per cent) Jobcentre Plus clients had heard of the website www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk. There were no visible gender differences; however the 16-24 age group were more likely to report awareness (68 per cent), whilst only 54 per cent of those aged 45+ reported the same. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who currently have an email address were more likely to be aware of the website (77 per cent compared with just 48 per cent of those without an address).
Just over those aware of the website were asked how they first became aware of it. Just over two-fifths (41 per cent) of respondents who reported awareness of the Jobcentre Plus website said that staff or an adviser in the Jobcentre Plus office first made them aware of the service. Sixteen per cent reported that it was through a friend or word of mouth, 15 per cent through a poster or leaflet in a Jobcentre Plus office, and under one in ten (eight per cent) indicated that it was through a poster or leaflet in a different location.

A fifth of those aware of the website (20 per cent) reported that awareness was through ‘another’ source. Some of the sources mentioned include:

- social workers;
- Jobcentre Plus course;
- browsing on Internet;
- library;
- Connexions.

Those aware of Jobpoints were also asked how they first became aware of them. Over half (56 per cent) of those aware first saw them in the Jobcentre office, just over four in ten (42 per cent) indicated that staff in the Jobcentre Plus office/adviser told them. Just five per cent said it was through a friend or word of mouth. The 16-24 age group were more likely to indicate this (nine per cent), whilst only three per cent of their 25-44 year old counterparts said the same. Only two per cent of participants aware of Jobpoints mentioned a poster or leaflet, and the same proportion mentioned ‘other’ sources.

A small minority, four per cent, of Jobcentre Plus clients had not heard of any of the above-mentioned ways of accessing Jobcentre Plus Offices.

### 3.3.4 Use of Jobpoints

Perhaps not surprisingly, just over nine in ten (91 per cent) of those aware of Jobpoints have used them.

#### Number of times Jobpoints have been used

Two-thirds (66 per cent) of those who have used Jobpoints have used this service at least ten times. Over a third (37 per cent) of these high frequency users (10+) have Internet access at home, which is around the same proportion as for the whole sample. Interestingly, women are more likely to report low usage, with nine per cent indicating that they have only used Jobpoints once and another 17 per cent two-three times, (compared to only three per cent and seven per cent of men respectively). The table below summarises these findings:
Table 3.5  Number of times Jobpoints used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base: All who have used Jobpoints 311</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 times</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9 times</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+ times</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>6.07</td>
<td>6.39</td>
<td>5.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons for using a Jobpoint for the first time

Clients were most likely to say they first used Jobpoints instead of dealing with a member of staff or adviser in the local office because it was quicker (48 per cent). This was a particular incentive for men, with over half (53 per cent) indicating speed as a reason, whilst only 39 per cent of their female counterparts reported the same.

One in five (20 per cent) said they were first directed or advised by a member of staff, whilst 18 per cent were curious about what Jobpoints could do. Seventeen per cent first used this service because they prefer to do it themselves. A further 13 per cent said the queues were long. A fifth gave ‘other’ reasons.

Other reasons mentioned included:
- ‘Was easier to do it myself instead of with staff’;
- ‘Easier to access the jobs’;
- ‘To compare with what was on the internet’;
- ‘Don’t need to make appointment’.

Reasons for not using Jobpoints

Around one in five (22 per cent) of the 32 participants who have not used Jobpoints reported that they ‘don’t know how to use it’. The same proportion indicated that they are ‘not currently looking for a job’. Due to the very small sample size these findings should be treated with caution. Figure 3.4 shows these and all of the other answers given.

What would make clients more likely to use Jobpoints?

When those who have not used Jobpoints were asked what would make them more likely to use, one in six (16 per cent) mentioned they might use it if they were shown how to make best use of it, while clear usage instructions, training and less queuing were all mentioned by 13 per cent. Another 13 per cent (four respondents) gave ‘other’ reasons whilst the same proportion ‘don’t know’ what would make them
more likely to use. It is worth noting that nearly four in ten (12 respondents) said ‘nothing’ could make them more likely to use Jobpoints.

Figure 3.4 Reasons for non use of Jobpoints

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not currently looking for a job</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know how to use it</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer taking to an adviser/member of staff</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to search for jobs online</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know what you can use it for</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not like using interactive computer/screen</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queues too long</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All who have not used the Job Points (32).

**Jobpoints – qualitative findings**

All respondents to the qualitative stage had used Jobpoints. The vast majority had first used them spontaneously whilst visiting a Jobcentre Plus office. Jobpoints were seen as easy and intuitive to use, and most clients did not feel they needed to be directed to them or shown how to use them.

‘It’s much quicker now, you just touch the screen and get all the information.’
(North East, Under 35)

‘They’re easy, anyone could use them, they’re foolproof.’
(North West, Over 35)

Only a small minority had been directed to Jobpoints by Jobcentre Plus staff. These clients tended to be less experienced users/non-users of computers and other information and communication technology.

Positively, Jobpoints were perceived to be user-friendly and queue free. They also allowed respondents to undertake tailored job searches (i.e. by location, job type, etc.) and allowed clients to search for jobs under their own steam and with a certain amount of independence.

‘It’s hassle-free if you do it yourself. You don’t spend half an hour sitting there with them telling you about a job you’ve no interest in.’
(Scotland, Under 35)

Jobpoints were widely preferred to the old system of searching for jobs at the Jobcentre, when jobs were listed on cards attached to display boards.
‘It’s a lot easier with these touch screens, because you haven’t got loads of people mingling in front of the boards. It’s one person, one screen.’

(East of England, Over 35)

Jobpoints were also praised for offering a degree of privacy while searching for jobs.

However, Jobpoints were seen as having a number of drawbacks. In particular, they were criticised for not allowing clients to search and apply for jobs with complete independence, as full job/employer details could only be accessed via Jobcentre Plus staff.

‘It should just tell you where the job is and give you the phone number. Really, it should tell you all the information the adviser tells you there on the Jobpoint.’

(Scotland, Under 35)

Having to take Jobpoint printouts to Jobcentre Plus staff somewhat undermined the freedom from queues experienced when using Jobpoints. Clients stated that they would inevitably have to queue up after using a Jobpoint to retrieve the full details of the job they were interested in from a member of staff.

‘Normally, you would use the Jobpoint, get a printout and then go to someone and get more information. They have to tell you where to phone and give you an application form. Why can’t you do it all in one go on your own?’

(East Midlands, Over 35)

More skilled clients criticised Jobpoints for offering them a limited range of jobs (for instance, there was a perception that IT jobs were not made available on Jobpoints). It should be noted that these clients did not think it inappropriate for Jobcentre Plus to offer skilled jobs.

‘I’m a teacher and there isn’t a lot in the Jobcentre for me. Every time I go there, I have trouble finding jobs. So I tend to search on the Guardian website. In fact I start work in January.’

(West Midlands, Under 35)

Across the groups, these respondents tended to be older. They had been working for longer and acquired strong skills in their particular area. They were more IT-savvy than other respondents and also tended to be male. Furthermore, some commented that the jobs advertised on Jobpoints could be updated more frequently. There were also complaints that tailoring job searches to particular locations did not always work effectively, as jobs for a broader range of locations than requested were often displayed.

‘They throw up jobs that are miles away, or they’ve already gone.’

(East Midlands, Over 35)
3.3.5 Use of website

Over half (54 per cent) of those aware of the Jobcentre Plus website have used the site. Men were more likely to have used the website than women (62 per cent and 42 per cent respectively). Those with Internet access ‘now’ were more likely to report usage (73 per cent), compared to those with mobile phones or digital TV (both 59 per cent).

Number of times the website has been used

Clients who had used the Website were most likely to say they have used the website at least ten times (42 per cent). The chart below shows the detailed findings for this question.

Figure 3.5 Number of times website used (all website users)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of times</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 3 times</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 5 times</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 9 times</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+ times</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All who have used website (123).

Reasons for using the website for the first time

Over a third (37 per cent) first used the Jobcentre Plus website because it was quicker than dealing with a member of staff/adviser in the Jobcentre. A fifth (20 per cent) said curiosity about what the website could do influenced them. It is worth noting that 45 per cent gave ‘other’ reasons for using the website. Other reasons mentioned include:

- ‘Could access from home’;
- ‘Could not get to the Jobcentre’;
- ‘Can take your time’;
- ‘Gives a better range of jobs’;
- ‘Convenience’.
Due to the low sub-group bases, sub-group differences on this issue cannot be confidently reported. Figure 3.6 shows the detailed findings for this question. Interestingly, those using the website were also utilising other services, over half (55 per cent) were also using Jobpoints, and more than two in three (68 per cent) were using Jobseeker Direct and almost a half (49 per cent) were using Warm Phones.

**Figure 3.6 Reasons for using website rather than face-to-face interaction at Jobcentre Plus office**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This was quicker</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was curious about what it could do</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to do it myself using this than asking an adviser/member of staff</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was directed/advised by a member of staff to use it</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printouts are useful</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The queues were long</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All who have used website (123).

**Reasons for not using the website**

When those who have not used the Jobcentre Plus website were asked the reasons for this, lack of Internet access was given as the main reason for non-usage (59 per cent). A quarter (25 per cent) gave ‘other’ reasons. Other reasons mentioned included:

- ‘was not aware of it’;
- ‘just as convenient to come and use Jobpoints’;
- ‘Not interested in computers’;
- ‘Can’t read or write’;
- ‘I don’t have a computer’.

Figure 3.7 shows more detail of the findings for this question.
Figure 3.7 Reasons for non-use of website

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't have access to the Internet</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know how to use computers/need training</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know how to use websites/need training</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty getting on a computer (e.g., at library etc.)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t like using computers</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t like using websites</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t trust the web/Internet</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer talking to an advisor, member of staff in the office</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know what you can use it for</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All who have not used website (103).

What would make clients more likely to use the website

Just over a quarter (26 per cent) of those who have not used the website would be more likely to use it if it were available for use on a computer at the Jobcentre. A third (33 per cent) gave an ‘other’ reason. Around a quarter (23 per cent) said ‘nothing’ could make them more likely to use the website. ‘Other’ reasons mentioned include:

- ‘If I had a computer’;
- ‘If I was made aware of it’;
- ‘If I needed to look for a job’;
- ‘If I had access to the Internet’;
- ‘If it was advertised more’.

Figure 3.8 shows the detailed findings for this question.

Figure 3.8 Factors that would increase website use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If it were available to use on a computer at the Jobcentre</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By showing people how to make best use of it</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If it meant I didn’t have to travel to a Jobcentre Plus office</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By training people on how to use it</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear instructions on how to use it</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If it speeded things up</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If it provided other services (e.g., making appointments, online benefit applications)</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All who have not used website (103).
Interestingly there was a group of 12 people who said nothing could make them use Jobpoints or the website. Looking at this in terms of age, perhaps not surprisingly, there was only one person aged under 34 who would not use either the website or Jobpoints. Among the remainder, four were aged 35-44, five 45-54 year olds and two 55 and over. However, due to the very small base sizes, these findings should be treated with caution.

**Jobcentre Plus website – qualitative findings**

In contrast to the quantitative sample, all those in the qualitative focus groups who had used the Jobcentre Plus website had come to it via a speculative Internet search. No one had been directed to the website address by Jobcentre staff.

Prior to searching for the site, these clients had not seen any publicity for it and were not aware of the services it offered. They had simply assumed the Jobcentre had a website and had taken steps to investigate its content.

Searching for the website usually involved typing ‘Jobcentre’ or ‘Jobcentre Plus’ into a search engine and accessing the site from the resulting address page.

Users of the site had visited it to conduct job searches. No respondents mentioned using it for any other function.

It was found that the vast majority of users of the Jobcentre website in the qualitative focus groups had Internet access at home. These respondents were predominantly male, although age did not seem to have a bearing on use of the site. There was evidence that those from lower socio-economic groups were less likely to have Internet access at home and therefore less likely to have visited the site.

For those with Internet access at home, the site was viewed very positively. It was seen as:

- easy to use;
- convenient (removing the necessity for visiting Jobcentre Plus physically);
- providing clients with greater independence in their job search.

> ‘Personally, I find it better to go on-line. It’s less hassle. That’s the way to go.’

(East Midlands, Over 35)

Nevertheless, for those without Internet access at home, visiting Jobcentre Plus in person was seen as preferable and more convenient to using the site. Primarily, this was because:

- it was just as easy to get to Jobcentre Plus as it was to visit an Internet café/public library;
- there was a cost/time restriction involved in using the Internet at an Internet café and at some public libraries;
- the lack of privacy offered by libraries/Internet cafés was off-putting.
There were indications that those currently without Internet access at home would be open to using the site if they obtained home access in the future. This inclination was somewhat reduced where respondents had little previous experience of using the Internet (e.g. at a library).

‘I haven’t got access to my own computer, but if I did, I would use the website I think. On the web it would be more immediate, there would be no waiting.’

(North East, Under 35)

Only one or two respondents across the qualitative groups stated that they would consider using the Jobcentre Plus website at a friend’s or relative’s house. Most often, this was because:

- time was restricted;
- using the Jobcentre website was not a very social activity;
- respondents wanted more privacy when conducting job searches, etc.

There were requests for computers to be made available in Jobcentres, so that clients without access to the Internet at home might make use of the website while visiting Jobcentre Plus.

The site was seen as having a significant drawback for those with Internet access at home. Users did not feel that the site gave them enough independence in their job search. They expressed dissatisfaction at having to phone Jobseeker Direct or visit a Jobcentre Plus office to retrieve the full details of a job they had found on the site. Many wondered why this information could not be included on the website.

### 3.3.6 Use of Warm Phones and Jobseeker Direct

Almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of those aware of Jobseeker Direct have used this service and over two-thirds (68 per cent) of those aware of Warm Phones indicate that they have used the service. There were no significant differences found within sub-groups for Warm Phones and Jobseeker Direct.

**Warm Phones**

Although awareness is quite high, the qualitative findings show clear evidence of confusion amongst clients as to the exact function of Warm Phones. This is a result of two factors:

- variation in functionality between Jobcentres (e.g. while some Jobcentre Plus offices allow Warm Phones to be used only for calls to Jobseeker Direct and First Contact, some do not appear to put any restrictions on their use);
- lack of clear signposting as to what Warm Phones may be used for in many Jobcentres.
‘No one actually tells you what to do. That’s why I don’t know about Warm Phones. No one actually tells you what’s available through them.’

(East Midlands, Over 35)

It was apparent that confusion as to the function of Warm Phones deterred many clients from using them. Clients were wary of making inappropriate/unauthorised calls using Warm Phones.

Clients did report instances of Warm Phones being abused. These included:

- Warm Phones being used by people to call their friends/family;
- Warm Phones being used by people to arrange for someone to collect them from the Jobcentre.

In relation to this, instances of staff refusing access to Warm Phones or accompanying respondents to Warm Phones to prevent their abuse were described.

There was a widespread perception that Warm Phones lacked privacy. Clients complained that their personal conversations about benefits and employment could be overheard by people using neighbouring phones. This had discouraged some respondents from using Warm Phones.

Positively, Warm Phones were seen as being particularly useful where clients did not have a phone at home. They were also praised for offering free access to Jobseeker Direct.

‘You can use the phones to call prospective employers. They’re a good idea. It saves you spending money, or if you don’t have a phone at home. And you don’t have to wait in a queue for them.’

(North East, Under 35)

There was evidence that Warm Phones were particularly attractive to younger Jobcentre Plus clients who lived with their parents or in shared accommodation. In these circumstances, Warm Phones could offer greater privacy than clients received at home.

It is evident that clearer signposting of Warm Phones in Jobcentre Plus could dispel confusion as to their function, reduce instances of abuse and encourage an overall increase in use by clients.

**Jobseeker Direct**

The Jobseeker Direct service is well regarded by those who currently use it. It is perceived as a convenient service that allows clients to access Jobcentre Plus advisers without having to visit a Jobcentre Plus in person.

‘It’s very easy to use and you can call it from home instead of going into town.’

(East of England, Over 35)
Jobseeker Direct appeared to be used most frequently amongst younger respondents (under 35) in the qualitative sample. They appeared to prefer the ‘anonymity’ offered by the service, which is seen as offering advantages over face-to-face contact by many, particularly when dealing with difficult or personal matters.

Many younger respondents also felt that Jobseeker Direct advisers were easier to talk to and less patronising than advisers in the Jobcentre itself.

‘It’s just the same as speaking to an adviser, except they’re better. They’re a bit less patronising!’

(North East, Under 35)

In contrast, older respondents (over 35) often found the service rather impersonal and unfriendly. They preferred speaking to advisers face-to-face.

However, there was a common perception amongst respondents that calls to Jobseeker Direct are paid for at a premium rate. Many respondents claimed that this had discouraged them from using the service.

Furthermore, for those respondents more dependent on adviser support and encouragement, Jobseeker Direct is seen as lacking the emotional support and ‘personal touch’ provided by face-to-face contact.

It was apparent throughout the qualitative groups that more could be done to publicise Jobseeker Direct. The majority of respondents could not recall any publicity material (e.g. leaflets or posters) for the service and few claimed to have been directed to Jobseeker Direct by Jobcentre Plus staff.

### 3.3.7 Overall use of services

In order to get an insight into the combined use of the website, Jobpoints, Jobseeker Direct and Warm Phones, the data has been analysed to show the proportion of respondents using none, one, two, three and four of these services. The findings are summarized below:

- one in ten (ten per cent) do not use any of these services;
- just over one in five (22 per cent) were using just one service;
- exactly three in ten (30 per cent) use two services;
- around the same proportion (29 per cent) use three services;
- one in ten use all four services.

It is also interesting to see how these services are being used. As Table 6 illustrates, website users are most likely to have used all four services (27 per cent), while Jobpoints users are least likely to have used all four services (11 per cent). In addition, users of Jobpoints are more likely to have only ever used this one service (21 per cent).
Table 3.6   Use of services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base: All</th>
<th>Ever used:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t use any</td>
<td>10 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses 1</td>
<td>22 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses 2</td>
<td>30 31 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses 3</td>
<td>29 39 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses 4</td>
<td>9 27 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.8 Improving alternative channels

A number of improvements to the range of existing alternative channels were identified during the qualitative focus groups. These are identified in table 3.7 below. Table 3.7 also describes the expected client outcome resulting from the improvement identified.

Table 3.7   Improvements and outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jobpoints</td>
<td>• Provide full employer/job details on screen/via printout</td>
<td>• Quicker more efficient access to information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Greater independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm Phones</td>
<td>• Provide privacy and clearer signposting in Jobcentre Plus</td>
<td>• Encourage use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Raise awareness of functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobseeker Direct</td>
<td>• Increase publicity</td>
<td>• Encourage use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Increase convenience and flexibility of job search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>• Increase publicity</td>
<td>• Increase awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilitate access in Jobcentre Plus</td>
<td>• Facilitate use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Increase convenience and flexibility of job search</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident that clients would like to see more done to increase awareness of alternative and e-channels, particularly with regard to Warm Phones, Jobseeker Direct and the Jobcentre Plus Website.

‘When you sign on, they should give you a leaflet telling you about all these services.’

(Scotland, Under 35)

While awareness of Jobpoints is very high, clients would like a greater degree of independence in using this channel, through provision of full employer and job details on the screen/via a printout.
**Migrating services**

Respondents were given a number of tasks or activities they may need to do in connection with Jobcentre Plus. For each task they indicated whether they would be willing to do it online using a website and using an interactive machine similar to Jobpoints.

**Website**

The overall findings for respondents’ willingness to use the website are shown in Table 3.8. However, there are some very clear differences between the levels of enthusiasm of respondents aged 16-44 and those aged 45 and over. For every task or activity except new claims for benefit, those aged 16-44 expressed a higher level of willingness to use the website. For new claims for benefit, it was the 25-44 age group alone who were more likely to indicate that they would be willing to use the website.

**Interactive machines (similar to Jobpoints)**

Figure 3.9 summarises respondents’ attitudes to using an interactive machine for a range of tasks and activities. Sub-group differences were less widespread than for the website, however, for Fortnightly Job Reviews (FJRs), there were notable differences between the 25-44 and the 45+ age groups, with the younger group more willing to use the service (74 per cent compared to 62 per cent). In addition, for new claims for benefits, those aged 25-44 were more willing to use this service than those aged 45+ (70 per cent and 56 per cent respectively). The chart below illustrates willingness to do tasks using a website and Jobpoints.

**Figure 3.9  Willingness to do tasks on interactive machine or website (combined chart)**

![Willingness to do tasks on interactive machine or website (combined chart)]
Migrating services – qualitative findings

Although there was little resistance to the idea of migrating services from face-to-face to alternative and e-channels, there were significant practical barriers to clients using migrated services in practice. The following barriers were identified during the qualitative stage of this research:

- alternative channels becoming more complex/less user-friendly;
- clients having insufficient IT skills to use them effectively;
- clients not having access to personal computers at home (this only applies to the Jobcentre Plus website).

Many clients had less advanced IT skills. They ranged across both younger and older/male and female segments but, typically, these respondents had lower levels of educational achievement and had never been involved in any kind of educational course involving IT. They were less likely to have computers at home.

For these clients, the prospect of alternative channels (particularly Jobpoints) becoming more complex is particularly daunting. While the vast majority found Jobpoints intuitive and very easy to use, there were clear indications across the groups that if they became more complicated (e.g. if a computer keyboard was required to operate them), clients could be deterred from using them.

‘They could show us how to use computers, but I’ve heard about IT courses, and after a while you just get completely fed up, so I’m not sure I’d want to bother with it.’

(Scotland, Under 35)

Many were sceptical of how effective the process of completing forms on-line (e.g. benefit claims) would be. Most respondents found Jobcentre Plus forms long and difficult to complete and were resistant to the idea of filling these in on-line without assistance, for fear of making mistakes in their claim.

‘Forms are something where you have to know what you’re doing, what you’re looking for. You’d have to see an adviser for that.’

(North East, Under 35)

It should be noted that if the migration of services to alternative channels results in existing channels becoming more complicated, clients may be discouraged from using them and instead resort to face-to-face contact with staff, perceiving this as the ‘easy option’.

Amongst those unfamiliar with putting their personal information on-line (e.g. via on-line shopping/on-line banking) there was concern about how secure their data would be. Some were resistant to putting their National Insurance Number on-line, due to concerns about ID theft/Internet fraud.
‘I don’t shop on-line with a credit card and I won’t put my personal information on there.’

(East of England, Over 35)

It was often older respondents who were most concerned about issues of Internet privacy. Older respondents were less likely to have purchased goods or services over the Internet and were therefore less familiar with entering their data on-line.

However, a number of benefits were identified. These included:

- increased independence when claiming benefits/searching for jobs;
- less need to visit Jobcentre Plus;
- quicker, more efficient and more flexible access to information;
- fewer queues to see staff face-to-face.

‘This would free up the staff so there wouldn’t be that massive a queue.’

‘They could have a questionnaire on the website: what age you are, how many kids you have and it would tell you whether you’re entitled to more benefits.’

(Scotland, Under 35)

Across the qualitative sample, services many clients were particularly eager to see migrated to alternative channels included the following:

- applying for jobs via the website/Jobpoint;
- checking their account status on-line/via Jobpoints;
- putting their CV on-line.

‘They could give you direct forms on the Jobpoint. You could just pick up the application form and cut out Jobseeker Direct.’

(North East, Under 35)

‘It would be a lot easier to check your account balance on-line. You wouldn’t have to wait half the day to just find out what’s going on with your money.’

(East Midlands, Over 35)

3.3.9 Current and future use of technology

Clients were asked to indicate whether they had Internet access, mobile phones, digital TV and other devices now, or were likely to have use of these in 12 months time or neither.
Internet access

Overall, three in five (60 per cent) of participants reported that they have some form of Internet access ‘now’. The table 3.8 shows where this access is currently and is likely to be in the next 12 months. Almost four in ten (39 per cent) currently have Internet access at home. Around one in ten (nine per cent) reported that they were likely to have access in the next 12 months, with the 25-44 year age group more likely to report this than those aged 45+ (13 per cent and four per cent respectively).

