Delivering a work-focused service: views and experiences of clients

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ONE is a new integrated service for delivering benefits which provides a single point of entry to the benefit system for people of working age (16-59) who are currently not working or who are working less than an average of 16 hours a week. The service was introduced in 12 pilot areas across England, Scotland and Wales between June and November 1999. ONE is delivered through three different models: the Basic Model, the Call Centre variant; and the Private and Voluntary Sector (PVS) variant; each model was piloted in four areas.

Before April 2000 participation in ONE was voluntary, except for people claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance. As part of the overall evaluation of service delivery, BMRB Qualitative was commissioned to conduct research following full participation (April 2000) with clients who attended a Personal Adviser meeting in July 2000, and with clients who had attended follow-up meetings with a Personal Adviser in November 2000.

The study considered clients’ experiences of, and reaction to, the service by exploring individual attitudes and behaviour. In addition, the study focused on respondents’ views of the principles upon which the service was based. The research sought to address two key issues. Firstly, the extent to which ONE enables clients to experience a more effective and efficient service tailored to their personal needs. Secondly, to what extent ONE manages to alter the focus of the benefit system from that of unemployment and dependency, to that of labour market participation and independence.

This study used wholly qualitative methods and comprised a total of 364 depth interviews with clients claiming a ONE benefit. The first phase of the study focused on the initial stages of the ONE process and comprised 207 depth interviews. The second phase focused on experiences of follow-up contact between clients and their Personal Adviser, and included 157 depth interviews. Respondents were drawn from the four main clients groups participating in ONE: Jobseekers; lone parents; sick or disabled; carers and widows.

Respondents were interviewed in all 12 pilot areas. Fieldwork for phase one of the study was conducted between September and November 2000. The research team returned to the field between February and March 2001 to conduct interviews for phase two of the study.
Clients became aware of ONE through several different means. Some were referred to the ONE service from other agencies when seeking to make a claim for benefit (e.g. the Benefits Agency, the Local Authority or the Employment Service in areas where these agencies were not directly involved in the delivery of ONE). Other clients became aware of the new service through informal sources, publicity materials and other written material such as letters of invitation. A small number of clients found out about ONE from organisations on the periphery of the benefit system, such as GPs, charities, employers and the Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB). The way in which clients became aware of ONE had implications for their level of understanding and hence expectations of the service. Very few clients received comprehensive explanations from those directly involved with the delivery of the service, but the few that did understood the principle of ONE were aware of the work-focused, tailored support available.

The Start-up meeting is the first stage of the ONE process and can be conducted either face-to-face, or over the telephone as in the Call Centre variant. Basic information is collected such as personal details, work history, reasons for claiming benefit and any specialist needs a client might have. Start-up is designed to serve a diagnostic function: advisers assess a client’s needs and make a decision to either direct the client towards work or to arrange an initial Personal Adviser meeting within three days of Start-up. The Start-up Adviser can also make a decision to defer or waive the initial Personal Adviser meeting if the client is not job-ready.

Whilst clients found Start-up Advisers to be generally courteous and friendly, discussions tended to be very brief and entirely benefit focused. Advisers failed to adequately communicate the work-focused element of the service to clients. In most cases, clients did not receive an explanation about the purpose of the initial Personal Adviser meeting or the Personal Adviser’s role.

Start-up in the Call Centre variant was well received by clients. Using Call Centre technology reportedly offered greater convenience and efficiency, although there were a number of ‘technical difficulties’ encountered during the early stages of the pilot, which caused frustration and delays.

Start-up meetings in the PVS sites were felt to have a greater customer focus. Clients believed Advisers demonstrated customer care skills, and explanations about the entire service were provided more often in PVS sites than either Basic or Call Centre sites.

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As the pilots progressed a decision was made to ensure Personal Adviser meetings are booked within four days of Start-up, to ease the pressures on the ONE service.
The initial Personal Adviser meeting aims to identify each client’s proximity to the labour market and identify strategies to overcome barriers to employment. It is also at this point the benefit claim is checked and finalised, and any training needs or referral to specialist services are discussed.

The ‘gateway’ function of the ONE service begins at this point, the Adviser identifies those clients they can help, and refer others to more relevant services depending upon their distance from the labour market. The most needy are referred to support services such as rehabilitation or basic skills training, whilst the more job-ready are put forward for suitable vacancies. Those clients in need of more training or advice to improve their employment chances are referred to suitable organisations such as the Careers Service or training providers.

In general the initial Personal Adviser meeting was primarily focused on the client’s claim for benefit. This was welcomed by many because their short-term financial anxieties were resolved at the outset. In a few cases job searches were conducted but the ‘gateway’ function of the service was not communicated to most. Given that few clients had received comprehensive explanations of the service at the outset and during their Start-up meeting, the failure to communicate it during the initial Personal Adviser meeting further exacerbated confusion about ONE for many clients. Therefore, many clients were unaware of their rights and responsibilities or indeed what ONE could offer them. There was very little referral to either support services or training provision during the initial Personal Adviser meeting.

The Personal Advisers were viewed favourably in most cases, they were thought to be courteous and polite. However some felt their Adviser lacked adequate experience particularly in respect of some benefits, notably Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Research with Advisers (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) suggests the difficulty with these benefits may have been caused, in part, by cultural tensions between the different agencies involved in the delivery of ONE (see Section 2.4 of this report for further discussion).

The ONE sites were widely acknowledged as superior to either Benefits Agency or Employment Service sites in terms of décor and ambience. However, some clients, particularly those with sensitive cases, raised concerns about the degree of privacy available in open-plan offices.

All clients are encouraged to maintain contact with their Adviser in order to devise strategies to find employment and to overcome barriers. Others may be invited to attend compulsory ‘trigger’ meetings due to a change in circumstance that might have an impact on their benefit entitlement, employability or ability to consider work a viable option. However, in the early stages of the pilot this function of the service was not effectively communicated to many.
Experiences of follow-up contact varied considerably, whilst some had frequent and prolonged contact with their Adviser, others had considerably less. Many clients had limited follow-up contact because they were unaware they could instigate meetings. The purpose and scope of follow-up contact was evidently not conveyed to many clients. Some believed the initial stages – Start-up and initial Personal Adviser meeting – was the ONE service in its entirety.

Experience of follow-up contact sometimes followed the vision: where meetings were work-focused; contact was prolonged and structured; and continuity with the same Adviser was achieved. More commonly though clients received a disjointed service where they saw a number of different generalist Advisers, some of whom seemed ‘up to speed’ with their case. In these cases clients were indifferent to the lack of continuity. However, where Advisers were not familiar with a client’s circumstances, rendering it necessary for clients to repeat their story, many clients felt resentful at the impersonal service they received.

As the pilot progressed, Adviser teams developed a range of strategies to cater for the diversity of needs clients presented. The observational case studies and staff research (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) suggests it was not always realistic to deliver continuity of service through a single Adviser, and as such alternative strategies were adopted: firstly, referral to Specialist Advisers who then take on the client’s entire case; secondly, a team-based approach, whereby a team of generalist Advisers, each of whom is knowledgeable about a client’s case share practice to help them overcome barriers; and thirdly, a generalist Adviser provides the main point of contact for a client, but the client also has access to a Specialist Adviser on an infrequent and ad hoc basis. Each of the above strategies were well received by clients, however those with sensitive cases valued continuity and thus preferred to have contact with a single Adviser, be that a generalist or specialist.

Clients generally believed by acting as a ‘gateway’ ONE could enable the full range of clients to benefit from the most appropriate support. It was felt clients would be assisted in the short-term by their Adviser to overcome immediate financial concerns, and in the longer-term Advisers could direct them down the most appropriate route.

As outlined above, internal referral to Specialist Advisers was working well as the pilot progressed. Many lone parents and clients with sicknesses or disabilities were effectively referred to Specialist Advisers and were appreciative of the expertise and in-depth knowledge they received.

Referral to training provision was not as well received. Often training provision was thought to be too basic and of little value because it was mostly non-accredited. Many clients took the view that training would only be useful if it could provide recognisable qualifications, thereby
improving their chances of gaining sustainable employment. Clients wishing to upgrade their skills or train for an alternative career felt the training provision available through ONE was inadequate. However, a number of clients were positive about the training available. These clients tended not to attach the same degree of importance to gaining accreditation, rather they were concerned to learn new skills to improve their self-confidence.

Early referral from ONE to the New Deal programmes rarely happened. A number of clients seeking accredited training and structured support were disappointed they would have to wait until they had endured six consecutive months of unemployment before they could be referred.

A number of Advisers referred selected clients to employers for unpaid work experience. Clients regarded ‘job trials’ as an invaluable opportunity to test the feasibility and sustainability of balancing certain types of work with their domestic responsibilities. Clients’ benefits remained unaffected for a period of two weeks while they (and the prospective employer) assessed the suitability of the position. Other clients expressed an interest in unpaid work experience but the same opportunity was not extended to them.

Despite Advisers conducting job searches for many clients, referral to employment opportunities was often dismissed. Many clients believed the work available to them through ONE (and the Employment Service more generally) was often poorly paid, unskilled and unsustainable.

Clearly, ONE succeeded in serving a ‘gateway’ function in some respects, but the routes down which clients could be directed were not always adequate or appropriate.

The ONE service was extended to four principle client groups in the pilot areas: jobseekers; lone parents; sick or disabled; carers and widows. Although there were differences within each client group there were more marked differences between client groups in terms of expectations, previous experiences of claiming benefits and contact with employment Advisers.

**Jobseekers**

Most Jobseekers included in the study had previous experience of back-to-work initiatives and in fact found ONE was very similar in many respects. Their expectations of the service were shaped in part by their previous experiences. However, many felt ONE Advisers approached their circumstances sensitively and demonstrated greater empathy.
In general jobseekers found ONE had been effective in resolving short-term issues such as their claim for benefit and immediate job searches, but often at the expense of longer-term considerations such as accredited training and sustainable employment.

Although jobseekers were informed they could instigate further contact many were not informed why they might do so and therefore didn’t. It is perhaps unsurprising to note follow-up contact between jobseekers and their Personal Adviser tended to be mandatory, following 13 and 26 consecutive weeks of unemployment. However, there were some examples of caseload contact with the more job-ready jobseekers in the sample.

In general this client group received discontinuous service. However, this was not considered problematic, especially where each generalist Adviser had familiarised themselves with the client’s case history and preferences.

A number of clients felt ONE must have poor relationships with local employers because of the limited scope and quality of jobs available through job searches conducted by their Advisers. Some clients expressed an interest in unpaid work experience so that they might identify sustainable work opportunities. However, they were informed such a scheme was unavailable.

Some of the jobseekers in the sample had health problems which impinged upon their employability, most were effectively referred to Disability Employment Advisers and grateful for the specialist advice and guidance offered.

**Lone parents**

Lone parents typically felt apprehensive about ONE because where they had claimed benefits in the past they had limited face-to-face contact with Advisers. Most were pleasantly surprised by the sensitive way Advisers addressed their needs. The staged process of Start-up and initial Personal Adviser meeting proved problematic to many, it was thought to be less convenient and less efficient than past experiences of claiming by post. Many found arranging childcare on two separate occasions, or trying to concentrate where they took children with them, very problematic. For these reasons lone parents overwhelmingly supported the Call Centre variant.

Most only received partial explanations of the service at the outset, they had not understood the work-focus and gateway function. Although they were appreciative, Advisers had resolved their claim for benefit and thereby relieved their financial anxieties, many felt they would have made more extensive use of the service if they had known ONE could help prepare them for work.
As the pilot evolved the work-focus was more clearly conveyed to lone parents and many clients had regular and sustained contact with their Adviser to overcome their barriers to employment. Continuity of service was important to this client group, they felt their needs were better understood by one individual and valued the opportunity to build a relationship with their Adviser. Where continuity was not possible, lone parents felt adequately supported by a team which typically comprised several generalist Advisers, knowledgeable of their case and less frequent support from a Lone Parent Adviser. Many lone parents were in fact referred to a Specialist who took over their entire case and provided a single point of contact and support. Whether or not clients were dealt with by a specialist there was widespread support for them.

There were numerous examples of clients taking training and part-time work as a result of the support provided by Advisers. Referral to training was viewed favourably and experiences were positive, largely because clients believed non-accredited training was adequate for their needs. However, there were a number of job-ready and skilled clients who wanted to upgrade their skills, for them the training provision was felt too basic. Some lone parents were effectively referred to New Deal for Lone Parents.

Strategies were in place to ensure employment was sustainable. Several lone parents embarked upon unpaid work experience and felt reassured about their future and relieved their benefits remained unaffected by the experience.

Most lone parents in the sample were appreciative of the support they had received through ONE and when asked for their views on the amount of contact they felt others in their situation would benefit from, most felt contact should be regular and structured. Others felt contact should occur following the introduction of new initiatives of greatest relevance to the client group.

Sick or disabled clients

This group comprised a diverse range of clients. Whilst some were suffering from physical incapacities; others had psychological problems. There were also variations in the projected length of illness. Also some were still technically employed, whilst others were considering a complete career change.

In the first instance, client contact with ONE was typically indirect. Most had received advice and guidance about claiming from peripheral sources such as GPs, hospitals, solicitors and the CAB. This had implications for the level of awareness and understanding many clients had about the service.
Respondents felt Advisers accommodated their needs well, particularly where they had liaised with relatives when a client was unable to manage their own affairs. During the implementation phase of the pilot some clients felt the initial Personal Adviser meeting should be deferred. As the pilot progressed clients were more appropriately deferred as clearer guidance was issued to Advisers.

Follow-up contact was most frequent with the more job-ready clients in the sample. Advisers maintained regular contact with the job-ready clients by using the telephone, which was viewed favourably because leaving home was problematic for some who still wished to discuss ways of overcoming barriers.

Continuity of service was highly valued by sick or disabled clients, although most were content to see alternative Advisers providing they had familiarised themselves with the client’s situation. However, clients with sensitive or complex medical problems expressed a strong preference for continuity.

Referral to specialist Advisers was well received. As with lone parents, this client group was catered for in a number of ways: some were handed off to the Disability Employment Adviser who then became their single point of contact, whilst others dealt primarily with general Advisers and less frequently with a specialist.

Referral to specialist training was arranged for some clients, although it was more common for discussions about training and job searches to be omitted from meetings. Despite these shortcomings clients generally believed clients should regularly see an Adviser. In particular, they believed clients suffering from long-term incapacities would benefit in terms of self-esteem and by tackling the sense of isolation many feel.

**Carers**

Carers had very limited experiences of claiming benefit prior to going through ONE. Like some of the sick or disabled clients, it was common for carers to become aware of their benefit entitlement from peripheral sources. Others made their claim by completing forms for Carer’s Allowance that were attached to the form belonging to the person in their care. In either case, clients became aware of ONE sometime later when they were invited to attend a meeting.

The Call Centre variant was favoured by this group for the convenience and flexibility of making the claim from home. However, some felt the option of face-to-face meetings should be available. For those who attended meetings in the ONE site they were impressed by the aesthetics although some were concerned by the lack of privacy available in the open-plan offices.
On the whole, Advisers catered for carers in a sensitive, friendly and supportive manner. There was evidence of referral to support services such as respite care and counselling, although in general clients had been offered such support prior to their experience with ONE.

In the main, discussions were not work-focused which most felt was appropriate. They believed their Advisers were perceptive and responsive to their needs. However, on the few occasions clients received comprehensive explanations of the gateway function they felt confident to raise work and training, they were pleased to be in a position to make informed decisions about their future.

Continuity of service was very important to carers. Clients felt it where their Adviser had understood their circumstances; they felt adequately supported and positive about the future. For those who saw more than one Adviser recounting their case afresh was distressing.

Views were mixed about the mandatory trigger meetings carers are required to attend when caring responsibilities cease. Some felt a meeting at that time would be encouraging and useful. Others felt they would not need help to find work because they had only been caring for a short while and, therefore, did not feel distanced from the labour market. However, the small number of carers in the sample who attended a trigger meeting had in fact instigated the contact to notify of their change in circumstances and therefore felt making the meetings compulsory seemed unnecessary.

**Widows**

In general, widows had very little awareness or understanding of the ONE service. Like many of the sick or disabled clients and carers included in the study, widows typically bypassed ONE in the first instance. Most went to the DSS\(^2\) to make their claim at which point they were told about ONE although the initial Personal Adviser meeting took place some weeks later.

When clients attended the initial Personal Adviser meeting they felt uncomfortable by the lack of privacy in the open-plan offices. Only occasionally were discussions work-focused. However, where they did take place clients felt they were irrelevant either because they had employment to return to or because they were not considering work because of their age.

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\(^2\) The Department of Social Security (DSS) became the Department for Work and Pensions in September 2001.
Follow-up contact was minimal. As the pilots progressed Advisers made the decision to defer meetings with widows because they felt they were inopportune or inappropriate. Those clients who did attend meetings following the death of their spouse had mixed experiences, but on the whole Advisers were thought to have approached their case sympathetically.

**What would make a difference**

The findings from this research suggest there are a number of features of the service that would benefit from improvement. In light of the findings from this study it is recommended that attention be paid to the following issues:

- there must be clear and comprehensive explanations of ONE available not only to clients but also to groups on the periphery not directly involved in the delivery of the service, for example GPs, Citizen’s Advice Bureaux, solicitors and employers;
- the entire process, from Start-up and initial Personal Adviser meeting through to caseload and referral must be made clear to clients from the outset;
- financial anxieties should be resolved at the outset to enable the client to focus on work-related discussions, although adequate time must be built into meetings to ensure Advisers identify barriers to employment and possible strategies to overcome them;
- all clients should receive sensitive yet work-focused service tailored to both their short- and long-term needs;
- clients should be notified of likely delays in benefit processing times and Advisers should endeavour to be honest about the quality and range of job vacancies and training available;
- Call Centre technology could be employed for Start-up in all areas, with the option of face-to-face contact for those unwilling or unable to use the telephone;
- the gateway function of the ONE service should be effectively translated/reiterated and adequate systems to refer clients should be established;
- Advisers should have a wider knowledge of the range of training provision available to clients in a given area, at present training provision is too basic for many clients, for others training or unpaid work experience are not raised as issues for discussion;
- Advisers need clear guidance on early referral to New Deal programmes, many clients expressed a keen interest in New Deal programmes but only a few were referred;
- continuity of service is only necessary where circumstances are particularly sensitive, in most cases it is acceptable for generalist teams (with occasional access to a specialist if necessary) to cater for an individual providing they are familiar with the case;
where appropriate clients should be referred to specialists to access in-depth information and advice; and finally

- clients must be made aware of their rights and responsibilities, they need to be informed about the choices available so they can make autonomous decisions about their own future.
ONE is a new integrated service for delivering benefits, which was introduced in 12 pilot areas across England, Scotland and Wales between June and November 1999 (see Table B.3 in Appendix B). The ONE service is designed to provide a single point of entry to the benefit system, and offer employment-related advice and guidance to clients. The ultimate aim of ONE is to increase economic activity, encourage greater labour market participation and offer an effective, more streamlined service tailored to each client’s circumstances. It also aims to transform the culture of the benefits system towards independence and work where appropriate, rather than payments and dependence.

Central to the ONE service is the relationship between clients and their Personal Adviser. The Personal Adviser seeks to identify the extent to which clients are job-ready and to help them accordingly. When clients are not job-ready, further help and support will be offered, and clients may be referred to specialist services, or training, as appropriate.

The ONE service is being piloted in 12 areas through three different models. There were three phases to the introduction of ONE: the first phase, in June 1999, saw the introduction of the Basic Model; the second phase, in November 1999 saw the introduction of two variants, the Call Centre variant and the Private and Voluntary Sector variant. The third phase of the introduction of ONE was in April 2000, when all people claiming ONE benefits in the pilot areas were required to go through the new service. Prior to full participation, only Jobseekers were required to claim through ONE.

This report brings together research with clients at different stages in the ONE process. Data was collected in two stages: at the initial stages (i.e. Start-up and initial Personal Adviser meeting) and later to gather views on caseload and any ad hoc contact between clients and Personal Advisers.

