Jobcentre Plus’ delivery of New Tax Credit policy

Report of qualitative findings

Abi Franses and Andrew Thomas

A report of research carried out by BMRB Social Research (part of BMRB International) on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions
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# Abbreviations

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<td>CTC</td>
<td>Child Tax Credit</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEA</td>
<td>Disability Employment Adviser</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPTC</td>
<td>Disabled Person’s Tax Credit</td>
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<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
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<td>IR</td>
<td>Inland Revenue</td>
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<td>IS</td>
<td>Income Support</td>
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<td>IB</td>
<td>Incapacity Benefit</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSA</td>
<td>Jobseeker’s Allowance</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIG</td>
<td>Minimum Income Guarantee</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTCs</td>
<td>New Tax Credits (collectively referring to Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NJI</td>
<td>New Jobseeker Interview</td>
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<td>NDLP</td>
<td>New Deal for Lone Parent</td>
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<td>ND25+</td>
<td>New Deal 25+</td>
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<tr>
<td>ND50+</td>
<td>New Deal 50+</td>
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<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Personal Adviser</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTC</td>
<td>Working Tax Credit</td>
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<tr>
<td>WFTC</td>
<td>Working Families’ Tax Credit</td>
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The research team at BMRB would like to thank the following people for their help in carrying out this research: Vicky Petrie, Bairbre Kelly and Emily Cattell at the Department for Work and Pensions; Josephine King, Harpal Dokal and Tina Sud for organising the recruitment at BMRB; and also the respondents, for the readiness and frankness with which they expressed their views.
The Authors

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Summary

Background

The New Tax Credits (NTC), comprising Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and a range of additional elements, were introduced in April 2003 as a means of promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age. Within this overall policy objective the government has also set a number of targets:

• reduce the number of children in low-income households by at least a quarter by 2004, as a contribution towards the broader target of halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020;

• demonstrate progress by Spring 2006 on increasing the employment rate and reducing the unemployment rate over the economic cycle;

• over the three years to Spring 2006, increase the employment rates of disadvantaged areas and groups, taking account of the economic cycle – lone parents, ethnic minorities, people aged 50 and over, those with the lowest qualifications, and the 30 local authority districts with the poorest initial labour market position, and significantly reduce the difference between their employment rates and the overall rate;

• reduce the proportion of children in households with no one in work over the three years from spring 2003 to spring 2006 by six and a half per cent; and

• in the three years to 2006, increase the employment rate of people with disabilities, taking account of the economic cycle, and significantly reduce the difference between their employment rate and the overall rate. Work to improve the rights of disabled people and to remove barriers to their participation in society.

While the Inland Revenue administers NTCs, Jobcentre Plus has a significant role to play in helping to support the Inland Revenue by delivering NTCs. In order to understand how Jobcentre Plus functions as a gateway to NTCs, BMRB Social Research, on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions, conducted a large
piece of qualitative research amongst staff and Jobcentre Plus customers to explore the effectiveness of the delivery process nine months after the launch of NTCs.

The objectives of the research were to:

- assess the success that Jobcentre Plus offices and Personal Advisers have had in promoting NTC policy (identifying any difficulties/barriers to effective delivery) to Jobcentre Plus customers;
- assess the quality of service provided by Jobcentre Plus to different types of customers (e.g. childless over 25 customers, lone parents, people with disabilities, etc.);
- explore how the introduction of NTCs has affected the Personal Adviser role, workload and the mechanisms put in place to deal with this change, and on their ability to move people into work;
- explore the role of Better off Calculations (BOC) in the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus advisers;
- explore whether different customer groups have received different types of service from Personal Advisers;
- explore customer views on whether and how Jobcentre Plus’ Delivery of NTCs may have influenced their decision to work; and
- consider exemplars of good practice and provide suggestions for change and improvement.

The report is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the nature of New Tax Credits and presents an overview of the research methodology adopted. Chapters 2 and 3 consider the delivery of NTCs from the point of view of Jobcentre Plus advisers. Chapter 2 discusses the infrastructure that was put in place for advisers to deliver NTCs to customers; Chapter 3 considers how advisers presented and delivered NTCs to customers, the role of the BOC in delivering NTCs and the perceived impact of the delivery of NTCs on their workload. Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings of the research from the point of view of customers. Chapter 4 considers how NTCs were presented to them and the perceived role of the BOC in the delivery of NTCs. Chapter 5 discusses the impact of the delivery of NTCs in terms of customer understanding of the role of NTCs, the impact that NTCs had on their views about moving towards employment and their overall perceptions of the quality of service. Chapter 6 presents some examples of best practice arising out of advisers’ approaches to delivering NTCs together with the implications of the research.

Methods

The study was based on depth interviews with Jobcentre Plus customers and group discussions with staff across eight regions in England, Scotland and Wales. Areas
were selected to reflect a mix of urban and rural catchments as well as a range of early predictions of the likely take-up rate of NTCs. In total, 48 Jobcentre Plus staff took part, reflecting a considerable diversity in terms of job role, and 101 customers. Customers were segmented by type – lone parents, couples with children, childless over 25 customers, people with disabilities, and people aged over 50 – whether they were in work or out of work, gender and size of family (for couples only). All customers had to recall having had some discussion of NTCs with a Jobcentre Plus adviser to be included in the study.

The Jobcentre Plus infrastructure for delivering NTCs

A number of infrastructure developments accompanied the introduction of NTCs. These included: formal two-day training sessions, cascade training sessions and new IT implementations – e-portal and View Only – which provided the opportunity to capture NTC applications and view cases online.

Despite these developments, Jobcentre Plus staff did not feel completely prepared to deal with NTC applications made by customers. This was partly due to feelings of inadequate training and partly due to initial problems with the IT systems.

While staff welcomed the opportunity to train, the overall feeling was that it was too generic and theoretical, insufficiently tailored to job roles and lacking in the opportunity to practice. Trainers were also unable to answer the majority of queries that arose. Staff still felt the need for training that was more practical and related to the types of customers they were likely to deal with. This was particularly so for advisers who were relatively new to the Jobcentre Plus environment and for those who had not dealt with WFTC/DPTC (Working Families’ Tax Credit/Disabled Person’s Tax Credit) before.

As a consequence of the flow of NTC applications happening later than expected, staff did not have the opportunity to consolidate any learning that took place. Of all the Jobcentre Plus staff, it tended to be New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) advisers who felt they had the best understanding of NTCs and as a consequence acted as a resource for other advisers in the Jobcentre Plus office. There was a general view that in order to counter the lack of opportunity to consolidate their learning, that refresher training should be put in place.

Early indications were that the Inland Revenue (IR) Helpline could not always sufficiently answer their enquiries. Advisers therefore made informal links with local IR offices to obtain further information and clarification about the detail of NTCs.

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1 The districts and postcode sectors were selected using the August 10-20 per cent Inland Revenue scan. Using the areas with higher numbers we chose the postcode sectors and variables for the subsequent January Download.
Because of the unpredictable flow of NTC applications and the lack of opportunity to initially put the learning gained from the training into practice, advisers felt that they experienced very high workloads, although this is said to have reduced over time.

During the early months of NTCs introduction the IT systems were considered by Jobcentre Plus staff to be unreliable. The consequence was that staff felt that helping customers to complete paper applications and transferring the information to the e-portal at a later time further increased their workload. Although the IT systems down-time has decreased considerably over time, the initial problems have left some members of staff feeling less confident in its use.

The consequence of these training and IT issues was that Jobcentre Plus staff did not always feel confident to deliver NTCs to customers. Indeed, advisers fell into one of three types: those who lacked confidence in their knowledge to even raise or mention NTCs to customers; those who would mention them to customers, perhaps provide a leaflet and process the simplest of claims, but would refer on to a colleague if the case was more complex; and those who felt confident enough to deal with, or at least find out how to deal with, every type of application for NTC. Typically, these latter advisers were those with specialist roles such as NDLP advisers and to a lesser degree ND 50+ advisers and DEAs.

**Staff approaches to delivering New Tax Credits**

There was no clear uniform process that advisers used to introduce or discuss NTCs with customers. Variations occurred as a result of the length of time allocated for a customer – adviser interview, whether more pressing issues needed to be dealt with, such as domestic issues for lone parents, whether the customer was sufficiently job-ready to consider the issue of a return to work and making an application for NTCs, and staff confidence in dealing with NTCs. With customer – adviser interview lengths ranging from twenty to sixty minutes, advisers felt it was very difficult to provide any form of overview of NTCs in the shorter interviews.

Advisers who felt confident about discussing NTCs generally presented them as part of a financial package that could make work viable. This was in contrast to the way in which WFTC/DPTC had been promoted as an in work ‘top up’. Generally presented as an incentive to take work, NTCs were felt to be easier to present to flow rather than stock claimants, mainly for reasons of customer motivation. However, advisers indicated an overall mixed response to NTCs, some of the negativity expressed being due to the adverse media coverage surrounding their introduction. Advisers also found that while NTCs could be attractive to lone parents and 50+ customers, the presence of other barriers meant that paid work remained unattainable. These barriers could include for example the loss of free school meals, which is a consequence of returning to work, for lone parents; and skills shortages and employer reactions towards customers aged 50+.
The BOC is a standard tool that has been available to advisers for many years. However, due to a lack of NTC-related training there was a marked lack of confidence amongst advisers in using the BOC to deliver NTCs. Less experienced advisers found the BOC difficult to use and interpret; more experienced advisers found certain aspects of the BOC problematic, particularly around the selection of the financial year or where incomes had varied during the year. However, for those confident in its use, the BOC was seen as a useful tool in helping to deliver NTCs.

Introducing customers to New Tax Credits – the customer perspective

Jobcentre Plus offices were not necessarily the first point at which customers learned about NTCs, with the media campaign, friends and family and organisations such as the CAB and Remploy all playing a part. Taking together the customer experience, the manner in which Jobcentre Plus advisers dealt with NTCs varied enormously. Generally, lone parents were taken through NTCs in considerable detail, often in their first interview. By contrast, couples with children and childless over 25 customers may not have had as much discussion about NTCs, if at all.

Lone parents, people with disabilities and 50+ customers who were receiving NTCs had BOCs undertaken at either the initial interview stage or when they returned for a second meeting. Advisers would spend some considerable time discussing their financial situation and how much they would receive on a weekly basis if they stayed unemployed and received benefits compared to what they could be receiving through employment and NTCs. Considerably less emphasis appeared to be placed on BOCs with childless over 25 customers and couples with children.

Customers may have already been aware of NTCs before attending a Jobcentre Plus interview, but the degree to which the interview raised their awareness further or enabled greater understanding of NTCs varied considerably. Overall, customers could be categorised into three groups, those who recalled NTCs being mentioned by advisers, those who recalled some discussion of NTCs but could not remember any detail, and those who had a better recall of the detail of NTCs. Greater recall was generally associated with the amount of time advisers spent discussing NTCs and whether or not a BOC was carried out. There were no differences in the recall of NTC discussions between the In-Work or Out-of-Work samples; of all the customer groups it was the lone parents who recalled the fullest discussions.

Customer understanding of NTCs was therefore varied. In general, customers did not understand very much of the detail of NTCs. Where there was greater understanding, it was associated with lone parents and to a lesser degree people with disabilities and the 50+ group with whom the specialist advisers had generally spent more time, although disabled customers could also be particularly critical about DEA's knowledge of NTCs.
Advisers in Scotland and Wales were generally praised for the amount of time they spent with the customer. This may be the reason why customers in these areas felt that advisers were more knowledgeable about NTCs compared to the other areas in the study. There appeared to be no difference in understanding about NTCs between the In-Work and Out-of-Work samples.

The impact of NTCs on customer behaviour

There was some evidence to indicate that the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus could play a part in a customers’ decision to take paid work. The critical features that underpinned this effect were a genuine desire to work, a clear understanding of the role of NTCs in making work a viable option, the extent of NTC-related discussion with a Jobcentre Plus adviser, and whether the outcome of a BOC demonstrated that employment was financially worthwhile.

Customer perceptions of the quality of service delivery

Overall, customers had positive perceptions of Jobcentre Plus staff, even if they learned nothing about NTCs during their interviews. In general, the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus advisers did not necessarily equate with a positive service delivery in the view of their customers:

- For customers who indicated that work was of no interest to them, the discussion of NTCs was seen as irrelevant and was neither a positive nor a negative aspect of the service delivery.
- Customers who were motivated to find work but were not interested in claiming benefits or NTCs also felt that the discussion of NTCs had no effect on their overall view of the service delivery by Jobcentre Plus advisers.
- Customers who were motivated to find work and received a fluent description of NTCs saw the service delivery in a positive light, irrespective of whether they moved into work or not.
- Customers who were interested in work but felt that the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Advisers was brief, hesitant, lacking in detail or inaccurate tended to consider the service delivery as negative.
- BOCs that indicated that work was not viable had a mixed effect. Those who were very motivated to find work tended to view that whole NTC delivery experience in a negative manner due to the fact it was not always necessary to promote work to the same extent to these customers; those who were interested in work but were some distance from engaging in the labour market tended to view the service delivery in a neutral or positive light.
- Customers who moved into work on the basis of a BOC and then perceived that they were less well off in work viewed, with hindsight, the NTC delivery experience as highly negative.
Best practice

Examples of best practice tended to arise out of circumstances that Jobcentre Plus advisers found difficult to deal with or compromised their ability to deliver an adequate service to customers. There were a number of innovative and interesting ways in which the Jobcentre Plus offices involved in the research had addressed issues that had arisen when NTCs were introduced and centred primarily on aspects of training and methods of delivery to customers. These were:

- in-house training in NTCs, usually put together and delivered by NDLP advisers;
- the supply of simplified handouts that described the key aspects of NTCs in Jobcentre Plus language;
- practical sessions using the Better Off Calculator;
- ‘after hours’ workshops to deal with issues arising and the discussion of potential strategies;
- an on-line chat facility that was available for advisers to discuss various aspects of NTCs;
- customer-focused drop-in clinics that dealt exclusively with NTC applications and queries; and
- a childcare log that was available to customers with children, outlining their experiences of returning to work and also how they found and used the specific childcare facilities.

Implications of the research

There are four sets of implications that can be drawn from this research and relate to the definition of the adviser role, training issues, the process of putting in place the infrastructure to enable the delivery of NTCs, and methods of engaging the customer in the delivery of NTCs.

Defining the adviser role

There is some evidence to suggest that because of the unpredicted nature of the flow of NTCs in the early months after going live, the problems surrounding the training and the unpredictability of the IT systems, advisers had to change their way of working and therefore their roles changed. Because these changes in working practices were not monitored and co-ordinated, a range of different practices occurred. The effect was to compromise the delivery of NTCs to customers. Closer monitoring of the initial months of NTC delivery with corrective action being taken may have resulted in a more coherent delivery of NTCs.

It is also apparent that the delivery of NTCs and the use of BOCs varied across customer groups and across advisers. This meant that some customers who might
have benefited from a detailed discussion of NTCs and/or the use of a BOC might have missed out on the opportunity. A more standardised and better-defined approach to the delivery of NTCs may have reduced this problem.

Training issues
The research findings indicate that advisers did not generally feel familiar enough with the detail of NTCs in order to deliver them in the most effective way, a view that was echoed by customers. Given the unpredicted manner in which the take-up of NTCs occurred it is not surprising therefore that the training that was delivered to staff was not sufficiently consolidated. Four key issues arise. First, the perceived inadequacies of the training that was provided need to be addressed. Second, facilities should be provided to enable the cascading of new information together with opportunities for advisers to discuss and brainstorm issues arising. Third, the need for greater opportunities for follow-up learning, refresher training and ‘diagnostic sessions’ that tackle specific issues arising. Fourth, where there is a discrepancy between the predicted and actual flows of customers, additional training facilities should be put in place in order to help consolidate the training that has been provided.

Putting in place the infrastructure to deliver NTCs
Despite forward planning and the early provision of the infrastructure through which to deliver NTCs, the infrastructure (notably the IT systems) were not fully operational when the NTC application process went live. It is suggested that experienced operational staff should be engaged in a ‘dry-run’ or pre-test of the introduction of a new initiative or facility in order to draw on their operational knowledge and expertise.

Engaging the customer
The amount of time spent delivering NTCs appeared to vary by customer group. Similarly, advisers made decisions about when and with whom they would discuss NTCs that meant that some customers may not ever engage in the NTC/work decision-making process. There would appear to be an opportunity to increase customer engagement with NTCs by making NTCs and BOCs a standard part of the customer – adviser interview process.

It appeared that in the main it was the customer groups for whom there were specialist advisers (lone parents, disabled customers and jobseekers aged 50+) who received the most active NTC interventions. This disparity could be addressed with a more effective delivery of NTCs to the other customer groups, particularly childless over 25 customers and couples.
1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In April 2003 the New Tax Credits (NTCs – Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit) replaced Working Families’ Tax Credit, Disabled Person’s Tax Credit and Children’s Tax Credit. The 50+ element of Working Tax Credit replaced the New Deal 50 + Employment Credit.

The aim of the New Tax Credits, as stated in the 2000 Budget, was to ‘tackle child poverty and make work pay’. This reflects a long-term aim for the Department for Work and Pensions in promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age, while protecting the position of those in greatest need. Within this, a number of targets are set:

- reduce the number of children in low-income households by at least a quarter by 2004, as a contribution towards the broader target of halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020;

- demonstrate progress by spring 2006 on increasing the employment rate and reducing the unemployment rate over the economic cycle;

- over the three years to spring 2006, increase the employment rates of disadvantaged areas and groups, taking account of the economic cycle – lone parents, ethnic minorities, people aged 50 and over, those with the lowest qualifications, and the 30 local authority districts with the poorest initial labour market position, and significantly reduce the difference between their employment rates and the overall rate;

- reduce the proportion of children in households with no one in work over the three years from spring 2003 to spring 2006 by six and a half per cent; and

- in the three years to 2006, increase the employment rate of people with disabilities, taking account of the economic cycle, and significantly reduce the difference between their employment rate and the overall rate. Work to improve the rights of disabled people and to remove barriers to their participation in society.
Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit are referred to collectively as ‘New Tax Credits’ (NTCs), the structure of which is shown below.

### 1.1.1 The New Tax Credits

**Working Tax Credit** (WTC) is a payment to top-up earnings of working people on low incomes and extends support to some groups of individuals without children. People are entitled to WTC if they:

- are aged 25 or over and working at least 30 hours per week; or
- have responsibility for a child or have a disability and are aged 16 or over and working at least 16 hours per week; or
- are aged 50 or over and are returning to work after at least six months on certain benefits and working 16 hours or more per week.

Working Tax Credit includes a number of elements:

- basic element;
- couples and lone parent element;
- 30 hour element, for families with children or a disability;
- disability element;
- severe disability element;
- childcare element; and
- 50+ element.

**Child Tax Credit** (CTC) replaces the child-related elements in Income Support and income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance. It is available to families with children, where the child is:

- under age 16 (but payable until 1 September following their 16th birthday); or
- aged 16 to 18 and in full-time non-advanced education.