Table 3.8 Which of the following do you have now, or are likely to have in the next 12 months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base: All</th>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Now %</th>
<th>In 12 months %</th>
<th>Neither %</th>
<th>Don’t know about future %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet access</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At library</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At friends’ house (that you can use regularly)</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Internet café</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At work</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At other location</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *small base

Just over a fifth (21 per cent) have access at a library ‘now’ with younger respondents (aged 16-24) more likely to report this (29 per cent compared to just 12 per cent of those aged 45+). Seven in ten (70 per cent) do not have access ‘now’ and think they are unlikely to have access in the next 12 months; the 45+ age group was most likely to report this. Just six per cent have access at an Internet café ‘now’; respondents aged 44 or under were more likely to be currently using them.

Interestingly this study’s findings on Internet access are in line with those from NOP’S Internet User Profile Survey. It shows that usage is highest amongst younger respondents, particularly those aged 15-24; access is also quite high amongst the 25-44 age group, then decreases amongst those aged 45-54, and perhaps unsurprisingly is lowest amongst those aged 55+. The table below illustrates the findings of the NOP User Profile Survey.
Table 3.9  NOP’s Internet user profile survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Percentage of those with access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-17 year-olds</td>
<td>1.6 million</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24 year-olds</td>
<td>4.6 million</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34 year-olds</td>
<td>8.8 million</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44 year-olds</td>
<td>8.3 million</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54 year-olds</td>
<td>7.4 million</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+ year-olds</td>
<td>15 million</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on all GB adults, taken from NOP’s Internet User Profile Survey (June 04).

Mobile phone/device

Overall, more than three-quarters (77 per cent) of Jobcentre Plus clients reported that they have a mobile phone now. Seventy seven per cent have a mobile phone with SMS ‘now’, younger respondents (16-24) were more likely to have this service (84 per cent compared to 66 per cent of those aged 45+). Just over seven in ten (71 per cent), currently have a mobile phone with voicemail, women were significantly more likely to have access (78 per cent compared to 66 per cent of men). Younger respondents (16-24) were also more likely to have a mobile phone with voicemail (80 per cent compared to 60 per cent of those aged 45+).

Over a third (34 per cent) currently have a mobile phone with MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service). Twenty-five to forty-four year olds and particularly the 16-24 year olds were more likely to say they have this service (36 per cent and 51 per cent respectively) whilst just 12 per cent of those aged 45+ reported that they currently have this service. Five per cent of participants indicated that they were likely to have this service in 12 months time (compared with no respondents aged 45+). One in ten (nine per cent) currently have a mobile phone with video phone. Again younger respondents were more likely to say that they have the service now (14 per cent of 16-24 year olds). Six per cent said they are likely to have this in 12 months time, with the 16-24 age group significantly more likely to report this.

Table 3.10 below shows the detailed findings for this question.
Table 3.10  Which of the following do you have now, or are you likely to have in the next 12 months (Mobile phones)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Now %</th>
<th>In 12 months %</th>
<th>Neither %</th>
<th>Don’t know about future %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With SMS (i.e. text messaging)</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With voicemail</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With MMS (Multimedia Messaging Services – i.e. photo/picture messaging) – with email</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video phone (i.e. 3G)</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Digital TV

Two in ten (20 per cent) have Sky Digital ‘now’, with younger respondents (16-24) significantly more likely to have this service (30 per cent compared to 18 per cent of 25-44 year olds and 13 per cent of those aged 45+). A further four per cent are likely to have it in 12 months. Table 3.11 shows the detailed findings for this question.

Table 3.11  Which of the following do you have now, or are you likely to have in the next 12 months (Digital TV)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Now %</th>
<th>In 12 months %</th>
<th>Neither %</th>
<th>Don’t know about future %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digital television</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky Digital</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeview only</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cable</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other devices

Just one per cent reported that they have a Palm device ‘now’, two per cent a pocket PC and one in ten (ten per cent) a text phone.
3.3.10  Overall use of technology

In order to look at Jobcentre Plus clients’ current overall use of technology, i.e. internet, mobile phone and digital TV, the data has been analysed to show the proportion using none of them, as well as those using one, two, three and four of them:

- one in ten (ten per cent) are not currently using any;
- almost a quarter (24 per cent) of respondents indicated that they only use one;
- over a third (36 per cent) are currently using two;
- three in ten (30 per cent) are using three.

Internet and digital TV users are more likely to be multiple users of technology than those with mobile phones.

When the data is analysed by type of benefit, the findings for those on JSA tend to reflect those for the total sample of Jobcentre Plus clients. Ten per cent do not use any of the technologies (internet, mobile or digital TV). A quarter (25 per cent), use one channel, nearly four out of ten (38 per cent) use two and fewer than three in ten (27 per cent) use three. However, when looking at the findings for those on IS, the proportion who do not use any of these types of technology rises to 24 per cent, while 34 per cent use one, 20 per cent use two and 22 per cent use three.

3.3.11  E-mail

As the chart below shows, over a third (37 per cent) of Jobcentre Plus clients have an email address. The 16-24 year olds were more likely to say they had an email address (45 per cent, compared to only 28 per cent of those aged 45+). Over half (56 per cent) of those who have an email address reported that they check it most days. Figure 3.10 shows the detailed findings for this question.
Figure 3.10 Frequency of checking email

- Do not check on a regular basis: 13%
- Check at least once a fortnight: 4%
- Check at least once a week: 26%
- Check most days: 56%
- No/Never: 2%

Base: All who have an email address (136).

Likelihood of having an email address in the next 12 months

Those who have reported that they do not have an email address were asked if they are likely to have one in the next 12 months. Figure 3.11 shows the findings.
3.3.12 Encouraging use of alternative channels

Throughout the group discussions, it was clear that different Jobcentre Plus client groups had different service delivery needs. The qualitative research identified four broad categories of Jobcentre Plus client, in relation to their use of and attitudes towards alternative and e-channels. These are identified in the diagram below.

**Figure 3.11 Are you likely to have an email address in the next 12 months?**

- **No** 81%
- **Don’t know** 8%
- **Yes** 2%

Base: All who do not have an email address (235).
Each of these groups had different needs with regard to accessing and using technology, due to the length of time they have been unemployed/their varying degrees of tech-literacy. Different methods may be required to encourage each group to use alternative channels more extensively.

The next diagram demonstrates the most appropriate methodology for encouraging each of these groups to use alternative channels more extensively. It can be seen that the more tech-literate \((\text{Skilled, self-sufficient/Young, less-motivated})\) will require less encouragement to take-up alternative channels. These groups are more likely to be early adopters of any migrated services.

However, the less tech-literate \((\text{Older, highly dependent/Motivated, less tech-literate})\) will require much greater support, encouragement and help in order to feel comfortable using alternative channels and are more likely to take a cautious approach to newly migrated services.
3.4 Conclusions

It is important to stress that the findings of this survey are based on just 371 claimants out of a total population of 4.83 million, providing data with a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 5.1 percentage points at the 95 per cent level. These conclusions should be read with this in mind.

- Awareness of Jobpoints is very high. Although fewer clients were aware of the website, Warm Phones and Jobseeker Direct, there are still around three in five clients who have heard of them. This is a strong base from which to encourage clients to migrate to alternative and e-channels.

- The findings show that only two in five clients were directed towards using Jobpoints and the website by staff or advisers in the Jobcentre Plus office. Staff could therefore be given further encouragement and information so that a greater proportion of them direct clients to alternative and e-channels.

- Reducing the amount of time spent at the Jobcentre Plus office is important for many clients, while being able to complete tasks and activities without dealing with a member of staff or adviser is important for others. It is likely that clients could be encouraged to use alternative channels by focusing on these two key advantages.
• However, for some clients, contact with Jobcentre Plus staff is essential. They provide necessary help and advice, direction to relevant benefits and services and provide practical assistance with form filling.

• There is generally a greater willingness to use interactive machines rather than the website for a range of Jobcentre Plus tasks and activities. This was probably because clients are currently more used to using interactive machine and are less likely to have used a website. On this basis, it would seem that currently the easiest way to increase use of alternative channels is via interactive machines rather than the website.

• There are very clear barriers to accessing the Jobcentre Plus website amongst those without home Internet access. Where clients cannot access the site from their own home, they are unlikely to do so from another location (e.g. a library).

• However, use of the website could be increased if it were made available at the Jobcentre Plus office. This would have to be accompanied by instructions for use and staff would need to be on hand to provide assistance for some clients on how to access the site, how to use it and to demonstrate its functions.

• There is a core group of one in ten clients who do not currently use any alternative and e-channels. A similar proportion of clients do not currently use computers or mobile phones. These clients pose the greatest challenge with regard to encouraging use of alternative and e-channels. They are likely to require a high level of guidance and training before they feel confident in doing so.

• A key objective of the research was to establish the alternative channels through which Jobcentre Plus could connect with their clients.

• It would appear that email and/or the Internet is an option for around half of clients. Around a half (48 per cent) either have the Internet at home or have an e-mail address now or will have in the next 12 months. Further encouragement for a move to e-mail contact is that over four-fifths (82 per cent) of current email account holders check their mail at least once a week.

• It would also seem that mobile phones could be used as a way of linking with clients in the future. Four in five (80 per cent) currently have a mobile phone with SMS ‘now’, or will have in the next 12 months and almost two in five (39 per cent) have a mobile phone with MMS ‘now’, or will have in the next 12 months.
4 Experiences and views of Jobcentre Plus staff

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Background to the research

The introduction of Contact Centres, Jobpoints and the Jobcentre Plus website has changed the way in which Jobcentre Plus interacts with individual customers. The new channels of service delivery aim to provide cost effective ways of increasing accessibility to Jobcentre Plus services. However, there has been a relatively poor take-up of the current alternative channels, and information technology budget cuts have meant that new technologies have been cancelled or delayed. As a result, future investment into alternative channels will only occur where efficiency savings presents a business case. In order to move forward in this area, there is a concern to explore staff views and experiences of promoting and encouraging customers’ use of alternative service delivery channels.

4.1.2 Jobcentre Plus delivery channels

The main alternative channels that are currently available in the delivery of Jobcentre services are First Contact Centres, Jobseeker’s Direct Contact Centres, Jobpoints and the Jobcentre Plus and Worktrain websites.

First Contact Centres

First Contact Centres provide a first point of contact for customers who need to make new benefits claims, as well as arranging appointments with the local office to process the claim. Customers can access Contact Centres either through using ‘Warm Phones’ located in local offices – which are free of charge, or by using their own phones, whereby they are charged at local rates.
Jobseekers Direct Contact Centres
These provide the Jobseekers Direct (JSD) service and offer information and advice to customers on the latest job vacancies and how they can apply for them. Customers can call via their own phones or ‘Warm Phones’ in the local office. JSD staff can, wherever appropriate, contact employers directly to arrange interviews for customers.

Jobpoints
Jobpoints are touch screen terminals that are located primarily in local Jobcentre Plus offices, but also in community outlets: there is no charge for using them. They allow customers to search for job vacancies – differentiating type of employment and area. They provide customers with the relevant information and details about a vacancy once they have entered their search criteria including the job title, the job reference number, hours of work, location of work, wage and brief description of what the job entails, the requirements of the position and related criteria. This information can be printed out by customers and Apply Direct vacancies include the employers contact details so that customers can make direct contact.

Future alternative channel plans
In terms of future alternative channel services, the first phase of the introduction of on-line benefit applications is planned for autumn 2005. Open access internet computers are being piloted in around 30 Jobcentre Plus offices during spring 2005. Pilots are also being conducted with regard to text messaging to customers and job search by digital TV. The future of these pilots is yet to be agreed.

Internet websites
The Jobcentre Plus website provides information for customers on benefits for those of working age, training, employment opportunities and what you need to apply for vacancies. Worktrain also provides information on jobs, careers, childcare and voluntary work. Both websites allow customers to search the job database (Job Bank) for work by type and by area and enables customers to save and access suitable vacancies at a later date. The websites provide a 24-hour service – there is currently no access to the Internet in local Jobcentre Plus offices.

4.1.3 Research aims and objectives
Given the rationale and scope of the research the main aims were:
• to explore staff views of current and potential alternative channel delivery now and in the future
• to explore how staff members currently direct customers to alternative service delivery channels
• to explore how improvements can be made in the ways staff direct customers to these channels now and in the future.
The objectives of the research were to:

- explore staff experiences of promoting new channels of service delivery
- ascertain if staff are encouraging the most appropriate customers (such as those that are nearest to the labour market) to use alternative channels
- explore the main barriers that staff feel customers face in using new channels of service delivery
- explore the main barriers that staff face in directing customers to use new channels of service delivery
- identify lessons of good practice that can be shared across the organisations in terms of encouraging use of alternative channels
- establish how management can better support the field and providers in encouraging the use of alternative channels of service delivery
- explore the key areas of functionality that staff feel could be delivered via alternative channels
- explore with staff how new functionality of alternative channels might be received by customers
- explore with staff the use of new ways of encouraging customers to use alternative channels such as incentives e.g. reduced waiting times for claims, flexible appointments etc.
- explore with staff the use of new ways of developing incentives for staff to encourage customers to use alternative channels, such as changes to target regimes.

4.1.4 Research methodology

The research was conducted in two phases. The initial phase was conducted through desk-based research and liaison with the analytical division at Jobcentre Plus. It sought to establish accurate information and build knowledge on:

- the types of information provided and the use of alternative channels by Jobcentre Plus
- target audience
- training provided for staff
- links between front-line and alternative channel delivery
- regional/district variations – successes and problems.

The second phase of the research aimed to build on the background information and develop an in-depth analysis of the key issues related to alternative channel development. In order to do this a qualitative approach was taken consisting of ‘focus groups’ with front-line staff in Jobcentre Plus offices, Contact Centres and
Processing Centres. In addition to this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a Business Manager from a Jobcentre Plus office in each of the districts\(^9\) and with the Contact Centre Managers where appropriate, from each of the Contact Centres visited.

Research subjects were selected to ensure a full range of staff involved in delivery with a responsibility for, or close to, front-line services. The district-wide focus groups included a selection of the following staff drawn from a variety of Jobcentre Plus offices within the district: First Contact Officer; Financial Assessor; Floor Walker; Fortnightly Jobseekers Reviewer; Enquiries Adviser; New Deal Lone Parents Adviser; New Deal Young Person Adviser; Personal Adviser; Receptionist; Disability Employment Adviser; Specialist IB Adviser; Adviser Manager.

The focus groups for the Contact Centres also consisted of a selection of frontline staff and included the following mix: First Contact Officer; First Contact Team Leader; Jobseeker Direct Adviser; Jobseeker Direct Team Leader; Administration Team Leader; Forecasting and Schedule Officer; First Contact Administration. Within the Processing Centres, job roles were necessarily more limited given their central function and thus the focus groups were mainly made up of a general mix of those processing the following claims: Jobseeker’s Allowance; Income Support; Incapacity Benefit.

The Jobcentre Plus districts were selected, in the first instance, to meet the need to explore delivery within integrated offices. They were also based on the districts available and, where possible, attempts were made to ensure a good geographical spread and include sites with different characteristics in terms of customer base and urban/rural locations. Research was also undertaken in three Contact Centres and two Processing Centres. The two Processing Centres were selected from the three large newer-style Processing Centres, which reflect the move towards a more efficient national model (Glasgow, Makerfield and Belfast).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Offices</th>
<th>Contact Centres</th>
<th>Processing Centres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders</td>
<td>Paisley</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>Middlesbrough</td>
<td>Makerfield (Wigan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancashire West</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham and Solihull</td>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wakefield</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^9\) A Business Manager interview was not possible in one District due to lack of availability.
4.2 Current alternative channels

4.2.1 Impact of job role in promoting alternative channels

The promotion of alternative channels in local offices is somewhat dependent on job role – although the majority of staff is prompted to encourage and promote them. Indeed there is recognition by staff that local offices are now designed to promote the current alternative channels. On a general level Floor Managers are at the very forefront of encouraging customers to utilise Jobpoints and the Warm Phones – and they also inform the customer about the Jobcentre Plus website and point them to public resources where they can access the website if they do not have access at home.

Other frontline staff (New Claims, Fortnightly Jobseeker Reviewer) also encourage the use of alternative channels verbally and, in some districts, with ancillary information available to customers in the form of leaflets and personalised cards with alternative channel contact details (website address, telephone numbers). Staff based at the ‘back of office’ – or at the back end of the process in local offices, such as the financial assessor or personal adviser – are less likely to be at the forefront of promoting alternative channels proactively – as are those dealing with the harder-to-help customers such as incapacity benefit advisers and lone parent advisers.

There are of course differences in how individuals in local offices embrace the promotion of alternative channels in their different roles. The reasons for this will be explored in more detail in Section 4.x.

4.2.2 The utility of alternative channels

Jobpoints – positives

Most staff across the districts expressed the opinion that there are advantages to having Jobpoints in the local offices. Staff can help customers familiarise themselves with how to use the Jobpoints and what benefits it has to them. The views of the staff were generally reinforced by Business Managers:

‘In my view from a staff point of view it is more efficient to have Jobpoints…from a customer point of view they know all jobs are on the Jobpoints’.

Most Business Managers offered positive opinions about Jobpoints, although certain managers remarked that there is a problem with categorisation of jobs – and that customers often need to be guided to find suitable vacancies. A perception exists that vacancies are categorised for monitoring and statistical purposes rather than how a customer would expect them to be logically – which can be a problem.

Business Managers across the districts are of the opinion that moving to alternative channels such as Jobpoints and JSD Contact Centres has saved staff time and resources. There is also positive feedback to managers from staff – with much praise from customers about the Jobpoints – in particular the customers who do not feel that they need to interact with staff. The same customers are also very positive about having access to the ‘Jobcentre Warehouse’. As frontline staff noted:
‘Feedback from customers is mixed…but most people now seem to enjoy them and like using them’.

**Jobpoints – deficiencies**

A pertinent issue that came up consistently in relation to the functionality of the Jobpoints was that of the need for real-time updates of job vacancies so that customers and staff can be certain that the jobs advertised are available – this was also extended to the jobs advertised on the websites.

‘We seem to get an awful lot where the Jobpoints information is not accurate to the point where vacancies advertised are no longer open and have been filled…we can get two or three of those a week….sometimes more sometimes less…but it isn’t a one time rare occurrence…this is something that needs to be addressed’.

Certain Business Managers however, confirmed that this problem had been addressed in their offices. Selected offices in the Hampshire region also said that Jobpoints can be unreliable and that they are constantly down. As one Business Manager confirmed:

‘The only complaints we get is that they are just not working all of the time’.

A central problem for staff with regard to the efficiency of Jobpoints is the lack of resource in certain local offices – a large office in the Surrey district for example, complained that they have only four Jobpoints – which made it incredibly difficult to work efficiently, in particular at the busiest times.

**Websites – positives**

In terms of the websites available, staff agree in principle, that they make their jobs more efficient, but simultaneously point out that lack of computers in local offices is a major constraint to encouraging customers to use the websites. Several Business Managers reinforced this message regarding lack of customer access to the internet.

However, staff generally have a positive attitude to the utility of the Jobcentre Plus website and Worktrain website, although the more familiar and IT literate staff in each region pointed out that:

‘Worktrain has got far better search engines and is far quicker and is far more specific’.

A Business Manager also remarked that:

‘Feedback from customers on the website has generally been very good…they have seen a lot of improvements’.

From a Business Manager perspective it was difficult to assess the efficiency of the websites, as this was an area where they received minimal feedback from senior management. However, from the feedback received from customers and staff, there was a suggestion that they liked using the website – although certain
customers point to access and cost as major constraints. On a more positive note Business Managers noted that customers have been particularly positive about the availability of Apply Direct (also on Jobpoints) – where they can get details of the end job – i.e. employers details, without having to come back to staff.

Websites – deficiencies

The central problem for staff with regard to the efficiency of the websites is that of access for customers in local offices. In addition to this there is also an issue of staff ability to use the alternative channels and the difficulty of using the websites to search for jobs. Staff pointed out that it was easier to use other websites to search for jobs than it was using the Jobcentre Plus website (it was generally thought that Worktrain was more efficient and effective). In order to improve and make the website service more efficient, staff wanted to see:

- Investment in functionality (what it does needs to be improved e.g. search engine)
- Access to computers – they should be made available in local offices
- A website that is user friendly and offers more clarity to customers who choose to use it.

On the latter point staff remarked that:

‘Design-wise the website is not…very user friendly to those that aren’t used to using government sites…most websites where the customer needs to do something are wonderfully signposted…and our corporate colours on the website just blend into each other so that you can miss the information’.

On a different note, many of the staff expressed dissatisfaction with the internal ‘Intranet’ in terms of finding guidance or information on alternative channels services. There was also criticism of its general speed, which led to inefficiencies when conducting searches for customers when the need arose.

‘The customer services [Jobpoints] for the customers to use are user friendly, but the staff ones aren’t’.

Staff argue that many of the problems stem from the Local Market System (LMS), which in their view is:

‘Antiquated…and it is just a patch-up job after patch-up job…and gets slower and slower and is not user friendly to staff…they brought in the job search application which was an absolute waste of time’.

Contact Centres – positives

Business Managers, whilst acknowledging problems in Contact Centre delivery, identify that the main benefit of moving to such delivery is the reduced footfall into local offices – and the resulting cost and efficiency savings.
Some staff within the sample also have a positive attitude to what alternative channels delivery has achieved and expressed the opinion that Contact Centres have worked to reduce the queues in local offices, leaving staff more time to deal with the harder-to-help customers:

‘I think the whole concept of Contact Centre, that is good, because as Customer Services Manager the biggest complaint I used to have was people waiting at reception…they have done away with all that now that they can get on the phone…so I think the system is a much better system even though we have our own difficulties’.

‘It has cut down on queues, the delays and people being frustrated’.

Contact Centres – negatives

Unfortunately there were many more negative rather than positive opinions expressed concerning the inefficiency of Contact Centre delivery, with specific criticism of the benefits claim processing side. Contact Centre delivery is not perceived to be as efficient as the face-to-face method by a majority of staff in the current climate. Indeed in present form it is argued that Contact Centres create greater problems and inefficiency.

Across the districts there is concern about how the new system is working from a customer service delivery perspective. Opinions vary as to the cause of the inefficiency in Contact Centre delivery – some are general in focus, and others highlight specific factors and processes perceived to be causing the inefficiency. Even the staff that expressed positive opinions identified problems with the Contact Centre, which included:

• lack of clear lines of communication between the local office and the Contact Centre meant that problems take a long time to resolve and result in greater footfall to local offices

• Contact Centre staff lack knowledge and experience which has an adverse affect on local offices as customers are often given the wrong advice (or not advised at all) – and booked in with incorrect advisers

• false expectations given to customers by Contact Centre staff with regard to what local offices can do for them.

As one staff member remarked:

‘As a design on paper the Contact Centre works well but it appears to me that the actual investment in making it work with regards to training and the understanding of the roles…both our own and theirs…hasn’t been done…if you have got people who know something about the benefits background…they don’t have to have had 20 years in a Benefits Office…but they need to have more than 3 or 4 days…if they know something about background then they can serve the customer better’
Experiences and views of Jobcentre Plus staff

On a more specific level the utility of using the Customer Management System (CMS), in particular with regard to its reliability, is an important issue that seemed to resonate throughout the focus group sessions. Staff, in particular those that interact and liaise regularly with Contact Centres, feel that the introduction of CMS and its utility in current form, has led to greater inefficiencies in staffing, resources and the claims process. Problems identified include:

- the instability of the CMS system
- the design of the on-screen pro forma used in CMS
- the lack of customer service skills and benefit knowledge of staff within Contact Centres
- the poor level of staff training within Contact Centres.