In-depth interviews were conducted for the first stage of research in the latter part of 2000, after full participation was introduced, with clients who had attended a Personal Adviser meeting in July 2000. The pilot sites were just beginning to stabilise (in July 2000) after the effects of full participation. The subsequent increase in non-JSA clients entering ONE placed the pilot sites under pressure and therefore the findings presented in this report should be viewed in an evolutionary context.

3 The following benefits are included: Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), Income Support (IS), Incapacity Benefit (IB) unless returning to work at a specific time, Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA), Invalid Care Allowance (ICA), Housing Benefit (HB), Council Tax Benefit (CTB) (excluding HB and CTB renewal claims or if also claiming an in-work benefit) and Widow’s Benefit.
Further in-depth interviews exploring clients’ views and experiences of caseload and other follow-up contact took place in early 2001 with clients who had attended a Personal Adviser meeting in November 2000. All respondents had experienced further contact with a Personal Adviser, either because a certain life event had triggered the meeting\(^4\), or because they or their Personal Adviser had instigated further contact.

### 1.1 Models of delivery

#### 1.1.1 The Basic Model

ONE is intended to serve people of working age (16-59) who are currently unemployed, or working less than an average of 16 hours a week, and who put in a new or repeat claim for one of a range of specified benefits. Clients access ONE through either a Benefits Agency office, a Jobcentre, or a Local Authority office.

There are three definitive stages to the initial ONE process: the Start-up meeting, the initial Personal Adviser meeting and caseload meetings.

#### Start-up

The Start-up meeting is the first stage of ONE. In the Basic Model Start-up meetings are conducted face-to-face or over the telephone. At this stage the clients provide basic information about themselves including personal details, their reasons for claiming benefit and their work history. During Start-up each client is allocated a Personal Adviser and a meeting between the Personal Adviser and the client is arranged (unless the client’s circumstances are such that the meeting should be deferred to a more appropriate time, or waived entirely)\(^5\). Clients can be directed to job vacancies if they are sufficiently job-ready at this stage.

#### The initial Personal Adviser meeting

At this stage clients first meet their ONE Adviser. The purpose of the meeting is to establish a client’s personal circumstances and their job readiness, and to help them towards greater independence. The client agrees a plan of action with their Personal Adviser in order that they can move towards greater independence, and discuss suitable work opportunities. It is also at this stage that the claim for benefit is checked and finalised, and any needs for training or specialist referral are discussed.

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\(^4\) Mandatory ‘trigger’ meetings between clients and their PA can be triggered by a number of life events, these include: following receipt of a Capability Report, Invalid Care Allowance (ICA) ceases whilst other benefits remain in payment; Part-time work begins; part-time work ends; training and education through ONE ends; and client reaches 18.

\(^5\) Deferment is at the discretion of the Start-up Adviser when the client has good reason for not attending a meeting at the present time, for example, health or caring responsibilities or bereavement. The Personal Adviser meeting would be waived entirely in certain circumstances, such as a client suffering from a terminal illness.
The need for future meetings or in-work support is also considered at this point. When clients are not in a position to work, help and support may be offered. This may be work-related, or address the wider range of needs clients may have. (For a more detailed description of the Personal Adviser’s role and the purpose of the meeting, see Chapter 2).

**Follow-up contact**

Following the initial Personal Adviser meeting further contact between the client and their Adviser can be arranged. These meetings might be triggered by certain events or changes to the client’s circumstances which could have implications for their employability. Alternatively, further meetings may occur when the Personal Adviser and the client agree that further contact will be useful, for example to discuss benefit-related issues and/or strategies to overcome barriers to employment (caseload contact).

All Jobseekers are required to attend two meetings following the initial Personal Adviser meeting; these occur after 13 and then 26 consecutive weeks of unemployment, and then every six months. It was anticipated that clients in other groups would have more contact depending upon their needs and circumstances. The intention of follow-up contact is to ensure clients receive regular and on-going contact, which would provide support, and opportunities to review progress, as well as identifying strategies to overcome any barriers. The ultimate aim of follow-up contact is to assist clients towards greater independence. However, the extent of follow-up contact is negotiated between each client and their Personal Adviser, the meetings are not compulsory unless the client is a Jobseeker, or certain life events occur.

Trigger meetings are an integral feature of the ONE service and, as the name suggests, are meetings triggered by a change in a client’s circumstances. As outlined above the ONE service is designed to offer ongoing support and advice to clients, as such a change in circumstances may represent either the emergence or removal of a barrier to work for a particular client. For example, where a client has been suffering from a sickness or disability, and therefore unable to work, after a specified period they are required to attend a medical examination as part of a Personal Capability Assessment which ascertains whether or not they are fit for work. At the same time, a Capability Report will be completed and sent to the Personal Adviser who may use it in a trigger meeting with the client. It may be that the client is deemed fit for work, in which case the Adviser will help the client to establish a strategy to re-integrate them into the labour market. There may be other cases where the client is deemed not well enough for employment, in which case the Adviser would assist them with an application for longer-term disability benefits and/or referral to support services.
### 1.1.2 The Call Centre variant

The aim of the Call Centre variant is to make use of telecommunication technology to enable clients to access the benefit system. In Call Centres, the Start-up stage is carried out over the telephone and the claim for benefit is dealt with during the call. In the Call Centre variant the Start-up Advisers offer assistance to clients by completing electronic claim forms during the telephone call. Call back arrangements are built into this variant to ensure the call is not at the client’s expense. For clients unwilling or unable to make use of the Call Centre approach, face-to-face Start-up is available. The initial Personal Adviser meeting is arranged during Start-up and takes place face-to-face on a ONE site.

### 1.1.3 The Private and Voluntary Sector variant

The Private and Voluntary Sector (PVS) variant was designed to test the delivery of the service when private and voluntary organisations take the lead. The PVS organisations work in partnership with each other and with the public agencies, in developing innovative and flexible modes of delivering the ONE service.

A closer examination of the ONE process is provided in Chapter 2.

### 1.2 Aims of the ONE evaluation

The overall aims of the ONE evaluation are to test the operational feasibility of the three models and to test the effectiveness of each model in improving both the quality and quantity of labour market participation of people of working age. There are several components to the evaluation (see Appendix E). This study forms part of the delivery evaluation.

The delivery evaluation comprises both operational research and qualitative research with clients, and case studies with staff, stakeholders and partners delivering the ONE service (see Kelleher et al. 2001, 2002). There are three stages to the qualitative research with clients: firstly, research with non-participants prior to full participation (see Cotton et al. 2000); secondly, research with participants who have had an initial Personal Adviser meeting, and finally, research with participants who have had follow-up contact with ONE - the findings from phases two and three are integrated in this report.

The client research seeks to address two key issues. Firstly, the extent to which ONE enables clients to experience a more effective and efficient service tailored to their personal needs, and ultimately, to what extent it manages to change the focus of the benefit system from that of unemployment and dependency, to that of labour market participation and independence. The overriding aims of the delivery evaluation with clients are:

- to consider clients’ experiences of, and reactions to the service;
- to consider whether clients regard the service as personalised and tailored to their needs;
- to identify whether clients consider the service more streamlined and easier to understand;
to identify whether there has been a reduction in unnecessary client contacts;

to identify barriers to the delivery of ONE and identify what else, if anything, needs to be done to implement the service; and

to consider whether clients are aware of their rights and responsibilities, including their views of what these are and whether they understand the cultural change required.

The specific aim of this study was to consider clients’ views of the different stages of the ONE process, by exploring individual attitudes and experiences. Within this overall aim there were a number of key research questions which this study sought to address:

• what were respondents’ experiences of the initial stages of the ONE process?
• what were respondents’ experiences of the follow-up stages of the ONE process?
• were there differences between mandatory (trigger) and non-mandatory contact?
• what did they think of the ONE service, as they experienced it?
• what did they think of the ONE service, in principle?
• were there any differences between client groups?
• were there any differences between the three variants?
• in what ways did they feel the service could be developed?

The methodology used in this study was wholly qualitative, a total of 364 depth interviews were conducted with clients who were claiming a ONE benefit. The first phase of the study focused on client experiences of the initial stages of the ONE process and comprised 207 depth interviews. The second phase focused on follow-up contact between clients and their Personal Adviser, and included 157 depth interviews. Qualitative methods were chosen because they provided the best means of exploring individual experiences, attitudes and feelings. Depth interviews are particularly suitable for the exploration of information that may be sensitive, detailed and, as in this study, retrospective.

Respondents in our sample were drawn from the four major client groups participating in ONE:

• jobseekers;
• lone parents;
• sick or disabled; and
• carers and widows.

Details of the sample profiles can be found in Appendix B, Table B.1 and Table B.2.
Fieldwork was conducted in all 12 pilot areas. The fieldwork areas in each model can be seen in Appendix B, Table B.3.

In phase one of the evaluation, which focused on the initial stages of the ONE process, all respondents were interviewed face-to-face in their homes. Two-thirds of those interviewed for phase two were also interviewed at home, the remaining third of respondents were interviewed, in depth, over the telephone. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was conducted using a topic guide; this allowed respondents the opportunity to raise issues they felt were important, while at the same time keeping the interview focused on the aims of the research. All the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis. Copies of the topic guides used in phases one and two are included in Appendices C and D, respectively.

1.5 Report outline

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 outlines the intended process of ONE, contrasting the service with clients’ experiences of each stage. Chapter 3 compares clients’ views on, and experiences of, the major principles inherent within ONE. Chapter 4 summarises the experiences of each client group. Chapter 5 summarises the experiences of each client group. Chapter 6 covers differences between model variants, and finally Chapter 6 provides an overview of the findings, and concludes by considering a number of ways in which a work-focused service might be developed in light of the experiences of, and attitudes towards, ONE as expressed by the clients in our sample.

Throughout the following sections of the report reference is made to the Case Studies and Staff Research (Kelleher et al. 2001, 2002). By drawing on the observational case studies and depth interviews with staff, the findings from the delivery evaluation with participants are further illuminated and expanded, thereby offering a more in-depth exploration of emergent themes and related issues. Researchers from BMRB, including the authors of this report, conducted a number of staff interviews and this report therefore reflects insights from those interviews as well as the themes and issues reported by Kelleher et al. (2001, 2002).

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6 Despite the ONE database from which the sample was drawn indicating clients had experienced caseload contact when approached to take part in the study many did not recall having follow-up interviews. Therefore, the research team included telephone methodology to achieve a greater coverage of the full range and nature of follow-up contact.
2 THE ONE PROCESS

The ONE service has a series of distinctive stages, each of which is fully explored in this chapter. A diagrammatic illustration of the ONE process is also provided in the Appendix A.

2.1 Initial contact: awareness, understanding and expectations

The way in which clients made contact with the ONE service was varied. Whether through the Benefits Agency, the Employment Service, the Local Authority, or a private sector organisation, clients were informed they would have to claim their benefits through ONE. Clients also became aware of the new ONE service through informal sources, publicity materials and other written materials such as letters of invitation from ONE sites.

Participants’ understanding of what ONE offered varied considerably. Some appeared to have no understanding prior to going through the initial stages of the process, and only a partial understanding afterwards, as illustrated by one respondent’s experience:

‘Because everything you are saying to me about ONE is new, even though I have supposedly been through the system it all sounds new, maybe they should state clearly, you know, number one you will have a Personal Adviser meeting, number two we can help you look for jobs and so on.’

(Basic model, lone parent, female, age 25)

However, others had a clear understanding that ONE was a new service offering advice and guidance on both employment and benefit-related issues.

There are a number of possible explanations for the wide range of understanding. It is most likely a direct result of how clients were made aware of ONE. Respondents in our sample became aware of ONE through several means. Some were provided with formal explanations by involved agencies and organisations, whilst other respondents felt they had been given sketchy, and sometimes inaccurate explanations by organisations on the periphery of the benefit system, such as GPs or the Citizen’s Advice Bureau. See Case study 1 for one example of the confusion caused by peripheral sources providing an explanation:
Case study 1

The respondent lives with her husband and has been caring full-time for her parents-in-law for many years. For the past few years she has also been caring for her own father. However, the client has not claimed benefit because she was unaware of her entitlement.

When a social worker visited the client’s father she suggested the respondent might be entitled to claim Invalid Care Allowance. Hence, the social worker requested a claim form on behalf of the respondent and gave it to her to complete. It took a month from notifying the client of her eligibility for benefit to receive a claim form. The social worker posted the form to a central office of administration on the client’s behalf.

After a fortnight the ONE service contacted the respondent, she was unaware that the service existed or that could have completed her form with the help of an Adviser. The Adviser contacted her to conduct Start-up by telephone, she described the response as: ‘very quick’. Basic details were taken, such as age, occupation and reasons for claiming although she had already provided them on the claim form.

The Adviser explained that ONE was a new way of claiming benefit and the claiming procedure was described. The client was told she would be contacted with an appointment, and that she would have to attend an interview at the Jobcentre, where a Personal Adviser would check through the new claim form before it was sent away in order to minimise processing delays.

Because the client had such low expectations of the benefit service she did not feel a two-week delay at Start-up was unreasonable, in fact she thought this was efficient. She found using the telephone a ‘dam sight easier’ than attending a meeting as she was able to remain fully committed to her caring responsibilities. The client’s experiences of claiming had exceeded her expectations despite falling short in a number of respects of the original service vision.

The advisory role played by the social worker in the initial stages of the respondent’s claim highlights the importance of keeping peripheral groups, such as GPs and social workers up-to-date with benefits information. If the social worker had been aware of the ONE service she might have referred the client in the first instance rather than encouraging her to post a claim which she later had to complete again through ONE, thereby increasing the end-to-end processing time.

(Call Centre, Carer, female, age 59)
Clients who found out about ONE from peripheral sources typically submitted their claim forms by post, however most were required to attend Start-up at a later point. Others did not attend Start-up, instead they were seen by a Personal Adviser in the first instance. Which ever the case, clients in such situations reportedly felt confused by the lack of accurate information available and inadequate explanations they felt they had received. The experiences of this group of clients, points to the importance of accurate and comprehensive explanations at the outset as expectations were often based upon first impressions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, respondents who received comprehensive explanations from those directly involved in the delivery of ONE had the clearest understanding of what was on offer.

There were some respondents who had first become aware of ONE through publicity on local television, radio and buses, or in local papers, or they had seen posters at the Jobcentre, Benefits Agency or Local Authority offices. In these cases respondents did not generally have a clear understanding of what was being offered. Other respondents had been given explanatory leaflets or sent letters of invitation by ONE, and their understanding of the service seemed to be clearer.

Among the respondents in our sample, those who had received clear and comprehensive explanations appeared to have understood the principle of ONE and were aware that ONE offered a ‘one-stop-shop approach’ to both their employment and benefit needs. For these clients the most appealing features of ONE, in principle, were greater efficiency and tailored support. However, some of these clients were among the most disappointed when their expectations were not met. In particular, these clients did not feel they had received a sufficiently personal, efficient or supportive service.

2.2 Start-up

The Start-up meeting is the first stage of the ONE process and it may be conducted either in person or over the telephone. In Call Centres, Start-up takes place over the telephone unless the client is either unable or unwilling to use the telephone, in which case a face-to-face meeting is offered. At this stage of the process basic information about the client is collected such as personal details, work history, reasons for claiming benefit, and any specialist needs. The purpose of Start-up is to enable an initial assessment to be made about immediate benefit needs and to direct clients towards suitable work opportunities as appropriate. It is also at this stage that arrangements for a face-to-face initial Personal Adviser meeting are made, to take place within three working days of Start-up7 or if a client’s

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7 Evidence from Case Studies and Staff Research (Kelleher et al., 2001) indicated booking Personal Adviser meetings within three days of Start-up meetings had driven efficiency rather than quality of service. As the pilots progressed a decision was made to ensure Personal Adviser meetings were booked within four days of Start-up, to ease the pressures on the front-end of the ONE process and enable staff to spend more time discussing work with non-JSA clients.
circumstances are such that they are not job-ready, a decision to defer or waive the meeting is made.

Overall views of Start-up were based upon respondents’ experiences of waiting times, the assistance they received and the Start-up Adviser. Where clients had been invited to participate in ONE either by letter or telephone, waiting times were considerably shorter than for those who had been referred at initial contact from other agencies in the benefit system. Some clients expressed great frustration at lengthy waiting periods for what turned out to be a very brief Start-up meeting. Others were unsure why they had to attend Start-up at all. Where non-JSA clients had claimed benefits before and had claimed using postal methods, Start-up seemed to be an unnecessary additional stage to the claiming process. In a very few cases clients were directed towards suitable work opportunities, for most clients in our sample Start-up had been entirely restricted to benefit-related matters.

Generally, clients received little further explanation or clarification about the ONE service during Start-up. Where the Adviser had provided an explanation, or talked the client through an explanatory leaflet, clients reported feeling reassured because they had been made aware of the new process and how Start-up fitted in, and what they could reasonably expect from their Personal Adviser meeting.

Findings from the Case Studies and Staff Research (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) substantiate the views held by clients about the inadequacy of explanations at Start-up. Where explanations were provided by staff they tended to be ‘rote’ learnt introductions. These explanations were appropriate to make reference to some of the principles of the service, including the one-stop-shop and the single point of contact it offered clients. However, the work-focus was not communicated to many because Start-up Advisers had felt uncomfortable about pushing the idea of an employment focus to non-JSA clients. The evidence from the observational case studies suggested explanations provided by staff were often rushed, and therefore clients were unable to thoroughly understand the service available, it was thought the hurried explanations led to confusion about ONE among most client groups. One example from the client research illustrates such confusion:
Case study 2

The respondent had no previous experience of claiming benefit until mid 2000 when she went to a ONE site when her husband deserted her. At the time of contact with ONE she had a 16 month-old baby and was expecting a second child. Prior to motherhood she worked in retail which she intended to resume when her children both start school.

The client was uncertain how to make a claim for benefit and thus began by locating the telephone number of the Benefits Agency in the Yellow Pages. The Benefits Agency advised her she was required to claim through the ONE service, which she had never heard of and which the Benefits Agency staff did not explain, just gave her instructions to go to the Town Hall.

When at the Town Hall she waited 15 minutes until she was seen by a Start-up Adviser. During the meeting, with lasted approximately 15 minutes, the respondent provided basic details about herself and her family situation. She was given three separate claim booklets, and was told she would need to arrange a Personal Adviser meeting, although the purpose or aim of the Personal Adviser meeting was not explained.

The respondent described feeling embarrassed about claiming benefit, she felt the Start-up Adviser could have alleviated her discomfort by acting more sympathetically. During the meeting she felt ‘rushed’ by the Adviser. The Start-up Adviser’s manner inhibited her from asking many questions, but when she did ask questions the Start-up Adviser was reportedly unable to provide answers. For instance, when she asked how long it would take to process her claim, she was not given an answer. Similarly the client raised questions about the Child Support Agency, none of which were answered. She felt disappointed by the service she had received.

The client felt, as a new claimant, she would have benefited greatly from a detailed explanation regarding the service at Start-up. The Start-up Adviser did give the respondent a leaflet explaining ONE and this was thought to be very useful, however the information was not sufficiently detailed and the respondent thought it would have been better had it been explained face-to-face.

The respondent was neither offered assistance nor given the impression she could have asked for help completing her forms. Therefore, she completed them unaided at home during a time of considerable stress. She found some questions confusing and found the task time consuming. Overall, the respondent was dissatisfied with the initial stages of the ONE service feeling that it had not been sufficiently personalised or supportive, or that she had been given an adequate explanation of what she could reasonably expect.

(Basic Model, lone parent, age 23)
The overwhelming view towards the Start-up Adviser was favourable; many clients found them to be friendly, helpful and efficient. The generally courteous way in which Start-up Advisers dealt with clients was welcomed, particularly by those clients who had experienced more negative encounters in the past, or those for whom contact with the benefit system was an entirely new experience and feared with some trepidation.

It would appear, from what respondents in our sample reported, that the arrangement for a Personal Adviser meeting within three working days of Start-up rarely happened, more commonly clients waited a week to ten days to be seen by their Personal Adviser, although there were significant area and office variations.