There are a number of additional elements to CTC, which are:

- family element;
- family element – baby addition (if there is at least one child in the household under one year of age);
- child element for each child;
- disability element; and
- severe disability element.
1.2 Research objectives

The NTCs are administered by the Inland Revenue (IR), although Jobcentre Plus has a significant role to play in helping to support IR deliver them. Currently, the Personal Adviser (PA) role includes encouraging Jobcentre Plus customers to take up work and advise them on the overall package of support that is available on the transition to work. In relation to NTCs, PAs have a role in raising awareness and providing information and help to customers of Jobcentre Plus with their tax credits claims and queries. A key part of any customer interview will incorporate a ‘better off’ calculation, within which NTCs are included.

The Department for Work and Pensions wished to understand how Jobcentre Plus functions as a gateway to NTCs from the point of view of both customers and staff, focusing primarily on the quality of service delivered. Consequently, the research was designed to address the following objectives:

- assess the success that Jobcentre Plus offices and PAs have had in promoting NTC policy (identifying any difficulties/barriers to effective delivery) to Jobcentre Plus customers;
- assess the quality of service provided by Jobcentre Plus to different types of customers (e.g. childless over 25 customers, lone parents, people with disabilities, etc.);
- explore how the introduction of NTCs has affected the PA role, workload and the mechanisms put in place to deal with this change, and on their ability to move people into work;
- explore the role of Better off Calculations (BOC) in the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus advisers;
- explore whether different customer groups have received types of service from PAs;
- explore customer views on whether, and how, NTCs may have influenced their decision to work; and
- consider examples of good practice and provide suggestions for change and improvement.

It is important to note that the study was solely concerned with those aspects of the delivery of NTCs undertaken by Jobcentre Plus advisers to Jobcentre Plus customers. The research was not designed to comment on the implementation and delivery of NTCs by the IR, nor to consider any of the technical or financial aspects of NTCs.
1.3 Research design and method

1.3.1 A qualitative methodology
The aims of the research were primarily exploratory, having both descriptive and process-orientated facets. As a consequence a wholly qualitative methodology was used. It is important to note that qualitative methods neither seek, nor allow, data to be given on the numbers of people holding a particular view nor having a particular set of experiences. The aim of qualitative research is to define and describe the range of emergent issues, and explore linkages, rather than to measure their extent.

1.3.2 Research areas
The research was undertaken in eight areas of the country, six in England, one in Scotland and one in Wales. Areas were selected for inclusion in the study on the basis of an urban/rural mix and a prediction of the level of NTC applications that was made on the basis of the early months of NTC application receipts. A London area was specifically included in the study as London was thought to reflect a different set of delivery practices.

In order to ensure maximum learning from the study, the research was conducted in Jobcentre Plus areas. Findings could therefore be applied as the Jobcentre Plus model continued to be rolled out across the country. Employment Zones were specifically excluded from the study as the adviser/customer relationship is more intense compared to that occurring in Jobcentre Plus areas.

1.3.3 Fieldwork and recruitment
The research was conducted in two stages. The first stage comprised 48 Jobcentre Plus advisers who were interviewed in a group discussion format, one discussion group in each of seven study areas and a pair of mini-groups in a further area. Initial contact with the selected Jobcentre Plus sites was made by a combination of DWP and BMRB research staff, the purpose of which was to introduce each area to the proposed research, request their participation and identify a contact for day-to-day communication. With the exception of the Scottish area, Jobcentre Plus sites were then visited by one of the research team. This was intended to provide an opportunity for familiarisation with the process of delivering NTCs at the local level, identify a range of staff members for interview and agree suitable dates for the discussion groups to be held. Final arrangements were then agreed by telephone with the Jobcentre Plus contact, with each member of staff agreeing to take part in the research being sent a confirmation letter.

The discussion groups were structured to reflect a diversity of advisers in terms of their role and length of service. The group discussions were held between February and March 2004. The profile of advisers participating in the study may be found in Table 1.1.
Table 1.1 Personal Adviser profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job description</th>
<th>Number sampled in focus group</th>
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<tr>
<td>New Deal Lone Parent Adviser</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Deal 50+ Adviser</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Deal 25+ Adviser</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disability Employment Adviser</td>
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<td>Personal Adviser</td>
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<td>Restart Adviser</td>
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<td>Fresh Claims Adviser</td>
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<td>JSA Adviser</td>
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<td>Restart/Work Focus Adviser</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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One of the key objectives of this research is the exploration of how the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus has impacted on jobseekers’ views about work. Consequently, the second stage of the research comprised 101 face-to-face depth interviews with Jobcentre Plus customers, the central aim being to consider how the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus impacted on their views about work and movement from unemployment into work. In order to fully explore the impact of Jobcentre Plus’ delivery of NTCs on jobseekers, customers were segmented into those who had moved into work and were claiming NTCs (referred to as the ‘In-work’ group) and those who had discussed NTCs with an adviser but remained out of work (referred to as the ‘Out-of-work’ group). Further segmentation of these two groups was undertaken using the following characteristics:

- customer group:
  - lone parents;
  - couples with children, including those with small and large (3+ children) families;
  - people newly entitled to NTCs - over 25 year olds without children;
  - people with a disability; and
  - people aged over 50;

- gender.

The study sample was structured to reflect the diversity of customers, according to the criteria outlined above using a purposive sampling approach. This is a standard approach for qualitative research studies and is used to ensure the correct mix of customers within the overall sample.

Recruitment was undertaken from databases that were supplied by the Department for Work and Pensions. Initially, an opt-out letter was sent to customers (see Appendix C for an example letter), allowing people a two-week period to exclude
themselves from the study. Recruitment of individuals was then undertaken by both telephone and face-to-face methods using a screening questionnaire to determine their eligibility for inclusion in the study. A copy of the screening questionnaire may be found in Appendix B. Jobseekers were given £15 as a thank you for their time and effort in taking part in the study. In order to avoid any complications arising from the NTC renewals process that was due to begin in April 2004, the customer fieldwork was conducted between February and 31 March 2004.

During the recruitment process it became apparent that the ‘Out of work’ customers were particularly challenging to recruit. This was because there was a marked lack of recall, by customers, of any discussion about NTCs with the Jobcentre Plus adviser therefore suggesting that delivery was perhaps different for this part of the sample. For the purposes of the research only those customers who had some recall of NTCs being mentioned were recruited into the study.

The sample profile of customers may be found in Table 1.2

Table 1.2 Customer profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer group</th>
<th>In work</th>
<th>Out of work</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lone parents</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couples</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Anglia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All interviews and discussions were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using BM RB’s proprietary analysis method Matrix Mapping. Further details of the analysis process may be found in the Appendix.
1.4 Report structure and approach

Following this introductory chapter the report is divided into five further chapters:

- Chapters 2 and 3 consider the staff perspective, with Chapter 2 dealing with the infrastructure for delivering NTCs and focusing specifically on adviser training and the systems and resources that were put in place to deal with NTCs. Chapter three deals with the process of delivering NTCs and discusses how advisers delivered NTCs to customers, their use of the BOC, the confidence they had in delivering NTCs to Jobcentre Plus customers, and their perception of whether or not the delivery of NTCs had any effect on customer views about, or motivations towards, work.

- Chapters 4 and 5 reflect the customer perspective. Chapter 4 explores how customers were introduced to NTCs and how they perceived ‘BOCs’, with Chapter 5 focusing on how NTCs were delivered by Jobcentre Plus advisers, their knowledge and understanding of NTCs and whether, and how Jobcentre Plus’ delivery of NTCs may have influenced their employment decision-making.

- Chapter 6 presents some examples of good practice and draws out the implications of the findings for future roll-outs.

The research was designed to explore potential differences in the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus according to geographical area as well as staff characteristics, specifically job role and length of time in service. In addition, potential differences in Jobseekers' reaction to NTC delivery were explored amongst different types of customer:

- customer group: lone parent, couples with children, childless over 25 customers, people with a disability and those aged over 50;

- whether customers were ‘in-work’ and claiming NTCs or were ‘out-of-work’ but had received an NTC ‘intervention’ by Jobcentre Plus;

- gender; and

- size of family – three or less children or more than three children.

Overall, there were some differences in the way in which NTCs were delivered by Jobcentre Plus that were at area level, as well as a number that were specific to job role or length of time in service. The London area tended to have different delivery practices compared to the other areas; lone parent advisers tended to be the most active of all advisers in delivering NTCs and more experienced advisers tended to be more confident in delivering NTCs. However, many similarities also existed. Where differences were found to exist these are discussed in the report.

From the customer perspective, there was some evidence to suggest that lone parents received a different style of NTC delivery compared to the other customer groups; differences in delivery between the other customer groups were marginal. In terms of the effectiveness of NTC delivery the research evidence suggests that
NTCs can be a critical factor in changing views about work although this does not necessarily translate into a movement from unemployment to paid work. No gender or family size differences were evidenced by the research. Area differences, where they existed, tended to mirror the staff research. Where the impact of the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus advisers appeared to have a differential effect on customers, such differences are discussed in the body of the report.

However, given the nature of qualitative research and the use of purposive sampling to construct the study sample it is not possible to extrapolate these findings to the population of Jobcentre Plus areas. Where differences in the delivery of NTCs have been observed, these are reported in order to demonstrate that the NTC delivery process is not uniform and varies in a number of ways.
2 The infrastructure for delivering New Tax Credits – the staff perspective

This chapter considers the manner in which Jobcentre Plus sites were equipped to deal with the delivery of New Tax Credits (NTCs). The issues covered in this chapter include: how staff were initially informed about Jobcentre Plus’s role in the delivery of New Tax Credits, the training provision that was put in place, and the systems and resources that were available.

2.1 Introduction and background

NTCs were officially launched in April 2003 although Jobcentre Plus sites were preparing to deliver the service from January 2003 with applications accepted from this time. The infrastructure to deliver NTCs through Jobcentre Plus therefore began many months before this. In terms of implementing the NTC delivery service, the Department for Work and Pensions consider the process as having three stages:

- The first stage – pre-April 2003 – focused on training staff, deploying the infrastructure and setting up the e-portal. Because the Inland Revenue (IR) system could allow the early capture of NTC claims, applications were accepted prior to the official launch, during the January to April period. During this time there were less applications made for NTCs than had been expected, although application numbers began to rise towards the end of this period.

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2 This introductory section describes the roll-out of the NTC delivery infrastructure within Jobcentre Plus sites and the flow of NTC applications. It is based upon informal discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions.
The second stage, which covered the period April to June/July 2003, reflected the ‘bedding-in’ stage of the delivery mechanism. Although the IT systems were rolled out in Summer 2003, Jobcentre Plus sites experienced some down times of both the e-portal\(^3\) and View Only systems, with the latter being more severely affected. The flow of NTC applications and enquiries increased considerably during this time, at points to levels that were in excess of those that had been predicted. Anecdotal evidence from the Department for Work and Pensions also suggests that a proportion of those people approaching Jobcentre Plus offices with enquiries about NTC payments were not Jobcentre Plus customers\(^4\).

The third stage, covering the summer 2003 to March 2004 period, is considered to be the ‘steady state’ period during which the volume of NTC applications and enquiries through Jobcentre Plus was approximately as anticipated. DWP information indicates that during this time the IT systems became much more reliable.

2.2 Informing staff about New Tax Credits

Jobcentre Plus sites have a considerable degree of autonomy in the way that they carry out their business. Consequently, there can be considerable flexibility in the way in which tasks are allocated to different job roles, the manner in which information, new systems and new procedures may be communicated to site staff and the way in which staff training is handled. Consequently, in the following discussion of the delivery of NTCs, it will be apparent that the manner in which staff were introduced to NTCs and the role they had in respect to the delivery of NTCs may differ across the areas and by job role.

DWP have indicated that Jobcentre Plus staff would have received information about NTCs towards the latter half of 2002 through the internal memo system. Documents describing the NTCs would have been sent to Business Managers and every adviser. However, during the research with staff it was apparent that recall of this was patchy and that these communications had either not been delivered or had not been widely remembered. Indeed, there were staff who reported becoming aware of NTCs through the television and radio advertising campaigns before being formally told about the new system through their office.

\(^3\) The e-portal system allows the direct capture of new NTC applications using an electronic version of the NTC claim form. The system can also be used to enter changes in circumstances and is linked directly to the Inland Revenue system. The system does not operate in real time, with processing occurring in batches. View Only is a separate system to e-portal, although it too is linked directly to the Inland Revenue NTC processing system. View Only allows a Jobcentre Plus adviser to view NTC records. The system operates in real time.

\(^4\) Jobcentre Plus is only required to deliver NTCs to its own customers, i.e. people who are using its job broking service and benefit claimants.
Email communications seemed to be more prevalent with staff indicating they had received an introductory email that referred them to a site on the Jobcentre Plus Intranet outlining the basic approach of NTCs and how they differed from WFTC/DPTC (Working Families’ Tax Credit/Disabled Person’s Tax Credit).

There were also instances of Business Managers cascading information about the introduction of NTCs during general office meetings, or of meetings being held specifically to discuss the change from WFTC/DPTC to NTCs. One of the Jobcentre Plus sites participating in the study held small PA meetings that outlined the NTC policy that was relevant to the customer group for which they had responsibility.

Business managers had also downloaded information from the Intranet, which had been passed on in the form of handouts for staff. Although staff had commented favourably on these handouts...

‘They were good, set out clearly and easy to work through.’

(NDLP Adviser, Wales)

...there was a lack of handouts covering specific details relating to the different customer groups and the various NTC elements.

2.3 Training provision

2.3.1 Training in New Tax Credits

Staff training occurred in two tranches, with 27,900 staff being trained during the period September to December 2002 and 32,400 staff being trained during the January to March 2003 period. Tranche 1 of the training included the following key aspects:

- an explanation of NTC, how to claim them and how to introduce them into work focused interviews;
- job roles and responsibilities in relation to NTCs;
- dealing with enquiries and providing advice to customers who may be better off moving from benefits to NTCs (using BOCs);
- overview of the e-portal, the Gateway and NTC interest on legacy systems.

A second tranche of training covered more technical aspects of NTCs, including dealing with special circumstances – New Deal 50+, severe hardship cases, New Deal 18-24 and 25+ customers, and WBLA (Work Based Learning for Adults) customers – emergency payments and the advantages of NTCs to older workers.

Staff also received training in the View Only and e-portal systems. Both sets of training were provided through an e-learning package hosted on the DWP Intranet.
The way in which training was allocated to staff was at the discretion of the Business Manager and said to be based on DWP’s general organisational approach to training with selected staff attending formal training sessions and for them to cascade the information down to others on their return to the office.

‘I was asked to attend the training sessions... at region I think they were... and then lay on some training sessions here... cascading they like to call it... Yes, this the way they train us with some going on courses and then us training others.’

(Adviser, North England)

At the time of the research, the job roles within new Jobcentre Plus organisation were not necessarily finalised when the training was delivered. This may have impacted on the ability of Business Managers to nominate the right people to attend the training. Given the scale of this study it is not possible to determine whether or not this is correct. However, the staff participating in this research indicated that they felt that, in general, the correct people – more experienced staff and those who had prior experience of WFTC/DPTC – did attend the formal training.

2.3.2 Staff views about the New Tax Credit training

Staff indicated that the training they had received had been between one and six months before the formal introduction of NTCs. The earlier training had been the formal two-day training, the later training being held within the Jobcentre Plus office. Staff descriptions of the training they had received varied enormously and reflected the provision that had been made – ranging from two-day training sessions at District or Regional centres through to half-day sessions at the Jobcentre Plus site, as well as on-the-job training. There were also geographical differences in the length of training received with London advisers receiving either no more than half a day of training or simply an NTC training pack.

Of all the advisers interviewed it was the Lone Parent advisers who were most likely to have attended the two-day training sessions. They then acted as a source of information and cascaded information about NTCs to others in the Jobcentre Plus office.

The content of the formal two-day training sessions tended to be similar for all staff and generally covered the areas specified above. However, the content was recalled as being ‘generic’ with very little focus on the different elements of NTCs, particularly in relation to the lone parent, disabled and 50+ elements. The training was seen as rather theoretical and said to cover hypothetical cases with little opportunity to train using real life situations.

Advisers indicated that the training sessions appeared to be scripted which would account for the similarity in content and format.
Staff indicated that training was not made available for either the e-portal or View Only systems, as the IT was not functioning at the time of the training.

In addition, while some elements of the training involved staff using an online learning package, this was reported to be of very little use as the training program was not designed to work through difficult cases and if there was a problem, the system tended to crash or not deliver an immediate answer to a query.

‘When using the online learning sessions, if you got stuck with entering a bit of information, the computer always crashed and it wasn’t designed to answer problems you had.’

(Lone Parent Adviser, Wales)

Views about the formal two-day training in NTCs amongst the staff participating in this study were generally negative. Four main reasons emerged. First, there was a general feeling that the training had been delivered too early, in some cases a number of months in advance of the introduction of NTCs. The reasons for early delivery of training are clear as Jobcentre Plus wished to equip its staff with sufficient knowledge of NTCs in order to be able to adequately deal with the NTC enquiries that were expected to occur in the period January to April 2003, before the formal launch of NTCs. However, given that the number of NTC applications was lower than expected during this period this meant that the opportunities to use the knowledge gained in the training sessions were diminished. As a result, fewer staff were able to put into practice the information they had learned and the detail of the training was forgotten. Typically, as it was the Lone Parent advisers who had received the formal training it was they who tended to deal with the larger proportion of enquiries arising through Jobcentre Plus. The consequence was that this group of advisers tended to become the most knowledgeable about NTCs.

‘I think the training was delivered too early, by the time NTCs were introduced I had forgotten lots of things... it made things very difficult as I kept having to look for the NTC information pack which wasn’t always when you had a customer with you. It would have been much better if we had received the training a few weeks before.’

(ND50+ Adviser, North of England)

Although staff may have considered the training to be useful the lack of opportunity to consolidate their learning resulted in increasingly negative views.

The second general criticism of the training was its tendency to be theoretical. As advisers indicated, the need for a theoretical component is important as it provides the context but in order to fully understand the material that is being taught, practical exercises are essential. It was this that the training sessions were said to lack. Alongside this was a lack of detail around the different NTC elements, with the disabled, child and 50+ elements being singled out in particular and the lack of information about childcare funding being an additional issue that was felt to be lacking.
‘The training didn’t cover all the specifics which were relevant for the different customers. So we really had to teach ourselves, I had to look on the intranet and collect the information myself. It was actually a matter of learning on the job.’

(DEA, South West)

Although the training schedule comprised a component for ‘Introducing Tax Credits into work focused interviews’, none of the staff interviewed recalled this session.

Third, there was a generally held view that the trainers delivering the training were not sufficiently aware of the detail of NTCs themselves. This was evidenced by them appearing to read from scripts and being unable to answer questions without reference to Head Office or a helpline:

‘The trainers didn’t seem to know the ins and outs of NTCs and were following a script, couldn’t really answer the ‘what if’ questions.’

(NDLP Adviser, London)

Staff who had received the two-day training were given NTC information packs. While these were welcomed there was some feeling that these had not been sufficiently ‘translated’ from the language and terms used by the IR to those that were more commonly in use within the Jobcentre Plus environment.