As one staff member commented on CMS and efficiency:

‘Basically, the customer is waiting up to two to three times longer to get benefits processed because of CMS’.

Staff in one district also argued that this is not a teething or transitional problem, as CMS has been operational for over two years. The central problem for staff in the local Jobcentre Plus offices was the inconsistency in the everyday reliability of CMS. This caused uncertainty and also inefficiencies in dealing with and processing claims on a day-to-day basis. Staff did acknowledge that this problem was not widespread throughout all Contact Centres, but that a specific few had many ongoing problems with recruitment, staff retention, and staff training. However the problem is very real for local office staff and as one person pointed out on the operational value of CMS:

‘Every time they went to get it back on they had technical problems – and that is the frustrating bit – two or three times a week you are going in and you don’t know if the system or network is working’.

Moreover there is a negative perception of CMS and the utility of investing in such a system to take Contact Centre delivery forward:

‘The main concern is that they are spending all this money, but it is not value for money…it is not delivering what it is supposed to deliver. Despite this we still have the Contact Centres, and the problems associated with them, the staff and the CMS programme’.

Having said this, staff that have worked to establish, pilot and develop Contact Centres, whilst recognising the problems with CMS and other alternative channels, also recognise that the organisation is going through a major transition and that although many services have been delivered face-to-face in the past, many customers do not want that anymore, and are happy to use other non-face-to-face channels. A general concern from their perspective is that mistakes and problems highlighted in pilots are ignored by senior management and that rolling out new technologies and channels to more offices, without rectifying basic procedural and process errors, will lead to greater problems and more inefficiency.
Staff identified that the following changes in process are needed to improve the service provided through Contact Centres:

- Training for staff.
- Increased pre-emptive interaction between local offices and Contact Centres to address problems.
- Increased monitoring and management of Contact Centres to improve feedback of service.
- More feedback to local offices on Contact Centre activity/volume on a daily basis so that local offices can deploy staff more strategically and effectively, i.e. with greater foresight and planning (e.g. booking appointments).

### 4.2.3 Business Manager perspectives

Business Managers confirmed the main deficiencies identified by staff with Contact Centre delivery – and generally the feeling was that:

‘There are a lot more negatives than positives as far as Contact Centres go’.

The following common complaints were heard from Business Managers on Contact Centre functionality:

- Contact Centre staff do not have the knowledge, skills or experience to help customers in the right way. The consequence is an adverse impact on local offices – customers often come in with the wrong forms, the wrong information, claiming the wrong benefit – and there is a knock on effect on the time to deal with these customers when they come to see Financial Advisers in the office.
- There is a need for an ongoing training process in Contact Centres to increase the knowledge of staff on technical, customer service and Jobcentre Plus issues, as illustrated by this quote:

> ‘The majority of staff at Contact Centres don’t really have the background knowledge that they really need to question the customers further or understand what is behind some of the answers that customers give them’

- Lack of a contingency when Contact Centre technology and processes go down.
- Operating errors - people not getting through to the right local Contact Centre.
- Call back times from Contact Centres are very poor: this can take days at best and weeks at worst.
- Contact Centre access for customers is very poor: many struggle to get through and it often takes several hours.
- Local office to Contact Centre communication needs to be improved to resolve issues more efficiently.
- Staff retention in Contact Centres is poor: this does not help in building knowledge and experience amongst Contact Centre staff.
Greater national advertising of the Contact Centre numbers is needed so that customers do not have to come into the local office to acquire it.

Lack of flexibility in the Contact Centre script:

‘The initial conversation that Contact Centre staff are having with customers, the script is almost leading them sometimes in the wrong direction…whereas the staff here might say we don’t really need this or that…they don’t have the flexibility or knowledge…the script takes them one way and that is the way they go’.

Other Business Managers are more positive about Contact Centres. They pointed out there were many initial problems with Contact Centre set up and also local office staff perceptions of what Contact Centres actually did – and this did not help in the transition to using Contact Centres. In this sense it was acknowledged that the transition would take time in that:

‘The whole concept of Contact Centres was alien to them…to what they did…sending the customer away’

Certain Business Managers had more specific concerns and complaints about the technology being used and parts of the delivery process. An issue that was identified as causing the most friction was the booking system – and there was some reservation and concern as to the new system that was going to be introduced in April 2005.

The same Business Managers also talked about the wider implications of the introduction of a new system of working in April 2005 (CMS 2 roll-out) with regard to training needs and process responsibilities. There was concern about its actual utility given the launch of new systems and technologies in the past that had not worked.

4.3 Awareness of alternative channels: In-depth knowledge of functionality

4.3.1 Current and future alternative channels

Awareness of current alternative channels is very good amongst staff throughout the districts covered. Most staff are aware of the main alternative channels in use – Jobpoints, websites, Warm Phones – and some demonstrate an astute awareness of the central problems with the current alternative channels in terms of their job role and the wider efficiency challenge.

This is less apparent on possible future alternative channels – staff were vague about what they thought might be rolled out in the next few years and were only really familiar with possible future channels where they were being piloted in the district. For example, text messaging was being piloted in one district, although staff reported that the processing site had received the first that day and the customer had not given the correct information that could be acted upon – there was a need to phone back to obtain necessary information.
As one member staff noted:

‘We are not really sure how far down the line we are’.

As a caveat to this a relatively small number of staff did show an awareness of the technology that was being introduced (and possible future technology) and also services that might be delivered through alternative channels.

The Business Managers in each district are more knowledgeable on future developments in alternative channel rollout than frontline staff, as might be expected.

4.3.2 Training and alternative channels

Training is a major issue for staff and managers throughout the districts covered – although some managerial opinions varied as to the utility of extra training for staff and the type of training that they should receive.

Staff

The main method of learning identified by staff was through self-learning using the e-learning package. Staff expressed their dissatisfaction with this method of learning and argued that it was ‘not interactive enough’ and that ‘staff do not learn’ from the package. Staff want to see a user-friendly package and the introduction of facilitated learning packages and programmes. They also pointed out that extra time for training and familiarisation would have to be built in to the day-to-day business process.

‘The e-learning package is not interactive enough…it doesn’t answer the questions you as a learner have…it asks you the questions that someone as an e-learning designer has decided you need to know’.

‘E-learning is only as good as the person that is doing it…you can sit there and read the book all day but if you do not understand it’.

Staff think that training opportunities are inadequate and limited. Staff state that the e-learning package does not provide any in-depth knowledge of alternative channels or related technologies – and thus staff do not feel confident in promoting alternative channels. Furthermore staff feel that they do not have either the time or resources to engage in training – the emphasis was on self-training – but this was impossible to do on the frontline desk.

Although most staff are aware of alternative channels – with some having very good knowledge of how they worked – it was also pointed out that many other staff do not have an appropriate level of IT competence – even though this is assumed by senior management when they are implementing alternative channel strategies. This, of course, has an overtly negative impact with regard to staff confidence in promoting and encouraging alternative channels amongst customers.
‘The level of IT awareness within the Department…the ability varies dramatically and most have an IT need that has not been addressed at all…If you have got a good IT awareness it is because you have gone outside and got it…you have not got it within the Department’.

‘In order to get help to get the most out of e-learning, we need to ensure that all the staff have access to a minimum level of computer knowledge…people need to be brought up to a certain level…at the moment some people who use LMS don’t know how to use word…the internet’.

There was a consensus of opinion across the districts that to resolve this problem formal, facilitated, interactive learning and training needs to be introduced to give staff basic IT skills and in-depth knowledge of the alternative channel service (business process and technology). Some staff are aware of training opportunities in local offices, and many take advantage of them, but nevertheless staff expressed the desire for a more formal arrangement, rather than what they felt was the current ad hoc method of ‘do it when you have time’. As staff members noted:

‘I think the attitude is, this is coming in, have a go’.

‘If we get chance to do it…grab half an hour then we do it…if not then we don’t’.

They argue that they neither have the time or resources for training themselves, or the inclination given the day-to-day targets that they need to meet:

‘Every time they bring out a new channel I think sod it, I am not even going to bother…I am not even going to try it…we don’t actually have anyone who can train us to do our job’.

More flexibility is needed in the everyday working process to give staff comprehensive training, and thus confidence in promoting alternative channels to customers:

‘If they cannot train the staff electronically…then how can they expect us to train the customer…At the moment there is a lack of confidence in using alternative channels from staff’.

Overall, staff in local offices want to see the following implemented:

- A more formal training arrangement with time allocated for that.
- A designated training area within offices or external to the office so that staff are not disturbed.
- Training by qualified instructors and the development of facilitated learning.

From a different perspective local office staff also argue that Contact Centre staff training has to be improved. They perceive that the lack of knowledge and skills on the part of Contact Centre staff (coupled with the scripted approach that inhibits them) actually creates greater inefficiency and paperwork in local offices.
4.3.3 Business Managers

Business Manager perspectives varied on the issue of training. For some Business Managers – particularly in the small to medium size offices – training was not an issue and most frontline staff were seen to have a good awareness of alternative channels.

Others accepted that a lack of training was a problem in certain areas such as Internet skills – but also pointed out that where the provision is offered, many staff do not take up the opportunity or there is a reluctance to do so. The move to computer-based learning – some facilitated – was not popular amongst certain segments of staff. There was a wider issue of organisational change and changing staff culture and attitudes that formal training would not address:

‘Everybody whenever there is an issue says throw a bit of training at it…what I think we have got to do is educate people that there is no way back…this is the way that we have got to work…and this is how we will make best use of it’.

From another perspective training was acknowledged as a major issue of concern that needed immediate redress. Training in alternative channels through the e-learning package was minimal – and there was a general problem with basic IT literacy in the local offices (approximately one – fifth could not be considered to be competent in one local office). This lack of basic IT literacy amongst staff did not help when staff were asked to promote alternative channels:

‘It is a real issue for some staff and it isn’t just training on things like the Internet etc…it is sometimes something as basic as the Department provides no training on keyboard skills’.

There is an acknowledgement that, with the current methods (self - led, computer based), it will take a long time for all staff to benefit from the training. Certain Business Managers thought it was a particular worry for those staff that have been in the organisation for a long time and are finding it difficult to adapt to change in a short period of time. From this perspective, more facilitated learning is needed to bring staff up to the same level of competence and confidence as those that are more IT literate. It was pointed out that staff perceptions of what training offers and what they learn from it at the moment, is negative – most feel that it is inadequate, slow and laborious:

‘People don’t like e-learning…most of them find it very boring and very slow to use…and to be fair I think at the moment it is more e-reading not e-learning’.

This is a major barrier in trying to promote alternative channels. If staff are not confident and competent in using IT themselves, they are unlikely to be enthusiastic about promoting any e-service.

In addition to this, some Business Managers outlined two sides to the training issue – it was not just about staff receiving more training – but also, getting staff to recognise their own needs and taking responsibility for themselves in acquiring the necessary skills. However, it was recognised that different people preferred different types of learning – individuals had different learning needs and this had to be addressed.
4.3.4 Use of, and familiarity with, alternative channels

The majority of staff are familiar with the existing alternative channels and have used them. However, many members of staff are not very ‘Internet’ oriented and many found that the internal ‘Intranet’ functionality was poor. Some staff pointed out that in terms of encouraging alternative channels they needed to be more confident and competent in using the technology themselves.

Although most staff are familiar with the alternative channels available – this did not imply an in-depth knowledge of functionality from all staff. Indeed, in-depth knowledge varied from district to district – with staff in certain districts having much more competence. Certain staff members had not visited the website and did not know what it could or could not do. Moreover, many staff also admitted that they and other local office staff have not used the website at all – even the more senior frontline staff. For example, one member of staff admitted that she had ‘never been on the website and did not know what it did’.

4.3.5 Alternative channels strategy: ‘joined up’ delivery

The staff perception of service delivery was that it was ad hoc rather than joined up, with the following main issues identified as problematic:

- The technological systems implemented are not interfacing or interacting – they do not talk to each other.
- The technology is cheap and inadequate – CMS functionality is limited and unstable and staff have no confidence that CMS 2 will resolve problems identified with the current system.
- Feedback from staff is ignored with the result that one bad system after another is implemented.

Business Managers also acknowledged that interaction between the different parts of the e-delivery channels was difficult, commenting that:

‘There is now the Contact Centre, the frontline and the processing centres and getting all three to work in tandem can be a problem’.

Of the alternative channels used, Business Managers recognised that you can always improve on procedures:

‘The vast majority of times procedures are fine – it is when something goes wrong and you need to contact someone to put it right that I struggle with getting things dealt with and who should I be speaking to and just knowing the structures of getting in…there are lots of frustrations but it tends to be where things have gone wrong’.

Other Business Managers acknowledged that it would be beneficial to move towards an integrated system – at present it was seen as very fragmented, in particular with respect to Contact Centres – and it hindered delivery at different stages of the process.
'I think people have lost a lot of faith in the IT systems we’ve got because they have not delivered in the past…it would be wonderful if we could go in the morning and just log onto one system…and not half a dozen’.

However, it was also pointed out that it was not just a matter of introducing and implementing the right systems, but providing the right training so that staff can use these systems effectively and efficiently – which has not happened in the past.

Staff have a positive view of integration with respect to Jobpoints and the Jobcentre Plus website – they feel that these work very well together – although they did point out that there needs to be more uniformity and linkage in the information provided on both (real time vacancies).

The current delivery of the alternative channels strategy is seen in a negative light by many staff – in particular the linkage between the different cogs that deliver the strategy. Poor communication, lack of training and badly designed processes, do not imbue staff in local offices with the confidence that the services being taken away from them are being delivered more efficiently by Contact Centres. They recognise that some of this is attributable to the technology and systems in operation (Vantive) – but even those operating under CMS have little faith that CMS 2 will work in practice – in particular given past experiences.

Staff feel that the current alternative channels strategy is far from integrated. There is a clear lack of confidence caused by the difference between what the technology is supposed to be able to do in principle, and what has been delivered in practice, with the result that most staff are, ‘dreading the introduction CMS 2’ (which they point out should have been introduced but failed because of problems). As staff in one district noted:

‘We should be encouraged by the introduction of new technology and systems…yet the more it goes on the more discouraged we become’

Many staff clearly identified that there is a problem with a lack of integration with the processes in delivering the alternative channel strategy, as well as the technology – including a lack of awareness (staff and customers) and communication between staff that are delivering the different parts of the alternative channel service:

‘We had a customer the other day who downloaded the bereavement benefit from the Internet and she came in and handed it in…but she had not been through the Contact Centre…you have got to go through the Contact Centre to either to get deferred or come in for their interview…so we then had to back track and trace her back round again to get her back onto the Contact Centre…so we were going round and round in a circle…so one does not marry with the other’

In addition they pointed out that it was local offices that bore the consequences and were responsible for dealing with problems emanating from the badly integrated and managed processes within Contact Centres.
‘Local offices at the moment are bearing the consequences of everything...they are bearing the consequences of the processing sections being centralised and under-staffed...we are bearing the brunt of Contact Centres more or less pleasing themselves...and it is really quite wearing...the constant drip of having to sort out other people’s problems is very...very wearing’.

There is a consensus of opinion that the transformation to alternative channels has been rushed through too quickly – with business processes not being followed correctly and adequately – and thus creating inefficiency rather than efficiency. In summary, staff across the districts identified the following key issues on lack of joined-up delivery of the alternative channel strategy:

- Communication processes between local offices and Contact Centres are inadequate and caused unnecessary delays – even with simple query issues.
- Contact Centre staff do not have the necessary levels of knowledge or training on benefits and claims, which impacts adversely on local offices.
- Local offices have less control over the booking system leading to inappropriate appointments.
- The technology and systems in place caused inefficiency.
- There was no uniform information provision across the alternative channel service delivery platform.
- The Labour Market System (LMS) was outdated and had many problems.
- With regard to the Jobpoints and website, real-time vacancy updates were required so that both displayed the same information at the same time.

4.4 Encouraging the use of alternative channels

4.4.1 Customer awareness of alternative channels

Staff perceive that most customers are aware of the alternative channels available – Jobpoints, Warm Phones and the website. However, a difference exists between awareness and actually using alternative channels. Central issues with regard to the website for example, are a lack of access in local offices, and also a lack of basic and IT literacy amongst customers.

The central ways in which customers are made aware of alternative channels are:

- floor managers are proactive in guiding customers to Jobpoints;
- leaflets;
- advertising/posters in offices;
- literature within the jobseekers agreement on alternative channels e.g. (Jobseekers Direct (JSD) Cards);
• encouraging customers with no access to the Internet to use public facilities in libraries;
• business cards with details of all available alternative channels (websites and Telephone).

In general, most staff acknowledged that the local offices in terms of set up and environment act as an incentive for customers to experiment with alternative channels. At the same time however, this is very much dependent on the type of customer – and there is also the question of access with regard to the website. On a different note, many customers who are IT literate and want to use the Internet and e-mail are often frustrated by the lack of development of these channels by Jobcentre Plus.

4.4.2 Staff encouragement of the use of alternative channels

In terms of encouraging the use of alternative channels, staff are generally proactive - customers are directed to Warm Phones and Jobpoints in the offices and encouraged to use the websites if they have access.

The general findings show that it is the frontline staff that are more proactive, with those at the end of the customer process tending to be more reactive. Initiatives such as ‘Trailblazer’ (customers use of Jobpoints prior to the Fortnightly Jobseekers Review (FJR)), are also leading to a more proactive promotion of alternative channels amongst staff, although perceptions of certain alternative channels as unreliable, often do not help in moving towards proactive encouragement of alternative channel use.

Encouragement does depend on job role, and ultimately, the targets that have to be met by staff in their role – it thus only happens at certain junctures of the business process. Certain staff members said they explicitly did not encourage alternative channel use because of the need to attain Jobpoint targets – and that if they did direct customers to alternative channels such as Jobpoints or the website they would also ask them to book an appointment face-to-face to conclude the transaction (see section 4.x below).

Many staff and Business Managers see referral to alternative channels as part of the new business process. A substantial majority of staff however, do not identify any factors that prompt them to promote alternative channels other than this, because they have a negative perception of what it actually does for them – in particular Contact Centre delivery. When staff identified reasons for what prompts them to encourage alternative channels the following were prominent:
• Procedural: it is seen as part of the service, ‘the way it is done now’.
• It saves staff time (if processes and systems are working).
• It takes pressure off frontline staff and reduces footfall (if processes and systems are working).
• It empowers customers.
In essence, staff see the benefits that alternative channels bring to customers and staff, and promote them for this reason – but what constrains them is the reality of what is being provided to customers via alternative channels – in particular Contact Centres. Staff opinion is that they are being made to promote services that they know are problematic – and that they are increasingly trying to sell to the customer a service that they know is not working.

From a Business Manager perspective, encouraging alternative channels is part of the business process and there are backups in place for those that cannot use the alternative channels or access the systems (e.g. spare appointments).

‘There is a perception from staff that alternative channels is the norm and no longer the exception’

Some Business Managers want to see better marketing of alternative channels:

‘With Contact Centres and all those things that are sort of procedural issues for us, it is just a matter of doing what we are supposed to do… from my point of view I like the idea of promoting the telephone number of the Contact Centre because I want to reduce footfall into the office’.

Certain Business Managers feel that there is a problem with monitoring and feedback in measuring alternative channel success rates, and their promotion and use by customers. Some said that this would be valuable in identifying problematic offices.

Business Managers are proactive in encouraging the promotion of alternative channels directly, and also through regular prompting of team leaders at weekly meetings to coach staff to access alternative channels, learn about them and encourage their use. In certain offices staff that need the most help are also nominated by the Business Manager for training courses, to increase their knowledge and skills.

### 4.4.3 Staff constraints and barriers in encouraging the use of alternative channels

The main barriers identified by staff include:

- Performance targets.
- Distrust of technology.
- Distrust of the intentions of management.
- Legal issues and DWP transformation.
- Resources.
- Training.
Performance targets

One of the principle constraints identified by staff in encouraging the use of alternative channels was the target culture within Jobcentre Plus offices. Although some targets are considered more lenient for some job roles than others, the general consensus is that such a culture does not allow the time, resource and flexibility to influence customer behaviour towards alternative channels – and most importantly, it does not provide staff with any incentive to do so. The condemnation and contradiction between promoting alternative channels and target driven performance was widespread throughout all districts visited:

‘There is a culture of if you see a job you come back to me and I will put it through for you so that I can get the recognition for that…and not other people’.

‘Yes, the emphasis is still on making sure you get your points…so if you direct somebody to another channel you do not get the credit…and if you don’t get your points then you don’t meet your objectives at the end of the year’.

‘But we are target driven as well so we are encouraged to get the customer at our desk and do job searches for them rather than send them away’ There is a conflict between meeting targets and providing a customer service [including alternative channels]…also every customer is an individual and you cannot class them as a target’.

Business Managers acknowledge that staff need to be measured and that to this end alternative performance measurement was being explored (off-flow measurement). The staff concern however, is the time frame for any new approach to performance being introduced. They do not feel confident that this will be implemented in the short term, which in their view, will leave them in the same situation and make it difficult for them to prioritise encouraging alternative channels.

There were mixed feelings amongst Business Managers about the target driven environment and culture. Certain managers agree that targets are a major constraint:

‘I don’t think that there is anything wrong in principle with the system of alternative channels, but it is trying to move from the philosophy of job matching to alternative channels, because a lot of business delivery managers are given job entry targets and it is a constant conflict between referral to alternative channels and staff meeting targets. Until there is more streamlining…they [alternative channels] could become more successful if business delivery managers were not constrained’.

Others, however, argue that if the alternative channel strategy is rolled out properly this will reinforce rather than constrain staff encouragement of alternative channels. Targets are not perceived to be a major barrier per se – indeed one manager expressed the opinion that they should facilitate promotion of alternative channels as those that use alternative channels are low point and close to the job market.
‘...my points are to the harder-to-help...and then it is a mistake then in trying to get involved in picking up points the other way...so the target system should drive us to use alternative channels’.

Some Business Managers acknowledge that targets are currently a problem ‘promoting alternative channels is perceived by staff as a contradiction to achieving targets’. However, they are not overly concerned about this because they are aware that this issue is being addressed and that this will change in the near future with new ways of performance measurement being introduced.

Distrust of technology (CMS and now CMS 2)

Staff do not have any confidence in CMS and what it is delivering. This has an overtly negative impact on attitudes to Contact Centres and what they are supposed to be achieving (greater efficiency). The main issues for staff are:

- The lack of reliability of the CMS system.
- The CMS/Contact Centre proforma is badly designed.
- Poor staff training within Contact Centres.
- The inflexibility of the ‘scripted’ approach in Contact Centres.

Staff acknowledge that if CMS functionality was improved, this would make the claim process more efficient and be positive for customers. However, issues identified above also led to a perception from staff of an inconsistent, unreliable and ultimately more inefficient process, which actually caused greater problems at local office level rather than easing the burden. Central problems included:

- Customers visiting the office with a claim for the incorrect benefit because they were not told at the Contact Centre level that they were not eligible for that benefit.
- Increased waiting times for customers because offices lacked the flexibility in diaries to automatically deal with errors emanating from Contact Centres.
- Manually filling in paper forms in the offices, defeating the objective of Contact Centres.
- Ordering and storing paper forms in local offices as backup because of a lack of faith and trust in Contact Centre operational processes and how they feed into the local office level.
- Staffing and resources are stretched in local offices trying to deal with mistakes emanating from inadequate Contact Centre processes.

Intentions of management

Respondents perceived a need for clearer communication from senior management about their intentions regarding alternative channels delivery. Although staff believe in the principle ideals of alternative channels delivery, they felt that this
should not be used as a veil by management for what they perceive are the real consequences for them – which if followed logically, meant fewer jobs.

Staff feel they are being patronised – as though senior management think they are incapable of following through what they think is an inevitable logic of moving to an alternative channel strategy. This approach from senior management only serves to create uncertainty and cynicism amongst staff – and as a consequence also has a negative effect on staff promotion of alternative channels.