Observational case studies and depth interviews with staff (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) in various sites provided some explanations for the failure to arrange an initial Personal Adviser meeting within three days of Start-up. Delays were felt to be, at least in part, a consequence of the timing of implementation. The introduction of ONE, in some areas coincided with the school holidays (June 1999) which had implications. Firstly, staff took their pre-booked holiday entitlement around that time, which left a number of sites inadequately staffed. Secondly, there were huge seasonal influxes of students, teachers and support staff (on temporary contracts) claiming JSA. This research also attributed the difficulty of ensuring an initial Adviser meeting occurred within three days of Start-up to the effects of full participation. There were significantly more clients coming through ONE, and inadequate numbers of staff to cope. Although staff empathised with clients, they were unable to see many for at least eight days after Start-up.

2.2.1 Start-up over the telephone – Call Centre

Respondents generally reported positive experiences of Start-up over the telephone. Making a claim over the telephone was regarded as more convenient, efficient and prevented additional travel costs. The assistance provided with completing the claim form was well received by clients, many of whom found the prospect of completing benefit forms daunting. However, in some areas where the Call Centre variant was used, clients reported a number of technical difficulties where call back had not happened, or was significantly delayed. Others were told the 'system had been down' and therefore Start-up was done by post, leaving clients the task of completing the forms unaided.

The staff included in the observational case studies and depth interviews (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) were generally sympathetic towards clients who experienced difficulties during Start-up over the telephone. They believed aspects of the booking system used by call-centres were responsible for the delays. Some Advisers commented on the negative effects such delays had on clients’ attitudes towards them during the initial Personal Adviser meeting. (For further discussion see the report by Kelleher et al. 2001, 2002). However, such delays were fortunately
localised, and generally clients in our research were satisfied with the service they received at Start-up when using call-centre technology, believing it to offer greater flexibility and convenience. For one client’s positive experience of using Call Centre technology, see Case study 3:

**Case study 3**

The respondent lived with her grown up children and until recently she had worked as a teacher, but retired due to a ‘nervous breakdown’ brought on by family problems.

About five years earlier the respondent had made a claim for Incapacity Benefit due to stress-related problems, but ceased claiming shortly afterwards because her estranged husband decided to financially support the family. However, the financial support came to an abrupt end in the summer of 2000 when he was no longer able to provide for the family. Hence, she had to make a new claim for benefit. The new claim was made through ONE, however the respondent was only eligible for National Insurance contributions and a reduction in Council Tax as a result of a large personal pension.

When probed the respondent expressed a good understanding of some of the principles of the ONE service. She mentioned the principle of ‘dealing with all benefits in one location’, and felt the reason for separating Start-up and the initial Personal Adviser meeting was: ‘to provide basic information at the outset and allow the Personal Adviser meeting to focus on more important issues’.

The client knew very little about ONE prior to her initial contact. She had been advised by her GP to claim sickness benefit, but the GP had not given the respondent a number to contact, rather she acquired the ONE Call Centre number from her daughter who had previously claimed through the ONE service.

The respondent phoned the Call Centre number and a ‘convenient’ time was arranged for call back. At this stage, the respondent was given an explanation regarding the purpose of the Start-up interview; she was informed of the paperwork she would need and the type of questions she would be asked. The respondent viewed this explanation positively, because she felt prepared for the interview and had the necessary documentation to hand.

*Continued*
The respondent was extremely positive about using the Call Centre, as she believed it to be 'easier', 'convenient' and a 'less pressurising' method than visiting an office. No questions were felt to be too sensitive and the Adviser was described as 'extremely polite' and 'sensitive'.

Basic details and an overview of her personal circumstances were taken during Start-up, including financial information about her savings, pension and mortgage. The respondent suggested she preferred discussing both financial and personal issues in her own home, as it was more private, and documentation was more secure (as it was not being taken out of the house where it might be lost). The respondent was aware information was being entered into a computer and she described this as 'efficient'.

The respondent was given an explanation of the Personal Adviser’s role. She felt this made attending the interview less daunting than anticipated. The respondent was given the name of her Personal Adviser, and details including the time and location of the interview, and the documents she would need to take. She thought the information given during Start-up made the face-to-face interview situation easier, she was given the impression that her Personal Adviser was already aware of her circumstances.

Overall, the respondent thought it was a good idea to collect information from the clients prior to the interview as it allowed the Adviser to concentrate on more important issues. Start-up via the Call Centre model was thought to be a convenient, secure and effective method, particularly for those clients experiencing personal problems.

(Call Centre, sick or disabled, female, age 51)

2.2.2 Start-up – PVS model

Many clients who had Start-up in PVS offices were unaware of private sector involvement. PVS Start-up Advisers were reported to have demonstrated customer care skills. Comprehensive explanations about the ONE service and the stages of the process were reportedly given more often to respondents in the PVS variant than had been the case in either the Basic Model or the Call Centre variant. Details of one respondent’s experience of, and reaction to, such customer care skills are documented in Case study 4:
Case study 4

The respondent lived with her mother, stepbrother and boyfriend. Since leaving school she had worked in two factories and a supermarket. At the time of the interview she was working towards an NVQ which she had organised independently of ONE. Ultimately, she planned to go to university.

The client was unaware that ONE existed in her local area and only became aware when she visited the Jobcentre to make a new claim whereupon she was directed upstairs to ONE. In August 2000 she made her first claim for JSA through the ONE service, although, she only received payment for three weeks before her benefit was stopped because it transpired she had voluntarily left her job.

Overall, she viewed the initial stages of the ONE process positively, primarily due to the customer-focused approach she felt Advisers in the PVS site had demonstrated. The office environment was also thought to have created a good impression. The respondent described it as ‘very modern’ and ‘comfortable’. However, the trained receptionist with whom she had made initial contact made the greatest impression on the client. She described the receptionist as ‘really, really, nice’, ‘chatty’ and ‘lovely’.

The Start-up discussion with the trained receptionist lasted approximately 10 minutes. In which time the respondent was given the relevant claim form and advised which sections she should complete. An appointment was made for an initial Personal Adviser meeting 16 days from Start-up.

Although the client felt the trained receptionist had been courteous and helpful she failed to provide an explanation of the ONE service. The client mentioned feelings of uncertainty about her forthcoming Personal Adviser meeting, which suggests an explanation would have been useful.

The positive attitude expressed towards the service by the respondent did not equate with the actual level of service received. The service in the initial stages fell short on two counts. Firstly, there was no explanation provided regarding the ONE service; and secondly, the Personal Adviser meeting was delayed for 16 days. However, the behaviour and customer-focused attitude adopted by the PVS site staff was very well received and interpreted as representing a good quality service.

(PVS, Jobseeker, female, age 22)
It is possible the reason staff in PVS sites provided more comprehensive explanations was because sites operating in this variant were given greater freedom to develop flexible and innovative ways of working. A number of innovations were recorded by Kelleher et al. (2001, 2002). One innovation allowed staff to alternate between the roles of Start-up and Personal Adviser, thereby enabling them to gain a deeper insight into the entire process and responsibilities attached to each role. It is likely Advisers were in a better position to prepare clients for different stages of the process, as such the explanations provided were generally comprehensive and accurate.

2.3 Initial Personal Adviser meeting

The aim of the initial Personal Adviser meeting is to identify any barriers to work that a particular client may face, to agree a personalised action plan to help the client move towards greater independence, and to discuss any suitable job opportunities. It is also at this stage that the claim to benefit is checked and finalised and any training needs or referral to specialist services are discussed. The need for further meetings or in-work support would also be considered at this stage. The key activities, which the Personal Adviser meeting is designed to cover are:

- to explore the client’s individual circumstances and make an assessment of their employability;
- if job-ready, to help the client consider suitable job vacancies;
- to provide a personalised calculation showing potential in-work benefits at particular levels of earnings;
- to work with the client to identify any barriers to work, such as training needs;
- to refer clients to specialist services if appropriate;
- to agree a personalised action plan, which will set out a strategy to help clients improve their employment prospects;
- to agree a plan for future meetings or support; and
- to check and accept the claim for benefit and ensure the client is claiming the full range of benefits they are entitled to.

In almost all cases in our sample, it was reported that Personal Advisers dealt with the clients’ benefit needs first during the meeting. For some clients this meant there was little or no time remaining to discuss issues surrounding their intention to work. Others felt there was inadequate time to discuss the help and support they might need to become more employable, or strategies to overcome obstacles that may exist in a client’s life which was preventing them from work in either the short- or long-term.

The research with staff (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) revealed Advisers had decided to focus on benefit-related matters first to ensure claims were completed. Time pressures had apparently dictated the scope of Adviser meetings, it was noted that benefit claims tended to overrun and
therefore impinged upon the time available to spend on work-related matters. As a consequence, findings suggest there was insufficient time to engage in detailed discussions about work, rather, this element of the meeting was limited to passive question and answer sessions.

However, many clients appreciated dealing with their claim for benefit first, some appreciated the help their Personal Adviser offered when checking the forms believing their claim would be more efficiently processed. Other clients felt that dealing with their claim at the outset of the meeting left them free to discuss employment-related issues more unreservedly because their short-term fears about their financial situation had been alleviated. One example of the advantages of dealing with benefit-related issues:

**Case study 5**

The respondent was a recent divorcee with sole responsibility for her two-year-old daughter. She had worked as a computer manager for eight years but since her husband deserted the family she had to give up work.

The respondent made her first claim for benefit via ONE and at the time of the interview she was in receipt of IS and HB. The respondent had plans to relocate nearer her parents whom she felt could help with childcare thereby enabling her to return to work.

Prior to contacting ONE she had seen advertisements and perceived ONE to be a new ‘streamlined way to claim benefits that would prevent waiting and queuing’. Aside from the advertising, the respondent was not given any information about ONE from either the Start-up Adviser or Personal Adviser.

The Personal Adviser meeting was viewed positively, she was impressed with the Adviser’s attitude and the service she received, particularly the speed with which her benefit claim was finalised.

Securing her benefit claim, gaining information and advice about her mortgage and Council Tax Benefit were of paramount importance to the respondent, because she had no other source of income, having recently given up work. The respondent described herself as being ‘preoccupied’ and ‘worried’ about how she was going to manage financially. She was relieved that the Adviser dealt with her benefit claim first before discussing employment.

‘When you’re worried about money, it’s difficult to think or care about anything else, so I thought it was good that the Adviser sorted out my benefits first… I found it reassuring.’

(Call Centre, Lone Parent, female, age 36)
Generally, clients reported their Personal Adviser meeting had been primarily focused on their claim for benefit, in a small number of cases work had not been mentioned at all. Where clients reported a definitive work focus to their Personal Adviser meeting, views were mixed about the timeliness and appropriateness of the discussion. Some felt that their Personal Adviser had failed to appreciate their personal circumstances fully, particularly in terms of their readiness for work. There were certain cases where clients had felt pressured into searching for work when they were either emotionally, physically or practically unable to consider it a viable option. Carers and widows often cited feelings of resentment at having to attend a meeting in the first instance, and then anger at untimely discussions about employment. Some sick or disabled clients however felt encouraged at the prospect of returning to work, or the possibility of retraining with a view to changing their career path.

The research with staff (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) revealed the trepidation many Advisers felt about dealing with non-JSA clients. In fact, many called for specialist training to enable them to better recognise the needs of the full range of ONE clients. Some had found dealing with particularly sensitive cases quite distressing, they felt ill-equipped to deal with clients with emotional or social problems at the outset of the pilots. Staff had generally felt they lacked the necessary skills, and were broadly unaware of any local provision available to which they could effectively refer clients. There was also a degree of uncertainty about operationalising the referral process – they were uncertain what rules applied. This uncertainty goes some way to explain why there was so little evidence of client referral. However, it is important to recognise the evaluation found improvements in these areas towards the end of the pilot.

Both JSA and non-JSA clients commented on the limited advice Advisers provided about support or training opportunities, and referral was not made in most cases. Many clients in our sample were unaware that referral to training schemes was an option as it had not been raised during their Personal Adviser meeting. Overall, clients reported feeling disappointed and ‘short changed’ by the absence of training-related discussions. Case study 6 describes one client’s experience of an inadequate training-related discussion:
Case study 6

Due to a recent injury the respondent was unable to work. She made a claim for Incapacity Benefit through ONE. The client recovered from her injury but after six months she still remained unemployed and thus changed to Jobseeker’s Allowance. She was eager to gain employment and suggested she would like to return to her past career as a delivery driver, or alternatively would like to become a teacher.

The Start-up interview primarily focused on her claim for benefit. The respondent was given forms to take away and complete and was told any queries regarding completion of the form would be dealt with during her Personal Adviser meeting. This offer of assistance was viewed positively as some of the questions were thought to be ‘ambiguous’. Less positively, the respondent was not given any information about the ONE service and was consequentially unclear what the ONE service aimed to provide or what purpose the Personal Adviser meeting served.

The meeting lasted approximately 45 minutes and primarily focused on the completion of the claim form. The Adviser briefly asked the respondent about work interests but did not explore this area in any depth and did not carry out a job search. Training was not mentioned, despite the respondent having suggested, to the researcher, she was interested in teacher training. Although the importance of resolving her claim for benefit was acknowledged, she thought it would also have been useful to explore work and training options.

Following the Personal Adviser meeting the respondent visited the ONE office to enquire about teacher training courses and opportunities. The Advisers were unable to provide any information and staff were described as ‘uninterested’ she felt ‘let down’ by the lack of support shown.

‘I’d have hoped that they would at least have some sort of like leaflet on it … I was quite disappointed that they didn’t. But they didn’t show any interest at all, you know. I’m not saying that they could get me on a teacher training course or whatever. Even if they’ve got no information on that, they could have been more supportive saying ‘No, we can’t help you’, perhaps they could of told me where I should go, but they just didn’t seem interested.’

The respondent’s motivation to seek out training information and advice on careers following the Personal Adviser interview clearly demonstrated weaknesses in the ONE service. The respondent would have benefited from a more thorough discussion about training and career opportunities.

(PVS, Jobseeker, female, age 32)
Where training was discussed there were examples of inappropriate referral to courses. For some clients their personal preference for courses had been unmet because of inadequate local provision, whilst other clients felt they were referred to courses beneath their capabilities. Furthermore, many clients, for whom training had been discussed, were dismissive of the courses on offer because they rarely offered recognisable accreditation. Similarly, referral to specialist services had been minimal and quite often not mentioned as a possible avenue to many clients. Some respondents, especially sick or disabled clients and those with criminal records, felt that referral to specialist Advisers would have been particularly beneficial.

The Case Studies and Staff Research (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) indicated that, despite compiling directories of local provision, staff were generally unfamiliar with specialist services in their local area, and as a consequence failed to effectively refer clients. However, as the pilots progressed, links with local training and support providers were developing. There was evidence of organisations paying visits to ONE sites, the observational case studies demonstrated that where this had occurred Advisers began to refer clients to those organisations.

The research with staff (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) revealed there was excellent team working in operation in many sites. Staff were reportedly mutually supportive of one another and relied upon the information, advice and knowledge of their colleagues to carry out their role. Staff consulted each other about benefit and work-related issues and it was felt they effectively pooled their knowledge, and particularly drew on specialist knowledge of colleagues from the range of involved agencies. The involvement of benefit experts ensured clients received the best service although input from such specialists was variable. However the client research revealed that where benefit experts did assist staff often failed to make their involvement explicit, this was sadly misinterpreted by many clients as incompetence.

A carer who had to arrange childcare whilst she attended her Personal Adviser meeting was particularly frustrated by the apparent lack of expertise and knowledge she felt her Personal Adviser displayed:

‘He were just a young lad that didn’t know anything and kept going off asking other advisors, I got really annoyed actually...I thought they could have employed somebody who was a bit qualified, that knew what he were on about, because I didn’t know what was happening, and for him to keep going off, it were just a big put off, he just didn’t know what he was doing!...I just wanted to get out of there so I told him he’d wasted my time and I left.’

(PVS, Carer, female, age 36)
For those clients who Personal Advisers had deemed job-ready, many reported that the outcome of job searches conducted during the meeting had been disappointing. The staff research (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) highlighted a series of inadequacies with the tool used to by Advisers to conduct job searches – the Labour Market System (LMS). The overwhelming view shared by staff about LMS was that it was ‘shockingly bad’. Advisers found it very challenging to seem enthusiastic about job vacancies they were ‘horrified’ by. Kelleher et al., also suggested there was something of a disjointed relationship between ONE and local employers. ONE reportedly had a very low profile because there was limited contact and inadequate time to effectively market the service. This undoubtedly had implications for both the quality and diversity of jobs from which clients could choose (see Bunt et al., 2001 for more detailed information about the relationship ONE had with local employers.)

Quite often clients were directed to employment opportunities that paid the minimum wage or work that was inappropriate to their employment history and preferences. Some of the job-ready clients in our sample dismissed the work possibilities presented to them by their Personal Adviser in favour of conducting independent job searches in the local press or with recruitment agencies where they felt they would be able to secure better paid employment opportunities. Others concluded it was a safer financial option to depend solely on a range of benefits, which could ensure household expenses were covered, such as rent and Council Tax. For a number of these clients their Personal Adviser had not calculated likely in-work benefit and support.

Where in-work benefits had been calculated, particularly in the case of lone parents, many reported being surprised at the comparison between being solely dependent on benefit and the alternative of working and claiming fewer benefits. They felt encouraged by the options and support available to them in the longer-term. One respondent expressed her surprise when she realised the possibilities open to her following a calculation of likely in-work benefits done for her during her initial Personal Adviser meeting:

'I was surprised, it was better than I’d imagined, actually giving me an example made me realise that it’s not all bad and that it would be worthwhile getting back to work. It opens your eyes to the fact that you can work and be as well off as you were just claiming benefits.'

(Basic model, lone parent, female, age 23)

2.3.1 Attitudes towards Personal Advisers

The Personal Adviser in most cases was viewed favourably. Clients perceived their Personal Advisers to be generally courteous and polite. Particularly for clients who had prior experience of claiming benefits and contact with employment Advisers, their experience with ONE compared favourably. One respondent, currently sick or disabled, described how
ONE compared to past experiences of claiming benefit when he had been a Jobseeker:

‘In the past I’ve found the benefit system treats everyone like sheep...they make you feel as if it’s your fault that you’re in a difficult situation and therefore need to make a claim...ONE is a hundred times better because it’s just a more personal approach, it’s more to do with what I want and my needs, what I want is the issue, rather than them just getting me out of the door.’

(Basic Model, sick or disabled, male, aged 28)

2.4 Perceived limitations of the service

Despite the enthusiasm many clients expressed for the personalised service, a number of respondents felt their Personal Adviser lacked adequate experience. Some respondents reported having been given inaccurate advice about the length of time it would take for their benefit claim to be processed. This was often because Personal Advisers had failed to explain the role ONE played in the wider benefit system, and that in fact ONE was not responsible for the time it took other agencies to process claims. Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit were often reported to be processed most inefficiently. Unfortunately, respondents often attributed prolonged processing times to ONE directly, a likely reason for this misconception may have been the limited explanation many clients received about the ONE service.

Findings from the staff perspective (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) suggest that although Advisers from the Benefits Agency and Employment Service were working well together, some Local Authorities had failed to embrace ONE in the same way, and therefore ONE Advisers viewed the Local Authority as a debilitating factor in many respects. ONE Advisers suggested the Local Authority expected them to do too much in terms of verification of benefit claims. For example, where clients failed to provide the correct documentation needed for Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit, the Local Authority expected ONE to chase the client for documentation and send it to the Local Authority, rather than deal with the matter themselves.

The culture of Local Authorities was felt to be at odds with that of the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service. The Local Authority was not felt to have entered into ONE with the same level of commitment, in terms of seconded staff, resources or effective liaison (for further discussion, see Kelleher et al., 2002). For their part, Local Authorities felt that they had been invited to participate in ONE late and as an afterthought. In particular, they were concerned that the design of ONE did not seem to take account of the way local government is structured and operated, and that Housing Benefit was only one of the services they provided and it did not represent a major part of their work. Of course, the clients included in the delivery evaluation could not have been aware of the cultural friction between the partner agencies. Perhaps if Advisers had sought to clarify the gateway role the service plays, clients might not have felt so disappointed or attributed delays to the ONE service per se.
In general clients failed to understand that ONE could provide further support, guidance and work-focused advice; many assumed Start-up and the initial Personal Adviser meeting was the entire service. For example, where difficulties had arisen with respect to processing claims, clients had not been aware that they could go back to their Personal Adviser for advice and guidance.