‘I found the pack okay, but it used too many jargon terms in it, we didn’t really understand all the technicalities which meant we had to often look things up on the Intranet to see what it meant which took a long time.’

(NDLP Adviser, South East)

Fourth, the lack of training in using the e-portal system was repeated throughout the staff group discussions. At the time of the training for most of the staff, the e-portal system was not up and running, which meant staff were not trained in processing an application online. Instead they had to work through paper examples, which were not the same once the e-portal system was introduced. This tended to cause some confusion and reflected negatively on the training:

‘We used the forms at first which were not on the system and then when we tried to enter the information on the system the forms were not the same, this made things very difficult as it sometimes took double the time.’

(ND50+ Adviser, South East)

Following the formal two-day training, those who had been trained then cascaded down the information to other staff in the Jobcentre Plus office. This was undertaken in a number of ways and included lunchtime sessions, training sessions

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6 Although the e-portal is designed to capture new NTC applications and asks the same questions as the paper application form, the layout and format differ in some respects.
held at the end of the day, briefings held during office meetings and on-the-job coaching. Although not exclusively so, it was the Lone Parent advisers who tended to spearhead the internal cascade training.

It was clear that those who had received the formal two-day training were rarely in a position to cascade the material further until they had undertaken some additional work. Typically, this included familiarising themselves with the practical aspects of making a new NTC claim, checking the detail of the various NTC elements and practising entering an application through the e-portal.

As these training sessions were informal and unscripted, the content of the sessions varied widely across Jobcentre Plus offices. The emphasis of these training sessions was practical and tended to run through the main procedures in processing a new NTC application and using the e-portal system.

While these sessions were highly regarded there were two main comments made. First, there was a sense that these sessions lacked any theoretical background and did not always explain why NTCs were being introduced and how they differed from the previous tax credit regime. Second, the sessions were felt to be too short, particularly for those who were relatively new to the Jobcentre Plus environment.

However, these informal sessions were welcomed as they were considered to be highly practical with individuals learning from each other’s experience. The general discussion that occurred meant that as staff learnt from each other they could suggest the best ways in which to resolve any issues that arose.

2.3.3 Training in Better Off Calculations

The process of undertaking a Better Off Calculation (BOC) has been available to Jobcentre Plus advisers for a number of years. BOCs are now all run through a system known as IBIS, prior to which they were run through both IBIS and FERRET.

From a training point of view, although the training schedule included a session on ‘Advice to customers who may be better off moving from benefits to Tax Credits’ those who attended the formal two-day sessions considered the teaching inadequate. This was for three reasons. First, the electronic system was not always available, which meant staff had to use a paper version and did not therefore become familiar with the electronic version. Second, the BOC training was said to use simple, hypothetical, scenarios. Staff viewed these as unrealistic and unhelpful, with the resultant feeling that the BOC training was wasted. Third, where the electronic BOC was available, staff commented that despite entering the same information,
discrepancies in calculations could result. No explanation was given for this and as a result this led to some lack of confidence in the Better Off Calculator\(^7\).

As indicated earlier, the BOC has been available to advisers for a number of years and is not therefore an NTC-specific tool. Some of the training issues that have arisen are therefore partly due to the perceived inadequacy of the NTC training and partly due to an overall lack of training in BOCs generally.

### 2.3.4 Staff understanding of the different elements of New Tax Credits

In discussing the introduction of NTCs with Jobcentre Plus staff it was apparent that there is a clear recognition that, although conceptually similar as a tax credit, the WFTC/DPTC and NTCs are different, with NTCs being available to a wider range of people than their predecessor. Partly because of their similarity with the previous regime of tax credits and partly because they gave advisers something additional to talk about, NTCs were seen as relatively easy to introduce within the work-focused interview. However, there were differences in this respect across Jobcentre Plus advisers. For example, those advisers who had regularly dealt with WFTC/DPTC prior to the introduction of NTCs felt very confident in introducing and discussing tax credits. Similarly, advisers with a number of years of experience of working in the Jobcentre Plus environment were equally confident about introducing the idea of tax credits to customers. It was those advisers who had no, or very little, prior experience of tax credits and those who were new (under a year) to working for Jobcentre Plus who felt the most ill at ease about introducing tax credits into a discussion with a customer.

Generally, advisers were aware that there were different elements of NTCs, although there was a marked lack of confidence in understanding the detail and specific customer eligibility requirements. However, there were patches of poor knowledge, often associated with the London area. For example, a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) in the study was not aware of the disabled element of NTCs.

Considering the specialist advisers, it was the Lone Parent advisers and the 50+ advisers who tended to reflect the greatest understanding of the detail of New Tax Credits, with the former tending to have the widest understanding of how NTCs work for a range of client groups. The 50+ advisers and DEAs tended to be more customer-specific in their knowledge of NTCs.

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\(^7\) The explanation is as follows: the amount payable through Working Families' Tax Credit was fixed for six months. However, because the final amount payable through NTCs is not finalised until the end of the year – because of any changes in circumstances that may arise – it is not possible to predict EXACTLY the amount of NTCs payable, and final awards can be affected by previous as well as current year’s income.
The differences in tax credit knowledge was clearly reflected in how confident advisers felt about discussing NTCs with Jobcentre Plus customers and how they dealt with such discussions. Advisers tended to segment into one of three types:

- **Not at all confident about discussing NTCs.** This group of advisers did not attend any of the formal two-day training sessions. They tended to have little or no experience of the previous tax credits and may be relatively new to working in Jobcentre Plus. They were unlikely to initiate discussion of NTCs with customers; if the issue was raised they may give the customer an explanatory leaflet or refer them to another adviser in the office.

  ‘I know so little about them and all the differences, that I would go as far as saying I avoid bringing up NTCs in a discussion with a customer in case they wanted to apply or know more and I couldn’t help them.’

  (JSA Adviser, Wales)

- **Confident for ‘simple’ claims.** In this context a simple claim would mean a customer who was single with no children. These advisers may initiate discussion of NTCs with customers but would only feel confident to discuss the issue and process the claim if the case was a simple one. Anything more complex and these advisers would refer the customer to another more experienced adviser or they would provide a basic explanation and offer a leaflet to take away. Typically, these advisers had little experience of the previous tax credit regime.

- **Generally confident.** Typically, these advisers had specialist roles, such as that of Lone Parent adviser or 50+ adviser, and to a lesser extent the DEA, or had gained considerable experience during the previous regime of tax credits. These advisers would actively initiate discussion of NTCs with customers and would also act as a resource for other advisers in the office.

The London area operated a different system in that NTCs were not processed through the Jobcentre Plus sites. Advisers did not generally help customers to complete NTC application forms, but they did undertake to deal with NTC enquiries that arose when customers had problems filling in the forms that they had received directly from the IR. As a consequence, the London advisers in general tended to be less knowledgeable about NTCs per se because they did not deal with them on a daily basis.

The varying levels of confidence that was apparent amongst the Jobcentre Plus staff was also a concern for the staff themselves. Recognising that they may not be fully aware of the intricacies of the NTC system, two concerns arose:

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Although childless over 25 customers were seen as ‘simple cases’ in the sense that NTCs were easy to discuss, it did not necessarily follow that childless over 25 customers were interested in, or motivated to change their views about work, as a result of a discussion of NTCs.
• their inadequate knowledge of NTCs may mean that the BOC undertaken could be inaccurate and the delivery of NTCs less effective than it could have been; and

• their lack of confidence in discussing NTCs might be communicated to customers, who in turn may feel less confident about making an application for NTCs.

2.3.5 Suggestions for improving the training

Given their experiences of the training they had received, staff, not surprisingly, made many comments about how the training could be improved. Comments focused on six key issues:

• **Content:**
  - advisers felt that the training had been too generic and requested that future training should be adapted to suit the role of the adviser. Consequently, greater emphasis should be placed on the disabled element for DEAs, the 50+ element for New Deal 50+ advisers, etc.;
  - the training should be more detailed and cover each specific aspect of each element of NTCs;
  - the use of more varied scenarios in the worked examples, including a range of simpler and more complex cases; and
  - specific ‘hands-on’ training with the IT systems.

• **Approach:**
  - a more even balance between theoretical and practical work;
  - the use of simulated live situations, using the IT systems as part of the situation; and
  - use of role-play and interactive work as a means of learning about how to introduce and discuss NTCs in an interview situation.

  ‘We could all learn from each other and discuss ways in which other people deal with situations, and if they work, we could adopt them, and this would help us improve the way we deliver NTCs.’

  (NDLP Adviser, South West)

• **Length:**
  - given the range of issues to be covered and the desire for a greater emphasis on practical work, staff considered that the time for training should be increased and perhaps undertaken in two parts.
Follow-up training

- there was no evidence of any follow-up training having been put in place. Staff considered that the following would greatly enhance their confidence in delivering NTCs:
  - refresher sessions;
  - ‘diagnostic’ follow-up training whereby staff indicate areas and issues about which they are unsure and a trainer provides sessions that deal specifically with these issues; and
  - facilities to discuss issues with other advisers using a ‘chat room’ facility.

Trainer knowledge:

- staff were aware that the introduction of NTCs was a major initiative and recognised that the detail of NTCs is complex. Nevertheless, there was a feeling that the trainers were insufficiently versed in the detail of NTCs, the consequence of which was to undermine staff confidence.

The timing of the training:

- there was an overwhelming view that the training in NTCs had occurred far too early, with staff considering that future training should be provided closer to the introduction of a new system. However, as discussed earlier, although NTCs were not officially launched until April 2003, applications could be accepted from the January of that year. With this in mind, DWP initiated the staff training during the latter part of 2002. However, the number of applications that flowed during the early part of 2003 was less than expected with the consequence that advisers had less opportunity to consolidate their learning. In the light of this it may have been prudent to initiate a programme of refresher training.

2.4 Systems and resources

In considering the infrastructure available to deliver NTCs to Jobcentre Plus customers, three issues arose. These were staff resources, the e-portal, and sources of advice and information. These will be discussed in turn below.

2.4.1 Staffing

The general view of Jobcentre Plus staff was that during the early introductory phase of NTCs (April to June 2003) the delivery infrastructure was severely under-resourced. Exacerbating the resource issue were problems with the IT systems, particularly View Only but to a lesser extent the e-portal. These two issues were set against the context of negative coverage of the delivery of NTCs by the media and a marked increase in enquiries from the public about the delayed payment of NTCs. Workloads were said to have increased dramatically and processing backlogs occurred. The impact of workloads will be fully discussed in Section 3.4.1.
From the DWP perspective there were three issues that should be taken into account. First, at the time of the launch of NTCs, the rollout of Jobcentre Plus was continuing. As part of the Jobcentre Plus rollout, additional resources were made available to cover the changes in the way that Jobcentre Plus operates including significant resources to deliver TTC business. However, the juxtaposition of Jobcentre Plus rollout and NTC introduction meant that how these resources linked to NTC was not necessarily transparent to staff.

Second, the unexpected change in the flow of NTC applications in the early part of 2003 caused a number of problems. The reduced flow of applications during January to March 2003 meant that only a proportion of advisers obtained any ‘hands-on’ experience of delivering NTCs, the remainder being unable to consolidate their learning. When the flow of applications increased beyond the predicted level there were fewer advisers than expected who were able to deliver NTCs to Jobcentre Plus customers. When the flow of applications increased markedly around the time of the launch of NTCs, the Jobcentre Plus infrastructure became severely stretched.

Third, DWP have indicated that there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that a proportion of the enquiries dealt with by Jobcentre Plus during this period were from non-Jobcentre Plus customers. Given that Jobcentre Plus is not required, nor resourced, to deal with this group of individuals, this may provide further explanation as to why Jobcentre Plus advisers, generally, felt that they were under-resourced for the delivery of NTCs. However, the staff participating in this study were not able to corroborate this view.

In addition, staff indicated that they dealt with many queries from customers who were concerned about the delays in the payment of NTCs as well as under- and over-payments. Outside the London area advisers tried to deal with these enquiries as best they could, even if this meant telephoning the IR Helpline on the customers’ behalf. These were unexpected tasks which staff felt impacted on their overall ability to deliver NTCs to their Jobcentre Plus customers.

### 2.4.2 E-portal system

The e-portal system was introduced specifically for the processing of NTC applications. Together with its companion IT system, View Only, this suite of programs allowed Jobcentre Plus advisers to enter new NTC applications, make changes in circumstances and view a customer’s NTC record.

In principle, the e-portal system was seen as being very useful and ‘the way forward’. However, the e-portal was not necessarily used in the way that might be expected, for two different sets of reasons.

First, during the early implementation phase both systems, but particularly the View Only system, tended to experience numerous periods of down-time. Even though the e-portal was less seriously affected the overall downtime reflected negatively on advisers’ desire to use either of the NTC electronic systems. In addition to system crashes, it was also said that the local terminal could lock up whilst accessing the
e-portal. The consequence was that there were advisers who became reluctant to use the e-portal system at all. They therefore continued using the paper application forms. There were other advisers, mindful of the unstable nature of the newly introduced IT systems, who resorted to completing a paper NTC application form with the customer and then entering the information on to the e-portal at a later date. However, there were problems with this approach too, as there were said to be differences between the TC600 paper form (the NTC application form) and the e-portal image so that there could sometimes be gaps in the information required.

At the time of the research, advisers indicated that the NTC IT systems were much more stable and with very little down-time. However, there continued to be advisers who would not use the e-portal and preferred a paper-based approach. This led to advisers having to spend longer on NTC applications and in some cases fill in the paper form and then enter details on the system.

Second, advisers taking fresh claims indicated that they would generally not use the e-portal in the first instance. This was because customers would rarely have all the information required to complete an NTC application and advisers indicated that the e-portal screens could not be ‘saved’ for completion at a later date. Advisers indicated that in such instances they would ask the customer to complete a paper application and return it with the supporting documentation at a later date. Typically, the supporting documentation that would be required would be proof of income, a P60, and Housing Benefit and Council Tax information. The e-portal screens would then be completed during the next interview or held over to be processed later in the day by a member of staff tasked with such a job. This provides a further example of the way in which the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus was limited and less efficient than it could have been.

‘You often had it already in front of you to process, then you find out even though you asked the customer, they had forgotten to bring in something, which meant you couldn’t enter it then, as there was no point ‘cause there would be bits of information missing.’

(NDLP Adviser, South East)

In the London area, advisers indicated that they did not use the e-portal system. They would ask the customer to complete the NTC application form and send it direct to the Inland Revenue (IR). Should they return the form to the Jobcentre Plus site, staff would forward it by post direct to the IR. London Jobcentre Plus staff felt that customers were quite happy with this approach:

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9 The e-portal does have a save and retrieve facility which would allow PAs to only partially enter a case and return to it at a later date. However, none of the PAs in the study mentioned this facility which could suggest that this was either not covered, or insufficiently covered, in the training provided.
‘I’ve given the forms out to lots of customers and they’ve said how easy it was to fill in and sent them off themselves straight to the Inland Revenue.’

(New Deal 25+ Adviser, London)

Advisers were also concerned about how the e-portal handled income. There was a great deal of confusion surrounding the customer’s annual income. This was particularly so when customers had no record of their annual income and estimates had to be made, which in turn affected the NTC application process. The issue relates to over and under-payments and the way in which the IR calculates income.

‘If the customer has no idea what they earned in the previous or even current year and has no records, this is a massive problem for us, as you don’t really know what to enter so you estimate and then this brings about a whole host of problems with overpayment or underpayment... which has knock on effects for the customer and their claim.’

(NDLP Adviser, London)

There was also an issue of what to enter as the employment starting date when it occurred before the introduction of NTCs. Should the PA enter the actual employment start date or the date when NTCs were first introduced? Generally, PAs entered the actual employment starting date, but there were some who thought that this would confuse the system and so entered the date at which NTCs were introduced.

2.4.3 The Inland Revenue Helpline and other sources of information

Even those advisers who were familiar with the previous tax credits system and who felt confident in dealing with NTCs were concerned at their lack of knowledge about the detail of the NTCs. They therefore sought further advice and information. While some of this came directly from the DWP website, advisers also used the Inland Revenue Helpline and sought advice through other routes.

In the initial months, Jobcentre Plus staff indicated that they made great use of the dedicated Helpline that was available to them. The exception was the London area, which had a ‘hands off’ approach and did not generally get involved in individual customers’ cases. London Jobcentre Plus advisers said that they would ask customers to contact the IR themselves.

At the initial introductory stage of NTCs and six months thereafter, advisers reported they used the helpline regularly on a daily basis often telephoning in relation to one customer three or four times if the case was complex.

‘There were times when it felt like I was on the phone all the time to the Inland Revenue helpline, cause there were things which came up which I didn’t know the answer to and didn’t want to give the wrong information so phoned up for clarification, in some cases 3 or 4 times for one person.’

(DEA Adviser, South West)
Views about the IR Helpline were mixed. While the IR Helpline staff were generally seen as being very approachable and friendly there were some concerns about the quality of the advice that was being received. For example, staff mentioned that very often they would telephone regarding a complex case and the Helpline staff were unable to answer the query. Advisers commented that this was frustrating, as it was a time consuming process. Interview time would often run out with the customer and they would have to reschedule and remember to chase the IR helpline if they did not get back to them with the relevant information. Advisers viewed this as an embarrassing or awkward situation to be in with a customer. They were unable to answer the query, the helpline was also unable to answer the query, which left the customer thinking they did not know what they were doing and did not portray a sufficient level of professionalism to the customer.

‘It was embarrassing when you phoned up and the person on the other end of the phone didn’t have a clue either, they were very helpful and said they would find out and get back to you, but it didn’t give a very good impression to the customer of our competency.’

(NDLP Adviser, South East)

The Helpline was also very busy and often engaged; when it was available, Jobcentre Plus staff felt that the Helpline staff were very slow to deal with anything other than the simplest of enquiries.

‘You would try and get through to speak to someone about a case, you would be holding on for ages and when eventually you got through there was no one to talk to about specific cases so the problem would never be resolved. It was like a lottery being able to speak to someone you had previously talked to.’

(JSA Adviser, South East)

There was also variation found between the answers given by different advisers who were working on the IR Helpline. Advisers reported they would often receive two completely different responses to the same question from one day to the next. This did not instil any confidence in the IR Helpline and made it difficult for advisers to deliver NTCs with confidence.

‘Very often you were left wondering whether or not you were telling the customer the right thing as you weren’t sure if the information you got from the Helpline was right or not as they didn’t seem sure when they were telling you.’

(ND 50+ Adviser, Wales)

More recent experience of the IR Helpline has indicated that it is less often engaged and the quality of the advice has improved markedly. Speed of response was also said to have increased.

However, as a consequence of their experiences of the IR Helpline, there were Jobcentre Plus sites in the study that had made informal links with local IR tax offices. These links had proved to very successful (Scotland in particular) with Jobcentre Plus staff developing a trusting working relationship with the local tax office staff.
2.5 Overview

Staff recall of receiving introductory information about NTCs prior to their introduction was patchy, despite material being available on the Jobcentre Plus Intranet and being cascaded down by Business Managers.