**Legal Issues and DWP transformation**

Certain staff feel that there are legal/process barriers to actually taking alternative channels delivery forward where there was potential to do so (e.g. using e-mail and electronic signatures). Greater clarity is needed from senior management on what is possible and what is not, with regard to alternative channels. Many staff feel that legal ambiguities are a significant barrier to them developing or encouraging further use of alternative channels, internally and externally.

In addition to the specific constraints identified by staff, the wider issue of low staff morale caused by the organisation’s transformation and change is also seen as a barrier to encouraging new channels – in particular given the perception from some staff that this might very well facilitate the streamlining of staff from local offices once footfall is reduced further.

**Resources**

The majority of staff feel that there is a lack of resource in the local office to promote alternative channels with confidence, noting that, ‘*We promote alternative channels but we do not have the resources to follow that through*’.

Although some staff acknowledge that monitoring procedures will need to be put in place for computers to be placed in local offices and utilised in the correct way, they nevertheless feel that at present the lack of such resource does not allow them to market the full benefits of using the website, in particular to customers who do not have access at home.

In summary, the main constraints and barriers in encouraging the use of alternative channels identified by staff included:

- Performance targets.
- Contact Centre process and set up.
- Distrust of technology (CMS/CMS 2).
- Negative staff perceptions of available alternative channels.
- Office resource (human and technological).
- Legal issues/barriers.
Experiences and views of Jobcentre Plus staff

- Distrust of the intentions of management and the wider transformation of the DWP and Jobcentre Plus (staff feeling insecure).

- Lack of staff confidence in e-service delivery.

- The type of customer that predominantly uses the local office (the needier customers who are more reluctant to use alternative channels and who need face-to-face contact, greater help and encouragement).

- Intranet design and functionality - this impacted negatively on staff perceptions of using and promoting alternative channels.

Business Managers also identified several problems and constraints with regard to staff and changing their perceptions of alternative channels:

- Culture. Changing the mindset of staff towards what alternative channels can do, in particular those that have been in the organisation for many years. Many could still not accept the overall transformation and change that was occurring, therefore alternative channels were perceived negatively.

- Negative feedback on alternative channels and the perception amongst staff of inefficiency in practice.

- No clear channel strategy that staff understand and comprehend – at the moment it is ad hoc and there is perception that it is not very well thought out.

- Technology is seen as unreliable and inefficient. There is a need for greater transparency in rolling out new channels and new technology and greater consultation with the field to instil more trust in what is being done.

- Staff perceptions that alternative channels lead to a dehumanisation of their own jobs and a gradual erosion of the individuality of service for customers.

- Poor staff awareness and skills with regard to delivery through alternative channels (training).

- The target driven environment provided no incentive to promote alternative channels for staff. However, it was recognised by most managers that there were various proposals in the pipeline to address this issue.

Assisting staff to influence customer behaviour towards alternative channels

The following changes were recommended by staff to assist them in influencing customer behaviour towards alternative channels, with the major issues being those of resource, performance measurement, training and technology:

- Improving access to alternative channels in offices (Warm Phones and the Web in particular).

- Allocation of resources to offices to encourage use of alternative channels. Effective and sufficient staff resource is a significant element in the barriers to making the contact centre process a success for customers and staff alike.
• There is a perception that senior management is only interested in job entry targets in the end game which acts as a significant disincentive for encouraging the use of alternative channels by staff. This needs to be rectified if staff attitudes are going to change. As staff noted:

‘We could be doing a fantastic job, helping the customer, promoting alternative channels, but if you are not making your job entry targets nothing else matters’

• Recognise that use of alternative channels and promotion of alternative channels within offices will be more difficult given the relative success of the initial phase of alternative channel encouragement, i.e. there will be a fall-off as alternative channels are more successful with the less needy:

‘Alternative channels has done the job it was brought in to do…free up the less needy…but they need to accept that there is not going to be as greater a take-up of e-business because we are dealing with the more needy and need more time to familiarise them with it’

• Remove technological instabilities and deficiencies (CMS and LMS) that create uncertainty amongst staff of the efficacy of certain alternative channels. Improvements must be made in systems and technology at operational level (an integrated and interfacing system).

• Address problematic issues surrounding Contact Centre set up and process.

• Remove legal constraints that hinder the development of alternative channel delivery for staff that clearly recognise the benefits, but cannot change processes to take advantage of basic technology.

• Remove inconsistencies between districts and between offices within districts so that all staff are able to use the available technology to develop alternative channel delivery where customers are clearly able and willing.

• Improve the general alternative channel delivery platform and its capabilities to restore confidence in staff (and customers) who perceive the alternative channel strategy to have been delivered in a ‘cheap’ and ad hoc manner.

• Provide adequate and appropriate training to improve confidence in staff in promoting alternative channels.

• Provide clear and user friendly information on alternative channels to staff. Although there is a general awareness that it is the individual responsibility of staff to find out what is happening and available on the alternative channels front, it was felt that an ‘idiot guide’, with links, would be very useful tool for staff as a quick reference tool:

‘There is a big assumption out there [management] that everybody knows what they are doing…the Internet terrifies me…I don’t know what I am doing on it, I haven’t got a clue…I can’t be the only one out there…they have this assumption that everybody has a certain level of knowledge’.
• Provide clear guidance to staff on proposed alternative channel strategy and development.

From a managerial perspective it was felt that District Management should take away unnecessary weekly bureaucracy and duplication of tasks to free up local managers and give them more flexibility to initiate change where they see this will bring benefits in the encouragement of alternative channels by staff.

It should be noted that the bulk of the fieldwork for the research interviews took place prior to the roll-out of communications from national tier concerning ‘Delivering Our Vision’ campaign. These communications, via leaflets, agenda items and the intranet provide more detail on the future vision of the organisation and its interaction with customers.

4.5 Best practice in referring to alternative channels

4.5.1 Encouraging the use of alternative channels: examples

Overall, limited examples of best practice were revealed in the focus groups conducted with regard to encouraging the use of alternative channels, over and above the conventional methods. The exceptions to this rule were:

• a specialised list of job websites in addition to Jobcentre Plus websites, constructed by a new claims adviser and given to the customer at first contact;

• wallet sized cards produced by certain offices, which include details of all available alternative channels.

From a management perspective some examples of good practice rather than best practice included:

• prompting team leaders at weekly meetings and encouraging them to be proactive with staff in promoting alternative channels;

• outsourcing so that customers have access to computers.

4.5.2 Staff experiences of using alternative channels

In terms of staff experiences and alternative channels there is a dominant perception that Jobcentre plus alternative channels are of poor quality (done on the cheap), and underdeveloped in terms of services offered in comparison to available alternative channel services in other organisations (e.g. banks). There is a perception amongst staff that the Jobcentre Plus alternative channel strategy and the development of its channels are inferior to other public and private organisations – lacking dynamism, speed and quality in comparison. More pertinently the perception amongst a substantial number of staff is that other sectors that have moved towards alternative channels (e.g. banking) are now moving back to the personal face-to-face approach because ‘alternative channels did not work’. From a staff perspective the DWP are late in moving to alternative channels and would inevitably suffer the same fate – only five years later than others who had gone through the same process:
'We are going into contact centres when everybody else is going back [banks]...banks have learned their lesson...they’ve been in a Contact Centre situation for the last five years and realised it doesn’t work...and we are only just...lagging behind everybody else...going into a contact centre situation when everybody else is going back...and five years down the line we’ll be going back as well'.

This view was also echoed at managerial level:

‘It seems to me that we are making the mistakes that other companies have made...we are just making those mistakes later...and again going to the CMS project...people on the phone giving details for 40 minutes...if it was being done to me wouldn’t like it...and quite simple, I wouldn’t...but it is something that we are going to have to implement and put people through’.

‘...Everybody is unhappy with the way everybody is forced into using call centres because nobody likes using call centres...and we seem to have come along at the very end of using call centres ...with everybody else going back to proper customer service...and the staff find that quite frustrating...you go home and all the adverts are...we are a great bank we won’t put you through to a call centre...you can phone your bank manager...and we are doing the complete opposite’.

There is also a general perception from staff that the channel strategy is rather ad hoc and piecemeal, and that the Jobcentre Plus channel strategy is based on borrowing ideas from elsewhere but: ‘Without the thought behind it, the money behind it or the training behind it’. In addition there is also a perception that the channel strategy was rushed through rather than planned strategically, compared to other organisations.

The Jobcentre Plus alternative channel strategy is seen as ‘cheap and cheerful’, with the promises initially made by senior management clearly not being reflected in the reality of implementation on a day-to-day basis. There is a general feeling amongst staff that ‘you get what you pay for in IT’, and that senior management have constantly invested in upgrading what is already poor technology – without considering the overall consequences.

On a more specific level, some experiences of using other alternative channels were reflected on positively – and the main opinion was that many aspects of the Jobcentre Plus alternative channel strategy was similar or equal to that of other organisations – in particular the Contact Centres and the available job search websites. They acknowledged that although deficiencies existed initially in Jobpoints and the websites, they are now much improved and getting better. Some staff also saw the overall positives with regard to Contact Centres – and recognised movement to a Contact Centre was part of a wider development and transformation that is required for the organisation to modernise. They also argued that it is not as severe as other organisations, as the Jobcentre Plus model retained some face-to-face contact and interaction.
Those that were more IT literate and more familiar with the Jobcentre Plus website pointed out that it lagged behind other private sector job search websites in terms of its user friendliness. Worktrain was easier to use, but functionality on both could be improved. They also recognise that Contact Centre processes and systems, as well as incentives to staff within Contact Centres in other organisations, are much more advanced in other private organisations.

4.6 Staff perceptions of alternative channels service delivery

4.6.1 Benefits of alternative channels delivery

Staff recognise that there are distinct benefits for customers of moving to alternative channels delivery in principle, including:

- empowering jobseekers;
- improving the quality of service to customers;
- providing multi channel service delivery in line with other modern organisations;
- providing real choice for customers;
- improving efficiency of service.

In addition, staff see the benefit in terms of reducing the amount of time they spent with the less needy customers:

‘Some people need personal contact and some don’t and for those that don’t then it is a great benefit to us’.

However, staff did express the opinion that the multi-channel vision will only be delivered efficiently and effectively when alternative channels are fully developed, robust and dynamic enough:

‘If we had the efficiency and we knew that the systems were going to stay up that would be excellent…it would get rid of all the paperwork and put all the claims online…that to me would solve many problems’.

Staff do not see that alternative channel delivery has improved the quality of service to customers, in particular with regard to Contact Centres. Staff in certain districts also argue that for the benefits to be seen for customers in rural and poorer areas, the question of access has to be addressed.

4.6.2 Business Managers

From a business management perspective clear advantages and disadvantages can be seen and envisaged for staff, management and customers, now and in the future, in moving to alternative channel delivery. They are summarised in Table 4.2.
Table 4.2  Advantages and disadvantages in moving to alternative channel delivery

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Management</strong></td>
<td>• Time-saving/ Efficiency – less queues in offices</td>
<td>• Culture - Difficulty in selling alternative channels to staff and convincing them of the merits of alternative channel strategy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Greater resource to managers</td>
<td>• Lack of control over business vulnerable to mistakes from Contact Centres</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Internally – communication easier and more efficient</td>
<td>• IT failure – no contingencies.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Cost Effective processes – local offices become</td>
<td>• Lack of feedback/accountability surrounding alternative channels</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Staff</strong></td>
<td>• It will free up more staff time in principle</td>
<td>• Perception that alternative channels is making the service more impersonal – demoralisation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• It will allow staff to concentrate on those that are harder-to-help</td>
<td>• The frustration of staff because they perceive that alternative channels – in particular Contact Centres, are failing to deliver</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Customers</strong></td>
<td>• Multi service channel delivery</td>
<td>• It will only benefit certain customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Empowering customers</td>
<td>• Frustration of customers due to poor and unreliable technology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Greater choice, speed, and privacy</td>
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Perceptions of alternative channels development
Both positive and negatives were identified with regard to perceptions of alternative channel development for customers and staff. There is a positive perception amongst staff, in principle – and there is a certain element that see alternative channels as an inevitable and necessary part of Jobcentre Plus development.

There is also an acknowledgement that as alternative channels develop, the customer group within the local office will change – and the emphasis will change with regard to what staff will be required to do in offices. Indeed many staff recognise that this has already happened, with the result that staff are not very positive about their future job roles and functions (a perception that they would lack variation and become very functional).

Overall, staff perceptions of alternative channel development on the benefits for the customer are positive. However, their perception of future alternative channel development is somewhat marred by the current reality on the ground – staff in practice are frustrated, with a negative perception of major elements of alternative channels delivery. The systems and technology used are not seen as reliable or viable by staff and there is also a view amongst staff that the channel strategy is ‘being done on the cheap with systems that nobody else wants’.
Staff pointed out that the concept of alternative channel delivery is not problematic *per se* – but what is difficult is changing staff perceptions of the benefits of e-delivery – in particular in the current climate of transformation and transition – and the reality of what is being delivered. The difficulty is compounded by the many staff that are still not IT literate (and longer term staff who resisted change) in the organisation – it will take time for them to be persuaded – and for this to happen, adequate training programmes have to be put in place.

This however, is not the perception in the current reality. Staff feel that senior management want a quality alternative channel service without necessary investment to deliver it.

Business Managers perceptions expressed the opinion that staff are more concerned about the wider transformation in the organisation and what it means for them – rather than alternative channels *per se*. Staff are not against alternative channels, but the centralisation of the work process in Jobcentre Plus. They have a negative attitude to making their work more remote and taking it away from local offices – rather than the methods used to access the service:

‘I think staff…it is not so much about the alternative channels they have concerns about huge centralisation of work in the way that you do when you have a call centre…they have issues there about taking it away from local knowledge…local ownership…and it is that rather than the method of accessing that service that I think is the biggest problem’

Many Business Managers also note that there is much scepticism and cynicism amongst staff on what alternative channels are actually delivering. Although the majority can see the benefits that can be accrued in principle, it is clear that it will take time for the perceptions to change because of perceived poor customer service through Contact Centres.

**Contact Centres**

Most commentary on alternative channels and their efficacy related to Contact Centre delivery of the benefits service. Staff need more confidence in the Contact Centre processes and the technology being used (CMS and rollout of CMS 2) before they can encourage its greater use and benefit to customers. At present staff in local offices feel that they are suffering a double burden to make things work because of the poor processes and systems in place – without recognition.

There is an acknowledgement that when CMS works, then it works well and is more efficient – but more often than not because of the problems identified above, this is not the case:

‘The CMS system when it works well, it is fine…in particular with straight forward cases…it is when the Contact Centre does not give customers the information or gives them the wrong information…we have to deal with the complaints and apologise to the customer…and it is a mess’.
The web

In relation to the websites, staff wanted to see improvements in line with other organisations so that those that were IT literate could actually make more use of it. There was a general feeling that the websites were of inferior quality compared to many other private sector job search websites, in particular with regard to being able to apply online, send in CV’s etc. They also felt that there was a problem with the information provided for customers – in particular deleting closed vacancies.

However, the websites were on the whole viewed as a positive development and there was recognition that the Worktrain website had been improved – with some staff considering it to be quite advanced:

‘We have the JCP one which is quite basic, but the Worktrain one is far better’

They also noted that the search engine for customers on the Worktrain website was much better and more sophisticated than that available to staff on LMS.

Having said this overall, the following issues, as outlined by staff, need to be addressed to improve the service delivered through the websites:

- Access – there were concerns about access, in particular for the harder-to-help and poorer customers. Staff argued that resources should be put into local offices to improve the situation and access in other public areas should also be improved
- LMS – upgrade in technology within offices so that demonstrating the website to customers on staff machines is made more efficient, and they can see the benefits of the online services offered
- Improving Functionality – a consistent point made with regard to the websites was how far jobs that were advertised were current – and how far the information and functionality of the website was useful to customers.

Staff found that because of the poor quality of the websites, customers that are actually finding jobs through the Internet and web, are finding them through external websites and not the Jobcentre Plus websites. As a consequence, staff are not getting recognition or points for people finding employment – which obviously has a negative impact overall on the encouragement and promotion of these by local office staff.

Jobpoints

With regard to the Jobpoints they were thought to provide a very good service to customers and were seen as a valuable resource in the office. A central criticism – similar to that of the website – was how far the jobs advertised on the Jobpoints were regularly updated.
Overall, the following problems were identified and need to be addressed to improve the service delivered through the Jobpoints:

- Real time vacancies – ensuring jobs advertised are current.
- Resource – Offices in certain districts are under-resourced and need more Jobpoints.
- Access – Jobpoints could be placed in more public places to stop further footfall into offices – those districts with large rural areas thought this would be particularly beneficial.
- Job categorisation on Jobpoints – staff in some districts wanted to see this made much simpler for customers, so that customers could identify the specific jobs that they wanted in a more user friendly way:

  ‘If the Jobpoints could work like that then it would be much easier for customers…because at the moment they are coming to us and saying I can’t find it on here…how do I find it…it seems to been have designed by someone who’s never been into a Jobcentre in their life at the moment’

Service channels and customer delivery preference

Feedback from staff on customer type and their particular preference with regard to the channels that are used for Jobcentre Plus services was somewhat mixed.

Staff within certain districts make clear distinctions – highlighting that the younger generation prefer the e-channel methods of delivery. Other staff generally agreed that it was the more IT literate and white-collar workers, as well as the younger generation – that prefer alternative channels.

They also believe that preference for alternative channels is a generational, time and educational issue – and that ‘in 20 years time alternative channels would be seen as the norm by all customers’. Staff also remarked that there was a clear difference between the elderly and disabled – with a face-to-face preference – and the young and those closer to the job market, with a preference for alternative channels. Staff agreed that customers’ ability to use and accept alternative channels was dependent on the type of job they had come from.

Staff in other districts however, felt that they could not really generalise – a staff member that dealt with the 50+ age group thought that most of his customers were IT literate, but frustrated that they could not do more online. Staff did however, identify that the most needy still prefer face-to-face delivery, as many more complex issues often have to be resolved before they become job ready. Staff also pointed out that customers exist that are quite happy to use the Jobpoints and the Warm Phones in local offices, but prefer to complete the transaction face-to-face.
On a different note, staff in some districts argued that in many cases, across the customer base, it was not because they did not want to use alternative channels, but a question of access to channels – the telephone seemed to be the most preferred alternative channel in this sense because of this:

‘At the moment I would say that out of all the alternative channels it would be the telephone before the internet...because I would say about 70 per cent of the customers don’t have access to a PC...it is not that they would prefer the phone it’s just they don’t have anything else’.

Staff perceptions of barriers for customer use of alternative channels

The general message coming from staff on barriers for customers was that there should be more extensive consultation with frontline staff dealing with customers on a day-to-day basis – to ascertain what is needed. At present, staff perceive that those formulating the alternative channels strategy are not in touch with what is required by customers. As one member of staff put it: ‘I think when policies are made they are made at the intelligence level of the person that is making them...they are not made at the intelligence level of the person that is using it’.

Staff identified the following barriers for customer use:

- Access and availability, in particular lack of computers in local offices.
- The functionality of the alternative channels (Jobpoints not being updated on a regular basis and website speed, scope and service).
- Distrust of technology and perceptions of inefficiency (Contact Centres).
- Customer type – the harder-to-help are not interested and prefer face-to-face.
- Lack of awareness, understanding and knowledge amongst certain customers (education, IT literacy and basic skills).
- Resources in relation to customer numbers (i.e. Warm Phones, Jobpoints) – waiting times for customers because of lack of resource.
- Waiting times in getting through to Contact Centres.
- Cost attached to calling Contact Centres from home or outside local offices. A particular problem identified here in some districts was with the younger generation, who only had access to mobile phones.
- Language – for the ethnic minorities that have a poor grasp of the English language, calling a Contact Centre was very difficult.

4.7 Looking to the future

4.7.1 Alternative channels as a viable alternative

Staff commented that alternative channels were a viable alternative for certain customer groups and not others. There is a consensus that for the harder-to-help and the longer-term unemployed, alternative channels are not suitable because
Experiences and views of Jobcentre Plus staff

there are issues with such customers that can only be dealt with over time, through face-to-face contact.

‘There is only so much you can do online…and that is the same with any business…a certain element of face-to-face has to be maintained’.

Such issues did not arise with those closer to the job market or the short – term unemployed. Staff argued that the most suitable service was multi-channel that combined both face-to-face and alternative channel delivery – so that customers had a choice and could meet their own needs.

Other staff commented that alternative channels are only a viable alternative – if done properly. There is a perception at present that the strategy and channels and systems used to deliver these, lack quality and integration – and that the alternative channels available are very basic.

There is also recognition that for alternative channels to become a viable alternative in the near future there will have to be ‘much education around it’ – for customers and for staff.

From a Business Manager perspective, alternative channels are a viable alternative with clear benefits:

- staff savings – alternative channels are less resource intensive;
- they cut down on customer enquiries to the local office/footfall;
- they increase choice for customers, in particular for those who do not want to come into the local office or find it embarrassing.

As with the frontline staff however, managers recognise that alternative channels provide a viable alternative for those that are IT literate. They also recognise that alternative channels are not suitable for the customers that are harder-to-help – of any age. They remarked however, that staff are rather cynical as to where the alternative channels strategy will leave them given the wider transformation and change within the organisation.

4.7.2 Potential problems in pursuing an alternative channel strategy: implications for staff

Staff outlined several implications on pursuing an alternative channel strategy, with reference to both the wider and more specific operational issues that might arise. The most pertinent included:

- unemployment/redundancies for staff;
- lack of resources for efficient alternative channel delivery creating an extra burden for staff.
Unemployment/redundancies

The development of alternative channels in principle is perceived as a positive – but staff are frustrated and dissatisfied with the communication from senior management about exactly what alternative channels development means for them in the medium and long run:

‘I think they need to link up the information and come right out and tell us where it is all going, what it is all about and what its impact will be…because we are not told we are left to make assumptions on our own…and if you follow it through logically then it could mean less frontline staff’.

Staff expressed a need for clarity from senior management. Although they agreed that alternative channels will benefit customers, they expressed dissatisfaction at how senior management use this as a veil for pushing alternative channels – there is a perception that staff are not being given the ‘full story’:

‘If they could just tell us the overall grand scheme of where we might be in five years…we can see where it is going…but they are not telling us where it is going and they don’t trust us enough to tell us’.

There is a clear perception from many members of staff that the logical corollary of promoting alternative channels is the loss of their own jobs in the near future. As one staff member commented, ‘How are they going to get rid of staff if they don’t modernise and move to alternative channels?’.

Lack of resources

There is a concern that if frontline staff are being cut because of the movement to alternative channels – then alternative channels have to be adequately robust and well resourced to actually take the burden off frontline staff:

‘What we do not need is cutting down frontline staff – alternative channels not working efficiently enough to process claims and our staff having to deal with face-to-face complaints from customers because of this’.

They point in particular to the problems faced with CMS and the volume of complaints dealt with in offices because it did not work efficiently.

In summary, other potential implications outlined by staff included:

- staff shortages and lack of resources to implement the alternative channel strategy in local offices and Contact Centres;
- less face-to-face contact with customers in local offices and greater customer alienation as the service become more remote;
- less ownership and less job satisfaction for staff working in local offices;
- less opportunities for career development;
- greater dehumanisation of the service delivery process as more work is shifted to alternative channels;
- further closure of smaller offices and more centralisation.
4.7.3 Helping staff to encourage alternative channels

Staff identified that the following need attention to help them to encourage alternative channels:

- Provide more ‘holistic’ performance measurement – a model that will fit with the promotion of alternative channels.
- Address the issues relating to Contact Centre performance and set up (technology and business process).
- Staff morale – reassurance and clarity from senior management on what their intentions are with alternative channels and the wider changes in DWP.
- Clearer communication to staff of what is expected and what the alternative channel strategy means for them.
- Provide resources in offices to maximise promotion of available alternative channels.
- Supported training programmes – provide training to improve basic skills, competence, confidence and knowledge of staff regarding alternative channels.
- Provide a more robust and dynamic internal ‘intranet’ and make it interactive, user – friendly and relevant.
- Improve the quality and functionality of alternative channels so that staff can see the benefits to customers and promote them in the confidence that they will provide good customer service.
- A robust system and the technology that provides an integrated and interfacing service between the different parts of the alternative channel delivery service.