Although some respondents had been given contact details by their Personal Adviser, often in the form of business cards, and encouraged to instigate further contact if they felt it was necessary, many were uncertain on what occasion it would be appropriate to attend another meeting. Clearly the continuity of service available through the Personal Adviser had not been effectively communicated to some clients, therefore where problems did arise, particularly delays in benefits, it was common for clients to deal directly with the other involved agencies rather than approach their Personal Adviser for help. On a few occasions clients had understood that continuity of service was on offer and made full and effective use of their Personal Adviser to liaise with other involved agencies when delays in processing occurred.

One respondent experienced delays and confusion with his multiple claim for Income Support, Incapacity, Housing and Council Tax benefits, he tried to resolve them by dealing with the respective agencies directly but to no avail, involving his Personal Adviser relieved the stress:

‘Even though we’d been up to the actual DSS office, we still got dealt with better going back to the ONE, they sorted it out. If you talk to them through the ONE you get action. If you go up there as an individual and try to talk to them face to face about the problem you don’t get no response. The Incapacity people failed us miserably, Income Support let us down totally, the Council nearly sent me over the edge, I would have gone insane without the ONE team and I think my wife would have done as well.’

(Basic Model, sick or disabled, male, age 51)

Staff felt the basic principle of dealing with benefits and work-related advice in the same location was achieved. However, there was almost universal recognition that continuity of service with the same Adviser was generally unachievable. The Case Studies and Staff research (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) suggests this should not necessarily be interpreted negatively. Rather, it is suggested that discontinuity can be tantamount to flexibility. It is argued that Advisers work hard to satisfy clients’ needs by ensuring efficiency. Hence, it is often pragmatic decision-making that leads to clients seeing the first available Adviser, rather than their ‘Personal’ Adviser. However, there was still a commitment to delivering continuity of service where possible in many sites.

Many clients in the sample did not object to discontinuity of service providing the Adviser they saw was knowledgeable about their particular case. There was evidence of Advisers devoting time to familiarising
themselves with clients that were not specifically assigned to their caseload. The diligence and commitment some Advisers demonstrated was widely acknowledged and well received. Others would rather have received a less efficient service and maintained contact with a single Adviser, this was particularly the case for clients in complex or sensitive situations.

2.6 Office environment

Respondents’ perceptions of ONE offices were generally positive. In most cases clients felt the offices were in reasonably central locations, such as on major high streets or near main bus stations, although some clients felt clearer sign posting would have been helpful. There were very few problems with access overall, although often ONE offices were on an upper level which posed some difficulty to certain client groups, in particular lone parents with pushchairs, and sick or disabled clients with mobility problems.

Most respondents with prior experiences of going to either Jobcentres, Benefit Agencies or Local Authority buildings found ONE offices to offer distinct advantages in terms of the decor, ambience and cleanliness. Whilst the open plan offices were generally well received by the respondents in our sample, concerns were raised about the lack of privacy. Some clients felt that discussing their personal circumstances in such an open environment made them feel uncomfortable and inhibited, a number of respondents stated that they had not made full use of their Personal Adviser meeting because they would have preferred more privacy. Very few clients were told by their Personal Adviser that private rooms were available, some felt aggrieved when they realised such a facility might have been available. Lone parents in our study were particularly concerned about privacy, many found discussing issues surrounding the Child Support Agency (CSA) and absent fathers highly embarrassing. The following case studies outline markedly different opinions about the office environment:

**Case study 7**

The client was studying a part-time degree course when she participated in the research. Her husband had recently died, leaving her solely responsible for their nine-year-old daughter.

Previously the respondent worked as an accountant but stopped work when she had her daughter and did not return as she was planning to have more children. She first claimed Income Support when her partner died, at the time of the study she was claiming Income Support during the University holidays.
She made contact with ONE via the Benefits Agency who sent her forms to complete and then contacted her to arrange an appointment. The respondent did not attend a Start-up interview prior to her Personal Adviser interview and no information regarding the nature or purpose of the Personal Adviser meeting was provided. The respondent ‘had no idea’ why she was attending the Personal Adviser interview and assumed it was a method to check that she was a genuine applicant. The lack of information provided meant she failed to take the benefit claim form with her to the interview and as a consequence the benefit claim was delayed.

The ONE Advisers were described as ‘insensitive’ not only did they laugh at the respondent when she did not bring her form, but apparently asked ‘stupid questions’. The respondent objected to the service she received and found questions about her bereavement ‘inappropriate’.

“They come across to start with, as being very nice, they were very pleasant, they were very well turned and they started making stupid comments. They told me how lucky I was that he’d died, they were really so insensitive that it annoyed me at the time and I just didn’t think that they ought to be able to say things without actually thinking about what they were saying and the position they were getting the person in.”

The Adviser did not offer the respondent any help in finding work and the meeting was limited to a discussion about the claim forms. This lack of interest was, according to the respondent, attributed to the fact she would be returning to university and was not seeking permanent work.

Although this case highlights some negative aspects of the delivery of the ONE service, some positive aspects were noted, namely the environment, which was thought to compare favourably to the DSS/ Benefits Agency offices she had previously attended.

The respondent thought the environment was a vast improvement. She suggested the décor of the DSS and Benefits Agency offices was ‘depressing and unclean’ and the environment was made even more impersonal by barriers and screened booths.

“It’s much better than it used to be. I remember going down there just after *** died and it looked like nobody cared, it was all vinyl walls, vinyl floor, falling to pieces, chairs were grotty and there were great big barriers but its much more personal now there aren’t the glass cages that people were sitting in, it’s a more relaxed area.”

Despite a noted improvement in the ONE environment, some concerns regarding the lack of privacy were highlighted.

(Basic Model, lone parent, female, age 34)
Case study 8

The respondent lives with his wife and 17-year-old son and 15-year-old daughter. At the time of the interview he was claiming Incapacity Benefit.

The respondent had worked in engineering for 37 years until he was made redundant. Following his redundancy the respondent became depressed and unable sustain employment. He had been unemployed for eight months, during that time he alternated between different benefits including Incapacity Benefit, Jobseeker’s Allowance and Income Support depending on his health and the advice of his GP.

The respondent first made contact with the ONE service by visiting the local Jobcentre and enquiring at reception. At the initial Start-up interview he was given a full explanation of ONE and was issued with the relevant claim forms. The forms were found to be ‘daunting’ as a result of their complexity and length.

The Personal Adviser meeting was arranged for the following week. The respondent thought the flexibility of the Adviser when arranging the interview was positive as he relied on public transport to travel to the interview. The Adviser was described as ‘efficient’ and ‘polite’: benefit forms were checked and work history discussed. Referral to support services was not mentioned despite the respondent indicating that they had given up work as a result of depression.

The open plan environment of the ONE office ‘inhibited’ the respondent during their interview with the adviser. He felt the office was insufficiently private to ask for specialist advice regarding personal issues, such as his depression, and too open to discuss his concerns freely.

The respondent believed that private facilities should be provided for clients who feel uncomfortable in the open environment and thought it was wrong to expect clients to discuss personal issues in ‘a public area’. Drawing an analogy to the privacy expected at a GP’s surgery he stated:

‘It wouldn’t happen in a doctors surgery would it? You wouldn’t sit in a doctor’s surgery and have people walking round you. You’re sitting in the Jobcentre and you’re telling them personal things yet there are other people sitting by you.’

Despite being able to see the merit of the ONE approach the respondent felt the lack of privacy meant he was unable to take full advantage of the service.

(Basic Model, sick or disabled, male, age 53)
The research with Advisers (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) provided some explanations for the lack of privacy in many sites. In most cases, ONE offices were located in either Benefits Agency, Employment Service or Local Authority sites, and as such there was insufficient room, meaning desks where often too close together thereby minimising the sense of privacy for many clients. Sharing with another agency was also felt to exacerbate the lack of privacy in other ways, particularly where ONE teams were bound by the rules of the host agency and therefore unable to alter the environment significantly, staff were also uncertain whether they could secure private interview rooms. Therefore, Advisers resisted promoting the availability of private facilities to clients for fear of disappointing them.

2.7 Follow-up contact

This stage is related to structured further contact between the client and the Personal Adviser to review progress and provide support where necessary. In principle, all clients are encouraged to participate in continued contact with their Personal Adviser by instigating further meetings at times believed to be appropriate and useful. Although for some clients further meetings are instigated by the Personal Adviser, particularly where they may be triggered by certain life events or changes in the client’s circumstances that might have an impact on their employability, or their ability to consider work as a realistic option. For example, when a client reaches 18, or when training or education arranged through ONE has ended. In the case of lone parents annual trigger meetings are arranged.

Experiences of follow-up contact varied considerably: whilst some had frequent meetings with their Adviser; others had considerably less contact. The reason many clients had limited experience of prolonged contact was because they were not made aware they could instigate further contact, the purpose and scope of follow-up meetings was clearly not conveyed to all clients that went through ONE. Some had believed that the initial stages of process: Start-up and initial Personal Adviser meeting constituted the entire service.

However, findings from the second phase of research with participants demonstrated that as the pilots progressed follow-up contact became increasingly widespread. There were numerous examples of clients attending further meetings because they needed reassurance about their current situation, and encouragement about their future. Others instigated further contact because their Adviser had seemed sympathetic, caring and apparently more likely to help them overcome barriers than Employment Service Advisers they had seen in the past.

Experience of follow-up contact was sometimes a prolonged and continuous service with the same Adviser. More typically clients received a disjointed service where they saw a number of different Advisers, some of whom seemed to have familiarised themselves with the client’s
background, in which case clients felt indifferent about the lack of continuity as they felt confident in the Adviser. Where Advisers failed to familiarise themselves with a client’s case, feelings of resentment emerged because clients had to recount their story each time they saw a different Adviser, they did not feel they received a sufficiently personal or tailored service. Examples of the range of strategies Adviser teams adopted are outlined below:

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**Case study 9**

Aged 55, the respondent was made redundant in February 2000 after working as a stock controller for 22 years. He was claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance at the time of interview. He wanted to find clerical employment but felt his age was hindering his chances of finding a job.

The respondent had a sound grasp of the service, he saw it as a *job search, support and benefit service*. This understanding had come from information given at the initial Personal Adviser meeting, the Adviser gave him a verbal explanation and leaflets about ONE to take away.

The meeting primarily focused on a discussion of benefit calculation and training opportunities and led to the respondent undertaking a computer training course. The respondent was made fully aware that he would have to attend a meeting following the completion of the training course as he had received a leaflet explaining his rights and responsibilities.

The follow-up meeting was arranged and conducted by his designated Personal Adviser. During the meeting work options were discussed and the client was put forward for several jobs without success. Despite failing to secure employment the respondent had a positive view of ONE, he described it as:

*A pretty good service, so different from the way it used to be, very personal, it makes it so much easier when you see the same person.*

Dealing with the same Adviser was important to the client, he ‘appreciated continuity’ as it was thought to help create a more informal atmosphere and made him feel *at ease*.

(Call Centre, Jobseeker, male, age 55)
Case study 10

The respondent worked in a bakery for six months and was in receipt of Working Families’ Tax Credit, but she found sustaining work and domestic responsibilities difficult and subsequently gave up work. She initially claimed Jobseeker’s Allowance, but then changed to Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit due to a back injury she sustained. Upon recovery she was intending to start work in retail.

The initial Personal Adviser meeting was viewed positively. The respondent liked her Adviser and thought the meeting was tailored to her needs. Training, work and her claim for Jobseeker’s Allowance were discussed and the Adviser carried out a job search for the respondent which she thought presented some ‘relevant jobs’.

Following her back injury the respondent returned to ONE in order to change her claim to Income Support. The respondent did not see her original Personal Adviser at the second meeting, rather she was allocated a new Adviser. This lack of continuity was not viewed as problematic as the new Personal Adviser was perceived to be ‘up to speed’ on her case and was thought to have dealt with her claim effectively.

The respondent stated that she had been treated ‘like a person not just a number’ by both Advisers who were personable and made efforts to tailor the service to her situation.

‘Both of the ladies that I’ve seen have really been friendly you know and I think if someone’s friendly, it’s easier to talk to someone if they’re friendly … It doesn’t matter who you see.’

(Basic Model, Jobseeker, female, age 22)
Case study 11

Following the break-up of her marriage the respondent became primary carer for her four dependent children and was consequentially unable to continue working full-time. As a result of her change in circumstances, the respondent made a claim through ONE for Income Support. At the time of the interview the respondent had secured employment and was in receipt of Working Families’ Tax Credit.

She demonstrated a good understanding of the service as a consequence of the clear explanation and detailed letter supplied by the Start-up Adviser.

‘They actually sent me a letter and explained what the ONE service was for and how it was designed to help or to make things easier, so you were sort of given all your benefits to claim, dealt with all by the one person, you had the one Adviser. It sort of explained what it was all about.’

The initial Personal Adviser meeting was viewed positively. The Adviser was said to have provided ‘comprehensive coverage’ of all possible benefit entitlement; conducted in-work calculations; and supplied the respondent with written information regarding benefits. Additionally, the Personal Adviser referred the respondent to a Lone Parent Adviser for specialist support and advice.

Referral to the Lone Parent Adviser was viewed extremely positively. The respondent developed a close relationship with the Lone Parent Adviser and visited her on numerous occasions. The Adviser was found to be ‘very helpful and extremely knowledgeable’. She offered general support and supplied information and advice on: benefits; local child care provision; children and family services; work opportunities and they also carried out many in-work-calculation for the respondent which was found very helpful when looking for employment.

‘The Lone Parent Advisor went through things like the Working Families’ Tax Credit. How the Child-Care works out and she also brought me a list of childminders as well. Most of the things that I needed to find out about, the girl that I seen down there, the Lone Parent Adviser, she explained everything. She gave me 14 A4 pages of information about how the Working Families’ Tax Credit was worked out, and she broke it all down. I’m thinking, well if I took that job I’m going to get that benefit, so then I could budget. So then I could pick a job that’s going to pay the mortgage and pay the household bills and things like that. That was a lot of help, that was a real lot of help when looking for a job.’

The respondent felt that the Adviser was constantly available to offer support and guidance and believed that the support and ‘excellent’ advice she received enabled her to secure employment.

(Basic Model, lone parent, female, age 35)
There was considerable variation, in terms of extent and perceived value of continued contact. For example, lone parents valued the prolonged service they received through ONE, they felt very well supported by knowledgeable Advisers and support teams which often included a Specialist Adviser. There were many examples of lone parents overcoming barriers to employment, many undertook successful training and were making longer-term plans to re-enter the labour market. However, many respondents in other client groups did not have such positive experiences. Full and comprehensive discussions of the various experiences of follow-up contact, by client group, are provided in later sections of the report (see Chapter 4).
Because clients’ understanding of ONE was so wide ranging and their experiences varied, it was sometimes hard for clients to identify precisely what ONE had intended to provide. Despite having been through the ONE process, it was not clear if respondents were fully aware of the principles upon which ONE was founded. Therefore, in order to ensure that the key principles of ONE were fully understood each participant was given a full explanation of ONE by the researcher and the respondent’s views were sought on each principle in turn, namely:

- single source of help and advice about benefits and work;
- personalised service;
- distinct stages;
- continuity of service;
- private sector involvement; and
- full participation, mandatory trigger meetings and sanctions.

The ‘one-stop shop’ approach, to claiming benefits and accessing advice and guidance on employment-related issues, was explained. Respondents were enthusiastic about the idea of being able to claim several benefits and deal with all aspects of their claim in a single location. They felt that such an approach should offer advantages over alternative ways of putting in a claim, and there was a widely-held belief that the service would be more convenient and efficient. However, some clients felt there was a danger that the process may become bureaucratic, whilst others raised concerns about data protection issues. A number of respondents were sceptical that a single service could effectively deal comprehensively with all benefit, employment, training and specialist needs; they feared that resources may become stretched.

The observational case studies and depth interviews with Advisers (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) reveal doubts about the plausibility of a single Adviser effectively catering for the needs of a broad range of clients with different and often challenging needs. Staff shared the views expressed by clients about the perceived inadequacy of resources to effectively provide a fully-integrated service through a single gateway. As such, staff developed a number of ways to meet the demand of clients, including a team-based approach, which included drawing heavily upon the expertise and skills of Benefits Experts, Disability Employment Advisers and Lone Parent Advisers at the later stages of ONE. Although internal referral to these experts was working well, some sites found there were inadequate numbers of specialists to ensure clients’ problems were efficiently addressed, many lone parents had to wait a number of weeks for a meeting with a specialist Adviser.
3.2 A personalised service

Respondents were asked for their views on the principle of being allocated a Personal Adviser who would assist them with their benefit claim, provide advice and guidance on employment opportunities, or refer them to appropriate training or specialist services when appropriate. Respondents were very positive about the idea in principle, they felt that dealing exclusively with one Adviser would allow them to build rapport and talk freely about their circumstances. Many felt that dealing with one Adviser would provide continuity and prevent them having to duplicate their story each time they accessed the service. However, some clients feared that the continuity of service offered by dealing with a single Personal Adviser might be lost if the Personal Adviser was absent or left their post. Others raised concerns about the possibility of a personality clash between a client and their Personal Adviser which might inhibit them from making full and effective use of the service. Many clients were sceptical that Advisers, taking a generalist approach to the needs of all client groups, could adequately cater for the specialist needs of some clients.

The research with Advisers (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) sought their views on appropriateness of acting as single point of contact. It was clear that there were differences between Advisers who came from different agency backgrounds, some felt more able to deal with certain client groups than others. It was noted that staff who felt able to deal with the full range of clients tended to have Benefits Agency backgrounds as they had previous experience of dealing with non-JSA clients. Following full participation it tended to be Advisers with Employment Service backgrounds who were less confident when dealing with the full range of clients, particularly carers and the recently bereaved. A number of Advisers felt additional support should have been available to them when addressing the needs of clients in more sensitive situations. Their uncertainty and lack of knowledge about different client groups was largely attributed to a lack of appropriate training.

Some clients, when discussing their Personal Adviser did, in fact, feel they had built trusting relationships with them. These clients felt if they needed to talk to someone, about a change in circumstances or employment ideas, their Personal Adviser would be there to offer the appropriate degree of support. As one respondent explained:

‘I spoke about my situation and it was like the first time I felt completely at ease to discuss my personal situation without having to hold back anything. I talked to her really privately, on a personal level, it was as if she picked certain things out of my character or what I talked about, and I do feel I could phone that lady anytime and talk to her.’

(Basic Model, lone parent, female, age 22)

However, not all respondents had such positive experiences with their Personal Adviser. There were a number of cases where discussion related to employment opportunities or referral had not been mentioned by the
client’s Personal Adviser, and cases where it was discussed but had not materialised therefore leaving a small number of clients disappointed and disillusioned with ONE and unlikely to return for further advice on training or support.

As noted elsewhere in this report, the staff research (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) revealed there was generally inadequate referral to training or support because Advisers had lacked an understanding and knowledge of local provision.

A frustrated Jobseeker who had not received a comprehensive discussion about either employment or training opportunities available to him explained:

‘If someone had just sat down with me for half an hour. It was obvious that I just needed time to get a job so it would have been nice for someone to say well this is the best way…they could tell me about training courses or whatever. But they don’t tell you anything do they? They could just tell you about it all but they don’t, they are not helpful!’

(Basic Model, Jobseeker, male, age 23)

3.3 Distinction between the initial stages of ONE process

Views were also sought about the distinction between Start-up and the Personal Adviser meeting. Generally respondents felt that separating the two stages was sound in principle as many felt it should allow the largely administrative side of claiming to be dealt with at the outset, thereby allowing the Personal Adviser to comprehensively address each client’s particular needs during the meeting. However, some respondents felt that the two stages should be combined to achieve greater efficiency. These clients felt that returning to the ONE office on two separate occasions was costly and inconvenient.