Training in NTCs was made available to staff in the form of two-day training workshops, allocation being made at the discretion of the Business Manager. These staff were then asked to cascade their learning down.

Although the formal training was welcomed a number of issues arose:

- the training was provided too early before the introduction of the predicted main flow of NTC applications, resulting in a lack of opportunity to consolidate their learning;
- training was felt to be too generic and insufficiently tailored to job roles; it was theoretical and with insufficient opportunity for practice with worked examples or on real cases; and trainers were unable to answer queries arising;
- advisers felt that there was insufficient practice in conducting BOCs with NTCs;
- although staff generally recognised the differences between WFTC/DPTC and NTCs and were aware of the various elements for different customer groups, the better understanding was found amongst NDLP and ND50+ advisers. The consequence was that inexperienced advisers tended to avoid discussing NTCs with customers altogether or may provide an explanatory leaflet or refer to another more experienced adviser in the Jobcentre Plus office.

Although no additional staff resources were made available specifically in relation to NTCs because they were not seen to be particularly different to WFTC/DPTC, the staff compliment had generally been increased as a result of the change of Jobcentres to the Jobcentre Plus format. However, because of the unpredictable flow of NTC applications, staff at times felt seriously under pressure. This has lessened with time.

The e-portal and View Only systems were introduced specially for the processing of NTCs. During the early phase of introducing NTCs, both systems and particularly the View Only system, were considered to be unreliable. Reliability has now increased substantially but the effect is that advisers do not always trust the IT system. A perceived (but incorrect) inability to save an application part way through when customers were not able to supply all the requisite information meant that advisers may adopt an approach of completing a paper application prior to entering the material onto the e-portal. Whilst this facility does exist within the e-portal, some advisers were clearly not aware of it, the consequence being to limit the effectiveness of the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus.
During the initial introduction of NTCs, advisers made use of the IR Helpline. They found that while staff were generally friendly and tried to be helpful, there could be problems with the quality and speed of the information provided by Helpline advisers. The Helpline was also very busy and as a result Jobcentre Plus offices tended to make informal links with local IR offices with whom they established a working relationship.
3 Jobcentre Plus staff delivery of New Tax Credits

The discussion and delivery of New Tax Credits (NTCs) and the use of Better Off Calculations (BOCs) with Jobcentre Plus customers is only one part of an adviser's role. This study focuses only on the delivery of NTCs and the use of BOCs that support the delivery. It will be apparent that advisers do not necessarily have an identical approach to delivering NTCs and conducting BOCs, for reasons that will be discussed in the following sections. Given some of the difficulties that advisers experienced during the introductory months of NTCs, staff sought a variety of ‘workarounds’. For example, in order to obtain information about NTCs there were instances in which advisers no longer used the Inland Reveue (IR) helpline and sought information directly from a local IR office. Similarly, issues arising from the use of the e-portal meant that some offices only accepted applications for NTCs on paper, with another member of staff entering the information onto the e-portal at a later date. Consequently, although there were common processes and experiences amongst advisers there were also differences, which reflect on their overall approach to the delivery of NTCs.

This chapter focuses on the manner in which Jobcentre Plus advisers delivered NTCs to customers. It considers how advisers introduced and discussed NTCs with customers and the role of the BOC in the overall delivery of NTCs. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how advisers felt about the process of delivering NTCs and the impact that NTCs had on their workloads. Staff perceptions of customer reactions to Jobcentre Plus’s delivery of NTCs are also presented.

3.1 The process of discussing NTCs with Jobcentre Plus customers

Although there was a general tendency to deal with NTCs in the first interview of a new claim (during the New Jobseeker Interview (NJI)) it was clear that there was no uniform process of introducing and discussing NTCs with customers. The range of
variation was considerable and occurred for a number of reasons – the available length of time for interview, more pressing issues might need to be dealt with, the perceived relevance of NTCs to the customer, the complexity of the customers’ case, and confidence in dealing with NTCs. These will be discussed in turn below.

The length of time allocated for an adviser – customer interview varied across the different types of advisers and the types of interview they were conducting. For example, an NJI tended to last around forty minutes, although New Deal for Lone Parent (NDLP) advisers generally spent longer with their customers, as there was a general view that there were more issues to deal with. Consequently, interviews conducted by NDLP advisers could last up to ninety minutes. By contrast, advisers responsible for JSA (Jobseeker’s Allowance), Restart and Work Focus Interviews indicated that their interviews were generally shorter – around twenty minutes in length. In these latter instances, the time available was not considered to be sufficient to introduce and discuss NTCs, complete the application, enter the information onto the e-portal system and deal with the other issues programmed for these interviews. As BOCs could take up to twenty minutes to undertake, they were not usually performed at this time. Initial difficulties with obtaining information from the IR Helpline also meant that advisers had less time to spend discussing NTCs. The effect of these perceived time constraints was that advisers either held over the discussion of NTCs and the BOC to a later date, mentioned them briefly and gave out a leaflet, or did not mention them at all.

During the discussions it was apparent that one of the main differences between the different types of advisers was the amount of time allocated to spending with customers. NDLP advisers tended to work on one-hour slots, with seven cases booked per day, while New Deal 25+, JSA, Restart and Work Focus advisers tended to operate on shorter interview slots with ten customers booked per day. Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) and New Deal 50+ (ND50+) advisers also indicated that their days were generally fully booked. If there was sufficient time they would spend longer with their clients than the notionally allotted time. However, because their cases tended to be fairly complex in terms of barriers to work and other work-related issues there was said to be a lack of time in which to fully discuss the value of NTCs.

NDLP advisers and DEAs felt that for their customers there were often more pressing issues that needed to be discussed in advance of introducing NTCs. In this respect, DEAs tended to be reluctant to introduce NTCs in an initial interview because there would usually be many other issues to deal with first. Typically, these would be concerned with the ‘barriers to work’ or an application for Incapacity Benefit. DEAs commented that disabled customers could be of the opinion that as they had been ‘signed off’ by the doctor that they were no longer able to work. Before they introduced the idea of NTCs and a return to work they felt that they had to deal with a set of underlying attitudes first. The discussion of NTCs was therefore held over until a more appropriate time.
Although NDLP advisers generally said that they introduced NTCs in the first interview they undertook with their clients, this was not always the case. For example, customers who arrived in a clearly distressed state or who had other more pressing issues such as the security of childcare (where there may have been threats of abduction of the child), access issues, domestic violence, or maintenance difficulties were not introduced to NTCs at this time.

‘Often these people are very vulnerable and are having a rough time and when they come into see us they don’t want to talk about going back to work and receiving NTCs, there are other more pressing issues they want to sort out, that’s when I hold off and talk about NTCs the next time.’

(NDLP Adviser, Wales)

Depending on the situation, NDLP advisers may briefly mention NTCs and give out an explanatory leaflet at this time with the intention of discussing them at a less sensitive time, such as review meetings.

However, where there were less sensitive issues NDLP advisers indicated that they were keen to encourage lone parent jobseekers to find work. Irrespective of whether the issue of the cost of childcare had been raised, NDLP advisers indicated that their discussion would always cover the potential role of NTCs and Child Tax Credit (CTC).

There were advisers in the study who only discussed NTCs when they thought it was relevant to the individual. This was partly an issue of the available time for interview and partly a view that it is only of benefit to introduce new information with some customers if there is some relevance at that time. Consequently, these advisers would only raise the issue of NTCs if they considered the customer to be job ready, or they were discussing a specific job in which the customer had expressed an interest, or if the adviser felt that NTCs were likely to influence a customer to take a job. In the latter instance, this would only occur when the adviser was very familiar with the customer and their circumstances and felt they were in a position to guess the likely outcome of a BOC. This reflects findings from evidence from the six monthly review meetings where lone NDLP advisers do not perform BOCs in situations where they think that the customer will be worse off, as the BOC is viewed as a powerful tool in making the decision to return to work.

Overall, it was the view of these advisers that it was only of value discussing NTCs (or any other issue) if it had relevance to the individual at that time or in the very near future. Otherwise, they felt, the information would ‘wash over them’ and would waste theirs and the jobseeker’s time. In such circumstances the decision not to discuss NTCs was made on the basis of knowledge about the jobseeker, their job-search history and aspirations and motivations to find work. When they felt that the time was right they would discuss NTCs with the jobseeker in full.

The perceived complexity of a case was a further factor that related to whether, and how, NTCs would be discussed with a Jobcentre Plus customer. As discussed in
Section 2.3.4, levels of understanding about NTCs varied across the sample of advisers. NDLP advisers in particular tended to be the most familiar with NTCs and indicated that they would discuss NTCs with any customer, irrespective of the complexity of their situation. Examples of complexity include customers with multiple support needs and specific needs for disabled children or customers who are in receipt of numerous benefits. However, this was not so for other advisers who felt competent to deal with only the simplest of cases. Consequently, the complexity of the case could affect whether NTCs were raised at all with the customer and the degree of detail in any discussion of NTCs. Typically, those advisers who felt that they could only deal with the simpler cases tended to mention NTCs briefly and perhaps provide an explanatory leaflet and would refer the customer on to a more experienced member of staff.

Finally, as discussed in Section 2.3.4, confidence in dealing with NTCs was very mixed. As a consequence, customers who were dealing with more experienced and more confident (in NTC terms) advisers tended to discuss NTCs. Customers who dealt with advisers who were not at all confident in discussing NTCs may not have received any information about NTCs at all, or at best may have received an introductory leaflet, a partial explanation, or perhaps be referred to another member of staff.

‘I don’t know all the ins and outs of NTCs and when I am faced with a customer that is asking all about the different elements then I panic and I try and tell them as much as I know but I’m sure I leave out bits.’

(JSA Adviser, London)

Advisers who introduced NTCs to Jobcentre Plus customers considered that they did so in much the same way as they had with the previous Working Families’ Tax Credit (WFTC)/Disabled Person’s Tax Credit (DPTC), in terms of when they were discussed during the interview and the effect that would have on income levels and standard of living. However, advisers did suggest that NTCs were discussed with a greater emphasis on them being a work incentive, compared to WFTC/DPTC. This is the subject of the next section of the report.

### 3.2 How Personal Advisers promote NTCs

Advisers who felt confident in fully discussing NTCs with customers indicated that they used the NTC system in a different way to WFTC/DPTCs. Whereas WFTC/DPTC was seen and presented as a ‘top-up’ in-work benefit, NTCs were presented much more as a financial package that could make work financially viable – an incentive to take work.

Advisers tended to focus on different attributes of NTCs as selling points to their customers. Typical examples were:

- promoting the ‘top-up’ effect of NTCs in taking up paid work that pays at a level lower than they might have previously considered to be viable;
- outlining the childcare element of WTC to lone parents;
• encouraging customers with a disability to consider the option of part-time work, if full-time work was likely to be difficult for them at the current time, using the disabled element of WTC to make work worthwhile; and

• highlighting the 50+ element to relevant customers if they return to employment.

Advisers found that NTCs were easier to use and more effective as an incentive to work with ‘flow’ rather than ‘stock’ customers. The reasons were threefold. First, flow customers were considered to be less likely to have entrenched attitudes to work and were likely to be more flexible in the type of work they would consider as they were keen to return to work. Second, there was a sense that some stock customers were very negative towards Jobcentre Plus per se and saw NTCs as ‘just another way’ of trying to get someone into work. Third, with specific customer groups - the 50+ group in particular - NTCs may not be thought to be as financially lucrative as the previous 50+ Employment Credit. This meant that 50+ customers who were familiar with the 50+ Employment Credit could have quite negative attitudes towards NTCs. This issue will be discussed in more detail in Section 5.3.

It was clear from the interviews that advisers generally used NTCs as an incentive to work, demonstrating that taking paid work could become viable with NTCs. The use of the BOC was often instrumental in this illustration, and will be discussed in the next section.

3.3 The use of Better Off Calculations

The concept of the BOC was highly regarded and indeed very familiar to many of the Jobcentre Plus advisers in the study as such a facility had been available for many years. Advisers who had experience of both ‘Ferret’ and ‘IBIS’ for calculating BOCs preferred Ferret as it was seen as more user-friendly. In its current form the Better Off Calculator is felt to provide a more comprehensive set of results with income broken down by benefit entitlement.

However, the use of BOCs was marred by a number of issues:

• less experienced advisers were not familiar with the Better Off Calculator, or how to interpret the results. This was partly said to be a lack of training and partly insufficient opportunity to use the program and to consolidate their learning;

• a view that the BOC program may be inaccurate. As already discussed in Section 2.3.3, NTCs operate on a different basis to WFTC/DPTC with the consequence that changes in income during the year will affect the program results, although advisers did not seem to understand the reasons for this. Advisers therefore thought that even though they thought they were entering identical scenarios into the program, they might not have been doing so. They interpreted the differences in results as an error, rather than a correct calculation as a consequence of the information they were entering. Advisers mentioned that the program does not specify the year of income that needs to be entered, an issue that seemed to be the cause of much concern and confusion;
advisers mentioned that the BOC program did not sufficiently alert the user to potential errors with the information being entered. Range checks were particularly mentioned in this respect. So, for example, it could be possible to enter £100 instead of £10 income without any error checks being made. Advisers were concerned about this and the effect on their customers.

‘One wrong input and a customer can think they will be better off, but when it comes down to reality they aren’t. We are the ones to blame.’

(ND 50+ Adviser, South West)

Confidence in undertaking calculations using the Better Off Calculator was therefore mixed. In some cases, advisers were so unsure about the BOC that they, in addition, undertook a manual calculation as well.

Consequently, in the same way that NTCs were introduced and discussed with customers in a variety of ways, so too were the use of BOCs. The London area was also different from the rest of the study areas in that there was less apparent use of BOCs with Jobcentre Plus customers, the exception being NDLP advisers.

BOCs were said to take about 15 to 20 minutes to undertake with the simplest of cases and between 40 minutes and an hour for the very complex cases. In the context of an interview slot that had been pre-booked, perhaps for an hour, BOCs were therefore seen as time consuming and an additional burden.

‘There is no way you could do a Better Off Calculation for everybody which you are supposed to, you just couldn’t do it, logistically you couldn’t fit it in.’

(ND 25+ Adviser, Wales)

They were also seen as ‘not very useful’ if they were used in the absence of any concrete thoughts that a customer might have about work as jobseekers often found that BOCs that were not job-specific were difficult to relate to. This proved to be problematic, especially when the customer found employment and the adviser performed a BOC and it worked out they would not be better off as originally estimated with the hypothetical case. Therefore this often led advisers to performing BOCs only on ‘real cases’.

‘When performing the BOCs I tend to use real examples otherwise you are putting in hypothetical examples which would convince them to return to work and then in reality if they did and it worked out they weren’t better off then they would come back and complain to us.’

(ND 50+ Adviser, South East)

Advisers therefore tended not to undertake BOCs at every opportunity but only in a restricted set of circumstances, which they felt reflected when jobseekers would be most receptive to discussing NTCs. These were:

- when a jobseeker was considering a specific job or set of jobs;
- at 13 week and 26 week interviews, as a matter of course;
for ‘stock’ customers only, as it may be a sensitive time for customers with fresh claims\(^\text{10}\);  
• when asked for a BOC by a customer; and  
• possibly during an initial interview to provide an ‘indicative example’ of what the Better Off Calculator could do.

By restricting the circumstances in which a BOC was undertaken, advisers felt that they were able to use their time more efficiently, by only undertaking BOCs when they were considered to be strictly relevant. Although advisers commented on the amount of time that it took to undertake a BOC they could not see any way in which the process could be simplified or shortened. Rather, there was a view that if a BOC was to be undertaken, the interview should be scheduled for a longer period.

NDLP advisers, however, indicated that unless there were pressing reasons for not carrying out a BOC, they would do so during the initial interview with a customer. In part this was felt to be a reflection of the amount of time they had with their customers and in part the view that one of the main barriers to work for lone parents is financial.

Nevertheless, the BOC was seen by advisers who used them to be one of the key features in their armoury as it could demonstrate very clearly the advantages of the combination of paid work and NTCs. In this respect, the BOC was very highly regarded.

‘When you showed the customer how much better off they would be using the Better Off Calculation, it made it clear to them that even working part time would mean they would have more money compared to claiming, it spurred them on in some ways’

(DEA, South East)

\(^\text{10}\) This is not say that jobseekers with a fresh claim would not have a BOC undertaken. Rather, advisers felt that the NJI was not always the best time to undertake a BOC, partly because of the length of time it may take to conduct and partly because other issues might be more relevant. For example, some fresh claim jobseekers were felt to be so highly motivated to find work that was viable without NTCs that the discussion of NTCs was unnecessary. Similarly, lone parents may present a raft of issues that needed to be dealt with before work could be considered and so NTCs were not relevant at that time. Equally, lone parents could present themselves as job ready and with childcare issues already sorted out all they needed help with was finding work. The NTC/BOC discussion would be highly relevant here.
3.4 The perceived impact of delivery NTCs

As discussed in Section 2.3.4, staff varied in their understanding of both the concept and the detail of NTCs, which had a knock-on effect in terms of whether and how they discussed NTCs with Jobcentre Plus customers (Section 3.1). This had an impact on both the workloads of those advisers who were delivering NTCs to Jobcentre Plus customers as well as the manner in which NTCs were conveyed to customers. This section considers the impact of delivering NTCs to customers in the light of adviser perceptions of customer receptivity towards NTCs.

3.4.1 Staff workloads

In the initial months after the introduction of NTCs, staff were of the view that their workloads had increased dramatically. As these have been discussed in earlier sections of the report they are mentioned only briefly here. Increased workloads were considered by staff to be due to:

- a lack of familiarity and confidence in discussing NTCs;
- interview lengths that were increased to accommodate initial discussion of NTCs and a BOC\(^{11}\);
- IT problems, particularly the down-time of the e-portal, necessitating the use of paper applications;
- the amount of time taken to obtain advice and help for the Inland Revenue Helpline; and
- dealing with customer queries, particularly the issue of non-payment and overpayment of NTCs. Advisers indicated that their workloads were affected for at least six months through dealing with overpayment issues, as it was time consuming having to telephone the IR for help to resolve the issue. This issue was less apparent in the London study area as Jobcentre Plus advisers directed customers with processing queries to the IR. Nevertheless, in dealing with these queries, Jobcentre Plus advisers were aiding the delivery of NTCs to customers.

For the most part, all advisers felt that there had been an increase in their workload although there were those who remained relatively unaffected. Typically, these unaffected advisers were either not dealing with customers who were eligible for NTCs or were not confident enough to deal with NTCs and so they either did not discuss them with customers or they referred the customer to other members of staff.

In some cases the adviser suggested that the customer wait and apply in a couple of months time when ‘everything has settled down’, even if this meant not applying for a job in which the customer might be interested at that time.

\(^{11}\) After a while advisers became more selective in their use of the BOC.
Those who had more detailed knowledge about NTCs, mainly the NDLP advisers and to a lesser extent the ND50+ advisers and DEAs, found themselves dealing with an increased caseload as other advisers referred their NTC cases to them as well as providing an advisory role to other advisers in the Jobcentre Plus office.