Certain Business Managers would like to see:

- training resource and an allocated training officer to improve general IT literacy amongst staff;
- more feedback on the outcome of using alternative channels – measurements of impact and success so that staff can see clear business benefits and customers can be strategically targeted;
- alternative performance measurement so that staff feel that all aspects of their work is recognised and credited.

4.7.4 Potential areas of business that could be delivered by alternative channels

In principle, staff and Business Managers agree that more services could be delivered online and through other channels, in particular for those closer to the employment market. Staff are very positive about services such as account status, benefit queries, advice and information and better-off calculations being provided online – and also change of circumstances being done over the telephone or online.
Staff thought that most of the services mentioned are viable (see box below), but there is scepticism with regard to resources, access and functionality. The main issue for staff is improving the quality and efficiency of what is already available – there is a significant distrust and dissatisfaction with the integration between technology and business processes.

From a staff perspective, any rollout of further services is secondary to improving how the current limited alternative channels are delivered. The attitude is that if the platform and strategy is right, then many potential areas of business can be delivered. Staff also thought that if services are going to be migrated to alternative channels, issues of training and education (customers and staff) need attention urgently.

Staff have concerns about the practicality of complex benefits applications and claims being transferred online, the potential for fraud and the security and authenticity of information. Some feel that certain services are clearly not appropriate for alternative channels delivery, such as fortnightly reviews for higher risk customers. There is a perception amongst certain staff that there is a ‘line that should not be crossed’ and that some services can only be delivered face-to-face.

### 4.7.5 Areas of business that could be delivered by alternative channel

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<tr>
<th>Benefit advice</th>
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<tr>
<td>Better-off calculations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job applications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fortnightly reviews (for low risk customers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefit claims</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change in personal/employment details and circumstance,</td>
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<td>Interview arrangement,</td>
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<td>Benefit notification (monitoring benefit claims),</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queries on payment dates and amounts</td>
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<td>Account status</td>
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Business Managers also agree that most services are a possibility for delivery by alternative channels in principle – if underlying issues are resolved.

‘You could put anything onto it…it just depends what level of service you want to deliver at the end of the day’.

Some pointed out that you have to ask the question of which customers will be able to access it and use it given that it involves them incurring a cost. They also point out that you have to consider resources – for example if signing on was delivered
through alternative channel – this could be done with less resource theoretically – but in practicality you would need extra staff to cover enquiries – so overall there would be no efficiency or resource benefit.

Certain Business Managers acknowledge for services to be migrated to alternative channels in practice the necessary systems had to be in place and had to be reliable and viable. In addition, they identify exceptions to migrating certain services to alternative channels – their view being that customers will always exist that cannot use the technology. In addition, they thought that adviser interviews would need to remain to deal with more complex benefit claims. Clearly, certain Business Managers also thought that what could be migrated to alternative channels depends on the nature of the business:

‘…as I say I don’t think that there is anything you can’t put into e-business but there are some areas of it where the volume of information you are capturing is so great…like I say a half an hour forty minute phone call – if you were on the receiving end of that…customers aren’t going to particularly like that…and staff won’t like it’.

They also identified issues surrounding verifying authenticity and suitability of customers, with services such as online job applications. The responsibility will shift to the customer – which could have many legal implications for Jobcentre Plus.

4.7.6 Customer type and use of alternative channels

Certain generalisations were made about the younger and older generations in terms of who should be encouraged to use alternative channels in the future. Many staff could not identify specific customer types and their preferences.

Staff in certain districts did make clear distinctions – mainly that it was those customers that were IT literate, white-collar, and job ready that should be encouraged to use alternative channels. Staff in some districts also acknowledge that there are more barriers for older customers to address when making use of alternative channels.

Overall, staff recognise that alternative channels are already targeted at those customers that are closest to the job market – and that local offices will eventually be left to deal with the harder-to-help customers. Most Business Managers also expressed the view that the harder-to-help will need face-to-face contact and that the younger customers and those that are IT literate and closer to the job market should be encouraged to use alternative channels as they are more capable of benefiting from them.

‘At the end of the day unemployment is down to such a level…that they do need help…we are dipping into the sickness and incapacity cases…you are not going to get much input from them I wouldn’t have thought’.
4.7.7 Incentives to customers to encourage use of alternative channels

The main incentives identified by staff that they perceived would encourage customers to use the current available alternative channels include:

- **Access.** Computer resources in local offices so that customers can see the benefits of the website and any future online provisions.
- **Resources in offices.** There is a lack of provision of Jobpoints and Warm Phones in offices in some districts.
- **External Jobpoints.** To broaden access in particular in more remote areas.
- **Reduce cost to the customer.** Warm Phones are free in offices, but it costs customers to call from outside which is often a constraint. Make calls to Contact Centres free or introduce a mobile phone voucher scheme to help customers with cost.
- **Scope of alternative channel delivery.** Improve the quality and functionality of alternative channel service for those that are IT literate but have a negative perception of what Jobcentre Plus alternative channels can provide for them (i.e. applications online, e-mail enquiries and queries etc).
- **Customer training.** One possibility identified was vouchers for customer training if jobs vacancies are identified through alternative channels.
- **Improvement in Contact Centre service delivery.** Many customers have negative experiences and cannot at present see the benefits.

4.7.8 Incentives to staff to encourage customers to use alternative channels

Staff identified the following incentives to help them encourage the use of alternative channels further to customers:

- **Resources in offices (equipment.).** So that alternative channels can be promoted effectively.
- **Training of Contact Centre staff.** To provide them with the necessary skills and awareness so that local offices are confident that they will not have to deal with complaints and consequences of poor service.
- **Facilitated training for local office staff.** In terms of developing basic IT skills and in-depth knowledge of alternative channels to promote their use. This is particularly pertinent, as it seems that many staff have only very basic IT skills and have a limited awareness of alternative channels.
- **Provide legal clarity.** Clarify the legal barriers and constraints so that increased use of alternative channels within the business process can be utilised, e.g. use of e-mail for local office to customer communication.
Experiences and views of Jobcentre Plus staff

- Reformulating performance measurement to make it more ‘holistic’. To take into account all aspects of the job, i.e. alternative performance evaluation that recognises promotion of alternative channels.

- Providing a robust and dynamic internal e-system. There is a perception that LMS is opaque and inadequate which impacts negatively on staff perceptions of alternative channels.

- Integrate the systems being used. So that everybody has ‘view and do’ access to one system, for example. This will restore staff confidence and create a positive perception of the technology being implemented and its fit with the business process.

Business Managers thought that the following would help them to incentivise staff towards encouraging alternative channels:

- Introduce monitoring of alternative channel use so that staff know the business benefit (service provision) and customers can be strategically targeted: ‘if you want 50 per cent of customers to access it … be able to let us know that we have contributed to that 50 per cent… we just don’t get that feedback… if we had that that would be helpful’.

- Greater flexibility with regard to time and resources for training (less bureaucracy)

- Alternative performance measurement so that staff feel that all aspects of their work is recognised and credited.

4.7.9 Head Office, staff support and encouragement of customers towards using alternative channels

Staff

The central recommendations from staff on what Head Office could do to support them and encourage customers towards alternative channels are:

- Greater involvement and consultation of frontline staff in decisions concerning the implementation of technology and systems to deliver services through alternative channels.

- Feedback to staff from research being conducted on alternative channels (i.e. keeping staff informed) and evidence that staff feedback in pilots is being taken into account in developing and implementing business processes to support alternative channel service delivery.

- Change the target performance culture and implement a performance measurement model that is more conducive to the promotion of alternative channels.

- Improve the standard and quality of all alternative channel provision (in particular on benefit side) so that first time experience for customers is positive.
‘The one thing that must be done is to bring up the standard of all e-channel provision because the downfall in one will have an impact on the other…because if we work in a professional organisation all of our alternative channels have to be of a decent standard’

- Invest in new and advanced customer management technology. Ensure that technology is reliable, integrated and robust so that staff can be confident that aims and objectives are met with regard to alternative channels and their roll-out

- Introduce formal training programmes and monitoring mechanisms to provide staff with the necessary skills to promote alternative channels and ensure take-up and completion of such programmes by staff in local offices (compliance by managers).

- Produce clearer guidance on alternative channel strategy and the synergy with other parallel strategies being pursued by Jobcentre Plus – at the moment staff feel that there are too many mixed messages as to what is expected and what is important, which has an adverse effect on staff morale in the current climate of transition and change.

- Address the central problems outlined with regard to Contact Centres (skills and training, scripts, processes, systems) to restore confidence in staff in this method of delivery, and to improve customer perceptions on the utility of the current delivery through Contact Centres.

- Provide legal clarity so that using alternative channels becomes easier within offices (i.e. so use of electronic signatures, for example, can become common practice without having to go through complex checking and approval processes).

**Business Managers**

From a Business Manager perspective the following support and changes are recommended:

- Contingency arrangements for when alternative channels fail or do not work properly.

- Training for local office staff. When alternative channels are introduced or improved staff must be given comprehensive training on how to use them, how they are delivered and what the advantages are.

- Contact Centres and local offices need a greater understanding and improved delivery skills if consistency in delivery is to be achieved: ‘We have to have consistency…we have to have understanding…otherwise these virtual networks just don’t work’.

- Training for Contact Centre staff to improve general competence, knowledge and give them the necessary skills for dealing with the public and delivering good customer service.
• Clear guidance for staff on the alternative channel strategy, what it means for them and their part in delivering it.

• Taking into account local variation – identifying where the national/centralised model needs to be altered to ‘best fit’ local circumstance – and where it does not.

• Information for customers. Increased national marketing so that customers are aware of alternative channels and understand what they can offer without having to come into the local office (i.e. Contact Centre number, website).

• Forewarning. More preliminary consultation and communication from senior management to local offices regarding pilots and changes, to allow Business Managers to better prepare staff for changes:

  ‘I know it is difficult…because they are planning years ahead…but the more we know locally about what the next thing on the horizon is in advance, we can prepare our staff and think about our own strategy…’

• To ensure technological integration, interaction, uniformity and reliability. The perception is that CMS 2 will actually give local office less, not more flexibility

  ‘Make sure that the systems are sound and that they work – in terms of processes that they are meant to deliver – whatever is in place delivers what it is meant to do…’

• A greater understanding from people developing the alternative channel strategy and processes of what actually goes on in an office and what is needed:

  ‘I think that they are now getting so far removed and the dangers are that you have got somebody who has got a background in social security designing something that is going to be delivered in a JCP office…they haven’t got the understanding’.

• Flexibility in business processes and an understanding of risk management.

• More dedicated resource with regard to technology and staff to allow the alternative channel strategy to be implemented efficiently.

• Targets to be re-thought to give managers more flexibility to deal with other issues such as IT literacy/training. There also needs to be recognition of the part that local office staff play in promoting alternative channels in performance measurement.

• Intranet. As a tool for interactive delivery this is too slow and laborious and needs to be developed and improved.
4.8  Contact Centres

4.8.1  Awareness of alternative channels

Awareness of the current alternative channels varied between the three Contact Centres – a key factor here was the staff present at the focus group – one focus group only consisted of three relatively inexperienced staff.

In one of the Contact Centres visited, knowledge of alternative channels varied depending on job role – with those agents dealing with JSD being more aware – and having a greater knowledge than those in first contact with regard to the websites. Knowledge of Jobpoints is limited – and most of what is known about the website is self-taught. At the focus groups with more experienced staff present - on both the benefit gathering side and the JSD side – there was an excellent knowledge of alternative channels – what is available and what is new.

For example on the benefits side staff have a very good awareness of the new online tax credit application procedure and the problems with it. On the JSD side the staff have a very good awareness of the websites and Jobpoints.

At the team leader and managerial level there is an excellent knowledge of the alternative channels available - although there is a frustration at the lack of feedback on use of alternative channels such as the websites – this, in their view, constrains them from monitoring and improving.

4.8.2  Staff training

Different opinions were expressed on the issue of staff training and whether this would benefit staff in Contact Centres. Some feel that it is not an issue and that training is adequate. Other staff feel that extra training will help them – on the JSD side in particular, customers frequently ask questions about the website that staff cannot answer:

’We get a lot of questions from customers and to be honest I cannot answer the questions…I don’t find the time to go on it…some sort of formal training would help’.

Overall the inadequacy of staff training and the use of LMS was an issue for many staff. They expressed the opinion that basic training exists to increase awareness of alternative channels, but that more in – depth training would benefit them and help them to fulfil their role more effectively – in certain circumstances.

’I think more training for ourselves would also be a big benefit…it would be better if we could explain to customers…[how to use the website]’.

The views of Contact Centre Managers varied on similar lines. One Contact Centre manager thought that training was very brief with regard to alternative channels – and that more extensive training would be helpful.
The targets introduced for Contact Centre staff did not fit neatly with the promotion of alternative channels – and the whole target culture, creating competition between different parts of the ‘delivery’ machine – militated against any emphasis on promoting alternative channels and delivery through these.

‘...as an organisation we measure our performance based on the number of submissions and job entry points gained...now if we pass somebody off to the self-help route we lose out on the opportunity to submit that person to a vacancy...and in turn we don’t get a job return from that...local office, ourselves are in competition for this...so again there may be a reluctance...’.

4.8.3 Why customers call Contact Centres

The opinion on this was consensual across the three Contact Centres – that the majority of customers calling the Contact Centre have job references. In other words, the perception amongst staff is that most customers had already consulted the Web or Jobpoints before calling the Contact Centre:

‘Most of the calls we get are from people who have been on the Jobpoints and have already seen the jobs...they just ring for the contact details more than anything...but it is a bit embarrassing because we have only got the description that they have got...it would be useful if we got extra description’.

For the minority that do not – it is part of an agent’s role (job broking) to ask customers if they are aware of alternative channels such as the websites and Jobpoints – and they proactively promote these.

4.8.4 Perceptions of alternative channels

Experiences and complaints from customers using Contact Centres

Staff identified the following key customer complaints:

- The time they have to wait before their call is answered.
- The time it takes to get an appointment booked in from the local office – and the time it takes to call a customer back. ‘...and I think that really that is the main issue...because they want it here and now...’.
- People often call from mobile phones and run out of credit – so they complain about cost (however, most initial contact does come from local offices). It was suggested that although advertising gives out the Contact Centre number – it should perhaps also inform customers about Warm Phones as well, which are free.
- The method of delivery – many customers do not like the change to Contact Centre delivery and prefer the old face-to-face methods, in particular older customers.
- That customers wanted to fill in claim forms themselves, in particular those who know what they want to claim (i.e. Jobseekers Allowance).
Data protection and privacy complaints – customers feel that giving personal information over the phone is intrusive and they lack trust in this method of information gathering.

Some customers express the desire to apply directly for vacancies and do not understand why they must go through Contact Centres.

Jobs that have been suspended when customers call the Contact Centre (having found the jobs through Jobpoints or online).

General Queries - Contact Centre staff not being able to answer all customer queries on first contact. Customer expectations are false and they expect that First Contact staff can answer all queries. Customers are also often directed by local offices to call the Contact Centre – when clearly they cannot help them.

4.8.5 Problems in delivering services through Contact Centres

From a staff perspective the following are the main problems encountered:

- Local Management System (LMS) – this is slow and difficult to navigate – not helpful when conducting job searches. Also LMS does not provide any extra information that customers can access.

- Need for more in-depth training especially on CMS.

- Maximising e-delivery – for example being able to send results of job searches to customers electronically.

  ‘We don’t use alternative channels as fully as we might… a lot of people now will have a computer in the house and access to e-mail… but we don’t appear to have the system or major usage… it is maximising more efficient ways of getting information across’

- Scripts are inflexible.

The main problems encountered from a managerial perspective are:

- Unreliable IT and poor contingency.

- Resource – a high turnaround of staff and a high degree of absenteeism.

- Training is basic and staff knowledge is often not at the required level – exacerbated by high staff turnover.

- Scripts. From a managerial perspective there are elements of scripts that are compulsory, legal and necessary – but the culture that ‘script is king’ is problematic. Scripts work well with ‘model customers’ but otherwise removes staff ability to deal with a customer as an individual. In addition training does not promote self-initiative by staff to ask ancillary questions if necessary:

  ‘The biggest thing from experience of scripted calls is… people feel like they are reading and customers feel like they are being read to… there is the inherent danger that you sound disinterested… that transfers itself down the phone line to the customer who in turn shuts off and is less responsive…’.
• Internal communication. Management to staff communication is very difficult because of the nature of Contact Centre business – time needs to be built into quiet periods to rectify this.

• Inappropriate calls. The Contact Centre is under-resourced as it is and is certainly not resourced to deal with inappropriate calls, which take 10 per cent to 15 per cent of resource at Middlesbrough (at Pembroke Dock the level is much higher, running at 50-60 per cent).

• The IT systems are unreliable, go down frequently and cannot deliver (including LMS and CMS – with no confidence that CMS 2 will be any better).

• Operational level process. The current system and pro forma does not provide sections for all relevant information needed. Staff have an ancillary desk aid at the moment to complement the pro forma (which slows down the process considerably and is not ideal for staff or customer).

• More guidance is needed on general communication, in particular the use of e-mail internally and in liaison with customers.

4.8.6 Staff knowledge of customer barriers to using alternative channels

The central barrier identified by staff in one Contact Centre was that of IT literacy and general education. However, they stated that it was the older customers that tended to be more sceptical – in particular those that are not used to using alternative channels.

Staff and management in other Contact Centres gave more specific responses on barriers that they have encountered. The main barriers identified included:

• customer distrust of telephone process for disclosing personal details;

• lack of basic literacy and skills amongst certain customers (harder-to-help);

• a negative perception of the JSD service amongst certain customers (IT literate, job ready) – they do not understand why they have to go through the Contact Centre – seen as an unnecessary go-between;

• issues relating to cost for customers if they are not calling from local offices;

• accessing and using technology;

• culture/Education – older customers find it particularly hard to adapt to change.

A key barrier identified by managers is that of education and culture. One Contact Centre manager noted that it very much depended on the customer type. As a general rule, the newer customers – who have not known any other system of claiming benefits or searching for employment – are very good. With those that have experienced the old system, some have been converted and prefer the new methods of delivery, but many still need convincing of the benefits:
‘I think by nature people are wary of change…but I don’t think it takes them very long to convert to it…and I think if you gave our customers the choice now of going and standing in a job centre or ringing us…I am sure you will find they will want to ring us’.

4.8.7 Addressing perceived barriers and problems with service delivery

From a staff perspective, the following are seen as important by staff in addressing key problems with the current delivery of service and customer barriers:

- **Enhanced training** – in particular on knowledge of benefits. In addition to basic training through team leaders acting as ‘coaches’ (to provide additional benefit information, LMS guidance, script guidance etc) and also through peer to peer training.

- **Updated and integrated IT systems** – developed in consultation with staff:

  ‘We need to operate as a private company…most of them would not accept what was delivered to us…but we have to sort of make it work…they won’t send it back and say it is not doing this…they accept substandard delivery…and we just have to work around it and make it work somehow’.

- There is a perception that the systems being used are ‘second best’. This is an issue that must be addressed – the opinion is that other organisations need to be consulted and a more robust and integrated system implemented.

Staff and Contact Centre managers made the following recommendations:

- Implement a better telephony and recording system that will speed up customer contact time.

- Introduce e-forms and extend use of electronic information – sending paper is inefficient and a waste of resource (human and otherwise).

- Introduce robust technology – resource in Contact Centres is based on the assumption that systems operate effectively and efficiently – this does not reflect the reality.

- More consultation with staff on the ground when introducing new channels and new procedures and processes related to these.

- Speed of transactions – the claims process takes too long at the moment and this is not appropriate to Contact Centre delivery (i.e. amount of time customers are kept on the phone).

- The benefit claims process and procedure needs to be simplified (some awareness that this is being done for some benefits through the ‘Watch’ initiative).

With regard to customer barriers specifically, an important point made by staff related to greater education and information – and a better marketing strategy to inform customers about alternative channel delivery.
From a managerial perspective the following actions need to be considered to address the problems with service delivery and customer barriers to using Contact Centres:

- Shorten and simplify the benefits claiming process – do the claim in one call – no call back.

- Graduated training for staff – ‘Training is very important…but you have to be careful not give people a long stretch of training…and then expect them to remember it…I think the best way to go about training, is to train the basics…and then knowledge grows as you go along’.

- Provide a stable and integrated IT system ‘Stable IT and technology that talks to each other…instead of using two or three separate systems would be helpful’.

- Resource and incentive so that staff can be recruited, trained and retained.

- Marketing – better advertising of alternative channels is needed i.e. when Contact Centres send out information to customers. There is a perception that marketing has been poor in the past:

  ‘There are certainly marketing budgets that have been misdirected…campaigns that have not got telephone numbers on…or don’t have any detail…Jobpoints that miss out key information…there are ways that we can standardise that’

- More strategic and targeted external marketing towards those customers that aren’t using Contact Centres and aren’t likely to go into local offices (i.e. school leavers).

On specifically addressing customer barriers, staff and managers identified that the following action should be taken:

- Increase the awareness of harder-to-reach customers through outreach schemes and more presentations.

- More national advertising and a sustained national advertising campaign as soon as possible (it was acknowledged this was rather difficult at the moment as not all offices and Centres are rolled out).

- Training, education and information for customers on alternative channels

- Making technology available to customers.

### 4.8.8 Migrating Jobcentre Plus services to Contact Centres and other alternative channels

**Online services**

The following were identified as services that could be transferred online:

- change of circumstances (staff were aware of a pilot to try this over the phone);
- job applications (providing that the target system is re-evaluated);
• benefit claim forms – simplified e-forms could be created to cut out First Contact – customers could fill in this form and once submitted this could trigger a call-back to complete the claim. This is contingent on electronic signatures legislation and simplification of benefits;
• benefit and job queries – this could also be done by e-mail whereby customers simply, ‘e-mail a question and get an answer’;

In terms of complex benefits claims it was acknowledged that the online process might be more problematic – customers would have to input the basic information and complete the rest of the process over the phone with staff.

Contact Centre services

The Contact Centre Managers have a good knowledge of pilots for more services being delivered over the phone – such as change of circumstance and NINO allocation. Certain managers also suggested that Contact Centres could effectively deliver the following services:
• Housing Benefits claims;
• JSD – an increased role for the Contact Centre in sifting customers and directing them to appropriate employment.

Customer type and alternative channels

Opinions on the type of customer that should be encouraged to use new alternative channel services varied between Contact Centres.

Staff in one Contact Centre could only generalise – the dominant perception being that many people do not have a choice and that more people are being pushed towards using alternative channels through various initiatives (i.e. Jobseekers Agreement). Staff and management in other Contact Centres clearly thought that it was the job ready and IT literate (and those with a familiarity with alternative channels) that should be encouraged the most – and that for other customers there would have to be a process of education.

In general, Contact Centre Managers thought that the most suitable customers on the job brokering side were the job ready and those recently out of work. On the benefits side however, they could only generalise – the younger are probably more familiar – but there are also many older people who are very knowledgeable.

Contact Centre – current trends

Staff only had a general idea of customer percentages that called the Contact Centre with job references numbers and those that called with general queries. There was, however, a general agreement that the majority called with job references, indicating that most customers calling on the jobseekers direct side had already used an alternative channel service (websites or Jobpoints).
4.8.9 Encouraging the use of alternative channels and looking to the future

Encouraging customers to use alternative channels

From a managerial perspective customers are encouraged to use other alternative channels on both the First Contact benefit side and Jobseekers Direct side – even though this is not in the script they are both proactive in doing this. The website is promoted most – predominantly on the Jobseekers Direct side – but also with regard to benefits queries.