For this reason, the idea of the Call Centre variant was favoured by many respondents. The Call Centre variant in principle was also viewed positively by respondents because they perceived it to offer greater privacy than attending Start-up in person.

Interviews with, and observations of, Advisers (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) however revealed that in general they believed the two-staged process of Start-up and then an initial Personal Adviser meeting proved problematic to many clients. Advisers felt clients needed greater efficiency, particularly where clients were in dire financial predicaments.

3.4 Ongoing help and support

When asked for their opinions on the principle of prolonged, continuous and structured contact with the ONE service there was overwhelming support. Clients generally believed caseload contact would enable the full range of clients to reap the advantages of tailored support. It was felt that clients would be assisted in the short-term by overcoming immediate financial concerns. It was felt that the more job-ready clients could be helped to re-enter the labour market quite promptly with the help and
advice of their Personal Adviser. Meantime, it was felt Advisers could help those clients with significant barriers to labour market participation by identifying suitable training courses or referral to support services, and then monitor their progress, and offer further advice and support as appropriate.

In general, experiences of caseload and the principle of continuity deviated from the intended model. The short-term objective of overcoming immediate financial concerns was broadly addressed, however, the longer-term aims of caseload were not so effectively met. Findings from this study showed that it tended to be the most job-ready clients that were caseloaded. These clients were assisted in a number of ways including telephone calls to notify them of potential job vacancies, a series of meetings to conduct job searches and short-term deferral to agencies that could assist clients in improving their CVs and interview techniques. However, for the less job-ready clients discussions about ways they might overcome barriers to employment or referral to accredited training did not occur.

Research with Advisers (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) provides evidence to suggest that they felt unable to caseload for several reasons, partly some Advisers felt they lacked the necessary skills and experience to deal effectively with sensitive cases, and as such made decisions to help those clients with the least barriers. There was also widespread concern that ONE sites lacked the necessary resources to help those in the greatest need and it took quite some time for the referral process to improve. There was also evidence from the case studies to suggest targets from the home agencies meant staff implicitly worked to placement targets and therefore focused more intently on assisting more job-ready clients rather than the harder to reach.

However, there were many positive experiences of caseload. Overall, lone parents’ experiences of caseload were the most positive of any of the client groups included in the study. There was evidence of in-depth discussions about their plans for the future, Advisers also assisted lone parents by helping them to identify and then devise strategies to overcome both short- and long-term barriers to employment. For further discussion of lone parents’ experiences of caseload see Section 4.2.

Although it was clearly difficult for respondents to envisage the ways in which Private and Voluntary Sector involvement might take shape, many were able to give their opinions on the idea in principle. Some felt that the involvement of private companies would ensure greater efficiency because staff would be more accountable to profit making organisations. There was also a belief that such a model would focus more intently on developing the customer care skills of its staff.

3.5 Private and Voluntary Sector involvement in the delivery of ONE
However, a number of concerns were raised by respondents about a public/private partnership. Some were ideologically opposed and questioned the motives of private sector involvement in the state benefit system, believing their involvement amounted to little more than an opportunity to ‘make profit out of other people’s misfortunes.’ Others were concerned about the confidentiality of client records, fearing they may be open to abuse by private companies.

Very few respondents in our sample were aware that the initial Personal Adviser meeting they had attended was compulsory. It is interesting to note that a number of the non-participants in phase one of the delivery evaluation were not aware that meetings at that time were in fact voluntary (see Cotton, et al. 2000). Therefore, researchers gave respondents a comprehensive explanation about what full participation meant for clients participating in ONE, emphasising that failure to attend a meeting would result in a claim for benefit not being processed.

There was overwhelming support for full participation in principle. Clients believed that having to attend a Personal Adviser meeting could provide a welcome opportunity for clients to discuss their personal circumstances, ensure they were claiming the full range of benefits to which they were entitled and discuss employment opportunities available. Many felt it would provide motivation to certain client groups, especially those who had been unemployed for a long time, a group that might need additional support and guidance to find suitable employment. Many felt that having to attend a meeting face-to-face had the potential for reducing fraudulent claims, believing non-genuine clients ‘would find it harder to lie to their face than on the claim forms’.

However, a number of concerns were raised about the flexibility ONE staff might need to exercise when requesting certain client groups go through ONE. Some feared that unreasonable demands might be placed upon lone parents, clients incapacitated by illness, clients with caring responsibilities and widows. A number of respondents shared the view that a large degree of discretion should be exercised by the ONE service to accommodate the range of unique difficulties each of the aforementioned groups might face. For example, lone parents could be restricted to attending meetings at specific times of day dependent on childcare arrangements, in which case ONE should take care to offer appropriate appointment times. Likewise respondents felt carers should be flexibly dealt with because their schedules are often determined by the needs of the dependants in their care. Concerns about the physical capability of sick or disabled clients to attend meetings were frequently raised. A number of respondents felt that the expectation for recently bereaved widows to attend a Personal Adviser meeting was both untimely and insensitive.

3.6 Full participation, and mandatory trigger meetings
Many respondents believed that either short-term deferral or home visits were the most effective ways of catering for clients for whom attendance might prove problematic or untimely. Research with Advisers revealed that there was greater use of deferral as the pilot progressed. In the earlier stages Advisers had apparently been uncertain when it was acceptable to defer meetings because of a lack of steadfast rules and pressure from the ONE management team to curtail the numbers of deferrals.\(^8\) However, the last phase of staff research provides evidence to suggest that Advisers had exercised greater discretion and clients suffering from short-term incapacities and widows were not expected to attend meetings.

Most views expressed by clients concerning the sanctions underlying full participation were broadly similar to those held about full participation. Clients felt that sanctions were fair in principle. Many respondents felt it was unreasonable for clients to expect to get ‘something for nothing’ and likened the obligation of attending meetings to that of an employee’s loyalty to their employer. Respondents were concerned that ONE staff should exercise considerable discretion with certain clients and take full account of each person’s unique circumstance before imposing sanctions.

Similar views to those about full participation were expressed regarding mandatory meetings triggered by life events. Clients generally believed that meetings following a change in circumstances would be beneficial to clients, enabling them to discuss the implications of their life change with an Adviser and an opportunity to devise suitable strategies to move forward. However, many felt that there were occasions when the mandatory nature of the meetings should be carefully translated to clients. For example, clients whose caring responsibilities cease were believed to be most likely grieving the death of a relative or in a delicate emotional state if the dependant previously in their charge had moved to residential care. Most clients believed such a change in circumstance should be sensitively handled by Advisers, by either providing home visits or by exercising a large degree of flexibility in terms of the timing of a meeting.

However, research with staff (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) suggests there was insufficient time available to arrange mandatory meetings and staff reportedly felt uncomfortable with the idea of conducting mandatory meetings with non-JSA clients, other than at three- and then regular six-monthly meetings with Jobseekers. Findings from phase two of the client research suggests that there was in fact quite a degree of follow-up contact but in most cases, although not all, contact was instigated by the client rather than the Adviser.

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\(^8\) As the pilots progressed reforms were made to the deferral policy ONE sites used. At the outset staff were encouraged to ensure there was a minimum of 15% deferrals. This was later relaxed and, therefore, enabled Advisers to use a greater degree of discretion about which individuals should have their meetings deferred.
Possible explanations for this anomaly lie in Advisers' interpretations of what was meant by ‘caseload’. Whilst ‘caseload’ was thought to represent a flexible way for Advisers to help clients focus on gaining employment, beyond that there was very little consensus among Advisers about how to deliver ‘caseload’ in practice. However, there was widespread disappointment among Advisers about the inability to work in a sustained way with a set number of both JSA, and non-JSA clients to help them overcome barriers to employment (for further discussion see Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002).
There were a number of significant differences between the client groups involved in the research. The expectations of the different client groups varied for a number of reasons. Some had accessed the benefit system for the sole reason of securing benefits, while others were hoping to find employment or access advice on ways to overcome personal barriers to work. A large number of clients had experienced past Government back-to-work initiatives prior to their experience with ONE and were therefore able to draw comparisons. For others ONE was their first encounter with the benefit system and Employment Advisers.

Respondents’ experiences of ONE are best summarised by considering the way in which the service was received by the different categories of client. Therefore the experiences of Jobseekers, lone parents, sick or disabled clients, carers and widows are reviewed in turn.

For clients in our sample who were claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance, and therefore technically available to actively seek employment, views of ONE were often dependent upon prior experiences of employment initiatives such as the various New Deal initiatives. The concept of ONE and the key principles, upon which it is founded, as discussed elsewhere in this report, were generally well received.

A number of respondents in this client group were unable to identify significant differences between their past experiences with other initiatives and their most recent experience with ONE. Where respondents did draw comparisons they felt past experiences were more structured and proactive in finding them work. As one respondent explained:

‘When I signed on in the past I was on New Deal, they asked me what I wanted to do, what kind of work I wanted to get, so I went through New Deal to get a qualification from college so I could get a career in painting and decorating...now with this ONE thing it seems like you have to ask them to do job searches for you, although it’s usually been pretty good, they always seem so busy so if you did want to ask questions you’d only be waiting longer.’

(Call Centre, Jobseeker, male, age 26)

However, some respondents reported feeling pressured in the past, into taking inappropriate positions by their employment Advisers, and some felt their personal needs had not been understood or addressed, and in this respect ONE compared favourably.
Many clients felt their ONE Adviser had approached their needs more empathetically than other Advisers had in the past. Some believed their Adviser had listened to their preferences and had gone to great lengths to find them suitable employment. Many recognised the success of jobsearches, and/or allocation to appropriate and accredited training was often beyond the control of their Personal Adviser, and more likely to be a consequence of a lack of opportunities in the local labour market.

There were a number of examples where clients felt their Personal Adviser had ‘gone above and beyond the call of duty’ to assist them in their search for employment.

Conversely, a small number of Jobseekers in our sample had negative experiences with their Personal Adviser. This was especially true for Jobseekers that attended meetings in rural offices. These clients often had histories of attending their local Jobcentre to sign on, and had attended regular fortnightly meetings with Employment Service Advisers, a number of whom had taken on roles as ONE Advisers. This situation reportedly left clients feeling confused because they were unable to identify how the service had altered. One respondent who had a long history of signing on at his local Jobcentre explained his confusion:

‘It was the same woman I’d been seeing all along...she didn’t tell me nothing about this ONE thing, to me it was the same as the meetings I have every other Tuesday.’

(Call Centre, Jobseeker, male, age 24)

In the larger town and city sites, the distinction between ONE and its forerunners was more obvious to Jobseekers because they attended meetings with Advisers they had not seen before, and for this reason, expectations for a substantively different service existed. These clients were appreciative of the opportunity to deal with a new Adviser, who generally seemed to take a non-judgemental approach to their work history, personal circumstances and in most cases, offered them sensitive honest advice. This was particularly true in the case of ex-offenders, as one Jobseeker who had found it difficult to convince prospective employers to take him on explained:

‘Basically the only way around it is for me to be honest and when I go and have an interview with an employer I will tell them my background, say to them: ‘This is what I was, if you give me a chance I can prove myself.’ And my Adviser agreed with me and basically was sensible, she didn’t bullshit me, she didn’t say well maybe you could do this or that...she did come across a lot better than any of the others you know New Deal or Jobcentre Advisers, she sort of knocked it down to personal terms, she was honest with me and treated me as person not a criminal.’

(PVS, Jobseeker, male, age 26)
Despite the obvious work focus to initial meetings between Jobseekers and their Personal Advisers, some felt the balance of discussion had been slightly skewed towards benefit-related matters. Perhaps for this reason a number of respondents felt there was insufficient time to deal comprehensively with longer-term plans. Most felt their short-term needs had been addressed in terms of resolving financial difficulties and doing immediate job searches.

However, Jobseekers felt longer-term considerations, such as referral to relevant training courses with recognisable qualifications, were often not addressed. A number of Jobseekers had clear ideas about the type of training they felt would be valuable to them to ensure they were better equipped for well paid jobs, although many discussed their preferences with their Personal Adviser they were informed that local provision did not exist.

However, research with Advisers (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) suggested that one of the most positive aspects of ONE in their opinion had been the discretion afforded to staff to refer clients to training immediately, rather than waiting six months. Other findings from the research with staff point to initial confusion about early referral and therefore may explain why many clients were not immediately notified of training provision. Similarly, in the early stages of the pilot, Advisers lacked sufficient knowledge of training provision available in the local area, this may explain why inappropriate referrals were made.

One respondent with a clear interest in Information Technology had conducted some preliminary investigations of his own about the most widely recognised qualifications available in his local area and sought further advice from his Personal Adviser about referral to such courses, as he explained:

‘I wanted to learn I.T. - get qualifications - I wanted training, I had experience, I wanted qualifications to prove I could do what I could do - because nobody will employ me without the qualifications...but they don’t give you clear advice about where you stand with what course...I’d been told by the left hand to go on the course and told by the right hand that it’s not a Government course so I won’t get the £10, that it’s not work based and that I shouldn’t go on it, that I should forget it and get a job.’

(Basic Model, Jobseeker, male, age 40)

After gentle probing about arrangements for further contact between the clients and their Personal Adviser, it became apparent that many had formulated a personalised action plan.

For those Jobseekers who had experienced other Government initiatives the notion of developing a structured strategy towards finding employment was familiar to them, as such strong views were not expressed.
In most cases clients were given contact details and invited to instigate further contact with their Personal Adviser if they felt it could be of benefit to them. A large number of Jobseekers reported having been given contact details of Employment Direct, which many made use of. A number of respondents reported identifying several possible vacancies from job searches conducted by their Personal Adviser, and from Employment Direct, although the outcome of their application was unknown at the time of this research.

A small proportion of respondents in this client group did not feel they were in a position to seek employment despite being categorised as Jobseekers. For example, clients who worked for temping agencies and experienced short periods of unemployment, but were intending to take work again as soon as an agency arranged another short-term contract. Also school support staff, often only employed during term time, needed short-term financial assistance from the benefit system for the lengthy school holidays when their own children required care.

Clients in these, and similar, predicaments found ONE quite frustrating. They generally found the work-focus meeting irrelevant to their personal circumstances as they were not looking to change their current employment situation. They found the staged claiming process inconvenient and inefficient, some reported waiting several weeks for their benefits to come through only to find that they were not eligible, but they had been informed to the contrary by their Personal Adviser. These clients felt that their Personal Adviser had failed to recognise their circumstances fully and gave them inaccurate advice and false hope that they were entitled to benefit.

Again the staff research (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) goes some way to shed light on the reasons some Jobseekers felt their circumstances had not been fully acknowledged. Observations of meetings revealed only a brief discussion ensued regarding work preferences, and barriers to taking employment, clients were generally not encouraged to discuss work in any depth and were not probed on their work aspirations or experiences. Clients were generally deemed ready for work if they did not have medical problems. Hence, Jobseekers were treated as a homogenous group and those who deviated from the norm were inadequately catered for.

4.1.3 Further contact

In most cases Jobseekers reported attending further meetings fairly infrequently. In fact, most had only returned to ONE to attend the mandatory meetings after 13 weeks, 26 weeks and then at regular six-monthly intervals. Although many had understood they could instigate further contact most chose not to because they saw an Employment Service Adviser fortnightly when they signed on, during which time job searches were usually conducted. Many, therefore, felt uncertain whether ONE Advisers could offer support and guidance above and beyond that already provided by Jobcentre staff. A view shared by a number of
respondents was voiced by this Jobseeker who had been unemployed for several months. Following his initial Personal Adviser meeting he had only attended one other meeting which was mandatory because he had been unemployed for 13 weeks:

‘I suppose if I had any problems with my benefits I could phone and ask for an appointment but I’ve not been in a position that I really needed to go and see the same girl, so I just go in every two weeks and sign that I’m unemployed.’

(Basic Model, Jobseeker, male, age 55)

However, there were a number of Jobseekers who believed ONE could offer greater support and guidance than Employment Service Advisers. The initial and mandatory review meetings clients had with their Personal Adviser had reportedly been more thorough: as well as conducting job searches the ONE Advisers had discussed their employment preferences and the possibility of training – issues rarely addressed by Employment Service Advisers. This group felt the ONE service should require Jobseekers to attend monthly meetings so that progress could be monitored and alternative ideas could be discussed. As one respondent with previous experience of claiming JSA explained:

‘In the ONE they seem to be more helpful than the Jobcentre, they actually seemed to be more in-depth with everything than the Jobcentre are, they seem to be a lot less judgmental. It wouldn’t bother me having to go like once a month to them, like I say to be updated and anything new what’s come about, jobs and that, then we can discuss it like.’

(Basic Model, Jobseeker, male, age 25)

However, there were a number of Jobseekers in the sample who had not understood that they could instigate contact with their Adviser to seek advice and guidance on overcoming barriers and identifying suitable employment. This feature of the service had evidently not been effectively communicated to all clients. One of the older Jobseekers in the sample, who had been unemployed for a considerable length of time, had clearly not been informed that he could arrange appointments with his Adviser:

‘I mean it would be handy if you could have an Adviser who you could go and see at odd times, you know, if you’ve got any questions or ideas about work you might want to talk over, it would be handy for something like that.’

(PVS, Jobseeker, male, age 58)

4.1.4 Continuity of service

Some of the more job-ready clients in this group had been requested to attend regular meetings with their Adviser, in some cases fortnightly meetings were arranged to coincide with signing on, or monthly meetings in other cases. Unsurprisingly, subsequent meetings tended to be entirely work-focused. Advisers offered suggestions on ways in which clients might update and improve their CVs, suggested they attend meetings at the Careers Advisory Service, and conducted job searches with them.
On several occasions Advisers phoned prospective employers on behalf of the client which was very well received.

No patterns emerged relating to the frequency of contact by either model, area or site, rather it appears that the extent of Adviser-instigated contact a Jobseeker had, was attributable to caseload decisions made by individual Advisers.

However, it was very rare for Jobseekers in our sample to see the same Adviser more than once. Reasons for this lack of continuity were unknown to many clients in the sample although several had been informed that Advisers had either left the service or were away due to illness.

Those clients who had been provided with comprehensive explanations of the service, at the outset, were expecting to have continued and prolonged contact with specifically assigned Advisers, when they failed to receive this they were predictably disappointed. Meanwhile, those who received no explanation of the service did not expect continuity of service, and were therefore indifferent to the lack of continuity they received.

When probed for views on the principle of continuity some clients felt more let down than others. Clients with complex, sensitive or embarrassing personal circumstances felt particularly aggrieved at having to explain their situation afresh each time they saw a different Adviser.

Others in the sample however, were not concerned by the lack of continuity, especially where they felt each Adviser they saw had appeared to familiarise themselves with their case prior to meeting them. Many clients described the way in which Advisers seemed to be aware of their situation, circumstances and preferences, this impressed many who assumed there must be good communication within the ONE team and a genuine commitment to helping clients by providing a personalised service. Where clients felt their case was straight forward, seeing different Advisers did not prove problematic, especially when the Advisers had seemed capable and confident in their role.

Where clients had maintained contact with the same Adviser throughout views were mixed about the service received. Some felt that continuity of service provided the opportunity to build a useful relationship with an Adviser and thereby ensure maximum returns from the meetings. One client who found himself unemployed from his managerial profession following the sudden death of his wife, and subsequent childcare obligations to his young daughters, found the relationship he built with his Adviser had been invaluable in getting him back to work:
‘It [ONE] is a step to help, and it helps people keep their dignity in difficult times, my Adviser was really important. You are going to make more progress with an Adviser on board, you need to relate to your Adviser and have a common understanding of each other, you’ll be honest and open and trust can be built.’