‘When NTCs were introduced I noticed that other advisers were referring customers to me even if they weren’t lone parents, this didn’t happen all the time but at the beginning I was the person in the office who knew the most.’

(NDLP Adviser, South East)

‘In May last year I remember it was sometimes difficult to get out the door on time as other advisers wanted to ask me questions to do with people they had seen or were about to see. They wanted to clarify things especially as I had been dealing with Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance for years I knew what I was talking about.’

(DEA, Wales)

Although a continuing lack of confidence in being able to deliver NTCs amongst some advisers means that others took on an ‘NTC role’, at the time of the research in early 2004 Jobcentre Plus advisers felt that their workloads were generally returning to normal. The reasons for this are threefold: advisers have generally become more familiar with delivering NTCs, the IT systems have become more stable, and the IR Helpline has become more easily accessible. NDLP advisers remain busy acting as a primary ‘NTC resource’ for other members of staff.

3.4.2 Perceived customer reaction towards the delivery of NTCs

Jobcentre Plus advisers indicated that in the early months after the introduction of NTCs they faced considerable opposition from some customers when trying to discuss NTCs. This was mainly due to the negative media coverage that was prevalent at the time but also due to specific customer reaction to certain aspects of NTCs. Two issues predominated. First, NTCs were not the only factor in considering the financial viability of work - there were other important considerations such as access to free school meals. NDLP advisers indicated that for a proportion of lone parents the additional cost of providing school meals meant that work became no longer viable.

Second, ND50+ advisers indicated that customers who were familiar with the 50+ Employment Credit felt that the 50+ element of NTCs was less of an incentive to take work.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{12}\) With the removal of the flat rate 50+ Employment Credit and the introduction of a means tested 50+ NTC element, the amount payable will vary with some customers being better off and others worse off when in receipt of NTCs compared to the 50+ Employment Credit. Advisers did not seem to be aware of the reasons why this should be so and tended to assume that the 50+ element of NTCs were generally less generous than the 50+ Employment Credit.
'For the 50+ group the amount has come down from £60 to £40'.

(ND 50+ Adviser, South East)

Although there was no evidence of advisers directly communicating this information to customers it was also clear that some 50+ customers were aware of this and became more difficult to persuade that work remained a viable option. This was generally an issue for ‘stock’ rather than ‘flow’ customers.

Advisers also indicated that there would continue to be a group of Jobcentre Plus customers who had very high, unrealistic, wage expectations for whom NTCs would provide little additional incentive:

‘Yes, but depends. Some are very resistant and wouldn’t even go out to work if they were £100 better off. Others are happy to start work even if they are just a little better off.’

(ND 25+ Adviser, North of England)

However, despite these issues Jobcentre Plus advisers reported a generally positive reaction to NTCs and felt that in many cases the delivery of NTCs made a positive contribution to considering returning to work. From their perspective NTCs were seen as one of the major tools that they had in helping and encouraging people to consider a return to work, as they were a continuous source of finance that could make paid work viable.

‘They are very attractive to so many people who had otherwise chosen a career on benefits and probably the best thing we have to offer due to the flexibility of them.’

(ND 25+ Adviser, South East)

‘Probably the best thing we have to offer.’

(NDLP Adviser, Wales)

Although advisers had no evidence to prove their assertions they felt that the two groups of customers who were most likely to respond to the Jobcentre Plus delivery of NTCs were lone parents and childless over 25 customers. DEAs also thought that

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13 However, as noted in an earlier chapter there were selected instances where customers felt that their views were being confirmed by advisers indirectly, either through silence or by not contradicting their statement.

14 The Advisers Discretionary Fund was also mentioned in this context but as a ‘one-off’ facility whereas NTCs were seen as ongoing.

15 Note that ‘flexibility’ in this context meant that NTCs were available to a wide range of jobseekers and with different elements appropriate to jobseekers in different situations. It did not mean that NTCs were recommended or delivered in a flexible way.
NTCs could help to shape attitudes towards work for people with disabilities although they did not have any evidence at the time of the study that any of their customers had moved into work as a result of being eligible for NTCs.

Consequently, when asked whether the Jobcentre Plus delivery of NTCs encouraged customers to reconsider work, advisers were generally affirmative, but indicated that they were not necessarily the deciding factor in whether to take a job or not. This will be discussed in the next part of the report – ‘the customer perspective’.

3.5 Overview

Overall, there was no clear uniform process of introducing NTCs to customers. Variations occurred as a result of the length of time allocated for a customer - adviser interview, whether more pressing issues needed to be dealt with, such as domestic issues for lone parents, whether the customer was sufficiently job-ready to consider the issue of a return to work and making an application for NTCs, and staff confidence in dealing with NTCs.

Advisers who felt confident about discussing NTCs generally presented them as part of a financial package that could make paid work financially viable. This was in contrast to the way in which WFTC/DPTC was said to be promoted as an in-work ‘top up’.

NTCs were felt to be easier to present to ‘flow’ rather than ‘stock’ claimants, mainly for reasons of customer motivation. The BOC was seen as an instrumental component in demonstrating the benefit of employment and NTCs.

Advisers who were relatively new to the Jobcentre Plus environment, with less than two years experience, indicated that they found the BOC difficult to use and interpret. This was felt to be partly due to being relatively new to the job, the complexity of the benefit system and the manner in which benefits could interact with each other, and in some instances a lack of training and a lack of experience in undertaking BOCs. Generally, more experienced advisers found BOCs easier to undertake and interpret although there were certain aspects of the BOC that were said to be problematic, particularly around the selection of the financial year or where incomes had varied during the year.

Staff thought that customer views about NTCs were mixed and due primarily to the negative media coverage surrounding their introduction. The effect was to reduce the effectiveness with which staff could deliver NTCs to Jobcentre Plus customers.

Lone parents and ND50+ had some negative comments about NTCs. For lone parents, the loss of passported benefits such as free school meals (as a result of taking employment) meant that work might remain unviable. ND50+ customers with prior experience of the 50+ Employment Credit felt they were likely to be less well off receiving NTCs.
4 Introduction of New Tax Credits to customers – the customer perspective

This chapter considers how Jobcentre Plus customers were introduced to New Tax Credits (NTCs), the role of the Jobcentre Plus adviser in their introduction and the customer experience of Better Off Calculations (BOCs).

4.1 How customers were introduced to NTCs

4.1.1 Customers with experience of WFTC/DPTC

Customers previously in receipt of Working Families’ Tax Credit (WFTC)/Disabled Person’s Tax Credit (DPTC) were generally informed about NTCs by receiving a leaflet through the post.

The leaflet, designed by the Inland Revenue (IR), highlighted the differences between WFTC/DPTC and NTCs and was set out in a style that was said to be easy to understand. Customers reported that the change to NTCs did not complicate their case, with the transition appearing to be straightforward.

‘We got a leaflet through the post which told us of the changes, we were already receiving Working Family Tax so it didn’t make that much difference to us really, it had a form in the envelope for NTC and we filled it in and didn’t hear nothing, but it was all okay’.

(Couple with children, male, In-work sample, South East)

These customers with previous experience of WFTC/DPTC, when introduced to NTCs by an adviser, were already aware of the change and were able to ask more detailed questions regarding the differences between WFTC/DPTC and NTCs.
4.1.2 Customers with no previous experience of WFTC/DPTC

Customers with no prior experience of WFTC/DPTC tended to be aware of NTCs before attending a Jobcentre Plus interview. This was true across all the different customer groups and within the In-work and Out-of-work samples. They obtained their information about NTCs through a variety of different sources:

- media advertising campaign;
- word of mouth from family or friends;
- provided with application forms by members of family/friends; and
- the IR Helpline or website.

The television advertising campaign was widely reported as being a primary source of information about NTCs. Being unsure as to whether or not they were eligible for NTCs they had, in some cases, decided to approach Jobcentre Plus offices in order to clarify the situation.

It was mainly customers from the In-work sample who reported that the television adverts had prompted them to send off for the NTC information packs.

Customers who regarded their case as simple and straightforward generally found the information packs they received from the IR to be quite comprehensible and did not need any further clarification or advice. However, this was not true for everybody. Completing benefit application forms can be difficult for some jobseekers. This is particularly so when the form may be new or unfamiliar to them. In these instances jobseekers tended to seek advice and help, usually from Jobcentre Plus, but also from other external agencies.

Once jobseekers had received the packs, which included application forms, if they needed help with their completion they would approach Jobcentre Plus for help.

‘I got the form from the Inland Revenue but I had a problem filling it in as I didn’t know what to put for earnings as I had received therapeutic earnings and benefits so didn’t know how to work it out, that’s why I decided to take it to the adviser at the Jobcentre for help.’

(Disabled customer, male, In-work sample, North of England)

Customers with more complex affairs could find the application process to be more difficult than expected, as they needed advice on whether or not their other benefits would be affected if they started to work and claim NTCs.

‘I thought I’d get the form and it would be really easy to fill in but there were so many bits I didn’t understand I had to talk to someone as I wanted to know how my other benefits would be affected and I was reluctant to fill in the form and then weeks later find out my other benefits had been stopped.’

(Lone parent customer, female, In-work sample, South West)
This demonstrates that the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus was wide ranging and included not only the discussion of NTCs but also providing detailed help and advice, completing forms and assisting generally with the NTC application process.

There were customers throughout the In-work and Out-of-work samples who were first introduced to NTCs by external organisations, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau. Such organisations generally gave an overview of NTCs and referred the customer on to Jobcentre Plus.

‘I went to see someone at the Citizens Advice Bureau to talk about how to get more money as I was really desperate. They mentioned that I could get tax credits but they didn’t really know anything about it, so they told me to find out more from my local Jobcentre, so I made an appointment with a Personal Adviser at the Jobcentre and she helped me apply for it then and there, it was great.

(Lone parent customer, female, Out-of-work sample, Scotland)

An agency called ‘Working Links’ was another external agency reported by customers as being the route to their introduction to NTCs. This agency works in partnership with Jobcentre Plus offices to help people back into employment. Again, they tended to refer customers to Jobcentre Plus, seeing advisers as the NTC experts.

Turning now to the Jobcentre Plus setting, there were common trends found in the experiences of lone parents and disabled customers, but in relation to the other customer groups the variations ranged from having no specific discussion about NTCs with an adviser to receiving detailed in-depth information. This is broadly in line with the staff perspective (Section 3.1).

Customers commonly reported that Personal Advisers (PAs) introduced NTCs when discussing a prospective job. This tended to be when the customer had specifically visited Jobcentre Plus to look for employment and had entered a discussion with an adviser, a view that was expressed predominantly by the In-work sample. Again, this tends to corroborate the staff perspective with NTCs primarily being discussed in relation to a specific job. We consider each customer group in turn below.

Childless over 25 customers from the Out-of-work sample reported that they were generally not aware they were eligible for NTCs, even though they may have seen the NTC adverts on television. This group of customers indicated that when they had a meeting with an adviser to discuss seeking employment, NTCs were not mentioned. From this they presumed they were not eligible and therefore did not pursue the adviser for any further information.

‘I had been in a number of times to talk about things and the situation that I am in and all those times I went, she didn’t mention anything to me about tax credits, so I just presumed I was not eligible and didn’t even think to ask really... but then I found out from a mate I was and got the form from the Inland Revenue... but I still decided not to apply as I knew I wouldn’t be better off working part time compared to claiming.’

(Childless over 25 customer, female, Out-of-work sample, London)
Childless over 25 customers within the In-work sample reported the same level of unawareness as to whether or not they were eligible for NTCs, but had either initiated the conversation with an adviser to discuss NTCs or it had been introduced by the adviser as a benefit option that was now available to them.

**Couples with children** within the In-work sample reported that advisers tended only to mention NTCs once they had established whether or not the customer had found employment. A common theme reported throughout the interviews with the ‘Couple with children’ customer group was that advisers were more likely to mention or introduce NTCs into the conversation if they were discussing a particular job. They indicated that NTCs were not highlighted during the interview as being a separate incentive nor a reason for them to seek employment, but rather as an overall package of financial measures that were available.

**Disabled customers** reported that advisers would often present NTCs when they were discussing the prospect of returning to work and trying to weigh up the pros and cons. They commented that advisers would place more emphasis on the psychological benefits of returning to work or seeking employment and through this discussion they presented the added financial benefits that could be gained if they worked and received the disabled element of NTCs.

‘We were discussing the idea about me returning to work after not working for six months since the cancer treatment and we were talking about all sorts of things and I think she brought up tax credits and the benefits at the end, she certainly didn’t shove it down my throat she presented it as something I should think about.’

(Disabled lone parent customer, female, Out-of-work sample, South East)

**50+ customers** reported overall a similar experience to disabled customers. They indicated that NTCs were often introduced into the interview after they had discussed other issues concerning their return to work. Customers from both the In-work and Out-of-work samples commented that they found New Deal 50+ advisers were willing to discuss NTCs but did not always have the time to provide any detail as they had spent the time during the meeting discussing other issues that they had raised. In general, the emphasis of these interviews was not seen to be NTCs but rather an emphasis on the skills required for returning to work and a search for the most appropriate route into employment.

There were however customers who considered that the emphasis of the New Deal 50+ Advisers was more concerned with introducing and promoting the various types of benefits which were available to them, one of them being NTCs.

‘I felt bombarded with information about this benefit and that benefit, amongst them was definitely tax credits, she didn’t really seem to listen to what I had to say and it was quite frustrating really but there was a limited amount of time and I guess she wanted to be able to present all the different options.’

(50+ customer, female, Out-of-work sample, Scotland)
During these discussions between 50+ jobseekers and ND 50+ advisers there could be some discussion about the difference between the 50+ Employment Credit and NTCs. This only appeared to occur in the relatively few instances where the jobseeker was aware of, or had claimed, Employment Credit. In such instances, the jobseeker had been of the opinion that Employment Credit was ‘a better deal’ financially compared to NTCs, a view that advisers were said to have agreed with, even if only by the adviser remaining silent.

‘I remember saying to her that these tax credits weren’t as good as the old [Employment] Credit. She just looked at me and then went onto something else...I can’t remember what now... But I took it that she agreed but didn’t want to say.’

(ND50+, male, Out-of-work sample, London)

Lone parents across the sample were generally introduced to NTCs at their first contact meeting with an adviser. They found that when they approached Jobcentre Plus offices to discuss returning to work or specific issues that had arisen due to a change of circumstance, they were introduced to NTCs straight away.

‘I went in to talk about things with an adviser as they had changed and my husband had left me and I really had to return to work. She mentioned tax credits almost straight away to me and she went through how much better off I would be if I went to work and received them as a top-up on my salary. She really went into detail though the second time I saw her as I didn’t have time to spend as I was in a rush’.

(Lone Parent customer, female, In-work sample, South East)

The discussion of NTCs could either be in relation to a specific job or might be presented as an illustration using a hypothetical job and wage rate. In some exceptional cases, lone parents reported that NTCs were introduced briefly and advisers would then encourage them to arrange a second meeting in order to go into more detail highlighting the different elements involved for lone parents in relation to childcare provision and CTC (Child Tax Credit). However, the norm was for NTCs to be described in detail at that initial meeting.

Irrespective of how NTCs were introduced, lone parents were very conscious that the discussion of work and NTCs had been handled very sensitively by the NDLP advisers and the subject would only be approached once they had finished discussing more pressing issues that had to be resolved.

4.2 The role and use of BOCs

4.2.1 How BOCs were presented

The manner in which BOCs were presented and discussed varied considerably across the sample of In-work and Out-of-Work customers. BOCs were generally calculated in order to show the customer how much better off they would be if they were
employed and receiving NTCs compared to how they stood if they continued to receive unemployment benefits.

Overall, customers across the five different groups in the In-work sample reported having spent some time with advisers working through BOCs, although generally at a superficial level.

‘He did a quick example of what I could be getting if I worked and received Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit but he didn’t go into any detail, it only took about 5 minutes.’

(Couple with children, male, Out-of-work sample, Wales)

However, within the In-work sample there were exceptional cases, where customers from each group, indicated that advisers explained the rationale of the BOC and had discussed them in great detail.

In particular, lone parents, people with disabilities and 50+ customers who were receiving NTCs (the In-work sample) reported that advisers performed BOCs for them at either the initial interview stage or when they returned for a second meeting. Advisers would spend some considerable time discussing their financial situation and how much they would receive on a weekly basis if they stayed unemployed and received benefits compared to what they could be receiving through employment.

‘I was about to start a job and went in to see the adviser about all the different benefits I could get, she sat and went through this Better Off Calculation and I saw for myself how much better off I would be weekly receiving a wage and tax credits on top. It was good that calculation ‘cause you could compare the two.’

(Disabled customer, female, In-work sample, North of England)

Overall, these customers were pleased that they understood the calculation and emphasised the fact that advisers made the effort to explain NTCs in a simple manner and in language they could understand as opposed to bombarding them with jargon and mathematics.

‘They didn’t use fancy jargon like they sometimes do, they just showed it how it was and explained anything I didn’t understand.’

(Lone parent customer, female, Out-of-work sample, South East)

Lone parents in particular, reported how NDLP advisers spent long periods of time explaining the way the BOC was set up and how it worked. They were made fully aware that if the BOC was calculated for a hypothetical job, the calculation was merely an estimate as to how much better off they would be if working and receiving NTCs and could not be guaranteed. This was very important, because for many lone parents, when it came to deciding whether or not to return to work it was essential that everything was accounted and calculated for, as the difference of a few pounds could have an impact on their decision.
Disabled customers from the In-work and Out-of-work sample indicated that performing BOCs were a time consuming process. This was because their cases would often be complex and there were difficulties in working out how NTCs would interact with the other benefits they might be receiving. In this respect they felt that advisers were not always clear in their description of how other benefits, for example Disability Living Allowance, would be affected when they started working and receiving NTCs. This was a critical issue in Jobcentre Plus’ delivery of NTCs in that it undermined the usefulness of the BOC as those disabled people who were in work reported that the original BOC that was calculated did not compare well to the reality of when they started earning.

‘The adviser did a Better Off Calculation but she seemed confused as to how my benefits would be affected, so the estimate she gave was way out of line, when I started working I was actually much better off than the calculation had predicted, so it wasn’t worthwhile really.’

(Disabled customer, male, In-work sample, South East)

4.2.2 The role of BOCs in the decision to return to work

Considering the overall sample, there were only a few customers that reported the BOC played any significant part in their decision to return to work. These customers commented that the BOC presented the idea of returning to work as a realistic viable option compared to their current unemployed situation. They found being able to compare the two figures an easy concept to relate to and accept.

‘When she showed me the Better Off Calculation and explained the differences I hadn’t previously realised how much better off I could be and it was there in black and white in front of me which in a way motivated me to go and find work’.

(Lone Parent customer, female, In-work sample, Wales)

However, there were cases reported by customers where the adviser would present to them a number of different work scenarios and calculate the BOC, but even after applying the BOC to two or three hypothetical cases, it would still work out they would be better off claiming and receiving benefits compared to returning to work.