From a staff perspective, promotion of alternative channels on the JSD side is viewed as part of the process and is proactively encouraged. However, the benefits side is slightly more problematic. Staff perceive that they need more training in what is available, to promote it confidently – and they only tentatively promote the job search websites at present.

No incentives exist for staff to refer customers to alternative channels and they subsequently encourage the use of alternative channels predominantly because of procedural reasons. They also promote them as a way of remaining within their strict time restraints with regard to customer calls (‘to get the customer off the phone’). As one staff member noted:

‘At a crude level to end the call if it is dragging on a bit…we are only supposed to do five minutes with each…so we suggest that if they want to take it further to look at the websites…so time restraints prompt us…but it is also as well…some customers ring up and have not got an idea…it is difficult to know what job they are after…so in that respect it is better for them to look at their own leisure…get a general idea from the website and then ring back’.

Staff barriers to encouraging alternative channels

From a managerial perspective the main barriers to staff promoting alternative channels is their lack of knowledge and skills and also the lack of actual alternative channels available at present. In addition, there is no prompt in the script – although many staff do promote the websites, despite this.

Of the other factors identified by staff that constrained them from encouraging and promoting alternative channels, the following were the more dominant:

- lack of feedback and incentives to promote alternative channels;
- lack of recognition and credit due to the target driven culture;
- customer type;
- time – workloads are not spread evenly across the ‘virtual’ network;
- resource;
- no clear guidance on what staff should and should not promote;
- not in the script.
A central barrier to promoting and encouraging alternative channels – on the benefits side in particular – is that it is not part of the benefit collection/information gathering process – it is only relevant to certain customers.

**Helping staff to encourage alternative channels**

From a management perspective, more customer ownership would put an onus on staff to promote alternative channels. One Contact Centre manager had the opinion that:

‘*If they were involved in it…if we are going to take claims by fax, or web or e-mail…I think…then there will be more onus on them to sell that to the customer as a different way of [service]…because the more they sell it the more it will help them in the variety of their work*’.

Managers thought that better technology and more effective use of technology would give staff more confidence that systems would deliver good customer service.

Staff identified that the following factors would help them to encourage alternative channels:

- Developing e-communication with customers, for example to inform them of jobs.
- Training, to increase staff awareness of alternative channels, in particular in-depth knowledge of functionality.
- Marketing should be improved so that staff do not have to deal with inappropriate calls and general enquiries.
- Simplification of the benefits claim process and procedure.
- Reliable and integrated technology.
- Better and easier access to the internal system – making it more interactive and user friendly.

Overall, it was felt that staff and management need the right tools to deliver the alternative channel strategy.

**Customer preference and alternative channels service delivery**

The opinion of staff and management is that face-to-face delivery will always be needed – and that it is job ready customers that preferred alternative channels not the harder-to-help, as this was not always practical. As one Contact Centre manager put it:

‘*You have to give your customers options…you have to encourage them…but you always have to give them options…some of our customers still need that face-to-face*’.
Staff held the view that it is customers with an embedded benefit culture and poor literacy and IT skills (general education skills) that prefer face-to-face delivery.

Certain staff and managers thought that good customer service was the most important issue and that all customers should be able to choose which medium they prefer. They pointed out that more complex benefit enquiries and claims are not really suited to alternative channels and are best dealt with face-to-face.

At a more specific level it is customers with sensitive benefit cases that express a preference for face-to-face as they are very reluctant to use the telephone to give information. Many customers are also reluctant to use the telephone or online services because of the security issue – they have no trust that personal and private information will be protected.

Overall staff thought that most customers calling the Contact Centre found it convenient – in particular those that did not want to or were too embarrassed to visit a Jobcentre Plus office:

‘The majority of people now are quite familiar with telephony…but I think when it is sensitive I think then they would rather be face-to-face and have a more personal service’.

**Head Office: Encouraging customers to use alternative channels**

Management and staff made suggested that the following recommendations should be implemented by Head Office to encourage customers to use alternative channels directly in the future:

- improve marketing and awareness. To inform the public what Contact Centres are and how other alternative channels work and can help;
- re-educate the customers and communicate change in a better way through regular mail shots and making it part of all contact with customers;
- cost, make Contact Centre numbers free;
- more online services for the IT literate (providing that the right technology is in place);
- simplification, speed and efficiency. Make the benefits claim process much simpler and provide the tools to allow this to be taken forward (i.e. e-form);
- education and training for customers to increase familiarity and give them the skills and knowledge to utilise alternative channels;
- access for customers. Provide resources for those customers in need.

**Support from Head Office: Staff and Management**

The following could be done by Head Office to help staff and management encourage customer behaviour towards alternative channels:
• Provide training for staff to increase their knowledge and awareness of existing and future alternative channels.

• Greater communication from Head Office to staff and management of the channel strategy – so that staff can be better prepared and convinced of the benefits.

• There needs to be greater consultation at ground level on how the alternative channels strategy is to be delivered (process, procedures and systems) – and evidence that feedback is actually incorporated into the implementation process.

• Simplify the benefits claim process so that staff can work more efficiently and effectively.

• Provide an incentive for staff to encourage alternative channels – i.e. performance measurement.

• Invest in technology to provide a reliable, interactive and integrated system to allow e-delivery to be taken forward.

• Increase monitoring of website hits and use of alternative channels – so that targeting of customers can be more strategic in nature.

• Enhance the marketing strategy to create positive perceptions amongst the public and report the benefits of alternative channel delivery.

4.9 Processing centres

4.9.1 Awareness of alternative channels

Staff knowledge of alternative channels is very limited. It is not something they have to deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Processing Centre staff believe that there is a training issue that needs attention – and they point out that there is actually very limited literature for reference by staff to increase their awareness of alternative channels in Processing Centres. Staff feel that additional training on alternative channel functionality will help certain tasks in the processing centre – in dealing with general enquiries for example. They also think that it will be beneficial to those working on JSA.

In conversations with customers to ascertain further information for benefits processing it is obvious, that in both Processing Centres visited, staff do not, in the majority of cases, encourage the use of other alternative channels such as Jobpoints or the websites. Only staff on JSA promoted the website when they think it is appropriate.

This is not generally encouraged by management and is not seen as part of their job remit – encouraging alternative channels is perceived as deferring from their actual job (in particular Income Support and Incapacity Benefit processing). In addition, some staff felt uncomfortable in directing customers to online channels at the moment because of their uncertainty of where this fits with the current, wider
Jobcentre Plus vision. As one staff member noted:

‘As far as I am aware nobody has actually championed the cause of the e-channel...I am not aware of any organisation within the department that is running with this...sending out literature...to make staff aware and to make customers aware...anything like that’.

4.9.2 Perceptions of alternative channels and looking to the future

The central problems identified by the staff in processing customer benefits over the phone were:

- The inability of customers to provide the relevant information to staff due to the customer base.
- Language issue – makes explaining and understanding very difficult in certain circumstances.
- Volume management – increasing amount of telephone traffic without the systems or resources to cope with this.
- Fraud and authenticity.
- Current processes regarding downloading benefits applications and sending them to Processing Centres is flawed and actually provides more work and generates inefficiency.
- Ownership of cases – lack of ownership and processes of accountability leads to inefficiencies with claims being unnecessarily passed around different sections within the processing centre.
- Technology and systems – CMS is seen to be an inadequate system; the theory of what it is capable of and the actual practice of what is delivered, do not marry.
- Staff training in and knowledge of CMS is insufficient – this leads to mistakes, which often have to be rectified by the processing centre staff and leads to double or duplicate processing.
- CMS set up and format is not practical (the proforma).
- Local Office processes and management – there are often delays in receiving claims due to staff culture.

Over and above this, staff pointed out that performance measurement through targets, does not take into account the practical realities and problems involved in day-to-day processing.

4.9.3 Online benefits processing

Staff pointed out that much of the information gathering stage of the process can be feasibly done online and that this would be very beneficial – in particular given the problems in verifying information over the telephone at present. Staff acknowledge
however, that online benefit processing will only be possible if current legal and technological (system) constraints are addressed.

They also thought that the following might be feasibly done online:

- **Better off calculations** – There were some worries amongst staff that it would be difficult to do better off calculations online, as certain customers would lack the understanding of the more complex nuances with regard to what they could and should be claiming. It was also acknowledged however, that many customers could take advantage of it.

- **Account status** – ‘I think it is quite a good idea though…that if you were able to go in and put your national insurance number in…that it might give you some information…for example when your medical certificate is due…or even when you have been paid up to…when it went into your bank account…but issues would need to be addressed [security]’

- **Change of Circumstances** (managers were aware that this was already being piloted by telephone) ‘But again it will only be until the legislation changes…you still need a signature on a change of circs…so you could use alternative channels for a change of circs but legislation…it still needs a signature…we are years behind…we are so antiquated it is unbelievable’

- **Customer information and guidance online.** Staff argued that for any of this to be feasible there had to be reconsideration of the technology and systems being used – they were inadequate at the moment – the right systems needed to be in place and robust. They also pointed out that the correct legislation needed to be in place if online benefit processing was going to become a reality – in particular with regard to electronic signatures.

### 4.9.4 Aspects of benefit processing that could cause problems if done online

Staff could only generalise here – no particular aspect will be problematic if key issues are addressed prior to shifting to online processing. Fundamentally the website will have to be secure and encrypted – with adequate verification procedures.

Other general issues that staff thought might prove problematic if benefit processing was done online included:

- **collecting necessary information:**

  ‘You talk it over with them on the phone and then more often than not…when it comes in from the customer it lacks the information to allow you to process whatever it is you are doing…and that’s with you assisting them over the phone…so with customers going online I don’t believe that they would be able to provide any more information…and I think it would be constant backward and forward…e-mailing in order to establish what it is they are looking for and what you need from them in order to complete the change’
- customers not having the knowledge and skills to take advantage;
- providing the right information for customers at the right level;
- authenticity/fraud with claims;
- online security and customer privacy;
- general operational issues and contingencies if technology failed.

‘For me the way things stand right now there are too many questions and not enough answers...so we are worried about fraud and security...’

4.9.5 Online benefit processing and customer type

Staff in one Processing Centre could only generalise here – no particular customer type could be identified. However in the second Processing Centre visited, staff thought that the job ready and those in employment would be most suited (job seekers) to online benefit processing, whereas for the most vulnerable this would not be practical or possible. The feeling amongst staff is that even if additional help were given to such customers, problems would exist with regard to verification and security – in particular with groups of customers with mental health problems.

Benefits for customers of online processing

The main benefits seen by staff were:

- Increased choice and flexibility.
- Increased efficiency in processing their claims.
- Empowerment – in particular for disabled customers.

Some staff had a very positive view on processing benefits online:

‘if it is another choice for the customer then all well and good...if it saves them having to queue at an antiquated switchboard system that we have...if it saves them having to go in to an office for two or three hours to be dealt with then great’.

Staff did express concerns about moving to online processing in the current climate however:

‘At the moment moving online would give us more work...using the example of the customer that applies online...that fact that they can download a claim form and post it into us...the claim form comes in and it has to go back for a signature...we are going to take that claim form and pass it to Pembroke Dock...and they are going to pick up the phone and make the customer go through the whole process...it is appalling customer service...and that is an issue that we are trying to work around just now’.

‘For us we are all in agreement that we would need a hell of a lot of work done in the background and behind the scenes before we went hell for leather promoting this to customers’.
4.9.6 Characteristics and key features of a good online benefits service

Key characteristics and features needed for an effective online benefit processing identified by staff varied, but included:

- a secure and encrypted site to ensure security – as customers worried already about giving out personal information over the phone;
- the need to establish identity and authenticity of customers – a username, pin and password system for those using the site (added security for customers);
- user friendliness – the online site would need to be easy to access and simple and straightforward to navigate;
- the site would have to offer accessible and clear information on benefits claims (drop down menus) - for this to happen and actually work in reality there would have to be significant simplification of the benefit claiming and application process;
- compulsory sections on online forms so that customers cannot progress if essential information is not provided;
- prompts for customers to remind them of what is needed at each stage of the benefit claiming process – in particular with regard to identity verification documentation that might need to be produced;
- the technology used would need to be robust and reliable to create a positive perception amongst customers;
- audit trail log – the site would have to have a monitoring, feedback and confirmation (accountability) functionality, so that customers know their application has been received, can track progress and know which staff to contact if needed (this would also help staff – relieve burden of general enquiries);
- clear guidance on what is expected of customers – on what they need, from the beginning to the end of the benefit processing cycle;
- integrated benefits processing.

Joined up delivery and alternative channels

Within Processing Centres there is a perception that the service being provided is fragmented:

- problems with recruitment and staff turnaround often mean staff lack the knowledge, education and experience to deliver the service efficiently and effectively;
- the Legacy and CMS systems do not work together and this creates extra and unnecessary work;
- the lack of uniformity in which local offices are managed causes problems and confusion. There is a need for a standardised approach. There is a cultural working difference between local office staff and processing centre staff that needs to be addressed.
• scripting. The one size fits all approach is problematic and inappropriate across the alternative channel delivery platforms.

Processing Centre staff also feel that they are responsible for ‘picking up the pieces’ and ‘dealing with problems’ emanating from poor Contact Centre and local office management performance and service:

‘Historically staff from the benefits centre have always picked up the pieces for customers…when the enquiry gets here or when the claim gets here we will pick up the pieces and tidy everything up and give the customer what they need…but we are slowly moving away from that…and will not be resourced to pick up the pieces and it won’t be our responsibility to pick up the pieces…they have to now start doing what they are paid to do [Contact Centres and Local Offices]…I don’t think the system is working properly…or anywhere near its maximum potential’.

Support from Head Office

Staff thought that the following actions would help Processing Centre staff encourage and promote the move to alternative channels more effectively:

• Invest in IT systems. CMS is perceived as ‘inadequate’ and it is not an integrated, robust and reliable system.

• Investment in staff training is needed to ensure that staff are aware of the implications of movement to alternative channels, and to give them time to gain the skills necessary so that they can deliver effectively.

• Internal and external communication and marketing must be developed to increase information and awareness so that staff have adequate time to prepare and promote, and customers receive clear signals as to how alternative channels will work:

‘There has to be consultation with practitioners all the way through and that is what the department is very good at…since it became Jobcentre Plus it has become very dictatorial…and consultants are brought in and a lot of money spent…EDS to update computer systems and things like that…and we end up with IT systems that simply don’t work…it’s then left to staff to make it work…for example the efficiency challenge…they spent millions on CMS because on paper it is wonderful…but putting it into practice it is actually appalling…’.

‘They rush things and don’t take their time to see how things are bedding out…they just think this is a good idea and we are going to rush it in’.

• There must be more ongoing consultation with practitioners at ground level when deciding and implementing new systems, and evidence that feedback and concerns from working level are addressed.

• Implement legislative changes that are needed to eradicate confusion and inefficiency across the channel strategy delivery platform. Staff need legal clarity on what can and cannot be done through alternative channels.
Staff made the point that Head Office frequently piloted new ideas relating to alternative channel development – and frequently asked for staff feedback, but there was no evidence that this feedback is actually being used and incorporated in developing a channel strategy. Staff also commented that Head Office frequently raised expectations amongst staff concerning the introduction of new initiatives and systems – which staff supported – only to fail to implement them in the end game; this perpetuated cynicism amongst staff and had a negative impact on staff morale.

4.10 Conclusions and recommendations

4.10.1 Concluding remarks

The Jobcentre Plus is currently reviewing the utilisation, costs and benefits of service delivery channels available to Jobcentre Plus customers. The organisations focus on alternative channels – delivery provides scope for further development of the non face-to-face strategy and the aim of this research has been to explore staff views of current and potential alternative channel service delivery now and in the future and how improvements can be made in the ways staff direct customers to these channels.

What this research has revealed is that staff perceptions and attitudes towards alternative channels delivery and their promotion to customers are determined by a variety of important factors – a key motivation for local office staff being the provision of a high level of customer service.

Having explored staff experiences in local offices, Contact Centres and Processing Centres – themes, problems and barriers common to all became apparent – as did issues that were specific to each ‘cog’ of the alternative channel delivery service.

Staff have been frustrated and constrained by structural, organisational and procedural factors, and as a consequence of this, a greater burden has been placed on them without what they see as the requisite resources, processes and skills to promote and deliver alternative channels in an effective and efficient way. The rhetoric of what alternative channels were supposed to deliver in terms of efficiency and better customer service, from a staff perspective, has not been seen in the reality of the overall day-to-day business process.

If further business was transferred to alternative channels under the current model and delivery platform this would have a disproportionately harmful impact – and lead to greater inefficiencies. It would reinforce the existing negative perception amongst staff that they would have to make e-delivery work without the appropriate systems, skills, training, and business processes in place.

Footfall into offices has been reduced overall, but there is a clear sense from staff across the e-delivery platform that greater efficiency can only be achieved with more investment in educating staff, improving staff skills and training, implementing an alternative performance measurement and incentive framework, improved internal communication, and providing an interactive and integrated technology across the
alternative channel delivery platform. It is only through these actions that staff and customers alike can be imbued with the confidence that e-delivery has and can have in the future, in particular in relation to Contact Centres, major benefits over and above face-to-face delivery.

To move forward and to create a more positive climate for promoting and developing alternative channel service delivery, cosmetic problems need to be addressed— but also deeper underlying constraints and embedded barriers that staff feel deter them from promoting and encouraging the use alternative channels to their full potential. Most importantly, mechanisms and processes need to be put in place by Head Office to convince staff that the organisation’s move to e-service delivery will not compromise the quality of the customer service and care received.

Staff and management recognise the many benefits that alternative channel delivery can bring in principle. To move to the next stage and further develop new functionality of alternative channels it is imperative that senior management provide staff with the right tools, the appropriate skills and training, and a coherent channel strategy and quality e-platform that is fully supportive of and integrated with the appropriate business processes.

4.10.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the key findings of the research with Jobcentre Plus staff:

- Review local office training provision in order to strengthen staff skills in using information technology, new technologies and alternative channels.
- Provide dedicated resource in local offices (technology) to allow staff to promote alternative channels more efficiently and effectively.
- Improve consultation and feedback mechanisms with staff on the ground to ensure that development and implementation of alternative channel delivery is integrated, interactive and robust.
- Introduce monitoring and feedback mechanisms for the use of alternative channels so that targeting of customers can be more strategic in nature.
- Review Contact Centre training provision to give staff the skills needed to deal with enquiries from the public in an appropriate way and to deliver good customer service.
- Review the staff recruitment and retention policy and practice.
- Review the management of staff absence in Contact Centres.
- Review Contact Centre scripting. There needs to be more flexibility so that staff can deal with different customer needs and enquiries.
- Review target driven performance measurement and implement a performance measurement model that is more conducive to the promotion of alternative channels.
- Improve internal communication to better inform staff of the alternative channel strategy, how it affects them and where it fits with the future development of Jobcentre Plus. Produce clearer guidance on alternative channel strategy and the synergy with other parallel strategies being pursued by Jobcentre Plus.

- Review and develop technological platforms used to deliver the alternative channel strategy (internal and external). The alternative channel service delivery platform has to be fit for purpose and fully supportive of, and integrated with, the business process.

- Improve the standard and quality of all alternative channel provision (in particular on benefit side) so that the experience for customers is positive.

- Review and improve communication processes between the different ‘cogs’ delivering the alternative channel strategy to clear up misunderstandings, problems and delays in the business processes.

- Improve the national marketing of alternative channels so that customers are aware of alternative channels and understand what they can offer and how they can be utilised, without having to come into the local office. An ‘idiots guide’ to using alternative channels is needed to help guide customers through the alternative delivery channel processes.

- Review the issue of cost of using alternative channels to customers. Calling Contact Centres outside local offices could be free.
5 Key findings and messages from the research

5.1 Introduction

The preceding sections of this review have presented a range of evidence relating to alternative service delivery channels. Section 2 (undertaken by GHK International) examined a wide range of secondary information relating to alternative service delivery channels in both the public and private sectors, in the UK and elsewhere. Section 3 presented evidence collected by NOP from customers of Jobcentre Plus customers. Section 4 presented the views of Jobcentre Plus staff who were interviewed by the Centre for Public Policy. Each set of evidence covers similar ground – awareness, access, current usage, strengths and weaknesses of different channels, barriers to future expansion of alternative channels and some consideration of the levers that might be used to migrate services to alternative channels in the future – and each section draws conclusions and makes recommendations (although not always explicitly). Reflecting on this considerable body of evidence it is clear that there is a consensus on many issues but there are also differences. Sometimes the difference is simply one of degree, but in other instances the differences are more significant.

This final, concluding section reflects on the evidence presented and draws out of it the key messages for Jobcentre Plus. The section then moves on to examine the implications of the key findings for Jobcentre Plus strategy and operations.

5.2 Key findings

5.2.1 Alternative delivery channels in Jobcentre Plus

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that a wide variety of alternatives to the traditional face-to-face service are currently on offer to customers of
Jobcentre Plus. These alternative channels include:

- Jobpoints.
- Jobcentre Plus website.
- Worktrain website.
- ‘Warm Phones’ in Local Offices.
- First Contact Centres (contacted by phone).
- Jobseeker Direct Contact Centres (contacted by phone).

In addition to these mainstream services, pilots have been conducted in the use of open access internet computers, text-messaging and job search via digital television.

Jobcentre Plus has sought to promote the use of alternate channels by means of encouragement of customers by managers and frontline staff. Undoubtedly, large numbers of customers use such services and for many the switch to alternative service channels has been beneficial. Nonetheless, questions remain as to whether the extent of usage is as great as it might be, whether customers are using these services for the right reasons and in the most effective manner. Given the rapid pace of technological change in ICT and its diffusion into the populations as a whole, there are also major questions to be asked about whether the channels on offer need to be (or could be) supplemented, or even supplanted, by other channels and, if so, how amenable would customers and staff be to such developments.

5.2.2 Strategic vision

It is probably fair to say that the form and balance between different service delivery channels in Jobcentre Plus has grown in a piecemeal, and, at times, contradictory manner. Traditionally, Jobcentre Plus has been highly dependent upon face-to-face delivery of services, although some alternatives such as vacancy display boards have existed for decades. Technical opportunities to deliver some services by means of telephone or interactive machine have been exploited from time to time as opportunities presented themselves. This is not unusual and evidence from the literature suggests that the development of alternative service delivery channels is an ad hoc or organic process in most organisations, reflecting the unpredictable and rapid pace of technical change (see Section 2.x). What is notable in the case of Jobcentre Plus is that the development of alternative channels has been taking place against a background of increased emphasis on face-to-face contact because of the enhanced role of Advisers, especially in regard to programmes such as New Deal.

While opportunities for delivering Jobcentre Plus services by alternative means have been exploited, there is little in the evidence presented in this report to suggest any coherent strategy for such developments. The drivers of change in other organisations are variously to improve the quality of service, to match service more precisely to different segments of the customer base, to create new markets or to reduce costs. While variants of these factors are mentioned by staff within Jobcentre Plus, it is far
from clear that there is a single unifying strategic purpose to the development and use of alternative channels. Managers see clear gains in terms of resource savings and the quality of service. Frontline staff appeared more ambivalent towards alternative channels, encouraging their use while at the same time seeing such developments as potentially threatening the quality of services (arguing that face-to-face contact is essential for some activities) and undermining their traditional role within the organisation. Managers were clearly concerned about this ambivalence, but saw it as a consequence of the fragmented nature of the Jobcentre Plus strategy regarding alternative delivery channels that left staff unclear about the reasons for introducing new delivery channels and unsure how or whether to promote those channels. One consequence of this is that customers receive mixed messages from staff. Advisers and other staff inform customers about alternative channels while at the same time appearing to be less than enthusiastic and, in some instances, lacking knowledge of how alternative channels work and unable to offer practical assistance with their use.