(Basic Model, Jobseeker, male, age 57)

Meantime, other Jobseekers in the sample did not find their experiences of continued contact with an assigned Adviser so positive. Another respondent, also from a professional background and a similar age to the man above, attended regular monthly meetings with his assigned Adviser, but he was not as enthused by the service he received. Although his Adviser had sought to direct the client towards jobs he felt were suitable, the client did not share his views, primarily because he considered them too poorly paid. This client considered himself job-ready and interpreted the support and guidance offered by his Adviser as largely inappropriate and unhelpful. This respondent felt his Adviser had identified his most significant barrier to employment but had failed to help him overcome it:

‘I mean they understand my problem…it’s age, and they know I’ve sent all these job applications off but all they do is send me on courses and give me job applications that are beneath me. And then my Personal Adviser presses his buttons and does more searches to try and find something else, but I just don’t think they’re geared up to help me.’

(Call Centre, Jobseeker, male, age 58)

Research conducted with Advisers (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) substantiated the views expressed by clients that had histories of working in professional sectors prior to unemployment. Advisers were generally felt to lack the necessary skills to cater effectively for more skilled Jobseekers. This was particularly evident during job searches and identification of potential training courses. The observational case studies revealed, it was the more confident and experienced Advisers that had effectively met the needs of the more skilled clients in this group.

The findings from the participant research suggest that overall the Jobseekers in the sample appreciated the help and advice available to them, and although there were identifiable advantages to continuity of service it was not essential to see the same Adviser. Rather, what was important to clients was an Adviser who was knowledgeable of their circumstances and capable of offering a tailored and practical approach to their particular circumstances. Areas in which Jobseekers felt the ONE service excelled included the manner in which Advisers dealt with them. Most made reference to the ‘polite’, ‘courteous’, ‘helpful’, ‘kind’, ‘relaxed’ and ‘friendly’ way in which Advisers conducted themselves. They were also felt to be generally accommodating and flexible by agreeing to call clients on their mobiles, moving appointment times and seeing clients unannounced.
However, many of the Jobseekers interviewed suspected ONE was under resourced and hence struggling to deliver the most tailored and appropriate continued support to its clients. This view was most strongly expressed when discussing the training provision available to Jobseekers going through ONE.

### 4.1.5 Referral

A number of respondents reported being sent on useful, yet basic, courses which focused on interviewing techniques and ways of improving their CVs. However, training leading to accreditation seemed to be rarely available to clients interviewed. Many clients expressed a strong interest in enrolling on vocational courses with recognisable qualifications, but they felt Advisers often dismissed the idea out of hand.

Jobseekers with prior experience of Government back-to-work schemes, in particular New Deal for Young People and New Deal for 25 Plus, were disappointed with the training on offer through ONE, claiming courses were too basic and likely to be of little value when searching for employment. For example, one respondent had completed levels one and two of an NVQ Fashion Design course before she became ill. She changed from JSA to Income Support whilst ill, when she had recovered she went back onto JSA and was anticipating starting Level 3 of the NVQ course. However, she was unable to resume her studies through ONE, as she explained:

> ‘The ONE thing tries to find you training and help you prepare for work, but they don’t seem to have as many facilities as the New Deal. I think on the ONE thing they can put you onto training schemes for a couple of months, whereas on New Deal they will put you in college for a year. But I want to get back into college now, but I have to be signing on for six months before they’ll put me back on the right course.’

(Basic Model, Jobseeker, female, 23)

### Referral to New Deal initiatives

Some other younger clients in the sample had not discussed training at any point with their Advisers. A number suspected their Adviser was waiting until a time when they could be ‘handed-off’ to an appropriate New Deal programme, which was considered better equipped to provide suitable and accredited training. Meantime, several of the older clients seemed to suspect Advisers were reluctant to either discuss or refer them to training because it was uneconomical to send clients nearing retirement on training courses. There were several cases of clients over 50 enquiring about New Deal for 50 Plus from advertising they had seen, but they were informed they were not eligible for it at this stage.

Clients seemingly eligible for New Deal 18-24, New Deal 25 Plus and New Deal 50 Plus were quite frustrated that they would have to endure six consecutive months of unemployment before they could access structured and accredited training. It seems that none of the Jobseekers...
included in our sample experienced an early hand-off to New Deal programmes. An older Jobseeker in the sample felt ONE was unlikely to help him find relevant training to upgrade his skills, he had worked as a stock controller for 22 years for a very antiquated employer who had a dislike of modern technology. The client had wanted to access I.T. training but felt that courses available through ONE were too basic. He believed referral to New Deal could provide structured and accredited training, and proactive support to help him back to work. However, having never experienced unemployment, the client felt disappointed when his Adviser told him it would be six months until he could go on New Deal for 50 Plus. He explained:

‘ONE made it really comfortable and informal but they seemed like they couldn’t help me much. They looked jobs up on the computer but we talked about me age putting employers off. If I were younger I’d be better on computers, that’d help get me a job but she told me I have to wait six months to go this over 50s deal.’

(Call Centre, Jobseeker, male, age 55)

The staff research (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) provided partial explanations for the limited and in many areas non-existent, early referral to New Deal programmes. Apparently, Advisers were uncertain about the guidelines surrounding referral in general, but with regard to New Deal programmes they apparently lacked any guidance and as a result most Jobseekers were not referred.

There were examples of clients organising training independently of ONE when, after several fruitless discussions with their Adviser they had still failed to secure what they considered to be relevant and useful courses. One respondent, despite approaching Advisers on numerous occasions about the possibility of referral to accredited training, took it upon himself to organise and fund a course at his local college. His decision to arrange training independently of ONE was apparently not very well received:

‘I mean they turned around and said that the fact I had committed myself to these courses means I am not technically available for work, so that interferes with my declaration as far as the Jobseeker’s Agreement goes, so they queried that. But I’m not going to get a decent job without the training, I have no option but to sort it out myself.’

(Basic Model, Jobseeker, male, age 45)

**Labour market referral**

An overwhelming view shared by clients in the sample was that the training available through ONE was inadequate. Many were frustrated by the short-termist approach Advisers seemed to take when discussing training opportunities. Several clients suspected Advisers felt that whilst it was acceptable for them to seek relevant training, they should abandon such aspirations if a job vacancy arose in the interim. Many clients felt
the importance of gaining qualifications, with a view to improving their chances of sustainable employment in the long-term, was frequently overlooked at the expense of the short-term objective of finding (sometimes unsuitable, often poorly paid) employment.

The research conducted with Advisers (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) also acknowledged the apparent preoccupation with short-term solutions to long-term problems. It was generally found that Advisers from Benefits Agency backgrounds wanted to learn more about conducting job searches and identifying job vacancies, whilst Advisers from Employment Service backgrounds wanted to develop skills surrounding benefit claiming and processing. Advisers’ commitment to developing new skills meant longer-term objectives, such as helping unemployed claimants along a strategic path to employment, were largely unmet. It appeared to researchers and clients alike that the longer-term focus was not part of the ONE culture. As such the longer-term employment aspirations of Jobseekers were largely overlooked.

Several respondents outlined their views on the relationship they perceived to exist between ONE and local employers. A belief was shared by some that generally employers are reluctant to use Jobcentres to advertise well paid vacancies. This was also felt to be true of the ONE service, several respondents felt that ONE had a low profile among employers therefore the range and quality of vacancies available to clients were limited. One Jobseeker made a point shared by others:

‘They only have limited jobs because I know a lot of workplaces won’t put their ads into a Jobcentre because they are obviously looking for certain criteria. And I don’t know, maybe employers think that people that are signing on don’t fit that criteria. So I didn’t really have big, big expectations of finding a decent job there.’

(Basic Model, Jobseeker, female, age 21)

The staff research (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) found that relationships with employers were, as clients suspected, limited. ONE was found to have a low profile among employers (see Bunt et al., 2001) and Advisers generally felt few marketing opportunities existed. Some Advisers were upset by the lack of dialogue between the ONE service and employers, whilst others felt it would be inappropriate to ‘tread on the toes’ of the Employment Service.

There were several clients who expressed an interest in ‘job trials’ or work experience opportunities. They envisaged being given the opportunity to discover the skills and aptitudes needed for different types of employment without their benefits being effected or feeling committed to take the job when the period of familiarisation ended. Clients interviewed believed they would be better positioned to judge the likelihood of sustaining new found employment if they had a chance to
experience it first hand. This approach has been taken with a number of lone parents interviewed in this study and proved an invaluable method of firstly identifying, and secondly sustaining viable employment (for further discussion see Section 4.2).

**Internal referral**

Although there were no examples of JSA clients in our sample being referred to work trials, there were numerous successful internal referrals. Some clients experienced difficulties with their health, some were recovering from an illness or disability whilst others had permanent health problems but none were severe enough for them to be classified sick or disabled. For these clients it was likely that their health problem would have implications for the type and extent of the work they are capable of, and also the in-work benefits they might be entitled to. As such there were numerous examples of successful and effective internal referrals to Disability Employment Advisers. Although clients could rarely be seen immediately by the Disability Employment Adviser, they were able to make an appointment and access specialist advice in addition to the support and guidance provided by their Personal Adviser (for further discussion of the Disability Employment Adviser see Section 4.3).

Some clients attended mandatory meetings with an Adviser following a Personal Capability Assessment. For example they were considered in the Personal Capability Assessment to be fit for work and moved to Jobseeker’s Allowance.\(^9\) Whilst some acknowledged the outcome as an accurate reflection of their well being and physical capability, others contested the verdict. Several clients described ways in which their own GP, psychiatrist or physiotherapist had independently diagnosed them unfit for work but their judgement had not been taken into consideration by those conducting the Personal Capability Assessment. This was

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\(^9\) The All Work Test was introduced nationally in 1995 (when Incapacity Benefit replaced IVP) and renamed the Personal Capability Assessment (PCA) in April 2000; there is no difference other than in name. The PCA involves a Medical Services (MS) doctor assessing a client’s eligibility for IB. The MS doctor reviews a questionnaire completed by the claimant regarding their condition/impairment (the IB50), a form submitted by the client’s GP (IB113), and, if necessary, can call them in for a medical examination as well. The MS doctor completes an Incapacity Report on the basis of this evidence and sends this to a Benefits Agency Decision Maker who assesses the claim. A client’s eligibility for Incapacity Benefit is determined by a points scoring system which considers both physical and mental health factors. The Capability Report (CR) is an additional component to the PCA, which is being piloted in ONE areas (New Deal for Disabled People pilots also, though not any more). Here, MS doctors who examine IB claimants as part of the PCA complete a CR in addition to the Incapacity Report. The CR contains work-focused information about what a client may be able to do. MS doctors send the CR to Personal Advisers who are supposed to use it when they hold ‘trigger’ interviews with clients. Decision Makers do not see the CR; it does not have a bearing on IB eligibility.
particularly the case for clients suffering from psychological problems, where they felt such conditions were not measured or taken into account during their assessment. For example a client interviewed in this study suffered with an eating disorder, Anorexia-nervosa, and despite being diagnosed, by her GP as physically too weak to do many types of work, and by her psychiatrist as psychological unfit for others, those conducting the Personal Capability Assessment reached different conclusions. She described her emotional state at discussing her Jobseeker’s Agreement during a meeting with her Adviser following the assessment:

‘I came out of there more upset than when I’d gone in. I just feel she wasn’t listening to half the things I was actually trying to explain, and her biggest interest was getting me back to work, although I’d explained about my eating disorder – which was really hard for me to do – she was trying to find me work I can’t physically do, I just felt the whole thing was upsetting.’

(Basic Model, Jobseeker, female, age 20)

Clients in this and similar circumstances, where there is contention surrounding the outcome of the Personal Capability Assessment, reportedly felt frustrated and angry that they were considered fit for work. These clients were required to sign Jobseeker’s Agreements and demonstrate they were actively seeking employment. In most cases Advisers were praised for the sympathetic way in which they dealt with clients during the mandatory trigger meetings, which follow a Personal Capability Assessment. Overall, clients felt meetings following an assessment were useful and appropriate as it provided the opportunity to discuss the implications of the verdict with a Personal Adviser. However, in general clients were referred by their Adviser to a Disability Employment Adviser, this was viewed favourably because clients felt Disability Employment Advisers were more knowledgeable about the most appropriate strategies available to clients in such situations. One client described her reaction to suggestions the specialist Adviser made about appealing against the verdict in the long-term, and finding suitable work and training in the short-term:

‘She actually listens…she takes the system and the schemes and she actually tries to make it relate to me as a person, she looks at the commitments I have and the situation I’m in and suggests ways I might move forward, so she is really good.’

(PVS, Jobseeker, female, age 31)

It is clear from the findings that internal referral seems to have worked effectively for many Jobseekers. Other Jobseekers in the sample were equally satisfied with the way in which their Personal Advisers related to them. The major criticism of the ONE service among this client group was the lack of training opportunities and other proactive methods, such as job trials available through ONE. Though most attributed these shortcomings to insufficient resources and inflexibility of the system as a whole, rather than skills and abilities of ONE Advisers.
4.1.6 Summary of experience and emergent issues

- Jobseekers found ONE similar to other back-to work initiatives.
- Advisers were seen to approach clients’ circumstances sensitively and demonstrate empathy.
- Initial Personal Adviser meetings were felt to deal effectively with short-term issues (benefits, immediate job searches) at the expense of longer-term considerations (training, support).
- Although clients were informed they could instigate contact they were not adequately informed for what reasons.
- Further contact tended to be mandatory, following 13 and 26 weeks of unemployment.
- Follow-up meetings tended to become more work-focused as the pilot progressed.
- There was evidence of caseloading with the more job-ready clients in the sample.
- In general there was discontinuity of service. However, Jobseekers did not feel contact with several Advisers was problematic, especially where they were seen to have familiarised themselves fully with the client’s history and preferences.
- Training available was considered poor because courses were too basic and often unaccredited.
- There was no evidence of early hand-off to New Deal programmes. Clients felt frustrated at having to experience six consecutive months of unemployment before they could access New Deal programmes.
- Poor relationships with local employers were thought to limit the scope and quality of jobs available to Jobseekers.
- Many clients expressed an interest in ‘work-trials’ or temporary work experience but it was not available to them, despite being available to lone parents.
- Clients with health problems were effectively referred to Disability Employment Advisers, the specialist help was viewed favourably.

4.2 Lone parents

4.2.1 Expectations and awareness

A number of lone parents in our sample expressed feelings of apprehension about the ONE service prior to experiencing it, they feared they might be forced into taking employment. However, none reported feeling pressured during their initial Personal Adviser meeting. In fact, most felt their Personal Advisers had dealt with their needs and concerns sensitively. The majority of respondents in the sample were lone mothers, many felt that because their Personal Adviser was female they were better placed to appreciate a female’s circumstances and discuss solutions lucidly. In cases where the Personal Adviser had been male, respondents felt that their situation was less well understood.

Many clients in this group felt their Personal Advisers demonstrated empathy towards their circumstances. As such, many believed this was the reason meetings were overwhelmingly benefit focused. This group
appreciated the fact that their Personal Advisers had dealt with their claims in the first instance, as many had acute concerns about their financial situation, and by implication, the welfare of their children.

Nevertheless, there was a strong view among lone parents that Personal Advisers had glossed over employment opportunities and referral to training during the initial meeting. For some work and training had not been raised at all, in which case a number of clients came away unaware that ONE encompassed such features.

For those who were aware of the work focus many indicated they would have liked an in-depth discussion about the ways in which they might prepare themselves for returning to the labour market when their childcare responsibilities eased. It may well have been that the Personal Adviser had deemed such a discussion untimely, but a number of clients were in fact already in training that they had arranged independently of ONE. On several occasions the Personal Adviser had not ascertained such information from the client. A view commonly shared among this group was that their Personal Adviser had sought to resolve the short-term difficulties, by approving their benefit claim and putting them at ease, but their longer-term needs had not been addressed.

A number of clients felt that advice about the employment opportunities that were available, and information on how to access training, would have been invaluable. Clients reported their Personal Advisers had calculated in-work benefits in hypothetical scenarios, and whilst some felt encouraged, a greater number, who had tried to balance work and lone parenthood in the past, were dismissive. They were aware that Working Families’ Tax Credit was an option if they decided to work but concerns were raised about the shortage of local childcare provision. Other parents felt they would prefer to entrust the care of their children to family or friends who were not registered childminders and therefore not covered by the Tax Credit. Another group felt that it was their moral duty and expressed a strong preference to care for their children themselves.

A respondent who felt that attempts to help her return to work or access relevant training had not been addressed, expressed her disappointment and hence despondency with the ONE service:

‘They don’t help you in that way. I don’t feel he helped me, no-one up there helped me, it were just a case of taking me forms off me and that’s it...if he’d mentioned anything about training, you know to get me a good job with good pay to be able to support me kids then I’d’ve listened and gone on a training course or whatever...I didn’t feel I got any help at all, I got no encouragement to go back to work. If they’re not willing to help me why should we help ourselves. That’s what they’re there for isn’t it? To help people that are unemployed, to try and get them back to work...if I go back to work now it will be through my own doing and not through them!’

(PVS, lone parent, female, age 37).
It was clear that a number of respondents had not been given accurate explanations about the various features of ONE. Whilst many appreciated the help they received with their claim, a greater number felt disappointed that they hadn’t made extensive use of the service, especially in terms of gathering information about training or receiving advice about options for the future. A lone parent who had received an attentive service was nevertheless disappointed that she had not been fully informed so that she could take advantage of the ONE service in its entirety:

‘You can’t fault the people that work there, they are really friendly and helpful, you’re an individual and not just another in a long line. If there was more information about what it is and what it is offering then it would be a brilliant service.’

(PVS, lone parent, female, age 34)

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the Call Centre variant was particularly well received by this client group in the initial stages of the claiming process. Those who had successfully made use of the innovation found it efficient and convenient. Lone parents who had experienced Start-up face-to-face were asked for their opinion on using Call Centre technology, there was overwhelming support for the idea and many had wished they had been offered the opportunity to do Start-up over the telephone.

4.2.2 Experiences of initial Personal Adviser meetings

Despite some feelings of disappointment about only receiving part of the service, a great many lone parents were impressed with the courteous, generally non-judgemental way in which they had been dealt with. It was widely acknowledged by respondents that their Personal Advisers had undergone customer care training and this was warmly appreciated. One particular respondent, who had negative experiences of claiming benefits before, especially in terms of inattentive, uninformed staff and lengthy waiting times, felt that ONE compared favourably:

‘They have gone on training, you can tell they have had training courses - either customer care or customer services, I remember coming away and talking to my friends and saying I was so impressed by them.

(Basic Model, lone parent, female, age 22)

An overwhelming concern shared by respondents in this group was about the staged process of ONE. For this group in particular, the delays experienced between Start-up and the Personal Adviser meeting caused great anxiety. Lone parents who had claimed benefits in the past via postal means found ONE to be far less efficient and to cause great inconvenience, particularly where Start-up and the initial Personal Adviser meeting were conducted face-to-face in the Basic and PVS models. A respondent voiced her opinion about the distress she felt when her Personal Adviser meeting was arranged. The first available appointment for her was a fortnight after Start-up:
'When you have dependent children you want to get down there and sort it out straight away, you don’t want arrears on your rent and letters through the door saying you owe so much, you want it sorted out there and then, straight away - before the ONE service started you could go to the Income Support and sort it out the day you finished working or perhaps earlier.'

(Call Centre, lone parent, female, age 31)

Despite the obvious problems created by such delays, all respondents appreciated the fact that their meetings were arranged by appointment. They felt that knowing precisely which day, and at what time they had to attend gave them adequate time to prepare themselves and arrange childcare. Some parents did not have the means to arrange care for their children so took them along to the meetings. Where this occurred, respondents had a number of views about taking their children to the ONE office.

4.2.3 Office environment and issues of privacy

There was a general recognition that the environment was a vast improvement upon benefit offices they had anticipated or had attended in the past. Respondents felt, whilst it was not ideal to take their children with them, the offices felt safe and clean, unlike the aggressively charged atmospheres and intimidating seating and waiting arrangements many respondents spoke about when referring to DSS offices. There was some annoyance expressed by lone parents who took babies or toddlers with them when the ONE offices were on upper levels, and whilst many had lifts installed, clients were not made aware of the facility until they had struggled up flights of stairs with prams or pushchairs.