‘Whichever scenario he chose, it still worked out I would be marginally better off claiming all my different benefits compared with working part time as this is all my health would allow me’

(Disabled customer, male, Out-of-work sample, Scotland)

4.2.3 Issues arising with BOCs

Three specific issues arose with the use of BOCs. These were related to the type of calculation that was provided – a hypothetical example or a real-life situation; difficulties with selecting the correct year of income to use in the calculation; and customers’ experience of using the IR online Better Off Calculator.
Advisers tended to use BOCs only in relation to specific jobs in which the customer had expressed an interest. They recognised, in these instances, that people tend to be more persuaded by realistic situations rather than those that were hypothetical. Nevertheless, there were instances when *advisers also used hypothetical calculations* by way of example.

Customers reported that they found the BOC more useful when it was based on a realistic situation; it was difficult to predict whether the hypothetical situation would match that of a real employment opportunity.

‘It's only an estimate and it can’t really give you a realistic picture of what you could be getting as you don’t have a job yet and it’s hard to estimate what you could be earning if you don’t have a job to base it on.’

(Disabled customer, female, Out-of-work sample, Wales)

However, there was a useful role for hypothetical calculations as customers indicated in their successful use of the *online BOC via the Inland Revenue website*. They found the calculation easy to work through and were able to generate a set of calculations that were based on a variety of different hypothetical job scenarios. Customers also found it useful to estimate what they should be earning based on previous employment. They commented that this was a good approach, as they were able to perform a BOC relating to a realistic situation.

‘I predicted what I should be earning once I qualify as a full-time social worker and based my calculation on that as I thought that would be more realistic and give me a realistic picture as to how much better off I would be.’

(Lone parent customer, female, In-work sample, North of England)

However, in some cases customers reported using the system online proved not to work as smoothly as they expected, as they were unable to interpret the results of the calculation. There were a number of reasons behind these difficulties. Firstly, interpretation of the comparison figures proved difficult for customers to understand fully as they were not aware of how different benefits could be affected when applying for NTCs. Secondly, customers found the mathematical side of the BOC difficult to operate.

Finally, the third issue arising in relation to BOCs was *which year of income to enter into the BOC*. Jobcentre Plus staff were often unsure as to which income year to include, with customers expressing uncertainty as to how advisers were calculating the BOCs and the information they were based on, reflecting general staff lack of confidence in using BOCs (Section 3.3).

‘The Better Off Calculation just didn’t make much sense really as I was earning £50,000 before I was made redundant now I am earning even less than half of that but he based the calculation on my previous year’s salary so of course I am going to be better off based on that amount of money.’

(50+ customer, male, Out-of-work sample, Wales)
4.3 Overview

Customers found out about NTCs from a range of sources including the national media campaign, friends and family, CAB and Jobcentre Plus.

Customers in the study who had previously been in receipt of WFTC/DPTC at some point in the past generally found the application for, and transition to, NTCs unproblematic. So too did some of the customers who applied for NTCs on their own initiative; others sought advice from Jobcentre Plus.

The manner in which Jobcentre Plus advisers dealt with NTCs varied widely. Generally, lone parents were taken through NTCs in considerable detail, often in their first interview. By contrast, couples with children and childless over 25 customers may not have had very much discussion about NTCs, if at all.

Lone parents, people with disabilities and 50+ customers who were receiving NTCs had BOCs undertaken at either the initial interview or when they returned for a second meeting. Advisers would spend some considerable time comparing the differences to them in remaining unemployed in comparison to employment. Considerably less emphasis appeared to be placed on BOCs with childless over 25 customers and couples with children.

BOCs could play a role in making the decision to move from unemployment to work, but it was not necessarily the key factor in helping them make the decision.

Customers reflected that the most effective BOCs were those conducted using ‘real’ jobs rather than those based on a set of hypothetical situations.
5 The delivery and impact of New Tax Credits on Jobcentre Plus customers

This chapter considers the effectiveness with which New Tax Credits (NTCs) were delivered, from the customer perspective, and the impact that their knowledge of NTCs had on their employment-related decision-making behaviour. Where possible, differences between the various customer groups and whether they were working or unemployed will be discussed. However, it should be noted that overall the differences were slight, particularly amongst the Out-of-Work group (those who had an NTC intervention but remained unemployed). The chapter concludes with customer perceptions of the quality of service delivered by Jobcentre Plus in relation to NTCs.

5.1 The delivery of NTCs to Jobcentre Plus customers

5.1.1 Jobcentre Plus role in communicating NTCs to customers

One of the criteria for inclusion in the study was that customers recalled some mention or discussion of NTCs, either by name or concept, with a Jobcentre Plus adviser. In general, customers had great difficulty in recalling very much of the discussion about NTCs with the Jobcentre Plus adviser.

In terms of recall, customers were of three types. The first could only recall NTCs being mentioned but had no memory of any subsequent discussion. The second recalled that there was a discussion but could not remember any of the detail nor of when, or how, NTCs were introduced. The third group had a better recall of the NTC discussion. This could be for a number of reasons:
The delivery and impact of New Tax Credits on Jobcentre Plus customers

- the adviser spent some time discussing NTCs and presented a wide range of information. Discussion of NTCs in these instances were said to have taken around fifteen to twenty minutes;

- a Better Off Calculation (BOC) was undertaken;

- from the BOC it was clear that they could be substantively better off working and receiving NTCs, the difference was marginal, or they were likely to be clearly worse off in work and receiving NTCs;

- the adviser used specific words or phrases that the customer recalled. For example, there were customers who remembered the advisers referring to NTCs as ‘Working Family Tax Credit’ or ‘Family Tax Credit’, or in the case of a 50+ customer NTCs were introduced as a ‘Fair deal for the over fifties’ and alongside the New Deal for 50+.

Given that recall of the discussion of NTCs was patchy, customers found it difficult to remember when NTCs were introduced and the manner in which it occurred. However, there was a general view that NTCs were only discussed in relation to a specific job that the customer was interested in or if the customer specifically asked about NTCs. Consequently, NTCs tended to be introduced later in the interview and only where there was a specific purpose; they were mentioned less in the context of general information provision. There was a single instance in which NTCs were raised only after a job had been secured but the customer had not started work and had visited the adviser to discuss other issues connected with starting work.

There were no differences in recall of the NTC discussions between the In-work and Out-of-Work samples. Of the customer groups, it was primarily the lone parents who recalled the fullest discussions about NTCs. This may reflect the overall level of satisfaction with the delivery of NTCs by NDLP advisers. Overall, it was the lone parents and to some extent the 50+ group who expressed the greatest satisfaction with the amount of time that advisers spent discussing NTCs with them. Couples with children and childless over 25 customers tended to be less positive in this respect. With the latter two customer groups there was a sense that advisers were keener to find them work than to discuss other issues such as NTCs.

Reflecting the manner in which discussions of NTCs with advisers were recalled, customer understanding of NTCs was extremely poor. Perhaps not surprisingly, customers could not describe the change from ‘in-work’ benefits to a ‘tax credit’ form of income, although those who had been previously in receipt of WFTC/DPTC seemed to be more at ease with the concept.

Overall, customers could not describe how tax credits worked, the various elements that are available, nor how tax credits are calculated. However, lone parents, people with disabilities and the 50+ groups tended to be more familiar with the detail of tax credits.

Partly this variation in the effectiveness of the delivery of NTCs to Jobcentre Plus customers is explained by the manner in which advisers dealt with NTCs during the
interview, partly their own ability to deal with such issues during the interview setting, as has already been discussed, and partly by the amount of contact that customers had with advisers. It was clear that the amount of contact that customers had with advisers varied and that the greater the amount of contact related to a better understanding of NTC. So, for example, rurally based In-work customers tended to visit Jobcentre Plus more frequently and reputedly spent longer with advisers than similar urban-based customers, resulting in a greater understanding of the relevance of tax credits.

‘I found the more I talked to her the more I liked her, that was a good thing as I don’t like talking to strangers about my business and it was also good cause when she was telling me about the Better Off Calculation I trusted what she was saying, it was like she genuinely cared what I decided to do’.

(Lone parent customer, female, North of England)

There also appeared to be some geographical differences in the delivery of NTCs to customers between Scotland and Wales and the remainder of the areas in particular. Customers in Scotland and Wales particularly praised the way in which advisers dealt with them. Advisers were reputedly willing to spend more time in describing and clarifying NTCs and undertaking BOCs, providing help and support with completing NTC application forms and generally more time dealing with customers. There was also some indication from customers that advisers in Scotland and Wales were more knowledgeable about NTCs in general.

In the London area, as might be expected from the staff research, NTCs were not the focus of customer – adviser interviews. The London advisers were rarely said to have discussed NTCs. Where the customer raised the issue of NTCs a typical response was ‘That’s nothing to do with us’ and customers were advised to get in touch with the Inland Revenue (IR). Where London customers were knowledgeable about NTCs this was not said to be through any intervention by the Jobcentre Plus advisers.

The paucity of customer understanding about NTCs did not appear to be markedly different across the In-Work and Out-of-Work samples.

5.1.2 The Jobcentre Plus role in making an application for NTCs

Customers, in a number of instances, had already made an application for NTCs, obtaining the application form directly from the IR and returning it direct. This was true for both the In-work and Out-of-Work samples and there appeared to be no systematic differences between the customer groups. The exceptions were people with disabilities and the 50+ group of customers who seemed to be less likely to have made an application for NTCs prior to their Jobcentre Plus interview.

Customers in both the lone parent and disabled groups indicated that they would sometimes miss meetings with their adviser, either for reasons of childcare or ill-health. Even though the adviser may have indicated that NTCs were on the agenda for that next meeting there were cases where advisers would not follow-up
the missed appointments and so NTCs were never fully discussed, nor an application for NTCs made.

Experiences of the delivery of NTCs were mixed across the disabled group, although there was a general feeling that the way in which NTCs interacted with other benefits for disabled people was very complex. Not only was this a problem in understanding NTCs but it also affected their delivery, as there was some feeling that DEAs were not always sufficiently familiar with the detail of NTCs with the consequence that the explanation was not useful to them. NTC applications tended not to be made where there was any lack of certainty about the outcome.

Although there were customers who were given an NTC application form in the London area, this tended to be limited, with some customers being advised to contact the IR directly. If they had any difficulties with completing the application form customers were reluctant to contact Jobcentre Plus in the London area as they had experienced a level of help and advice from advisers that was not very encouraging. They indicated that they were more inclined to telephone the IR Helpline.

‘She handed me the form, told me to fill it in and send it off. She reassured me it was easy but when it came to doing it there were so many blank spaces as I didn’t know what to fill in, so instead of wasting my time and going back I decided to call the Inland Revenue helpline and they offered me advice over the phone and made sure I filled in it properly. If you didn’t fill it in then it could affect what I was going to be awarded. I thought her attitude was quite dismissive really and haven’t been back since.’

(50+ customer, In-work sample, female, London)

Although there was evidence of advisers performing an NTC-related BOC for jobseekers in the London area, this was very limited. The common practice within the London area Jobcentre Plus offices involved in this research was much more of a ‘hands off’ approach with customers tending to be referred on to other agencies such as Remploy for disabled customers. These issues appeared to be a common experience for In-Work and Out-of-Work customers.

5.2 The impact of NTC delivery on customers’ job-related behaviour

5.2.1 Overall impact of NTCs on customer behaviour

The impact of NTC delivery on customers’ job-related behaviour varied widely and for the following reasons:
• **Lack of motivation to find work**

Confirming the views of Jobcentre Plus staff, there were customers within the study for whom conventional paid work was of little or no interest\(^{16}\). Finding the flexibility of a ‘benefits lifestyle’ to their taste they expressed little motivation to find work. The discussion of NTCs did not change their views about work nor change their motivation to look for work.

• **Poor knowledge and understanding about NTCs**

As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, the level of knowledge and understanding about NTCs was often very poor. In the absence of this information and a clear understanding of the role of NTCs, the impact was minimal. In these instances there was no apparent effect of the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus advisers on customers’ views about work.

• **The perceived relevance of NTCs**

Within the sample there was a small group of customers whose primary stated aim was to return to work. They did not like being unemployed and did not wish to claim benefits for any longer than they had too. This group tended to have little experience of the benefits system in general and were experiencing a ‘temporary period of unemployment’. For them, the key aim was to return to the standard of living they had before they became unemployed. They were only interested in securing work that would allow them to live without having to claim any form of benefit or tax credit. Consequently, any discussion of NTCs with a Jobcentre Plus adviser had no effect on their views about work.

• **Whether NTCs had been discussed with a Jobcentre Plus adviser**

Where NTCs had been discussed with an adviser, as opposed to merely being mentioned in passing, it was clear that customers had given greater thought to the issue of taking work and making an application for NTCs. This did not mean that they would automatically take a job and apply for NTCs as a number of other issues arose such as whether they were interested in that particular type of work, travel to work distance, child care issues for lone parents and couples with children, disability-related issues for disabled people, and whether they would be financially better off if they returned to work.

• **Whether a BOC had been conducted and whether the expected difference in overall income was considered to be acceptable**

BOCs were an important component in encouraging customers to consider work. In the main there was a tendency to prefer work that paid a ‘reasonable wage’ but the use of a BOC could help customers to see that work that was paid at a level lower than they had wished could still be viable.

\(^{16}\) Income from the black economy may have played a part in this view, but was not a focus of the research.
5.2.2 The impact of the delivery of NTCs on different customer groups

Where advisers were able to discuss NTCs with customers, NTCs were emphasised as being part of a package that accompanied a return to work. In this section, customer movement towards work is considered in the light of this approach to presenting NTCs to customers:

• Couples with children and childless over 25 customers in the In-Work group commented that returning to work was already a priority for them. The discussion of NTCs did not have a direct impact on their decision to return to employment:

‘It was not a determining factor in my decision to return to work as I had already decided that I wanted to find work and then when the adviser told me about tax credits, I thought that’s good but it wouldn’t have made a difference to me really whether or not I took a job’

(Couple with children customer, male, In-work sample, South West)

• Lone parents and people with disabilities in the In-Work group tended to be among the more work-motivated customer groups. Lone parent customers, in particular, had found that when they had approached Jobcentre Plus for advice, NDLP advisers took time to listen to their problems, discuss the role of NTCs and suggest a number of different solutions. This positive response from advisers affected some customers’ opinions and attitudes towards returning to work:

‘There were jobs I had looked at previously and hadn’t even considered them as they were deemed not worth my while applying as the hours were shorter and the pay wasn’t that good. But then my adviser told me about the disabled element of tax credits and the top-up I would receive from this and we worked through a Better Off Calculation and it turned out to my surprise that I would actually be better off than staying as I was claiming.’

(Disabled customer, female, In-work sample, North of England)

‘I thought there was no way I could realistically think about work but then she suggested lots of things to me, like working part-time and doing a course, she came up with ideas I hadn’t even thought about, she was so helpful.’

(Lone parent customer, female, In-work sample, Scotland)

‘I hadn’t thought about going back to work as I’ve got three kids and there is no one really near me who can look after them so I never even looked for a job. But now I take the kids to the childminder and pick them up at the end of the day, I feel so much better in myself getting out everyday and having a break from them. Without that I wouldn’t have been able to even dream of doing this few years ago.’

(Lone parent customer, female, In-work sample, South East)
• 50+ customers also felt that the discussion of NTCs with Jobcentre Plus advisers could change their views about taking work:

‘I hadn’t thought about going back to work part-time and there were definitely jobs like cleaning I hadn’t even looked at but when I saw that I would be better off working and it didn’t have to be full-time because I would receive these top-ups it made things seem easier.’

(50+ customer, male, In-work-sample, North of England)

From the perspective of the Out-of-Work sample, there were numerous instances where the presentation of NTCs during the interview clearly changed peoples’ attitudes towards work. However, they were unable to move into work because other issues, often financial, predominated:

• Lone parents, for example, could feel that the loss of free school meals, which is a consequence of coming off Income Support and moving into work, could limit their ability to return to work.

• Disabled people also commented that they could not earn enough to cover the additional cost of travel or medicine, or that the strain of returning to work was too great to contemplate:

‘I was more concerned about the effect that returning to work would have on my [health problem] and if it would make me worse, this was really important because if I decided to return to work and it didn’t work out for health reasons then I wanted to know that my other benefits would not be affected and that I could carry on receiving Incapacity Benefit like I had done over the last year. So the incentive of tax credits did not really matter to me I had other things to worry about’.

(Disabled customer, Out-of-work sample, male, South West)

• Couples with pre-school children also made the point that childcare could be very expensive and prohibited their return to work. Those with school-age children also indicated that the absence of after-school care and the perceived inflexibility of employers, or child-friendly working hours, made the prospect of employment very difficult.

• 50+ customers in the In-work sample also mentioned additional barriers to work, such as age prejudice and the costs of the transition from not working for years to employment.

‘One of the main things I was most worried about was going back to work after such a long time, I was nervous and worried that my finances would not work out...’

(50+ customer, female, Out-work-sample, South East)
5.3 Perceptions of quality of service

Customers both from the In-work and Out-of-work samples reported on their perceptions of the quality of service they were provided with when visiting the Jobcentre Plus offices in the areas researched. Customers can visit Jobcentre Plus for a variety of reasons. These perceptions are related specifically to the instance when NTCs were discussed.

Perceptions were both positive and negative. Firstly, the overall positive views were as follows:

- in general, customers found Jobcentre Plus staff were helpful, patient and friendly;
- the environment of Jobcentre Plus offices was welcoming and modern;
- customers were presented with a wide range of entitlements, benefit options and support available;
- advisers were generally responsive to customer queries and attempted to address them directly; and
- specific facilities offered in the Jobcentre Plus offices were attractive and useful, for example, the telephone service to contact prospective employers and use of the Jobpoint facilities.

- for those jobseekers who were interested or for whom NTCs proved to be relevant, a fluent and detailed discussion of NTCs was seen in a very positive light.

An example of one customer with a positive view of Jobcentre Plus:

‘I hadn’t been to a Jobcentre for years and I couldn’t believe how things had changed there were no windows where you used to have to shout to people, the staff were different, they were all smiling and it wasn’t a bad experience as I got the help I needed.’

(50+ customer, male, In-work sample, Wales)

The negative perceptions of the quality of the service delivery were as follows:

- a lack of interest in the individual and their circumstances;
- poor understanding of the barriers faced by customers in returning to work. The disabled and 50+ customer groups particularly reflected this;
- conflicting advice and information may be given; and
- in-depth, detailed, knowledge of NTCs and the different elements was lacking, particularly in the London area.

Overall, customers had positive perceptions of Jobcentre Plus staff, even if they learned nothing about NTCs during their interviews.
In general, the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Plus advisers did not necessarily equate with a positive service delivery in the view of their customers:

- For those customers who indicated that work was of no interest to them at that time, the discussion of NTCs was seen as irrelevant and was neither a positive nor a negative aspect of the service delivery.

- Customers who were motivated to find work but were not interested in claiming benefits or NTCs also indicated that the discussion of NTCs had no effect on their overall view of the service delivery by Jobcentre Plus advisers.

- Customers who were motivated to find work and who received a fluent description of NTCs from advisers generally saw the service delivery in a positive light, irrespective of whether they moved into work or not.