5.2.3 Organisational culture

The application of new technology to any business can produce tensions and difficulties unless managed correctly. The literature review suggests that Jobcentre Plus has been less ‘nimble’ than private sector organisations in adopting and adapting new technology, especially ICT for the delivery of its services. The apparent lack of a coherent strategy can be regarded as a symptom of such organisational inertia. Evidence from Business Managers indicated that the fragmented nature of the policy on alternative delivery channels was a result of the prevailing organisational culture which would need to be transformed if Jobcentre Plus was to fully embrace the potential offered by the new means of delivering services.

The prevailing Jobcentre Plus culture reflects many different factors. Managers point to a shortage of resources and under-investment in new technology in an organisation that is increasingly driven by performance targets. Many of the staff have been in post for long periods and this tends to result in conservative, if not cynical and sceptical, attitudes towards change. Perhaps because of the juxtaposition of the introduction of alternate channels with cuts in resources, there appears to be a widespread view amongst staff that alternative channels are introduced ‘on the cheap’ at the expense of the quality of service and paving the way to reductions in staffing within the organisation. To some extent these attitudes and beliefs are transmitted to customers with an impact upon the reputation of Jobcentre Plus and the confidence that customers have in its services. It is ironic, therefore, that staff pressure to retain traditional services in parallel with alternative channels (rather than replacing the former with the latter) is likely to result in the least cost effective option in which none of the service delivery channels is adequately resourced.

Some of the issues described above merely reflect the difficulties that any organisation would face when managing. In the case of Jobcentre Plus, the evidence from both staff and customers points to the need for a much clearer vision of the purpose and
benefits of alternative channels – and a recognition of what services cannot be
migrated to alternative channels – around which the organisation and its staff can
unite to persuade customers of the benefits of alternate forms of service delivery
(while addressing any concerns that staff and customers might have about this
strategy). This lack of strategic vision is evident in a number of specific aspects of
alternative service delivery.

5.2.4 Awareness
Awareness of different service delivery channels is a necessary condition for their
use. To a considerable extent, levels of awareness of alternative delivery channels
may simply be a reflection of levels of awareness (or lack of it) amongst the
population as a whole. The evidence review suggests that levels of awareness in the
UK as a whole have been low but probably have been increasing rapidly. Evidence
from 2002 indicated that awareness of alternative channels amongst DWP customers
was low. The more recent evidence suggests that levels of awareness have probably
increased. Jobcentre Plus staff report – perhaps optimistically – that most customers
should be aware of the alternative channels, not least because staff make a
point of encouraging their use. The customer research also concludes that there is a
strong aware base within Jobcentre Plus customers, although the research only
considered four service channels – Jobpoints, Warm Phones, Jobseeker Direct and
the Jobcentre Plus website). Virtually all customers were aware of Jobpoints but only
two-thirds were aware of the other three channels. One weakness with the
customer research is that it cannot differentiate customers by the length of their
benefit claim. Consequently, it is not possible to know whether low awareness is
concentrated amongst newly registered customers or is more widespread.

5.2.5 Usage
There was a clear consensus amongst staff and customers that there is a continuing
need for face-to-face contact for certain types of activities and for certain customer
groups. While the conclusion reached by staff and customers is similar, the basis for
their respective views tended to differ. Staff tended to argue that the complexities of
claiming benefits are best dealt with by face to face meetings with customers
(although this view was not shared by those working in Contact Centres). To some
extent customers share this view (they were worried that mistakes when claiming
benefit would result in loss of, or delay to, their benefit payment) but customers are
more inclined than staff to stress the practical and emotional support provided in
face to face meetings.

Views that there is a continuing need for face to face contact implies that there is an
upper limit to the extent to which current and future services can be supplied
through alternate channels. Estimates of where the limit lies differ greatly amongst
staff and customers. Staff in Contact Centres see much greater scope for migrating
services to alternate channels than do staff in Local Offices, while managers in Local
Offices see greater scope for alternate delivery channels than frontline staff.
Frontline staff see alternate channels as most appropriate and easily accessed by IT
literate and job ready customers, a view they share with many customers. The evidence from the literature review indicates that the most common reason that customers do not use alternative channels is that they do not wish to use such channels rather than an inherent inability to do so. The research with customers found that ten per cent of customers made no use of any of the main alternative channels considered by the research.

The literature review concludes that usage of alternate channels is determined by physical access, ability to use the channel and a willingness to do so. In the UK as a whole, access to new communications technology, such as the internet or 3G mobile phones, is still limited, albeit increasing rapidly. Access to the internet at home is a particular limiting factor, especially for low income groups, lone parents and single people (all of whom are disproportionately represented amongst the Jobcentre Plus customer base) while the ability to use new ITC technology is influenced by age and level of education. The most commonly used alternative channel, as indicated by the research with customers, has been Jobpoints which are relatively simple to use and conveniently located in Local Offices. A large proportion of customers were aware of this service, most of these had used the service and a substantial proportion had used it on many occasions. As already noted, awareness of other channels is more limited while the proportion of customers actually using such channels is even more limited (the proportion of customers who had ever used the Jobcentre Plus website is probably in the region of 30 per cent). In the case of the website, the most common reason for not using was lack of access to the internet (especially access at home) and many said they would consider the use of the website if they could access it from the Jobcentre. A significant minority also said they could not use the website because they did not know how to use a computer.

5.2.6 Benefits and costs

The evidence from other businesses and from employment services in other countries is that customers can be persuaded to use alternative service delivery channels if they perceive sufficient benefits relative to the costs of using the alternate channel. One striking finding from the research with customers is the extent to which customers are prepared to consider, in principle, the use of interactive machines or a website for undertaking a range of activities from job search, job application, submission of CVs, notification of changes to circumstances and even signing on (although the level of support was lowest for activities such as claiming a new benefit). Since there appears so little resistance amongst customers to the idea of using alternative channels, the relatively low usage of some channels in practice suggests that there are barriers or disincentives to their use.

Both customers and staff see time savings and customer independence as the major benefits of the use of alternate channels. For customers, alternative channels helped them avoid queues in Jobcentres and in some cases eliminated the need to visit a Jobcentre Plus Local Office. Alternate channels are also seen as offering flexibility and a degree of independence. For Jobcentre Plus these benefits map into a need for fewer resources and improved efficiency while being able to offer customers a better quality service and an element of choice.
While the evidence points to the gains from alternate channels being real, to some extent they are offset by real or perceived limitations and costs. For instance, while customers using Jobpoints save time and can tailor their job search to their particular requirements, many pointed to the limited range of jobs covered and, most significantly, the need to go to staff for details of any job in which they were interested (thus mitigating much of the time saved). Many customers feel they lack the skills necessary to use the alternative channels effectively, while staff, although well informed about the alternative channels, appear to have insufficient knowledge to be able to help them use such channels. Evidence from the research with staff highlighted concerns about the level of ITC literacy amongst staff and their lack of in-depth knowledge of alternative channels. To some extent this is a self perpetuating situation. Where staff make little use of the alternative channels, they remain less knowledgeable about, and less skilled in the use of, such delivery channels.

Increasing use of alternate service delivery channels has the effect of shifting the relationship between advisers and other staff and their customers. Some customers and staff are comfortable with this changing relationship, usually those with ITC competence and confidence in its use. Others are less comfortable. Many customers are fearful of the consequences of taking responsibility for managing their job search and benefits (particularly if a mistake results in loss of benefit). Staff, on the other hand, are fearful of the loss of control over, and feedback about, the activities of customers as well as feeling their role in the organisation is being diminished. Amongst the latter group of staff there was a perception that Jobcentre Plus had not invested in training its staff in the skills necessary to cope effectively with the new service delivery channels. Where staff lacked competence, they often also lacked the confidence to actively promote alternative channels. Promotion of different service channels was also hampered by a lack of clarity amongst staff about why it might be advantageous to both staff and customers to develop alternative channels.

5.2.7 Service delivery in the future

In terms of the development of technology and access to it, there is considerable scope for developing further the delivery of Jobcentre Plus services by alternative and e-channels. Access to existing ICT is growing rapidly in the UK and this is reflected amongst Jobcentre Plus customers. Home ownership of computers is increasing rapidly reflecting falling costs. Alongside the take up on home computers has been a rapid increase in the number of households having access to the internet, and, in particular taking up broadband services which allow fast, reliable and continuous access to the internet. Around 7 million addresses in the UK are currently subscribing to a broadband service, compared with just 350 thousand in 2002. Given the socio-economic characteristics of Jobcentre Plus customers, it might be expected that they would predominantly fall on the wrong side of the digital divide. In fact, access to ICT is significant even amongst this group. Around 40 per cent of Jobcentre Plus customers currently have access to the internet from home and a further 20 per cent have access from elsewhere. This proportion can be expected to grow rapidly as the real cost of access continues to fall; an additional 10 per cent of customers expected to have internet access within the next 12 months. In terms of
other technologies, around half of customers had digital television which offers scope for interaction and e-mail messaging. Around three-quarters of customers had a mobile phone, although less than ten per cent had a 3G or video phone.

Thus, despite their often disadvantaged situation and low incomes, a large proportion of Jobcentre Plus customers already have the potential to use alternative channels for the delivery of services and this proportion can be expected to grow substantially over the next few years. Moreover, some of the alternate channels currently in existence do not require computer or internet access but merely the ability to use and access to a telephone. The challenge facing Jobcentre Plus, especially if a longer-term view is taken, is less one of customer access to alternative channels but more one of promoting take up of existing and future service delivery channels. As already noted, customers appear remarkably willing to contemplate the use of alternative channels for most types of activity other than dealing with new benefit claims. Customers also appear to acknowledge the benefits of alternative channels while recognising that there are some risks.

While the evidence suggest considerable scope for, and potential future benefits from, the delivery of Jobcentre Plus services through alternative channels, it must be recognised that the pursuit of such benefits is likely to be costly in terms of the investment in further channel development and streamlining of processes, marketing alternative channels and training staff to be champions of these alternative delivery channels. Such costs will be justified only if the take-up of alternative channels can be greatly increased from current levels to realise the potential efficiency savings. Increasing take-up of alternative channels, while ensuring that such delivery channels do not merely duplicate existing delivery mechanisms will be a major challenge for Jobcentre Plus if it is to implement a successful alternative channels strategy.

One approach to increasing the take-up of alternative channels is to offer some form of incentive to customers. There are various forms that such incentives might take. The experience of the Inland Revenue is that simple financial incentives (£10 to taxpayers who complete their Tax Return on-line) may have only limited impact. Much more successful are ‘incentives’ to customers in the form of easier processes and time savings. Developing simpler processes, offering easier access to services and promoting alternative channels in these terms may be a more fruitful form of incentive to customers that is, ultimately, also beneficial to Jobcentre Plus in terms of efficiency.

What then needs to change to increase take-up of alternative channels? Several factors would assist future take up of alternative channels. These include:

- clear guidance from staff on which activities should be undertaken by alternative channels and which require face-to-face contact with advisers and other staff. Customers need reassurance that when they need traditional face-to-face support they will receive it;
clear separation of alternative channels from face-to-face contact. There is little
gain to customers if in order to complete an activity started on an alternative
channel they need to refer to staff;

- the ability of staff to provide practical assistance for customers when they first
use alternative channels or encounter a problem;

- the development of quality (fast, reliable, content rich) e-service system(s) that
are ‘user friendly’ and easy to use.

5.3 Key messages

There are a number of key messages and conclusions that flow from the findings of
the evidence review and research with customers and staff. The messages for
Jobcentre Plus are as set out below.

- A service delivery strategy needs to be set out that clearly identifies the rationale
for alternative delivery channels. Such a strategy should set out:
  - the principles that lie behind the development of alternative channels (such as
    improvement of service quality, customer choice, efficiency/cost saving);
  - define the limits to which services can be migrated to alternative channels
    (and provide a guarantee of a face-to-face where appropriate);
  - identify which activities, and which customer groups, are appropriate for which
    service delivery channel.

- To fully embrace alternate delivery channels and to realise their benefits will
require changes to the organisational culture. As a start, the channels strategy
should be implemented in consultation with Jobcentre Plus staff at Local Office
level to ensure a ‘buy in’ on their part. It is necessary for the organisation to
recognise the potentially threatening nature of a substantial shift to alternative
channels for many staff and to address staff concerns about their role, loss of
control and the quality of service. If staff understand the purpose of the channel
strategy and are comfortable with its purpose, this will encourage them to
promote it and avoid the negative or mixed messages that exist currently.

- Business processes need to be reviewed in the light of the available service delivery
channels in order to avoid duplication, bottlenecks and undue complexity in
service delivery. Staff and customers need to be sufficiently confident in the
alternative delivery systems, and what they deliver, that it is possible to rely
entirely on some alternative channels for the delivery of some services (and face
to face contacts for others).

- There is a need for national support for the channel strategy on two fronts:
  - there is a need for investment in the development of simple to use, relevant
    and reliable delivery systems that are capable of providing the services that
    customers want and in which staff have confidence;
  - the needs to be a national promotional campaign to raise awareness of
    alternative channels and the benefits they confer.
at the local level there also needs to be support for the channel strategy:

- Local Office staff should promote and guide customers toward appropriate alternative channels. To assist them in this task, staff will require guidance (and possibly protocols) for promoting particular delivery channels and a basis for differentiating between different customer groups;

- resources need to be invested in local delivery of e-services, such as internet access points in Local Offices;

- resources need to be invested in the training of customers to use alternative delivery channels. Not only will this enable access and use of alternative channels but it will also enhance the key skills of jobseekers;

- adequate training in the use of alternative service delivery channels needs to be provided for staff so they can provide real support to customers.

The issue of incentives for customers to use alternative channels, and what form those incentives might take, requires further investigation.
Appendix A
Quantitative questionnaire: customers

Research with customers - quantitative questionnaire

Service delivery channels questionnaire
Issue F: 28.10.04

Good morning/afternoon my name is ….. from NOP Research Group, an independent market research company based in London. We have been asked by Jobcentre Plus to find out what you think about some of the facilities on offer here. It will take about 10 minutes.

Q1. Are you aware of any of the following that can be used to access Jobcentre Plus Services? READ OUT AND CODE (USE PROMPTS IN BRACKETS TO CLARIFY TO RESPONDENTS WHAT YOU MEAN)

1. www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk (the Jobcentre Plus Website)
2. Jobpoints (kiosks or machines where you can search for jobs – these are present in the office)
3. Jobseeker Direct on 0845 6060 234 (national number to support people in looking for a job)
4. Warm Phones (phones in the Jobcentres where you call Jobseeker Direct free of charge – these are present in the office. (INTERVIEWER ADD IF NECESSARY) phones on the wall where you can ring up for free for a job
5. None of these – GO TO Q6
6. Don’t know – GO TO Q6
ASK IF JOBCENTRE PLUS WEBSITE (CODE 1) MENTIONED AT Q1. OTHERS CHECK FILTER AT Q2b

**Q2a. How did you first become aware of the Jobcentre Plus Website?** DO NOT PROMPT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY IN FIRST COLUMN BELOW

ASK IF JOB POINTS (CODE 2) MENTIONED AT Q1. OTHERS GO TO Q3

**Q2b How did you first become aware of Job Points?** DO NOT PROMPT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY IN SECOND COLUMN BELOW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Job Point</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Staff in the Jobcentre Plus/an adviser told me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Through a friend/word-of-mouth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Radio advert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Poster or leaflet in a Jobcentre Plus office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Poster or leaflet in a different location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Saw the Jobpoint in the office (n/a for website)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Don’t know/Can’t remember</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ASK FOR EACH RESPONDENT IS AWARE OF AT Q1

**Q3 Have you ever used ................. (ASK FOR EACH AWARE OF AT Q1)**

READ OUT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>DK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk">www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk</a> (the Jobcentre Plus Website)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobpoints (kiosks or machines where you can search for jobs – these are present in the office)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobseeker Direct on 0845 6060 234 (national number to support people in looking for a job)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm phones (phones in the Jobcentres where you call Jobseeker Direct free of charge) (INTERVIEWER ADD IF NECESSARY) phones on the wall where you can ring up for free for a job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ASK IF USED WEBSITE AND/OR JOBPOINTS (CHECK Q3)

Q4 **How many times have you used the Website/Jobpoints** (ASK FOR EACH USED AT Q3)? CODE ONE ONLY IN APPROPRIATE COLUMN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Job Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+ times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ASK IF USED WEBSITE AND/OR JOBPOINTS AT Q3

Q5 **Thinking about the first (only) time you used the Website/Jobpoints** (ASK FOR EACH USED AT Q3), **why did you use it rather than dealing with a member of staff/adviser in the Jobcentre**? DO NOT PROMPT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY IN APPROPRIATE COLUMN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Job Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was directed/advised by a member of staff to use it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The queues were long</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This was quicker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to do it myself using this than asking an adviser/member of staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was curious about what it could do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify) Fills in time while waiting to sign on Print outs are useful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ASK THOSE WHO HAVE NOT USED THE WEBSITE (CHECK Q3).

Q6 **Why have you not used the Website?** DO NOT PROMPT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY

Don’t have access to the internet
Don’t like using computers
Don’t like using websites
Don’t know what you can use it for
Don’t know how to use computers/need training
Don’t know how to use websites/need training
Prefer talking to an adviser/member of staff
Difficulty getting on a computer (e.g. at library etc)
Don’t trust the web/internet
Other (please specify)

Don’t know

ASK THOSE WHO HAVE NOT USED THE WEBSITE (CHECK Q3).

Q7 What would make you more likely to use the Website? DO NOT PROMPT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY

Clear instructions on how to use it
By showing people how to make best use of it
By training people on how to use it
If it speeded things up
If it meant I didn’t need to travel to a Jobcentre Plus office
If it provided other services (e.g. making appointments, online Benefit applications)
If it were available to use on a computer at the Jobcentre
Other (please specify)

Nothing
Don’t know

ASK THOSE WHO HAVE NOT USED JOBPOINTS (CHECK Q3)

Q8 Why have you not used the Jobpoints? DO NOT PROMPT CODE ALL THAT APPLY

It wasn’t working
Its too far for me to travel in to use it
Don’t know how to use it
Don’t know what you can use it for
Prefer talking to an adviser/member of staff in the office
Prefer talking to an adviser/member of staff by calling Jobseeker Direct
Prefer to search for a job online
Queues too long
Jobs/information out of date
Not currently looking for a job
Do not like using an interactive computer/screen
Other (please specify)

Don’t know
ASK THOSE WHO HAVE NOT USED JOBPOINTS (CHECK Q3)

Q9  **What would make you more likely to use the Jobpoints?** DO NOT PROMPT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY

Clear instructions on how to use it
By showing people how to make best use of it
By training people on how to use it
If it speeded things up
If it meant less queuing
If it provided other services (e.g. making appointments, online Benefit applications)
Other (please specify)

…………………………………………………………………………………………………………

8. Nothing

9. Don’t know

ASK ALL

Q10a  **I am now going to read out a number of tasks or activities that you may need to do in connection with Jobcentre Plus. For each, I would like you to tell me if you would you be willing to do it online using a website?** READ OUT EACH TASK IN TURN, INCLUDING THE INFORMATION IN BRACKETS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Claim for Benefit (e.g. Jobseeker's Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortnightly Job Review (i.e. 'Signing On')</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of Circumstance (e.g. address, employment status)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking account status (e.g. when you will be paid, appointments booked with advisers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for jobs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying for jobs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing a CV and allowing employers to contact you about jobs that match your search criteria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ASK ALL
Q10b I am now going to read out a number of tasks or activities that you may need to do in connection with Jobcentre Plus. For each, I would like you to tell me if you would you be willing to do it in a Jobcentre Plus office using an interactive machine similar to Jobpoints? READ OUT EACH TASK IN TURN, INCLUDING THE INFORMATION IN BRACKETS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Claim for Benefit (e.g. Jobseeker’s Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortnightly Job Review (i.e. ‘Signing On’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of Circumstance (e.g. address, employment status)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking account status (e.g. when you will be paid, appointments booked with advisers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for jobs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying for jobs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing a CV and allowing employers to contact you about jobs that match your search criteria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q11a Which of the following do you have or use now, or are you likely to have or use in the next 12 months? ASK FOR EACH AND CODE “NOW” IN FIRST COLUMN, 12 MONTHS’ IN SECOND COLUMN AND “NEITHER” IN THIRD COLUMN.
### Internet access:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>In 12 months</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Don’t know about the future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- at friends house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(that you can use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regularly)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- at work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- at library</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- at internet café</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- at other location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Mobile phone/device:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>In 12 months</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Don’t know about the future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- with voicemail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- with SMS (i.e. text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>messaging)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- with MMS (Multimedia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messaging Service – i.e.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>photo/picture messaging)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- with email</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- with video phone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i.e. 3G)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Digital TV:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>In 12 months</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Don’t know about the future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- freeview only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i.e. set top box</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but no monthly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subscription – inc. BBC3 etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- cable (e.g. NTL,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telewest)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sky</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sky Digital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other devices:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>In 12 months</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Don’t know about the future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palm device</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pocket pc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textphone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ASK ALL

**Q11b** Do you have an email address?

1. Yes
2. No

IF YES AT Q11B

**Q11c** SHOWCARD A How often do you check it nowadays?

1. Check most days
2. Check at least once a week
3. Check at least once a fortnight
4. Do not check on a regular basis
5. No/never
6. Don’t know

IF NO AT Q11B

**Q11d** Are you likely to have email in the next 12 months?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don’t know

ASK ALL

**Q12** INTERVIEWER CODE SEX

Male
Female

**Q13** Would you mind telling me your age last birthday?

16-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+
Refused
Q14 SHOWCARD B To which of these groups do you consider you belong?
CODE ONE ONLY

White
British
Irish
Any other White background (WRITE IN)

Mixed
White and Black Caribbean
White and Black African
White and Asian
Any other mixed background (WRITE IN)

Black or Black British
Caribbean
African
Any other Black background (WRITE IN)

Asian or Asian British
Indian
Pakistani
Bangladeshi
Any other Asian background (WRITE IN)

Chinese

Any other ethnic group (WRITE IN)

Refused

ASK ALL

Q15 SHOWCARD C Can I just check, are you personally receiving any of these state benefits or allowances? JUST READ OUT THE LETTERS THAT APPLY
MULTICODE OK
Yes:

A  Income support
B  Jobseeker’s Allowance (formerly Unemployment Benefit or Income Support for unemployed people)
C  NI retirement pension/Over 80 pension/Old persons pension
D  Incapacity Benefit (previously sickness and/or invalidity benefit)
E  Some other benefit for people with disabilities
F  Some other state benefit (SPECIFY)

……………………………………………………………………

No, none of these
Refused

ASK ALL

Q16  Approximately how long have you travelled (one way) to reach the Jobcentre today?

Under 15 minutes
15-30 minutes
30-45 minutes
45 minutes – 1 hour
over 1 hour
Don’t know

ASK ALL

Q17  There may be an opportunity to take part in a group discussion to talk about your views on Jobcentre Plus services. Those who take part in the group discussion will receive £20 as a thank you. This monetary gift will not effect your benefit entitlements.

All travel expenses will be paid up to a total of £12 (to cover there and back). You will need to provide receipts.

ONLY READ OUT IF RESPONDENTS SAYS THEY NEED TO MAKE CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

We will cover childcare expenses up to £20 to a recognised/registered childminder based on the provision of a receipt.

Would you be happy to be recontacted for the next stage of this study?

Yes – RECORD DETAILS BELOW
No – RECORD DETAILS BELOW FOR VERIFICATION PURPOSES
Name:
Address:
Postcode:
Telephone Number:
Appendix B
Qualitative topic guide: customers

JCP E-channels/Project Highway

NOP ref: 436149

Final topic guide 15/11/04

Main objective:

Explore and evaluate the scope for migrating service delivery from face to face contact to more cost effective channels. This will be brought around by increasing understanding of client preferences, needs and receptiveness to different channels of service provision.