Where respondents had taken their children to their Personal Adviser meeting, there was a general consensus that their capacity to concentrate fully on matters being discussed was impaired. Some suggested that a play area might provide one possible solution, others felt home visits might be more appropriate.

The offices were not always well received, a number of respondents raised issues about the lack of privacy available in the open plan offices. This was particularly the case where discussions ensued about the client’s estranged partner. Lone parents generally felt embarrassed and inhibited when discussing the father of their children. There were a few occasions where clients had clearly stated they did not wish to pursue matters with the Child Support Agency (CSA) by indicating as much on their claim forms, but their Personal Adviser had pressured them into doing so. Many felt unable to justify their reasons because of the way the office was set out. For example, a young mother had recently split from her partner because he was violent towards her; she was claiming benefits because she wanted to escape from him. Clearly pursuing matters with the CSA had made her feel vulnerable but she was unable to clarify the situation with her Personal Adviser because there was insufficient privacy.
Research with staff (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) found Advisers were generally uncomfortable about discussing the CSA with lone parents, many had felt that it was inopportune to discuss such matters during the initial Personal Adviser meeting. However, some had recognised the importance of addressing the financial concerns of lone parents at the earliest point.

Many other clients felt embarrassed when talking about absent fathers, particularly in the smaller regional offices where they could be easily recognised by neighbours. A lone mother who attended a small regional office explained how she felt inhibited discussing each of the absent fathers to her five children during the Personal Adviser meeting which took place shortly after her mother had died:

‘I wasn’t emotionally fit for that meeting...I felt degraded going to the State for money and it wasn’t private, there were no doors, we weren’t in a room on our own and there were people either side of me claiming, I couldn’t speak or say what I wanted to - all I wanted to do was get the conversation over.’

(Call Centre, lone parent, female, age 31)

The Personal Advisers rarely raised the option of a private room with the lone parents in our sample. When their views were sought about such a facility most felt that they should have been made aware that it was available, and many felt they would definitely have made use of it if they had known it was an option. As mentioned elsewhere in the report there were numerous issues constraining the use of private facilities which were often beyond the discretion of individual Advisers (for further discussion see Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002).

A number of respondents included in the first stage of this study were invited to instigate future contact if they felt their Personal Adviser could be of any assistance, but no formal arrangements for subsequent meetings were arranged. In some cases Personal Advisers had promised to call the client in 12 months but often the reason for the call was not made explicit. Processing delays were encountered frequently, particularly Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit. Because clients usually received letters of arrears or eviction notices from the local Council or Local Authority, they dealt with these agencies directly and could not identify any ways in which their Personal Adviser might be able to help.

Opinions about continuity of service for clients through maintaining contact with a single Adviser were sought. Because advice on employment and training had been bypassed during some of the initial Personal Adviser meetings described by lone parents in this sample, and because future contact had not always been arranged, this client group struggled to envisage reasons for maintaining contact with their Personal Adviser. Although some respondents could see, and in fact felt, there were advantages to dealing solely with one Adviser:

4.2.4 Further contact
'I think that’s lovely, because you can get to know them, you get used to them and you can be more open with them and tell them your thoughts and views as well without being embarrassed.'

(Call Centre, lone parent, female, age 38)

During the face-to-face interviews with all participants, researchers provided a full and comprehensive explanation of the aims of ONE, in principle, in order that respondents could describe the extent to which they felt they had received the intended model, and to express their views about ONE in principle. As such, several of the lone parents in our sample after having received an explanation from the researcher about the aims of the service felt they might re-contact their Adviser to access advice and information before their annual review. For example, one lone parent, after being given an explanation about the full service ONE provides, described how she was intending to go back to her Personal Adviser to discuss the implications of setting up a small business from home sometime in the future:

‘At some point in the year I am going to have to go up and talk to him and find out if there is any way they might help and how it will affect my benefits in the future.’

(Call Centre, lone parent, female, age 50)

As the pilots progressed the extent of follow-up contact between lone parents in our sample and their Personal Advisers increased considerably.

4.2.5 Caseload contact

Findings from the second phase of the study with clients revealed that generally the follow-up contact received by the lone parents was extensive and overwhelmingly positive. A great many lone parents in the sample received continuity of service with the Adviser they had been assigned at the outset. This was viewed positively, a lone mother of four children described the merits of dealing with the same Adviser:

‘I wouldn’t have been as open, because she knew about my situation and what I’d been through and she was really nice and I just felt comfortable with her, so I’m glad it was her, you know. It would definitely have made a difference if it had been another Adviser.’

(Call Centre, lone parent, female, age 32)

Like the above respondent, a number of other lone parents interviewed felt the continuity of service was especially important. They believed continuity had enabled their Adviser to fully understand their personal circumstances, and hence assist them in meaningful ways to overcome both short- and long-term barriers to achieving greater independence from benefits.

It was clear that Advisers had effectively communicated the message that contact could be client instigated to many of the lone parents included in the second phase of the study. In fact, in most cases where clients had
seen their Adviser on more than one occasion, the client had usually
instigated the meeting. Advisers had also made clear to clients that they
could phone them if they had any concerns or queries. Lone parents
particularly appreciated the flexibility of using the telephone to contact
their Adviser and there was evidence of this group making extensive use
of this medium. It was especially convenient where childcare
commitments made attending meetings in person problematic. Lone
parents had also followed-up discussions they had face-to-face with their
Adviser with a telephone call to clarify points and ask for more detailed
information.

Many also described ‘courtesy calls’ they received from their Adviser
which some took to be indicative of a very supportive and caring service.
Such calls were apparently informal and friendly but often included a
discussion about job vacancies the Adviser thought might be suitable for
the client. There were mixed views about the appropriateness of such
calls, whilst some felt encouraged and pleased their Adviser was taking
such a proactive role in finding them work, others were offended and
felt their Adviser had not listened to their situation carefully and hence
wrongly assumed they were job-ready. Contrary views were expressed
by clients, below are the opinions of two respondents about the calls
they received from their Advisers:

‘I often hear from him, he’s just so damn helpful. I can’t see him dropping
it and forgetting it. I just honestly see him keeping in touch regularly
because that’s what he does, he phones me to see that I’m satisfied and to
find out if I want to work or whatever, he’s really supportive.’
(Call Centre, lone parent, female, age 33)

‘They just kept phoning me trying to get me to go to interviews, I felt I had
to go or they’d stop my benefits, but I just weren’t ready for work then –
he’d just walked out and left me on my own with three littluns to look after
on my own.’
(PVS, lone parent, female, age 32)

However, there were a number of lone parents in sample who did not
receive continuity of service with the same Adviser. Like respondents in
other client groups with complex or sensitive cases, many expressed
feelings of disappointment and frustration at seeing different Advisers on
separate occasions. Many held the view that it was not possible for a
series of Advisers to have the same degree of awareness and understanding
of each case history, that a single Adviser could provide. As such, many
felt disillusioned with ONE because of the disjointed and impersonal
service they felt they received. One young mother explained the effect
discontinuity had on her views of ONE:
'Because I think instead of swapping and changing the people that you see you should just see that one person. As long as you get on with that person, so you feel more open to like, nip in and ask questions rather than backing off which is what I’ve done now. I’m not going back again unless I have to, the thought of going through my business all over again… no thank you!’

(PVS, lone parent, female, age 21)

This said, there were many examples of clients receiving a team-based approach to their situation. Referral to Lone Parent Advisers appeared to be working exceptionally well in most areas. Of the many clients in our sample who were referred to Lone Parent Advisers, nearly all had positive experiences. In many areas arrangements were made for clients to maintain regular contact with their Personal Adviser and receive additional, although less frequent, support from a Lone Parent Adviser, whilst other ONE sites had made decisions to hand over entire cases to the Lone Parent Advisers. Both approaches were equally well received. One respondent described her views on the way in which her Personal and Lone Parent Advisers worked together to address her needs:

‘The way I think about it is I am an individual and I feel there is genuine concern come out of the ONE service. The attitude towards me was tremendous, it really was, it still is. There was empathy. There’s a team there and the team spirit seemed to be good. They were working with each other, they communicate – they work things through with you, the whole objective is to help you.’

(Call Centre, lone parent, male, age 54)

4.2.6 Specialist Advisers

In general, respondents voiced an immense amount of praise for their Lone Parent Advisers. In particular, they were considered very knowledgeable about the unique difficulties facing the client group and were seen to offer informed constructive advice. The specialist knowledge Lone Parent Advisers conveyed alleviated many fears, and assisted a number of clients to overcome barriers they faced. For example, following a difficult pregnancy and desertion by her partner whilst in hospital, one young mother found herself in temporary accommodation. She felt uncertain about her future and was anxious to secure employment to support herself and her son:

‘I was keen to find out how to get into work so I saw the Lone Parent Adviser and the attitude that came across was: ‘You’ve got loads of problems here, just slow down, work through things slowly, you don’t have to do things instantly.’ I appreciated that because I had created pressure for myself and they actually took the pressure off and allowed me to think things through more clearly.’

(Call Centre, lone parent, female, age 23)

Another respondent described the way her Lone Parent Adviser empowered her to make informed decisions about her future:
‘To be perfectly honest and quite candid about it, I think ONE overall, and especially the girl who dealt with me was brilliant. She showed me every option I had, and ways of changing it to the way I wanted: taking a bit of this and a bit of that, and a bit of the other and structuring things to suit me. So I could do training when I wanted to, nothing was decided for me, I made my own decisions. She showed me how I could do that.’

(Call Centre, lone parent, female, age 33)

It appeared that many lone parents found the specialist Adviser had struck the right balance between being supportive and allowing them the opportunity to make autonomous decisions. There were many examples of clients feeling their Advisers had assessed their circumstances accurately and offered the appropriated degree of assistance. One respondent successfully managed to secure employment to fit around his childcare obligations, he explained the role ONE had played in gaining independence from benefits:

‘I could just drop in any day I wanted to see my Adviser. She gave me the information, so I went around trying to find out about childcare and when I hit a brick wall I went back to ask about working part-time. She gave me a figure and then I could start looking around for jobs, I knew what money I needed to take home to budget. With ONE and the Lone Parent Adviser it was personal, you spoke to the same person each time and they know what sorts of jobs you’re looking for, the hours you need to fit around the kids. What I’m saying is the attitude was positive.’

(Basic Model, lone parent, male, age 35)

However, there were a number of clients in the sample who had not been aware specialist Advisers were a resource available to lone parents. Although most generally believed their Personal Adviser had provided a suitably tailored service there were cases of clients being misinformed, this was particularly the case when inaccurate in-work benefit calculations were made. Others felt their Personal Adviser had failed to appreciate their circumstances as a lone parent. Some felt pressured to take full-time employment, or employment that did not fit around childcare commitments or school hours. When asked for their views on specialist Advisers many felt they would have benefited from the input of a Lone Parent Adviser believing the advice would be better tailored to their needs. One respondent was not aware that Lone Parent Advisers existed, she expressed her views about specialist Advisers:

‘They’d be really good to see because they’d know exactly what you’re going through, what you need to know, what could help most. I think they’d be a good thing.’

(PVS, lone parent, female, age 21)

However, it must be acknowledged that in most cases the in-work benefit calculations Advisers did on the behalf of lone parents seemed accurate and were very well received. Several parents reported feeling encouraged
They believed being in a position to compare a hypothetical situation, where they could work and still claim benefits, enabled them to make informed decisions about the feasibility of taking work and balancing their domestic situation.

The in-work benefit calculations Advisers made, during the second stage of this study, had in fact encouraged a number of clients to take employment. However, many stressed the difficulties they experienced when the Working Families’ Tax Credit had taken a considerable time to come through. Respondents explained that whilst the Tax Credit helps with the cost of childcare, childcare providers generally expect prompt payment for their services. Lone parents described situations where providers refused to continue caring for their children until they received payment. Unfortunately these respondents abandoned their new jobs because they were accruing substantial debts to pay for childcare whilst waiting to receive the Tax Credit. At the time of the research several lone parents in this situation reverted to benefit dependency. They stressed the need for improved and immediate financial in-work support if employment for lone parents is to be sustainable. As one respondent explained:

‘I got myself a little job working in the grocery store down the road, and I was so pleased because it fitted in with the school hours and it was great for us. But it took eleven weeks for the Family Tax Credit thing to come through, by that time I was in debt with the electric, gas, water, Council Tax and the rent. In the end I had to quit the job and go back on full social because it had all taken so long, by the time it came through I was so far behind it has taken until now to get back on my feet.’

(PVS, lone parent, female, age 36)

This was a view echoed by another respondent who also had to give up her employment because working and claiming Working Families’ Tax Credit was not financially viable:

‘I know they’ve brought this scheme out for childcare but I tried to go on it twice, the thing is you’ve got to find the money up front before they’ll give it you. So if you’ve gone from being on benefits to starting a new job how can you find a hundred pounds straight off to pay a childminder before they refund you? You just can’t.’

(PVS, lone parent, female, 22)

Some clients felt ONE should either provide, or refer lone parents who had unsuccessfully sustained employment, to debt counselling. There were several examples of clients taking employment and failing to sustain it because of childcare difficulties. Upon finding themselves unemployed once again they were required to claim benefits, the apparently protracted process of re-applying for benefits meant some found themselves in financial difficulties and would therefore have appreciated constructive financial advice. There was no evidence of referral to debt counselling in this study.
There was a considerable number of lone parents who had taken part-time employment and claimed Working Families' Tax Credit, for some it proved a successful move towards greater independence, but unfortunately for others working part-time and balancing single parenthood proved unsustainable. These clients attended a meeting with an Adviser although none had perceived it as the compulsory trigger meeting which follows the termination of part-time employment. In fact in most cases clients had instigated the contact because of the need to discuss the change in circumstance and potential implications for their benefit entitlement. A number of clients in this small group felt disheartened by their failed attempt to work, although some were offered referral to training and felt that with a greater skills base they might be in a position to take more lucrative employment sometime in the future.

**The value of ‘work trials’**

In several areas, measures had been taken to prevent lone parents finding themselves in a cycle of unsustainable employment, re-application for benefits and debt. Advisers in a number of sites had encouraged clients to engage in ‘work trials’ for a short period, usually two weeks, to gauge whether a position was appropriate to their skills and could fit around their domestic circumstances. Clients were very positive about this approach because they felt it provided the opportunity to assess their job-readiness and employment preferences whilst not losing their benefits, and avoiding the need to reapply and go through the entire claiming process again if the position was unsuitable. One respondent who had recently lost her mother to cancer, had taken employment shortly afterwards when she was emotionally unstable, she found balancing her home life and the demands of a new job very difficult. She expressed her views about job-trials:

‘She told me if we find a suitable job, I can start then have two weeks to decide if it’s going to be suitable for me and if I’m suitable for the job. I don’t lose my benefits, or lose out on rebates which is brilliant. I didn’t have that kind of security last time, I just rushed in and ended back at square one with even less money than before because I had to wait for everything to be processed.’

(Basic Model, lone parent, female, age 40)

When interviewed, other lone parents who had not been offered job-trials were asked for their opinions, most suggested brief spells of work experience would provide an invaluable opportunity to build confidence whilst maintaining a sense of financial security. Many were fearful about re-entering the labour market after prolonged periods at home and felt job-trials offered an effective means of easing lone parents back into employment.
Job-trials seemed a good idea to those clients with vague employment preferences. There were, however, some clients that seemed entirely uncertain about the career direction they might take. Where this was the case most had been successfully referred by their Adviser to local Careers Services. Although visiting the Careers Service might seem quite obvious, a number of clients were uncertain where it was located or what it could offer and were therefore very grateful to their Advisers for setting them in the right direction. One lone parent with no experience of paid employment was uncertain where she could access advice about the range of career opportunities available. Her Adviser directed her to the Careers Service:

‘I think it’s brilliant, I’ve got someone I can turn to. I got someone who can advise me on where to go without making me feel stupid – because that’s a real biggy when asking for help – knowing you won’t be treated like you don’t know anything, but I know he’s not going to do me wrong.’

(Basic Model, lone parent, female, age 28)

There were other examples of effective referral. A small number of lone parents included in the research were referred to New Deal for Lone Parents, they tended to be more job-ready, and had sources of childcare support from relatives or older children. Others in the sample expressed an interest in New Deal believing it to be a proactive service through which they could access accredited training and ultimately sustainable well paid employment. The less job-ready clients felt they were discouraged from joining New Deal for Lone Parents by their Advisers, as ONE was described as being better positioned to offer more flexible support, referral to basic training and help them move towards being more job-ready.

Referral to training provision

Many of the less job-ready clients in this client group had been referred to training provision and were positive about the way in which their Advisers had assessed their needs and preferences and supported them in finding appropriate provision. One respondent who had initially enquired about New Deal for Lone Parents was advised to go through ONE, her Adviser helped her to identify suitable training provision to fit around her childcare responsibilities:

‘He made arrangements for me to attend an induction workshop, which was a two-hour session - which I went to and basically that was me up and running. I’d never thought I’d get the chance to do training that would fit around the kids and get me on course for a decent job.’

(Call Centre, lone parent, female, age 34)

However, some of the more job-ready and qualified clients among the group who were not referred to New Deal, were disappointed by the level of provision on offer through ONE. They generally felt there was
inadequate provision available for building on pre-existing qualifications or courses designed to help upgrade skills or change career path altogether.

The more job-ready clients tended to have professional or specialist backgrounds. This group found the training provision available through ONE to be quite restrictive. For example, clients could only take advantage of certain courses at specific colleges. Despite having identified alternative and more suitable courses from independent research of college prospectuses, clients were informed they were unlikely to receive financial assistance from the state if they enrolled. This made some clients feel quite frustrated by the seemingly inflexible approach adopted by ONE regarding training preferences. Although such inflexibility is not exclusive to ONE, rather it is an inherent feature within the wider benefit system. However, for those clients wishing to develop rudimentary skills and become familiar with the basics needed for many clerical positions, for example non-accredited introductory courses to new technology, the training on offer was viewed favourably.

Those clients who managed to successfully enrol on suitable courses, upon completion were required to attend meetings with their Adviser. The meetings were typically instigated by clients rather than Advisers, and as such were not regarded as compulsory trigger meetings. A large number of lone parents in the sample attended such meetings and described positive experiences. Some were encouraged to take further training whilst others were supported by their Adviser in searching for suitable job vacancies.

4.2.9 Mandatory contact

The timing of this study did not encompass the mandatory annual trigger meetings lone parents are required to attend with their Personal Adviser. However, when asked for opinions on the timing and appropriateness of mandatory contact there was almost universal agreement that an annual trigger for lone parents was insufficient. Many felt that clients should have at least quarterly meetings, whilst others felt monthly meetings would be most beneficial.

Many felt that contact should be more frequent because there may be many changes, namely in terms of legislative developments in benefit entitlements and arrangements, but also in local childcare provision, and training opportunities, not to mention possible developments in a lone parent’s personal circumstances which might have an impact upon their ability or willingness to take employment. This view, expressed by a lone mother about to embark upon a teacher-training course, was shared by many:
‘I think over the past few years things have changed so much there are always different schemes coming up so at least if you are in touch on a semi-regular basis then you are being made aware of them. I know there is a lot of media marketing but sometimes I think you actually need to speak to somebody to get the details. You need to be given the facts not the propaganda.’

(Basic Model, lone parent, female, age 36)

However, there were differences of opinion directly related to the ages of a client’s children. Clients with pre-school children felt meetings should occur either quarterly or biannually as they did not envisage a great deal of change in their personal circumstances or freedom to take employment. Whilst parents of older children felt meetings should correlate with the developmental stages of their children, for example starting full-time education or moving from primary to secondary education - milestones at which their children became less dependent and thereby providing an opportunity to consider working. Others meantime felt the training opportunities available to them through ONE could be undertaken whilst their children reached such milestones, thereby enhancing their longer-term employment prospects.