- Customers who were interested in work but felt that the delivery of NTCs by Jobcentre Advisers was brief, hesitant, lacking in detail or inaccurate tended to consider the service delivery as negative.

- BOCs that indicated that work was not viable had a mixed effect. Those who were very motivated to find work tended to view that whole NTC delivery experience in a negative manner; those who were interested in work but were some distance from engaging in the labour market tended to view the service delivery in a neutral or positive light.

- Customers who moved into work on the basis of a BOC and then perceived that they were less well off in work viewed, with hindsight, the back to work experience as highly negative.

5.4 Overview

Customers may have already been aware of NTCs before attending a Jobcentre Plus interview. However, the degree to which the interview raised their awareness further or enabled greater understanding of NTCs varied considerably. Overall, customers could be categorised into three groups, those who recalled NTCs being mentioned by advisers, those who recalled some discussion of NTCs but could not remember any detail and those who had a better recall of the detail of NTCs. Greater recall was generally associated with the amount of time advisers spent discussing NTCs and whether or not a BOC was carried out.

There were no differences in the recall of NTC discussions between the In-Work and Out-of-Work samples; of all the customer groups it was the lone parents who recalled the fullest discussions. Disabled customers and 50+ customers also tended to recall the discussion of NTCs.

Customers felt that advisers were not always sufficiently familiar with the detail of NTCs. This was a view particularly expressed by the disabled customer group.
Customer understanding of NTCs was also varied. In general, customers did not understand very much of the detail of NTCs. Where there was greater understanding it was associated with lone parents and to a lesser degree people with disabilities and the 50+ group.

Advisers in Scotland and Wales were generally praised for the amount of time they spent with the customer. This may be the reason why customers in these areas felt that advisers were more knowledgeable about NTCs compared to the other areas in the study. There appeared to be no difference in understanding about NTCs between the In-Work and Out-of-Work samples.

There was some evidence to indicate that the delivery of NTCs could help to change customer views about work. The critical features that underpinned this effect were:

- a genuine desire to work;
- a clear understanding of the role and value of NTCs in making paid work a viable option;
- the extent of NTC-related discussion with a Jobcentre Plus adviser; and
- the outcome of a BOC, with calculations that demonstrated that paid work could be viable.

Customers in both the In-work and Out-of-Work samples were generally positive about their experience of discussing NTCs, where these were discussed with advisers. However, they felt that there could be some lack of interest in the individual circumstances of the individual and poor levels of knowledge about NTCs.
6 Overview, best practice and implications of the research

This concluding chapter considers examples of best practice that were evident across the study areas and draws implications for future roll-outs of similar programs.

6.1 Best practice

The best practice examples tended to arise out of circumstances that Jobcentre Plus advisers found difficult to deal with or compromised their ability to deliver an adequate service to customers. There were a number of innovative and interesting ways in which the Jobcentre Plus offices involved in the research had addressed issues that had arisen when New Tax Credits (NTCs) were introduced and centre primarily on aspects of training and methods of delivery to customers.

As the evidence presented in this research suggests, Jobcentre Plus staff did not feel adequately trained or sufficiently familiar with the more detailed aspects of NTCs. A number of good examples of best practice arose out of this. Examples of best practice around further training were:

- Advisers, usually New Deal for Lone Parent (NDLP) advisers, designed and implemented a set of handouts that were circulated to other staff. Such handouts covered the basic background to NTCs, the principle behind their introduction, and main aspects of NTCs and the additional elements for different customer groups. The handouts were presented using language that advisers would be able to understand, as many advisers had reported the language used within the training sessions was too technical. The handouts also highlighted common issues that may arise, together with trouble shooting techniques. At one Jobcentre Plus site, staff had designed handouts that were tailor-made for each type of adviser, relating the different elements of NTCs to each specific customer group:
‘We made handouts relevant for each kind of adviser and covered the information about NTCs we would need to be aware of when introducing them to customers, taking into account things like how other benefits could be affected.’

(ND50+ adviser, North of England)

• In order to increase staff confidence in delivering Better Off Calculations (BOCs) to customers, Jobcentre Plus sites within the study areas set up in-house training to practice BOCs and designed to encompass a range of different scenarios. The NDLP adviser usually provided this in-house training. It was workshop-based and provided an opportunity to work through the BOC process with other members of staff, highlighting the difficulties they may encounter when delivering NTCs to customers. Advisers commented that they found this to be one of the best ways to learn how to calculate a BOC, as they were able to use the IT system and ask questions throughout the sessions:

‘These sessions were really good as we worked our way through a number of different scenarios and worked out [what] went wrong and the exact information that was needed in order for a Better Off Calculation to run smoothly. It was run by the New Deal for Lone Parents advisers in the office as they were used to calculating them on a daily basis and were able to help us when there were things which came up we didn’t understand or know how to resolve.’

(DEA, Wales)

• The training sessions meant that the practice gave them more confidence in delivering BOCs to the public. Without these extra in-house training sessions they would have usually only conducted a BOC if they were requested to by the customer or in some circumstances would have totally avoided performing one:

‘Before the training I wouldn’t have done a Better Off Calculation unless someone asked me to, purely cause I hadn’t received any training and didn’t really know what I was doing. But after I had gone to a few of the sessions I felt I knew what I was doing and my confidence increased with explaining them to customers.’

( Restart adviser, South West)

• After the launch of NTCs there were a number of problems that arose relating to the different elements involved with the customer groups and in particular with overpayments to customers of NTCs. This meant there were times within the first few months where advisers were unable to resolve these issues. In order to address this, Jobcentre Plus offices held ‘after hour surgeries’ to discuss the various issues and find constructive ways to address them. These meetings were usually weekly and held as an open forum in which advisers could raise any issues they had with NTCs, discuss individual customer cases, and brainstorm potential solutions. In this instance, the initiative was introduced at a regional Jobcentre Plus office and then implemented in other Jobcentre Plus sites within the area, as advisers had commented how useful these sessions had been at
addressing the issues and taking customers forward in the process of applying for NTCs. Useful strategies were noted and circulated to other staff:

‘It was great, we were able to talk about all the things that was going wrong with NTCs and from talking to other advisers we came up with ways in which to address these issues and try and sort them out for customers. This was one of the best ways to address things as we then had on hand a handout which gave us various solutions or advice we should give to customers.’

(ND50+ adviser, Wales)

- An online chat room facility was set up on the DWP intranet for advisers to discuss a range of NTC-related issues. As the chat room was also accessible to Head Office, further information and strategies could be fed into the system directly by the architects of the NTC policy.

Examples of best practice in terms of the delivery of NTCs included:

- Within a rural Jobcentre Plus office a ‘drop in clinic’ was set up for customers. This facility operated during office hours and ran on a first come first served basis, with different types of advisers operating the desk. This enabled them to deal with the simple cases more quickly and to schedule specialist help for the more complex cases.

‘It was a good way to address issues customers had which we were unable to answer during the times given for meetings, as usually we would run out of time and ask them to come back and they were unable to and often didn’t show. So someone suggested that we set up a drop in clinic and it worked really well. At first loads of people were dropping in with questions they had about NTCs and we were able to address them then and there which was good for us and the customer as this made the whole process a lot easier.’

(NDLP Adviser, South East)

- The use of BOCs to promote NTCs by illustrating to customers a number of different work scenarios based on different working hours and levels of wage. By bringing ‘to life’ the BOC calculation advisers found that customers began to build up a picture of how small differences in working hours and wage level could have a significant difference on the calculation thereby proving they would be better off in work.

- One Jobcentre Plus office in the sample found that any discussion of childcare raised issues of reliability and quality with the available childcare provision. An NDLP adviser set up a ‘recommendations and feedback folder’ that described how other parents who had used registered childminders in the area viewed them. This proved to be very useful and reassuring for lone parents.

‘Many customers reported this folder as being really helpful as it put their minds at rest seeing what other parents thought about the childminders and which ones they recommended.’

(NDLP Adviser, South West)
6.2 Implications of the research findings

6.2.1 Defining the adviser role

The Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser has a very wide set of duties. The delivery of NTCs was slotted in to this set of duties without, it seems, any discussion of how NTCs would impact on their role. Advisers felt that they were being asked to accommodate an additional issue to discuss (not all had experience of WFTC/DPTC), against a backdrop of negative media attention, training that was insufficient, predictions of NTC workflow that were not met, and a perception that their workload was increasing. The effect was that advisers tended to segment into three types. These were (mainly) NDLP advisers who took on an internal training role, experienced advisers who dealt with the delivery of NTCs as best as they could and inexperienced advisers who avoided anything to do with the delivery of NTCs as best as they could. However, these roles emerged in an erratic way, the effect of which was for a wide variation in the delivery of NTCs to occur. From the staff perspective this made the delivery of NTCs very inefficient. Closer monitoring of the initial months of NTC delivery with corrective action being taken may have resulted in a more coherent and efficient delivery of NTCs to customers.

It is also apparent that the delivery of NTCs can vary across advisers and across customer groups. NTCs may be discussed in an initial interview, or it may be deferred until a later date. While there are a number of clear reasons as to why deferral might occur it was also apparent that some customers slip through the net and do not appear to receive any discussion of NTCs. A more standardised and defined approach to delivery of NTCs may reduce this problem.

Although there are valid issues raised about the use of BOCs based on hypothetical information or jobs, it is also clear that a BOC can be a useful tool in the effective delivery of NTCs. Greater thought needs to be given as to how to introduce BOCs into a wider range of adviser - customer interview settings.

6.2.2 Putting in place the infrastructure

The Department for Work and Pensions were putting in place the infrastructure for Jobcentre Plus advisers to deliver NTCs to customers many months before the NTC application process went live. Yet, despite this forward planning there continued to be a number of problems with both the IT infrastructure and the delivery of appropriate training (see Section 6.2.3) that took many months to resolve after the NTC application process had gone live and clearly impacted on the effectiveness with which Jobcentre Plus could delivery NTCs to its customers. Although ‘dry-run’ tests were carried out, lessons learnt from this process could have fed more effectively back to staff so that the infrastructure was in place and working correctly before going live. This not only draws on a wealth of practical experience from the
field but also helps to engage staff if they are aware that new initiatives have already been appropriately tested and are as effective as possible:

‘We have no choice in the matter, these policies are introduced without the government ever asking us what we think would work best and what improvements could be made to benefits etc... if they took time to talk to the people who deal with them day in day out they could learn something from us which would be beneficial not only to them but to the customer in the long run’

(ND50+ adviser, Wales)

Related to the question of infrastructure is the predicted flow of NTC applications. While it is recognised that predictions can only ever be estimates and that variations are likely to occur, there appeared to be no planning for the time when the flow of NTC applications might exceed expectations. Again, this compromised the delivery of NTCs to customers.

6.2.3 Training

It is clear from the research findings that advisers did not generally feel familiar enough with the detail of NTCs in order to deliver them in the most effective way, a view that was echoed by customers. Given the unpredicted manner in which the take-up of NTCs occurred it is not surprising therefore that the training that was delivered to staff was not sufficiently consolidated. Four key training issues arise.

First, the perceived inadequacies of the training that was provided need to be addressed. These include: simplified presentation of the theoretical aspects of NTCs; more practical sessions; application to a wider range of cases; tailored learning according to job role; and trainers who were more familiar with the material that they were using for training purposes.

Second, facilities should be provided to enable the cascading of new information and training together with opportunities for advisers to discuss and brainstorm issues arising.

Third, there should be greater opportunities for follow-up learning, refresher training and ‘diagnostic sessions’ whereby small pieces of training are provided that directly address issues that have arisen. These sessions should be tailor-made and based specifically on the issues arising within a Jobcentre Plus office or collection of sites.

‘It would have been good to have received a refresher course, ‘cause by the time we were actually seeing customers about six months had passed and I couldn’t really remember what I had learned in the training sessions, I had to hunt for the training notes and read up on them.’

(DEA, South East)
Fourth, where there is a discrepancy between the predicted and actual flows of customers, additional training facilities should be put in place in order to refresh and help consolidate the training that has been provided. Advisers commented that because they were delivering and administrating an IR system it would have been very useful to have either an Inland Revenue representative or an NTC specialist present at key times. This would have helped advisers deal with complex issues much faster and enabled a more efficient delivery of NTCs.

### 6.2.4 Engaging the customer

Throughout the research it was apparent that the amount of time spent discussing and delivering NTCs with Jobcentre Plus customers varied considerably. Such variations occurred partly due to a lack of confidence on the part of the adviser in delivering NTCs, partly because the adviser had made the assumption that NTCs were not relevant to specific customers and partly because customers raised the issue of NTCs themselves.

In the light of this there would appear to be an opportunity to increase customer engagement with NTCs. For example, in cases where the customer did not raise the discussion about NTCs, this could be made to be a standard part of the interview process, although there may be an issue of the amount of time allocated to interviews here. Similarly, there were cases where the customer wanted to find work that paid at a sufficient rate that NTCs were not required. Advisers may have an opportunity here to present NTCs in a more appropriate way such that the role of NTCs to these types of customers becomes more apparent.

Overall, it appeared that the customer groups for whom there were specialist advisers (lone parents, disabled customers, and jobseekers aged 50+) who tended to receive the greatest amount of discussion about NTCs. There is clearly room here to address this disparity and provide a more effective delivery of NTCs to other customer groups, particularly childless over 25 customers and couples with children.
Appendix A
Topic guides

The study aims to explore:
- Personal Advisers’ (PAs) understanding of New Tax Credits (NTCs)
- How PAs deliver NTCs, whether there are differences in ease of delivery for different client groups, and comparisons with the delivery of ‘old’ tax credits
- Training and support in the delivery of NTCs and how this compares with previous tax credits
- NTCs as a work incentive

1. Introduction:
- About BMRB
- About the research study: A study commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions looking at how Jobcentre Plus acts as a ‘gateway’ to NTCs staff experiences of delivering NTCs and the role of NTCs as a work incentive
- How they were selected for the study
- Length of discussion (1 hour)
- Confidentiality and tape recording
2. **Background/Role of Respondents:**

- Staff role?
- Length of time as a PA?
- Do they work on the New Deals (which one)?
- Client group worked with since introduction of NTCs
- Client group worked with prior to introduction of NTCs
- What were they advising on before their role changed?
- Prompt – Disabled Person’s Tax Credit/Working Families’ Tax Credit/New Deal 50+ employment credit (This is useful to include for more analysis purposes.)
- What is their role now regarding NTCs?
- Are they responsible for providing advice on the various elements of the NTCs or are they responsible for specific tax credits (Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and the different elements)
- Has their role changed with the introduction of NTCs?
- How has their role changed?
- Differences in experience of delivering NTCs compared with previous tax credits
- Does this vary by client group; for whom and how?

3. **Introduction of Tax Credits and Training:**

- Did they receive any information/guidance about NTC when they were introduced in April 2003?
- What information/guidance did they receive and from whom?
- Probe on training days, guidance handbooks, multi benefit bulletin, NTC desk aid, etc
- How useful was the information/guidance received?
- Looking back, could there be improvements; what?
- Were they provided with training in order to be able to deliver NTCs:
  - Nature of the training (method of delivery)
  - Perceived quality of training
  - Satisfaction with training
  - What improvements could be made?
  - Any need for further training; what?
• If they needed information/guidance about NTCs where would they obtain this from?

• Have there been any changes made to the office to enable them to offer NTCs:
  - Introduction of more ‘work stations’, phone areas, computer facilities etc
  - Do they have sufficient resources to cope with the customers who are eligible for NTCs?
  - Are there any improvements that could be made?

4. Awareness & Understanding of NTCs:
• What do staff know about NTCs:
  - Are they aware of the changes and differences with NTC compared to WFTC/DPTC/CPTC/ND50+ Employment Credit?
  - Are they aware of different clients eligibility for tax credits?
  - Are they aware of how tax credits may influence their attitudes towards taking up work or increasing their hours of paid work?
  - Are they aware of the changes for Income Support and Jobseeker’s Allowance customers with regards to Child Tax Credit?

• How confident do they feel explaining the changes to customers:
  - Does this vary by customer group; in what way?
  - What could be done to increase their confidence?

5. Delivery of New Tax Credits:
• How do they introduce NTCs to customers, when in the conversation? At what point do they introduce the idea of NTCs? At initial meetings/review meetings to introduce something new?

• Do they introduce them differently for different client groups:
  - over 50s
  - lone parents
  - disabled people
  - adult carers
  - ethnic minority customers
  - Obtain examples of these differences
  - What are the important points of emphasis for the different client groups?
• How do you use NTCs to sell work:
  – Does this differ according to customer group; how?

• Has the introduction of NTCs helped them make work more attractive?

• Has the introduction of NTCs improved their ability to get people into work:
  – Evidence for this
  – Features of NTCs that underpin this (longer awards, reactive to change, etc.)

• Compared to WFTC/DPTC/CPTC/ND50+ Employment Credit how effective are NTCs in terms of acting as a work incentive for customers:
  – Features of NTCs that underpin this

• Would they refer customers to a tax credit specialist:
  – Are there any in the Jobcentre Plus, who are they?
  – Under what circumstances would they do this?

• How have customers reacted to the introduction of NTCs:
  – Are reactions different for CTCs compared to WTCs?
  – What are the differences?

• Are customers aware of when to notify the Inland Revenue (IR) of changes in their circumstances?

• How are the customers made aware?

• How easy/difficult in operational terms are NTCs to deliver?

• Compared to the previous tax credits what makes NTCs easy/difficult to deliver?

• Do they find one tax credit easier to explain than the other (Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit); reasons?

• Are there any differences in delivering NTCs to the different customer groups; what differences are there?

• What would make NTCs easier to deliver?

• Are there any problems relating to specific client groups? Have they come across any problems relating to the following issues:
  – More people are entitled to awards
  – People aged over 50 and confidentiality issues
  – Since the Tax Credit is paid through the employer, does it appear complicated?
- Lone parents claims are no longer fast tracked
- Interactions with other benefits
- CTC element of IS/JSA

• How do they think these issues can be addressed in order to improve things

6. Better of Calculations (BOC)

It would be useful to note which customers they do an In Work Benefit Calculation (IWBC) with and which customers they do not? (i.e. – would they consider doing one with lone parent who has not only caring responsibilities but also a health problem?)

• When do they undertake BOCs:
  - At initial meetings/reviews etc?
  - How confident were they in providing BOCs?

• Do they offer BOCs now; if not why not:
  - What system do they use (IBIS/Ferrett)?
  - Preferences and views about systems in relation to NTCs
  - How confident are they in providing BOCs?

• Have there been any difficulties in providing BOCs as a result of the change to NTCs and an annual award?

• Do they calculate Previous Year/Current Year incomes:
  - How have they found this?
  - Improvements

• Do they calculate BOCs for all customers:
  - Which clients do they calculate BOCs for and which clients don’t they calculate?
  - If BOCs are not always carried out, on what basis do they decide to do a BOC?

• Are customers able/willing to provide partners’ income details:
  - Any problems with this?
7. Administrative Issues
For each of these, try to gauge how often these tasks occur. Note that this is for descriptive purposes only and has no statistical validity?