Overall specific objectives:

- To explore JCP client’s experiences of different service delivery channels
- Explore reasons why some JCP clients are failing to utilise the alternative channel service provisions
- Identify ways in which JCP clients can be encouraged to use new channels of service delivery
- Explore whether, and how, JCP staff are directing the JCP clients away from face to face interaction

We will aim to cover all of the following material across the sample as a whole. However, the amount and depth of coverage typically varies according to relative importance to sample type. For example, we may not ask all the questions listed or they may be asked in a different order.
1. **Moderator’s introduction (5 mins)**
   - Thank respondents for taking part in the research.
   - Introduce self, NOP, explain nature of research interview: to ask their opinions and views on JCP service provision, and to get their reactions to some ideas.
   - Discussion will last for 1½ hours and it will be recorded for the purpose of the research.
   - Importance of everyone being able to say what they think, respecting one another’s views, not talking over one another.
   - Any questions?
   - Round Robin of names.
   - General information: place of residence, family set-up, hobbies and interests.

2. **Exploring services used within Jobcentre Plus offices (10 mins)**
   *(Aim: to explore respondent’s use of JCP services and their perceptions of those services)*
   - How often do you visit the JCP office?
   - When do you visit the JCP office?
     - Why do you visit it at that time?
     Moderator: Probe/ascertain if JCP visits are part of other general activities e.g. shopping in town so pop into the JCP as located near by.
   - What do you usually do on your visit to a JCP office?
   - What are the main things you think about when you think about a visit to the JCP?
     - What are your main likes? Why?
     - What are your main dislikes? Why?
   - What makes a good service?
   - Which services do you think/feel are good? Why?
   - Which services do you think/feel are bad? Why?
   - Since you have been coming to the JCP office have you always thought the same about these services
     - If yes, then why?
   - If no, then what has changed?
3. **Explore and evaluate general knowledge of interactive services (10 mins)**

(Aim: To ascertain and investigate the volume of use of interactive services in everyday life)

- What do you think is an interactive service?
  
  Moderator: If respondents uncertain of types of interactive service then prompt with - using the internet for shopping, buying tickets through electronic machines at train stations, collecting cinema tickets, digital TV.
  
  Moderator: Brainstorm interactive services and write them on a flip chart

- What do you think of these services?

- What is good about them?
  - Why?

- What is bad about them?
  - Why?

- How do you feel about trying new interactive services?

- How often do you use them?

- What do you use them for?
  - Have you ever bought anything online?
  - How did you find the experience? Why?

- How do you feel about using them in comparison to other services e.g. face to face

- Why do you think they have been introduced?

- Who does it benefit?

- What could be the potential benefits of those services in a few years time?

4a. **Response to JCP e-channel services (10 mins)**

(Aim: To explore respondent’s views of JCP interactive services)

- In which ways do you access job information through the JCP?
  - What made you decide to access the services in this way?

Moderator: To write all services mentioned on a flip chart.

If not mentioned probe on the following an add to flip chart:

- Face-to-face
• Warm Phones (phones in the Jobcentres where you call Jobseeker Direct free of charge – these are present in the office).
• Jobseeker Direct on 0845 6060 234 (national number to support people in looking for a job)
• Website (www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)
• Jobpoints (kiosks or machines where you can search for jobs – these are present in the office)
• Which services do you like/dislike?
  - Why?
Moderator: Ask respondents to rank services in order of preference.
• Why have you ranked them in that order?
• Why do you like that service the most?
• Why do you like that service the least?
Moderator: Ask respondents to rank them again in order of efficiency i.e. which service performs best for them.
• Why have you ranked them in that order?

4b. **Explore perceptions to JCP e-channel services (15 mins)**

*(Aim: To investigate respondents experience and perception of the JCP e-channel services)*

Moderator: Tell respondents we are now going to focus in on two services provided by JCP- their website and Jobpoints.

(i) **Job Points**

• Have you ever used the JCP Jobpoint
  - If yes, why and how often?
  - If no, Why?
• What made you use the JCP Jobpoint for the first time?

Probe:
• JCP staff
• Curiosity
• Advert/literature (radio, poster, leaflet)
• Personal preference
• Avoid long queues for adviser
• Fills in time while waiting to see adviser

• How did you feel about using the JCP Jobpoint for the first time?
  - What was it like?
  - What was good/bad about using it?
  - What worked/didn’t work?

Moderator: Write Jobpoint on the flip chart and ask respondents to brainstorm everything they associate with them. Probe what they write down distinguishing between actual experience and perception.

• Why do you think that?

Moderator: Probe if a personal experience or perception of service.

• How could it be improved?

• How do you rate the overall Jobpoint service?
  - In comparison to the face to face service i.e. talking to an adviser
  - How is it better/worse then face-to-face? Why?

(ii) JCP website

• Have you ever used the JCP website?
  - If yes, why and how often?
  - If no, Why?

• What made you use the JCP website for the first time?

Probe:
  • JCP staff
  • Curiosity
  • Advert/literature (radio, poster, leaflet)
  • Personal preference
  • Avoid visiting JCP office

• How did you feel about using the JCP website for the first time?
  - What was it like?
  - What was good/bad about using it?
  - What worked/didn’t work?

Moderator: Write JCP website on the flip chart and ask respondents to brainstorm everything they associate with them. Probe what they write down distinguishing between actual experience and perception.
• Why do you think that?
Moderator: Probe if a personal experience or perception of service.
• How could it be improved?
• How do you rate the overall JCP website service?
  - In comparison to the face to face service i.e. talking to an adviser
  - How is it better/worse then face-to-face? Why?
• How do these services compare to other JCP services?
• How do these services compare to other interactive services that you use?
• Do you use Digital TV?
  - If yes, how do the JCP e-channel services compare to digital TV?

Moderator: Write any barriers mentioned either specifically for JCP e-channel services or interactive services in general to use in the following section.

5a. **Barriers / potential encouragements to using JCP e-channel services (20 mins)**

*(Aim: Use scenario to explore the barriers and potential inducements for using JCP e-channel services)*

Moderator: Initially explore barriers feeding in responses from previous section.
• What are the barriers to use at the moment
  - How can these be dealt with?

Moderator: Within the question above explore each barrier referring to flip chart and ensure the following points are covered:
• Probe: Prevention/limitation of barrier
  - No internet/computer access
  - Dislikes using computers/websites/interactive service
  - Unable to use computers/websites/interactive service- needs training
  - Distrust of online services i.e. privacy issues
  - Prefers face-to-face
• Probe: Improvements/incentives required to use service
  - Clear instructions
  - Training to use e-channels
  - Prove more efficient service
  - Did not need to visit a JCP office
  - Provide other services
  - Website accessible at the JCP office
Moderator: Explain to respondents that they have to pretend that they are in charge of all the Jobcentre Plus offices and they have to encourage their customers to increase their use of the JCP website and the Job Points. Split the respondents into two groups for this exercise (allow 5 minutes).

- What are the good points/benefits about these services?
  - How should these be advertised?
- How should customers be told about these services
  - What would it involve-types/forms of communication
  - What would it involve-service provision

Moderator: If respondents fail to spontaneously introduce any services please mention the following and probe- make new claims for Benefits, fortnightly job review, checking account status, job searching, job applying, changing circumstances, completing CV.

- Who would you target? Why?
  - Who do they think would not want to use these services? Why?
  - How could they encourage customers who are not keen to use these services?

Moderator: Bring groups together to feed back ensuring all above points are covered (allow 5 minutes).

5b. Exploring the potential developments for JCP e-channel services
   (10 mins)

(Aim: Investigate respondents’ attitude and receptiveness to using JCP e-channel services to undertake a number of JCP tasks or activities)

- Imagine if the following services (read list of probes) were made available and accessible through the JCP websites and Jobpoints. How would you feel undertaking these tasks (please probe each service) using the JCP website or using a Jobpoint? Why?

Probe:
- New Claim for Benefit (e.g. Jobseeker’s Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support)
- Fortnightly Job Review (i.e. ‘Signing On’)
- Change of Circumstances (e.g. address, employment status)
- Checking account status (e.g. when you will be paid, appointments booked with advisers)
- Applying for jobs
• Completing a CV and allowing employers to contact you about jobs that match your criteria

• What would prevent/encourage you from using the JCP website or Jobpoints for carrying out these tasks. Why?
  - In what way would this interactive approach be easier than current methods of carrying out these tasks?
  - How could these interactive services be made easier to use for carrying out these tasks? i.e. How could the JCP make these interactive services more desirable?
  - What would personally make you prefer to use an interactive service to carry out the mentioned tasks?

Moderator: Please refer to the flip chart and probes suggested in section 5a to investigate reasons for responses. Please ensure respondents discuss issues of privacy in terms of providing personal information online (who it goes to and where is it stored).

• If you used the JCP website to carry out these tasks where would you wish to do it? Why?
  - At home
  - In the JCP office
  - Other

Moderator: Please ensure respondents discuss issues of privacy in terms of how comfortable they feel using e-channel services to carry out the above tasks in the public arena i.e. in the JCP office.

Moderator: Write all the tasks on the flip chart and ask respondents to tick or cross the ones they would like to carry out on the JCP website and give one main reason for their choice.

• Why have you chosen those?

• How could you be encouraged to carry out the tasks with the crosses on the JCP website or Jobpoint?

6. Ascertain/explore role of staff in encouraging the use of e-channel services (5 mins)

(Aim: To explore perceptions and experiences of respondents’ views of staff proactiveness in encouraging use of e-channel services)

Moderator: Ask respondents to focus in on actually how they found out/started using the e-channel services but keeping in mind the comparison with their own scenarios above.
For those of you who have used a Job Point or the JCP website, how did you start using the service?

Probe:
- Staff showed me
- Found out myself
- Read about it
- Word of mouth
  - How well were you shown how to use the service?
  - Did it encourage you to continue using it
- If yes, why?
- If not, then why?
  - How could JCP staff encourage you to start using the e-channel services?

7. **Sum up (5 mins)**

- What one piece of advise would you give JCP to encourage customers to start using Jobpoints and the JCP web sites?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

THANK & CLOSE
Appendix C
Qualitative topic guide: Staff

Background
a) What is your role in Jobcentre Plus?
   i) Job roles i.e. Introduce themselves what they do, how they deliver there service
b) What sort of information and advice do you provide for Jobcentre Plus customers?
c) How do you provide this information?
PROMPT
   i) Face-to-face
   ii) Written
   iii) Telephone lines

d) How efficient are current channels of providing services?

e) Which aspects of your service are delivered in an inefficient way? What do you think are the main reasons for this?

Awareness of alternative channels
a) Are you aware of the range of alternative channels (non-face-to-face) available today and what will be available in the near future?
PROMPT

   Today
   i) Jobcentre Plus website
   ii) Worktrain website
   iii) Jobpoints
   iv) Telephone- lines (Warm Phones, Jobseekers Direct etc) (Contact and Processing Centres)
Future

i) Applying for benefits online rather than on the phone (next year)

ii) After 2007 – may enable change of payment or circumstances online

b) Have you had training in relation to the range of alternative channels available (does this act as a barrier to encouraging customers if not)?

PROMPT

i) Jobcentre Plus website (Job search)

ii) Jobpoints

iii) Telephone- lines (Jobseekers/Employment direct etc)

c) Have you visited/used the various range of alternative channels available (does this act as a barrier to encouraging customers if not)?

PROMPT

i) Jobcentre Plus website

ii) Jobpoints

iii) Telephone- lines (Jobseeker direct etc)

d) How well integrated do you think e-channel delivery is in service provision (in reducing face-to-face)? (i.e. whole alternative channels strategy)

PROMPT

i) How does, for example, the use of Jobpoints/Contact Centres/Processing Centres link up with the face-to-face service for finding jobs?

ii) Does perceived lack of integration/joined up strategy decrease your encouragement of use of alternative channels and thus take-up

Encouraging the use of alternative channels

a) How are customers made aware of alternative channels (internally and externally)?

PROMPT

i) Encouragement from counter staff

ii) Floorwalkers – i.e. to show customers how to use Jobpoints

iii) Adverts

iv) Leaflets

v) Mail shots

vi) Searching on the web?
b) How do **you** encourage customers to use alternative channels? What form does that encouragement take?

PROMPT
i) verbally
ii) leaflets
iii) Does it tend to be reactive or proactive

c) What prompts you to encourage the use of alternative channels (external and internal)?

PROMPT
i) Saves repeating information
ii) Takes pressure off front-line staff
iii) Allows staff to focus on needs – harder-to-help customers
iv) Empower users – allows them to take control of the information
v) Provides an effective link between Jobcentre Plus and employers (i.e. Jobpoints) – enhances service to customers
vi) Type of customer/Where they live
vii) Managerial instruction

d) What constrains you from encouraging the use of alternative channels?

PROMPT
i) Customers not articulate enough to use alternative channels (language, education etc)
ii) Customers lack awareness/access/trust of technology
iii) The use of alternative channels generates more questions that don’t have time to answer (no value added)
iv) Lack resources
v) Target culture – Is there a conflict/contradiction between central initiatives to increase take up and job entry targets (jet) set by central management?
vi) Not encouraged by management

e) What would assist you, as Jobcentre Plus staff, to influence customer behaviour towards the web/other alternative channels?
   i) Improved marketing tools
   ii) Incentives to encourage and explain the benefits of alternative channels to customers (performance measurement – points for those who find a job through an e-channel – which does not happen at the moment)
iii) Disincentives (to use face-to-face)
iv) Clearer guidance for staff on the e-channel strategy

Best practice

*a) Can you think of any examples of best practice in terms of encouraging use of alternative channels?*

**PROMPT**

i) Domestic examples e.g. Lewisham and job kiosks
ii) Other issue areas that you are aware of – Banking, Health, Retail

b) What have been your experiences and what are your opinions on these areas/initiatives?

**PROMPT**

i) If negative, why?
ii) If positive, how?

*c) How do your experiences affect your view of alternative channels delivery in JCP?*

Perceptions of alternative channels

*a) In your view, what do you think the main benefits of alternative channels delivery are in general?*

**PROMPT**

i) Empower job seekers
ii) Improve quality of service to customers
iii) Reduce employer costs and speed up the recruitment process
iv) Offer multi-channel service delivery – based on what customers prefer/want/need on an individual basis

Do you perceive them as a positive or negative development for:

i) you (with regard to your own job role)
ii) customers (i.e. IB PA – alternative channels may provide wider access)

b) Do you think that Contact Centres provide a good service for customers?

**PROMPT**

i) Are easy to get access to
ii) Are easy to use
iii) Provide the information in a timely fashion
iv) Have the sort of information they need
v) Allows customers to find the level of detail or complexity that they need
vi) Allow you to perform your role in a more resourceful way (helping the more needy customers)

c) Do you think that the web provides good access to services?

PROMPT
i) Is easy to get access to
ii) Is easy to use
iii) Provide the information in a timely fashion
iv) Have the sort of information they need
v) Allows customers to find the level of detail or complexity that they need
vi) Allow you to perform your role in a more resourceful way (helping the more needy customers)

d) Do you think that jobpoints provide good service?

PROMPT
i) Are easy to get access to
ii) Are easy to use
iii) Provide the information in a timely fashion
iv) Have the sort of information they need
v) Allows customers to find the level of detail or complexity that they need
vi) Allow you to perform your role in a more resourceful way (helping the more needy customers)

How could they be improved and developed to help you in your job role and to increase take-up?

e) What sort of medium do you think that customers prefer? Can you differentiate between different customers' needs and their preferred service delivery preference?

PROMPT
i) Face-to-face
ii) Written
iii) Telephone-lines
iv) Web
v) Job kiosks
f) What are the main barriers in your view to customers using alternative channels?

PROMPT
i) Customers not articulate enough to use alternative channels (language, education etc)
ii) Customers lack awareness and access
iii) Customers lack of trust of technology
iv) Too complex – prefer face-to-face

g) What are the main complaints from customers about alternative channels?

Looking to the future
a) Do you think that e channels provide a viable alternative to face-to-face or telephone delivery?

b) What benefits do you think e channel delivery can bring, over and above current methods?

PROMPT
i) Time to deal with more needy customers
ii) Efficiency
iii) Widening access

c) What problems do you perceive in the future, if the alternative channels strategy is pursued? What do you think are the main implications for you?

d) What would lend to the success of the alternative channels strategy from your perspective?

e) What would help you to encourage the use of alternative channels?

PROMPT
i) Reformulation of targets and indicators
ii) Staff Training
iii) Methods/Practices to raise awareness
iv) Increased perception of viability
v) Reliable technology and processes

f) What areas of business could be delivered by alternative channels? What wouldn’t be appropriate?
Appendices – Qualitative topic guide: Staff

PROMPT

i) List of functions – e.g. Benefit advice, better-off calculations, Job applications, fortnightly reviews (for low risk customers), benefit claims, Change in personal/employment details and circumstance, interview arrangement, Benefit notification (monitoring benefit claims), Queries on payment dates and amounts, Account status

ii) Types of channel for above service function i.e. kiosks for simple services and transactions, face-to-face or telephone for anything more complex requiring guidance, advice or planning etc +SMS (reminders), Idtv (info) etc

g) Which types of customers, in your view, should be encouraged to use alternative channels?

PROMPT – let them come up with their own ideas

h) What sort of incentives could we offer to customers to encourage the use of alternative channels

PROMPT

i) Reduced waiting times

ii) Flexible appointments

iii) Quicker benefit payment

iv) Cost/Access

i) What sort of incentives could we offer to staff to encourage them or to persuade them to encourage customers to use alternative channels

i) Target system

iii) Workloads

iv) Resources

v) Formal training

j) What can head office do to encourage and support staff in influencing customer behaviour (i.e. towards using alternative channels)

i) Changes to target regime

ii) Changes to processes

iii) More/less flexibility in the process

iv) Better marketing materials

v) A segmented e-channel strategy
Local Office Manager Interview

**Background**

a) How efficient are current methods of giving information and delivering services?

b) Which functions and services are inefficient? What do you think are the main reasons for this?

**Awareness of alternative channels**

c) What sort of training is provided for staff to educate them about the alternative channels available (internally and externally)?

d) In your view is training for staff on alternative channels sufficient? Is lack of training a real barrier to encouraging the use of alternative channels in local offices?

**Encouraging the use of alternative channels**

e) From a managerial perspective, what provisions do you have in place to encourage the use of alternative channels to deliver Jobcentre plus services?

i) What prompts you to encourage the use of alternative channels amongst your staff (internal or external factors)?

ii) What, for you, are the main constraints/barriers in encouraging your staff to refer customers to alternative channels provision (internal and external factors)?

f) How do staff in your office perceive the alternative channels strategy? What do you think are the main reasons for their views?

**Best Practice**

g) Are there any examples of best practice in your office in terms of encouraging use of alternative channels (that have been initiated by you)?

h) Are you aware of any other examples that might be applicable to JCP delivery of alternative channels i.e. where lessons could be learnt?

**Perceptions and Looking to the Future**

i) In your view are how well integrated are alternative channels services with other jobcentre plus services? What are the implications for delivery in your office?

j) Do you think that e channels provide a viable alternative to face-to-face or telephone delivery? OR What benefits do you think e channel delivery can bring, over and above current methods?

i) What would help you to encourage the use of alternative channels?

ii) What areas of business could be delivered by alternative channels?
iii) Which customers, in your view, should be encouraged to use alternative channels?

iv) What sort of incentives could you offer to staff to encourage them or to persuade them to encourage customers to use alternative channels?

k) What do you see as the main advantages/disadvantages for moving to alternative channels delivery now and in the future, for i) you ii) your staff iii) customers?

l) Overall, what changes in your view (external or internal) need to be made to drive the process of alternative channels delivery forward in your office, and on a wider basis?

m) What can head office do to encourage and support staff/managers in influencing customer behaviour (i.e. towards using alternative channels)

Contact Centre Focus Group and Interview

Background

a) Background information about attendees/interviewees

b) What sort of information and advice do you provide for Jobcentre Plus customers?

PROMPT

i) Benefit information – JSA, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support

ii) Job information – Jobseeker Direct

Awareness of alternative channels

a) What is your knowledge of the various range of alternative channels available outside of contact centres?

b) Do you feel that you require any/additional training in relation to the range of alternative channels available – would this help you to fulfil your role more efficiently and effectively?

   i) Jobcentre Plus website

   ii) Jobpoints

   c) What are your general perceptions of why people are calling Contact Centres with regard to jobs queries i.e. not using other available channels like Jobpoints, web.

Perceptions of alternative channels

  d) What are your experiences with customers in delivering services through Contact Centres? What are the main complaints from customers in using the Contact Centre service?

  e) What problems have you encountered in delivering you particular services through Contact Centres?
PROMPT
i) Scripts

ii) Overall knowledge of benefits/eligibility

iii) Technology/systems

iv) Communication with local offices

v) Resources

vi) Training

f) In your experience what could be done to address any problems or perceived barriers to using Contact Centres to deliver services?

PROMPT
i) Cost (to customer)

ii) Time and access

iii) Internal processes

iv) Local office processes

g) Do you have any knowledge of customer barriers to using other alternative channels from your communication with them?

h) Do you think that there would be advantages in bringing other services to Contact Centres or other e-service delivery channels?

i) What parts of your own jobs and JCP services do you think could be better done over alternative channels?

ii) What parts of JCP services do you think would be more feasibly done over the phone?

iii) Are there particular types of customers that you would encourage to use alternative channels?

iv) Do you have an approximate idea of what percentage of customers call with a specific reference for a job (i.e. from web or job point) and what percentage ring with generic enquiries about jobs

i) How well integrated is the contact centre service delivery with other forms of alternative channels delivery? Is integration important in your opinion to effective delivery of your service?

PROMPT
i) CMS – contact centre and processing centre information sharing on benefit claims

ii) Local Office processes – links to Contact Centres
Encouraging the use of alternative channels and looking to the future

j) Do you encourage customers to use other alternative channels with regard to your own service or related services?
   i) Are there incentives for staff to refer customers to other alternative channels?
   ii) What prompts you to encourage the use of alternative channels?
   iii) What stops you from encouraging the use of alternative channels?

PROMPT
   i) not in job description
   ii) not in the script
   iii) not encouraged by management
   iv) some customers not articulate enough to use alternative channels
   v) poor marketing/information
   vi) poor technology/integration

k) What would help you to encourage the use of alternative channels (customer behaviour towards the web/other alternative channels)?

l) Given your experience of Contact Centre delivery of JCP services, what sort of medium do you think that customers prefer?

m) Are there aspects of your job or other JCP services that you think are simply not practical for delivery through Contact Centres or other alternative channels?

n) What can head office do to encourage customers directly to use alternative channels?

PROMPT
   i) Better marketing materials
   ii) Incentives for customers
   iii) User friendliness of services
   iv) More online services

o) What can head office do to encourage and support staff/managers in influencing customer behaviour (i.e. towards using alternative channels including CC’s)
Processing Centre Focus Group

Background
a) What are your central roles?

Awareness of alternative channels
a) What is the staff knowledge of the various range of alternative channels (web and Job Points) available outside of Processing Centres?

b) Do you feel that any/additional training is needed by processing centre staff with regard to alternative channels – would this help them to fulfil their role more efficiently and effectively?

c) In conversations with customers to ascertain further information for benefits processing, do you encourage the use of other alternative channels i.e. Job Points, website

Perceptions of alternative channels and looking to the future
d) What problems have you encountered in processing benefits/furthersing customers benefits over the phone?

e) What feasibly could be done online in terms of benefits processing?

i) What aspects of benefit processing could cause problems if done online?

ii) Would online benefit processing be suitable to certain types of customer?

iii) What do you think the benefits might be for customers?

f) What are the characteristics of a good online benefits service? What key features would be required to create an effective online benefits processing service?

g) How well integrated is the processing centre service with the local offices and contact centre processes? What are the main problems that crop up?

h) What can head office do to encourage and support staff/managers in influencing customer behaviour (i.e. towards using all alternative channels)?
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