- How often have they dealt with:
  - Straightforward enquiries for New Tax Credits?
  - How have they found issuing and completing the forms?
  - Are there any areas of the forms that cause particular difficulties?
  - Completion of forms for interim payments
  - How do they return these to the IR?

- Probe – clerical claim form, e-portal, IR internet site

- What methods do they use to inform the IR of changes in circumstance and what have their experiences been?

- Do they ever refer customers to the IR helpline – for what types of queries?

- Have they ever contacted any other agencies with regards to NTCs (Local Authorities, Pensions Service, Inland Revenue)?

- Why did they have to contact other agencies?

- Experiences of this

8. Impact of NTCs on the PA Role

- How has the introduction of NTCs affected their job:
  - Probe for differences in:
    - Tasks
    - Processes

- Impact on PA caseload/workload

- Overall what effect has the introduction of NTCs had on their ability to fulfil their PA role?

9. Overview

- Overall views about:
  - Their ability to deliver NTCs to their customers
  - Where improvements in delivery could be made
  - Effectiveness as a work incentive
  - Impact on their role as a PA

Thank the Interviewee and Close
Department for Work and Pensions
New Tax Credits (WTC/CTC)
Topic Guide – Customers

The study aims to:
• Explore the quality of service provided by Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers
• Identify whether different client groups and ages have received different services
• Explore customer understanding of New Tax Credits (NTCs)
• Explore customers’ views on how/whether NTCs have influenced their decision to take up work
• Identify good practice and suggestions for improvements

1. Introduction
• About BMRB
• About the research study: A study commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions looking at how NTCs (Working Tax Credit & Child Tax Credit) may have impacted on the work related decision making of customers and the quality of service provided by Jobcentre Plus staff
• How they were selected for the study
• Confidentiality and tape recording
• Note: Use the terms ‘Working Tax Credit’ and ‘Child Tax Credit’ and not ‘New Tax Credit’ during the interviews
• Note: Where possible explore the differences between the client groups but note that this will primarily be an analytical output
• Ask sections 1-5 and 8 of all respondents. Section 6 applies only to those who applied for Working Tax Credit/Child Tax Credit and have moved into work. Section 7 applies only to those who are not in work.
2. Background

- Basic information – age of respondent, number and ages of children (if applicable)
- Status – whether they are disabled/lone parent/older worker/adult carer/working (nature of work)
- Have they ever participated in the New Deal:
  - Ask which – New Deal for Partners, New Deal for Young People, New Deal 25+, New Deal 50+, New Deal for Disabled People, New Deal for Lone Parents
- Are they in receipt of benefits/tax credits:
  - Probe which one (Income Support, Jobseeker’s Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Working Tax Credit, Children’s Tax Credit)
  - How long have they been claiming each benefit?
  - Have they received any Tax Credits in the past (i.e. before WTC/CTC) (i.e. WFTC or DPTC)

3. Experience of Jobcentre Plus

- Note: Talk through the experience of discussing work with the PA
- ‘You recently told us that you discussed Working Tax Credit/Child Tax Credit with someone at Jobcentre Plus... thinking about this experience...’:
  - When was this?
  - Who did they see (what type of adviser, Lone Parent, 50+ adviser, 25+ adviser, Restart, New Deal etc)?
  - Was this the usual person they see, or someone different?
  - Describe what was discussed in that meeting?
  - Did the PA talk about the possibility of moving into work:
    - How did the discussion take into account your personal circumstances (e.g. being a lone parent, disabled, having children, being over 50)?
  - Did the PA talk about any help that they could receive if they moved into work:
    - Note: see if Working Tax Credit/Child Tax Credit is mentioned spontaneously – hold this discussion until the next section
    - Note: see if Better Off Calculations are mentioned – hold this discussion until a later section
  - Is work a realistic option for them? Probe reasons but avoid long detailed discussions about the barriers to work
• How would they characterise the meeting with the PA:
  – Informative/interactive probe
  – Sufficient time?
  – Any language issues?
  – Useful/not useful – probe reasons why

• How did this meeting (in which WTC/CTC was discussed) compare with other meetings they have had with the PA?

• Is there anything that you would have liked to have discussed that wasn’t; what?

• Is there anything that you need help with that was not offered to you?

• Is there anything that you need help with that was not covered in your meeting with the PA?

• Overall, what key information/messages did they take away from the meeting with the PA?

• What do they think of Jobcentre Plus:
  – What type of office do they visit?
  – What do they see as Jobcentre Plus’ role?
  – How does Jobcentre Plus help them; what services has it offered them?
  – How would they like the Jobcentre Plus to help them?

• How often do they go to Jobcentre Plus?

• Do they ever telephone Jobcentre Plus:
  – Under what circumstances?
  – Preference for telephone or face to face contact

• What do they hope to get out of their visit/telephone call to Jobcentre Plus?

• Have their expectations been met?

• What more would they like Jobcentre Plus to do for them?

• Do they seek advice/support about work/returning to work from elsewhere?
  – Where?
  – Why (this) organisation?
  – What information/support were they seeking?
  – Were their expectations met?
  – How does (this) organisation compare with Jobcentre Plus?
4. Discussion of NTCs

- Pick up on previous discussion about help that could be available if they moved into work...

- Remember to use ‘Working Tax Credit’ and ‘Child Tax Credit’ throughout

- Did they approach Jobcentre Plus to discuss WTC/CTC or was the issue raised by Jobcentre Plus?

- What type of adviser did they discuss (Tax Credits) with (PA, DEA, Restart)?

- What help was mentioned:
  - Probe the specific Tax Credits that may have been discussed (WTC, CTC, (the latter being in case people get the names mixed up more so than as a prompt) WFTC, DPTC)

- How were these introduced:
  - Were the words ‘Tax Credits’ used, or were the specific Tax Credits mentioned (e.g. WTC/CTC)?
  - Explore whether Tax Credits were a focus of the discussion or mentioned in passing

- Had they heard of ‘Tax Credits’ before; which ones; where had they heard of them:
  - Did this knowledge make it any easier to understand WTC/CTC?

- What did the discussion involve (Note: as much detail as possible)

- Did they understand what they were being told
  - Ask respondent if they can recall their understanding of what was said - Note: reassure them that this is not a test but we simply want to see what type of explanations are being given
  - Are they aware of the disabled element and the older worker element (where relevant)?

- Did they have to ask for further information/clarification:
  - How much more information did they need?
  - Did they feel they could ask for further information?

- Was the information provided easy to understand?

- Did they want any further information/advice; what; how would this have helped?
• Did they seek further information/advice:
  - What?
  - From whom?
  - How did it help?
• What were their thoughts about this?
• Did knowledge of the (Tax Credit) that the adviser gave them make work seem more (or no more) viable:
  - How did they arrive at this conclusion?
• Knowing about Tax Credits from the adviser, did it make them think of work any differently?
• Did they consider returning to work because of the advice given to them by the adviser about the Tax Credit?

5. **Better Off Calculations**

• Did someone calculate their likely income if they worked and claimed a (Tax Credit) – a ‘Better Off Calculation’:
  - Who?
  - When was this done?
  - What information did you provide?
  - What level of work income did it assume – how feasible was this (or perhaps a number of hours was suggested?)
  - Did they understand the calculation and what it meant to them?
  - Did it have any effect on their decisions about work; what and how?
• Who did the previous year/current year income calculation:
  - Did they need any help?
  - Where did they get help from?
6. Applying for a New Tax Credit (ask only of those who applied for a Tax Credit and are in work or who are about to start work)
This section needs to be thought of more in terms of whether a customer applied for a NTC based on the advice of an adviser

- Did they apply for a New Tax Credit:
  - Which one?
  - Explore the decision making process to apply for a Tax Credit:
    - Was the advice given to them from Jobcentre Plus (Tax Credits) the key reason for moving back into work?
    - Explore what the impact (define what is meant by impact) of (Tax Credit) was
    - Explore other reasons for moving into work
  - How did they apply for (Tax Credit); telephone/face to face?
  - What was the Jobcentre Plus/PA involvement; was it their usual PA or someone different?
  - What was the Inland Revenue (IR) involvement?
  - Explore reasons for using Jobcentre Plus versus IR?

- Explore the type of business they conducted at Jobcentre Plus:
  - Enquiries about WTC/CTC
  - Receiving WTC/CTC forms
  - Completing WTC/CTC forms
  - Receiving specific (Tax Credit) advice
  - Informing IR of change of circumstances
  - Completing forms for interim payments
  - If the above were not conducted through Jobcentre Plus, explore how they were conducted and reasons why

- When they were applying for (Tax Credit) at Jobcentre Plus, did they do anything else at that visit (If relevant):
  - Explore what else they did?
7. Reasons for not Applying for a New Tax Credit (ask only of those who discussed WTC/CTC with a PA but have not moved into work)

- After being told about the Tax Credits did they consider applying for WTC/CTC?
- If ‘Yes’:
  - Based on the advice given by Jobcentre Plus what was initially attractive about WTC/CTC?
  - Why did they not then apply for WTC/CTC (probe whether it was because the advice was difficult to understand for example.)?
  - Under what circumstances would they apply for WTC/CTC (probe what Jobcentre Plus could do to help you apply for WTC/CTC)?
- If ‘No’:
  - Based on the advice given by Jobcentre Plus what made them decide not to apply for WTC/CTC?
  - Based on the advice given by Jobcentre Plus explore whether they fully understood what WTC/CTC would mean to them (if not already done so)
  - What were they taking into account in their decision not to apply for WTC/CTC (e.g. probe was the advice difficult to understand etc)?
  - Under what circumstances would they apply for WTC/CTC (e.g. probe what could Jobcentre Plus staff do to help you apply for WTC/CTC)?

8. Close

- Overall what do they feel about the process of being informed about WTC/CTC:
  - How could Jobcentre Plus improved the delivery of NTC?
  - What further information/advice would they want from Jobcentre Plus?

Thank the Interviewee and close
Appendix B
Recruitment questionnaire

RECRUITMENT DOCUMENT

This form is confidential property of: Job Number: 45101989
BMRB International Job Name: DWP/NTCs
Hadley House Date: 29.1.04
79-81 Uxbridge Road,
Ealing, London,
W5 5SU

PLEASE WRITE IN BLOCK CAPITALS
Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms: Initials: Surname:

First name: ____________
Address: ___________________________________________________________________
________________________________________
Post Code: __________________________
Tel Home: __________________________
Tel Work: __________________________

QUOTAS:
Area recruited for
• South West
• South East
• E Anglia
• London
• Wales
• Midlands
• Scotland
• North

Gender
• Male
• Female

Sample Type
• In work and claiming New Tax Credit
• Out of work and had discussion with adviser about New Tax Credit

Customer Group
• Lone parents
• Couples with small families
• Couples with large families
• People newly entitled to NTCs (over 25s without children)
• Disabled People
• People over 50

Age
• 16 to 24
• 25 to 50
• 51+

Age


Interview details

Face to face recruitment: 1
Telephone Recruitment: 2
Delivered Invitation: 3
Sent Confirmation: 4
Confirmed Attendance: 5

RECRUISER'S DECLARATION

The person named above has been recruited by me in accordance with the instructions and within the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

Signed: __________________________

Print name: __________________________    Date: ______________

BACKCHECKED

Signed: __________________________

Print name: __________________________    Date: ______________

“Good morning/afternoon, I’m from BMRB International, an independent research agency. We have been asked by the Department for Work and Pensions to look at people’s experience of work incentives.

We are interested in any discussions you have had with a Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser about either of these tax credits, how they introduced and discussed Tax Credits (Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit) with people using Jobcentre Plus. It does not matter whether you receive either of these tax credits. To do this, they have asked BMRB to speak to people like yourselves who have used Jobcentre Plus in recent months. Anything you say will be treated in confidence. May I ask you a few questions?”

Explain as appropriate:

The nature of the methodology – Depth Interviews

Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents- this is extremely important for this piece of research

About BM RB

Incentives.
Interviewer please fill in:

1. Location
   - South West 1
   - South East 2
   - East Anglia 3
   - London 4
   - Wales 5
   - Midlands 6
   - Scotland 7
   - North 8

Interviewer please fill in:

2. Gender
   - Male 1
   - Female 2

3. How old were you last birthday?
   - 16 to 24 1
   - 25 to 50 2
   - 51+ 3

4. How would you describe your marital status?
   - Single (no children)
   - Lone parent (never married, separated, divorced, widowed)
   - Married, or living as married with no children under the age of 18
   - Married, or living as married, with children under the age of 18

Recruit to Quota
Go to Question 4

Recruit to Quota
Go to Question 2

Recruit to Quota
Go to Question 3

Close
Go to Question 4

Recruit to Quota
If Lone Parent or couple with children go to Question 5.
If not proceed to Question 8
5. How many children do you have in total?
None 1
Less than 3 children 2
3 or more children 3

6. Are any of your children aged between 16-18
Yes 1
No 2

7. Are they either
In full time education 1
Or
Recently left full-time education, not working and not receiving Income Support in their own right? 2
Or
Neither of the above 3

8. Do you have a disability or long-term limiting illness?
Disability is defined as having an illness or a disability that puts you at a disadvantage when getting a job.
Yes 1
No 2

9. Are you on a disability benefit? What disability benefit are you currently receiving? (List them – take the benefits from the Showcard A)

10. Are you working at the moment?
Yes, 16 hours a week or more 1
Yes, less than 16 hours a week 2
No 3

Questions 11 and 12 are IMPORTANT for those respondents who have had Tax Credit Intervention (ie had a discussion with a Personal Adviser about Tax Credits, Better of Calculations etc)
11. Have you recently gone to a Jobcentre
   Plus Office and remember talking to a Personal
   Adviser about going back to work?
   (Note that this could either be at an initial
   meeting or a review meeting or at some other
   point in their contact with an adviser)
   Please be careful here to probe in the right way
   and try and jog their memory of the discussion
   with the adviser.

   None 1
   Less than 3 children 2
   3 or more children 3

12. Do you remember if the PA talked to you
    about the financial implications/benefits of
    going back to work? Did they talk specifically
    about a Better off in Work Calculation (BOC)
    or Tax Credits?

    Yes 1
    No 2

FOR INFORMATION ONLY

13. Are you currently receiving...

    Child Tax Credit 1
    Working Tax Credit 2

14. Are you receiving the disabled person’s
    element of the Working Tax Credit?

    Yes 1
    No 2

15. Are you at present receiving any benefits
    (including anything you have already
    mentioned)?

    Yes 1
    No 2
16. Which benefits are you currently receiving?

- Council Tax Benefit 1
- Disability Living Allowance 2
- Housing Benefit 3
- Incapacity Benefit 4
- Income Support 5
- Jobseeker’s Allowance 6
- Other specific 7

17. How long have you been receiving this benefit?

- Under 6 months 1
- 6 months to 1 year 2
- 1 – 2 years 3
- Over 2 years 4

18. Would you be willing to take part in this research?

- Yes 1
- No 2

If no, give reason: ..............................................................

The interview will be held on:

.........../........../....... (Date), at........... (Time)

THANK AND CLOSE
Showcard A

Classed as disabled if you have an illness or a disability that puts you at a disadvantage in getting a job, and either you currently receive one of the benefits below

- Disability Living Allowance
- Attendance Allowance
- War Disablement Pension (which includes Constant Attendance Allowance for you or a Mobility Supplement Allowance)
- Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (which includes Constant Attendance Allowance for you)
- an invalid carriage or other vehicle provided under the Invalid Vehicle Scheme

Or if you currently receive one of the following benefits, or have been receiving one of the following benefits in the last 26 weeks before the date of your claim:

- Incapacity Benefit at the short-term or higher rate or long-term rate
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- Income Support which includes a disability premium for you or a higher pensioner premium for you
- Jobseeker’s Allowance – income based, which includes a higher pensioner premium for you
- Housing Benefit, which includes a disability premium for you or a higher pensioner premium for you
- Council Tax Benefit, which includes a disability premium for you or a higher pensioner premium for you
- you are claiming through the Working Tax Credit Fast-Track
Appendix C
Opt out letter

Feb 2004

Dear

We are writing to ask for your help. You may be aware that you have been selected to take part in a study looking at the delivery of New Tax Credits. We are currently conducting some research amongst Jobcentre Plus offices in order to explore the impact of the introduction of New Tax Credits (NTCs) on Personal Advisers and Jobcentre Plus customers.

To help us to do this, we have asked an independent research company, BMRB International, to do the research on our behalf. Your name has been randomly selected from our records and we would like BMRB to ask you some questions about your experiences delivering the New Tax Credit policy.

Someone from BMRB may contact you in the next few weeks to ask whether you would be willing to take part in the research. Everything you tell them will, of course, be in complete confidence. No information that could identify you will be passed on to the Department for Work and Pensions or anyone else.

Please be assured that this is genuine research commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions to help improve its services and I do hope that you will be able to take part in this important research study. However if you really do not want to be involved you can let us know by returning the slip at the bottom of this letter within the next 7 days to:

Caroline Simpson, FREEPOST WD 354, London W5 5BR.
If you do write, please give the reference number from the top of the letter and your name will be taken off the list of people that BMRB will contact. Whatever you decide, any dealings you have with the Inland Revenue or the Department for Work and Pensions will not be affected in any way either now or in the future.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Abi Franses at BM RB on 0208 433 4471 or Caroline Simpson on 0208 433 4390. If you would like to confirm the validity of this study then please contact myself, Victoria Petrie, 020 7962 8510.

Many thanks for your time.

Yours sincerely

Victoria Petrie
Research Officer

If you do not wish to participate in this research please complete this tear-off strip and return it to:

Caroline Simpson, BM RB FREEPOST WD 354, London W5 5BR
Department of Work and Pensions – New Tax Credits 45101989

I do not wish to be included in this research

Signed …………………………………………………………………………

Name …………………………………………………………………………

Address …………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

Telephone Number …………....
Appendix D
Matrix mapping

The analysis of qualitative material using ‘Matrix Mapping’

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

Qualitative analysis is essentially about detection and exploration of the data, making sense of the data by looking for coherence and structure within the data. Matrix Mapping works from verbatim transcripts and involves a systematic process of sifting, summarising and sorting the material according to key issues and themes. The process begins with a familiarisation stage and would include a researcher’s review of the audio tapes and/or transcripts. Based on the coverage of the topic guide, the researchers’ experiences of conducting the fieldwork and their preliminary review of the data, a thematic framework is constructed. The analysis then proceeds by summarising and synthesising the data according to this thematic framework using a range of techniques such as cognitive mapping and data matrices. When all the data have been sifted according to the core themes the analyst begins to map the data and identify features within the data: defining concepts, mapping the range and nature of phenomenon, creating typologies, finding associations, and providing explanations.

The mapping process is similar for both individual interviews and group discussions. The analyst reviews the summarised data; compares and contrasts the perceptions, accounts, or experiences; searches for patterns or connections within the data and seeks explanations internally within the data set. Piecing together the overall picture is not simply aggregating patterns, but it involves a process of weighing up the salience and dynamics of issues, and searching for structures within the data that have explanatory power, rather than simply seeking a multiplicity of evidence.