Superseding the above views however, was the opinion shared by most that where a good relationship exists between a client and their Adviser, the need for mandatory meetings was not necessary. Rather, the different range of views about the timing of meetings offer a guide to the minimum amount of contact respondents in our sample felt lone parents should have with their Adviser. Respondents believed that for clients to get the most from the service they should be made fully aware that contact is two-way. Whilst Advisers need to be sensitive to times when clients are likely to benefit from more contact, clients meantime must recognise they can also instigate contact. A lone father who had regular contact with both a Personal and Lone Parent Adviser described his views:

‘I actually don’t think there is any harm going in at any time. Personal circumstances are different for each person, different children need different things, you’ve got a set of circumstances – but the kids always come first, my Advisers understood that. I’ve been asking questions and getting answers, they’ve been throwing ideas into the pot for me to work with. ‘Why don’t you try this, why don’t you try that?’ and with their help my situation has changed. I think knowing I could call on them for ideas at any time was crucial.’

(Call Centre, lone parent, male, age 54)

Reference has been made, elsewhere in the report, to some of the lone fathers included in the study. Whilst their experiences appear broadly similar to the mothers in the sample, it is worth noting the extent to which the service they received exceeded their expectations – as they had anticipated a degree of prejudice. When asked about their experiences,
lone fathers felt their needs had been successfully assessed and catered for by ONE. They were surprised by the Advisers empathy towards their situation and impressed by the way in which Advisers, tailored the service to their needs. They felt their Personal Advisers had worked with them to identify the best strategies to enable them to move away from benefit dependency. One father had claimed benefits in the past and described the hostility he felt because of his lone father status:

‘Seven years ago before I met my second wife I was a single parent then dealing with the DSS, looking back at my experience with the DSS at the time, I had a lot of problems. They didn’t seem to be able to get their heads round me being a guy, abandoned by my partner, with three girls under ten in my care. Now you get a personal rapport going with them, that’s the big difference I’ve noticed, from going seven, eight years ago to now and seeing the difference. There’s no ‘them and us’ attitude anymore, which there used to be.’

(Basic Model, lone parent, male, age 35)

The lone fathers included in the study had been referred to Lone Parent Advisers, with whom they had regular contact, at least two or three meetings per month, and felt they had been helped to develop strategies to move into work. After resolving immediate financial concerns Advisers had outlined hypothetical work situations and in-work benefit entitlements. At the time of the research, the lone fathers in the sample were typically working part-time and claiming Working Families’ Tax Credit although they were formulating plans with their Advisers towards taking full-time work and complete independence. One lone father, whose views were echoed by other lone parents in the sample, described the features of ONE that he felt had helped the most:

‘Having Advisers, straight away that impressed me, and then the informal atmosphere, and the input of the Lone Parent Adviser – she gave me so much information, breakdown of figures to decide what work was worth doing. Information – getting the right message across, taking the threat out of dealing with the state system is what ONE did. We were working together to work out what was best for me: the right job to fit around school hours, the right amount of money I’d need to cover living expenses, the focus was on my needs.’

(Basic Model, lone parent, male, age 38)

The views of staff (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) about catering for the needs of lone parents broadly reflect the experiences and views of clients represented above. In general, staff believed lone parents were the client group who had benefited most from the ONE service, they felt they were in receipt of a better service than had previously been the case. Staff believed Advisers were in a position to encourage lone parents to think beyond parenthood, by offering them information about local support services they may not previously have been aware of, and by acting as gateway to training opportunities. This client group was felt to be better placed than other non-JSA groups, especially the sick or disabled who may face more barriers to employment or training due to ill health.
Lone parents initially felt apprehensive about ONE because they generally had limited face-to-face contact with Advisers in the past. However, most were pleasantly surprised by the sensitive way Advisers addressed their needs.

Most received only partial explanations of ONE and therefore felt disappointed that they had not made extensive use of the entire service.

The staged process was found to be inconvenient and less efficient than past experiences of claiming by post. Many found arranging childcare on two separate occasions problematic. This group overwhelmingly supported the Call Centre variant for these reasons.

Lone parents were pleased their claim for benefit was dealt with first during their initial Personal Adviser meeting. They felt relieved their financial concerns were addressed at the outset.

In-work benefit calculations were viewed positively by some as they had not felt work was an option. Others who had attempted to work and claim in the past experienced childcare difficulties and therefore felt less encouraged.

During the early stages of implementation there was inadequate work-focused discussions and training was largely not mentioned. There was also failure to convey contact could be client instigated. However, as the pilots evolved there was considerable follow-up contact, often instigated by clients.

Continuity of service was important to lone parents in the sample. They felt their needs were better understood by one individual and felt able to overcome both short and longer-term barriers with the aid of their Adviser.

Where continuity of service with one Adviser was not possible, lone parents felt adequately supported by a team, which typically comprised several general Advisers, knowledgeable of their case, and less frequent support from a Lone Parent Adviser.

Referral was working particularly well. Many lone parents were referred to specialist Advisers, who took over their entire case. Clients were positive about the expertise and support provided by specialists. Whether or not clients were dealt with by a specialist there was widespread support for them.

There were examples of clients taking training and part-time work as a result of the support provided by Advisers. Referral to training was viewed favourably and experiences were positive. However, a number of clients were unable to sustain employment.

Strategies were in place in some areas to ensure employment was sustainable. Several clients embarked upon ‘work trials’ and felt reassured by the opportunity.

The more job-ready and skilled clients in the sample considered the training provision available through ONE inadequate.
• Some of the more job-ready clients were effectively referred to New Deal for Lone Parents. Others who felt they should have been were not.

• Lone fathers had expected a degree of prejudice but were impressed by the empathetic and proactive ways Advisers dealt with them.

• Most clients included in the research felt an annual meeting was insufficient. Some suggested meetings should occur following legislative and policy developments of greatest relevance to lone parents (e.g. Working Families’ Tax Credit).

4.3 Sick or disabled clients

4.3.1 Diversity of the client group

The sick or disabled clients in our sample faced a range of different issues, and did not form a homogenous group. For example there were a number of respondents suffering from physical incapacities whilst others were suffering from psychological problems. There were also variations in the projected length of clients’ incapacities. Some clients anticipated being fit and able to work in the relatively near future. Others felt they might never return to work either due to the severity of their illness or disability, or because of their mature age.

4.3.2 Expectations and awareness

A number of clients in this group were still technically employed and as such not looking for work, their sole reason for approaching ONE had been that they needed short-term financial assistance whilst on half pay from their employers. Other sick or disabled respondents had alternative views about the ways in which ONE could assist them; whilst they too needed short-term financial assistance, they were also aware that they were unlikely to return to their current profession because of the nature of their incapacity. Therefore, they were anticipating ONE might assist them by advising them about alternative employment opportunities or relevant training to enable them to embark upon a total career change. Evidently the particular circumstances facing each client varied considerably, this in turn had a significant impact on the way in which ONE was experienced and the degree to which clients’ expectations were met.

Another key finding from the research with this group was the way in which sick or disabled clients accessed the benefit system, and hence made contact with ONE. For many clients this was their first experience of claiming; most of the respondents in our sample had very little prior knowledge of ONE before they had been through it, therefore perhaps unsurprisingly, expectations were wide ranging among this group.

A large number of the clients had not made contact with ONE directly. For those clients still technically employed their claim for benefit had often been arranged for them by their employers. A number of clients had been issued an Incapacity Benefit claim form from their employers, which on a number of occasions had not been the most up-to-date version.
Similarly, other sick or disabled clients had been issued claim forms from peripheral sources, such as local GPs, Citizen’s Advice Bureaux, family solicitors, and charitable organisations such as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB). In most cases clients had taken the form home and completed it unaided, they typically had no prior experience of applying for benefits and found the forms quite overwhelming. Some reported having spent several hours completing the form.

One respondent who was issued Incapacity Benefit claim forms from his employer found completing them quite traumatic. He was not aware that ONE existed or that the Call Centre variant was operating in his local area. The researcher asked him for his views of both the form and the Call Centre approach, as he explained, it is clear he would have welcomed some assistance:

‘I’d got to fill it in on my own…it was very confusing and very frustrating when you find out that it didn’t mean anything anyway, when you’ve gone to the trouble of finding all the information…it took me a full afternoon, about four hours, so not the best afternoon I’d ever had, but some of the questions they ask are so confusing, it’d’ve been a whole lot easier over the phone, they could of told me what not to bother with.’

(Call Centre, sick or disabled, male, age 54)

Once the forms had been completed and posted clients reported typically waiting several weeks to find out if their claim had been successful, which is quite usual for disability benefits and expected by clients in the sample. However, in most cases ONE was not brought to the client’s attention by the peripheral groups involved. It seems these peripheral sources were apparently unaware of ONE and therefore not in a position to tell the clients that it existed or the purpose it served. These clients became aware of ONE for the first time when they received either a letter or phone call from ONE, informing them that their claim form had been passed to the ONE office and that the client would be required to come in for a meeting. Some clients were given quite comprehensive explanations about the ONE service and its purpose at that point, whilst others recalled very vague descriptions.

4.3.3 Flexible and accommodating service

There were a number of examples recounted during this research about the sensitive way in which ONE dealt with some of the sick or disabled respondents. Positive views were expressed by a number of clients when discussing the way in which ONE staff accommodated their particular needs. Several clients reported how ONE had liaised directly with their partners or other close relatives, whilst they were unable to deal with the situation personally. For example, where clients were hospitalised or bed-bound at home, or for some other reason the client had been unable to deal with the situation alone. A blind respondent found completing forms and collating information very difficult. Upon her request, ONE had been happy to liaise with her sighted husband on such matters.
A respondent, who had been self-employed up until the time he became ill, was hospitalised and unable to deal with putting in a claim. Both the client and his wife had been very anxious about the implications of his inability to work on the household income. He explained his appreciation of the flexible approach his local ONE office adopted when his wife went in to claim on his behalf:

‘I think he could see she was in a state...I was out of the game, I couldn’t even sign my name, but he calmed her down, went through the forms, wasn’t patronising at all, he was just calm and gentle, he was relaxed and that calmed her down...it’s like going to your family doctor, you know, they make you feel like you’re the most important person.’

(Basic model, sick or disabled, male, age 51)

This flexible approach was very well received, particularly by respondents who felt anxious about their financial situation and keen to get their claim under way. However, there was a preference voiced by some respondents for deferral of their Personal Adviser meeting until such a time that they felt able to discuss the future. To many respondents in this client group their illness or disability had come as quite a shock and feelings of trepidation about what the future might hold were voiced.

As outlined at the beginning of this section the sick or disabled clients in our sample covered a broad spectrum of individuals who clearly differed in a number of ways. There were those who were highly motivated to return to the labour market and had youth and qualifications on their side. At the other end of the spectrum there were respondents suffering from severe depression, who found the concept of ever being job-ready alien in their present circumstances. In between there were clients for whom re-training or a career change had never occurred to them before this time and who were unaware what options existed. Clearly Personal Advisers faced a delicate task in identifying the position of clients within that spectrum, and the most appropriate way to address their needs. The overwhelming view expressed by clients in our sample was that Personal Advisers had approached their situation with sensitivity, and tailored the advice and guidance to their particular needs.

The staff research (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) however reveals Advisers felt quite uncomfortable dealing with sick or disabled clients. Like the clients in the sample, they too recognised the diversity of need within the client group, and at the outset some felt uncertain about their ability to effectively cater for the full range. Staff believed that as the pilot has progressed, and with the aid of training, they have developed a battery of skills to cope far better.

In most cases initial Personal Adviser meetings were felt to be evenly split between checking claim forms and a discussion about employment options and training possibilities. Clients who had completed claim forms

4.3.4 Experiences of initial Personal Adviser meeting
unaided several weeks before they heard about ONE were perplexed to find their form had found its way onto the Adviser’s desk. Many felt that if they had known an Adviser was available to help with claim forms they would most definitely have appreciated some assistance. Others felt that seeing their claim form again was indicative of an over bureaucratic system, although they did not object to the meeting they could not understand why the claim had not been processed already.

For the sick or disabled respondents who were still in employment but ‘off sick’ for a specified period, the idea of a Personal Adviser meeting to discuss finding work seemed inappropriate and untimely. Overall, ONE was viewed positively by sick or disabled clients, for example Advisers were deemed to be both ‘friendly’ and ‘helpful’. Others found the work-focused meeting encouraging, as they had become aware that it was unlikely that they would return to their old professions because of the nature of their incapacity. Advice about alternative careers and training provision available locally was well received.

However, on a few occasions suggestions made by Personal Advisers had seemed inappropriate to the clients in our sample. This was especially true for older clients, many of whom had worked in a particular trade all their working life and therefore felt they were only equipped with the skills to work in that area. Among this group a number of clients were barely competent at basic levels in numeracy and literacy, and were frequently unfamiliar with new technology. For them the suggestion that they might work in unrelated fields, for example clerical or administrative posts, or embark on training for such positions had seemed wholly inappropriate.

This group also raised concerns about the likely pay rates they could expect from the jobs presented to them by their Personal Advisers from searching the local database, many were sceptical jobs would be above the minimum wage; in which case they felt relying on benefits might be the only financially viable option open to them, particularly where they had to support families. As one such respondent explains:

‘I must be honest it’s finances that come into it first, I’ll turn my hand to anything but the money has got to be right…what with three kids, you can understand.’

(Basic model, sick or disabled, male, age 51)

There was evidence of structured plans being drawn up between Personal Advisers and clients in this group. A number of the more motivated and more job-ready expressed opinions about their personalised action plan; they were said by some to have instilled a sense of optimism. However, discussions about re-training, whilst encouraging, often failed to come to fruition, not infrequently respondents felt disappointed that no further mention had been made of training possibilities. Others felt further
discussions had not occurred because they were not well enough to take advantage of training at that point, and expected their Personal Adviser would be in touch with details at a more appropriate time; although arrangements had not been made to that effect.

When asked for their opinions on involving specialist Advisers or referral to specialist services there was overwhelming support for the idea in principle. Most of the respondents in this client group had not been made aware it was an option available to them. Although they had generally been satisfied with the ONE service, many suspected that specialist Advisers might have been more knowledgeable than their Personal Advisers. There were examples of clients discovering additional ways in which the benefit system could help them, for example with the cost of medicines and travel from home to hospital and back. This information had not been provided by their Personal Adviser, but by the peripheral sources referred to earlier, namely GPs, family Solicitors and the Citizen’s Advice Bureaux. Where clients had made discoveries from informal sources they felt uncertain whether their Personal Advisers’ knowledge base was extensive enough, and for this reason would have preferred to see a Specialist Adviser, as this comment from a respondent demonstrated:

‘The solicitor told me to fill out an AC1 form so I could get help with my treatment and get my prescriptions...you see no one at ONE told me anything about that...it would have been nice if I could have seen someone who’d known about all the things I was entitled to...they didn’t say anything about free prescriptions or things like that...a specialist might have known more about it.’

(PVS, sick or disabled, male, age 40)

Where clients described themselves as suffering from psychological illnesses, such as depression or paranoia, attending a face-to-face meeting in an open-plan office reportedly created some problems. Some felt inhibited when discussing their personal circumstances and would have preferred the meeting to be deferred. When asked about the possibility of conducting a discussion either over the telephone or in the respondent’s home rather than in a ONE office, many were concerned they would be incapable of discussing work-related matters regardless of where the discussion took place. For clients with psychological conditions the timing of the meeting was a more important factor than the environment in which it should take place.

Respondents from other client groups generally felt home visits should be available to sick or disabled clients. They believed attending face-to-face meetings in a ONE office might prove difficult for practical reasons. Home visits are a feature of the service and should be available to clients who need them, although among the sick or disabled respondents in the sample none had been offered the opportunity of a home visit. However, very few clients interviewed with mobility problems experienced practical
difficulties or failed to attend their meeting. Although some had encountered potential problems when they found the ONE office was situated on an upper level this was, in general, easily overcome by using elevators where available. On a number of other occasions staff accommodated client needs by conducting the meeting on a lower level of the building.

4.3.5 Further contact

Experiences of follow-up contact were mixed among the sick or disabled clients in our sample, the variation of experience was similar in both phases of the research. To a large extent the amount of contact was dependent upon the nature and extent of a client’s incapacity. For those clients deemed more job-ready or in a position to consider overcoming barriers to employment contact was relatively frequent. For example, one respondent who suffered bouts of depression made contact with ONE when she was unable to work. She was assigned an Adviser, and since her first contact the client secured employment but left because her depression returned. Her Adviser maintained contact throughout her changing circumstances, as she explained:

‘She is very helpful, she’s been in constant contact with me. I mean she even phoned me when I was working. When I gave up work again she phoned me with other jobs she thought might be good for me, she phoned and said: ‘I’ve got a great job in and I thought of you right away’ so I was impressed with that. But this one individual has followed me throughout which I think is great.’

(Basic Model, sick or disabled, female, age 36)

4.3.6 Continuity of service

In general, continuity of service for clients in this group was variable. There were many examples of regular contact either weekly or fortnightly. Advisers reportedly instigated contact by telephoning clients to check on their wellbeing, thereafter, contact typically occurred during face-to-face meetings and a series of telephone calls whereupon work focused discussions took place. Making use of the telephone to keep in contact was important for clients in this group with conditions that made leaving their home problematic. A respondent, with both hip and knee replacements, described the value of contacting her Adviser by telephone:

‘It’s a personal service that’s there for you, just for you. I felt they really took notice of me, and my Adviser is just so thoughtful. She will phone me up you know, ‘Hi, how you getting on? How’s everything?’ there was no specific reason I don’t think, just a friendly call.’

(Basic Model, sick and disabled, female, age 51)

Where continuity of service, with the same Adviser occurred, clients reported feeling comprehensively supported and valued. Many believed the opportunity to build a relationship and develop strategies together towards greater independence was a highly commendable feature of the service. However, it should be noted, as with other client groups, respondents were generally happy to see other Advisers if they had
familiarised themselves with their case, seemed knowledgeable and competent. This was particularly true for clients with uncomplicated and relatively less sensitive health concerns.

However, there were many clients that had complex medical problems, and the chance to describe and discuss them in full with the same Adviser prevented feelings of embarrassment and frustration. One respondent had a rare progressive nervous disorder for which there is currently no known cure, the client was understandably distraught about her condition and grateful to her Adviser for dealing with her situation in a sensitive manner:

‘She was excellent and she put me at ease, I was relieved she could make a totally new situation unstressful, I didn’t have any fears about going back after that meeting.’

(Basic Model, sick or disabled, female, age 54)

Again, the issue of privacy was raised as a major concern to clients in this group. The complexity and sensitive nature of many medical conditions could not be freely discussed during meetings. Where clients saw a series of Advisers, the need to explain their condition each time was reportedly very distressing to some, a client diagnosed HIV positive, explained his experience of attending different meetings at ONE:

‘I found it uncomfortable to tell the truth, because there is no privacy, I found it really difficult to talk, especially about my illness because it’s not something you bandy around. I found it very, very difficult to talk freely because everyone was listening, everyone in the whole room could hear what I was saying, I was afraid I’d get beaten up when I left the building!’

(PVS, sick or disabled, male, age 36)

There were many other cases where clients did not receive continuity of service. Generally clients felt frustrated at having to explain their case afresh on each occasion.

In the main clients attended subsequent meetings to resolve benefit-related matters. Other features of the service such as referral were not addressed. In these cases, clients had not been aware of the full extent of the service and staff had not effectively conveyed it at any stage.

The client referred to above received a particularly poor level of service, in addition to the lack of continuity and failure to offer greater privacy, the staff also failed to explain the full range of service ONE offered, such as referral to specialist Advisers or training provision. He felt angered by the service he received:

‘I felt their attitude had been unacceptable, they seemed to think: because of your illness, you’re not going to live long, so what’s the point of talking about going to college? I’m just as worthy as anybody else, you know and to be brushed off like that really annoyed me.’

(PVS, sick or disabled, male, age 36)
4.3.7 Referral  

Specialist Advisers

However, in the main Advisers were said to be very sensitive and capable of assessing clients’ needs. A number of sick or disabled clients described their experiences of early referral to a Disability Employment Adviser which were overwhelmingly positive. Clients generally appreciated the in-depth knowledge the Disability Employment Adviser was seen to have about their rights and entitlements.

Some clients were handed-off to the Disability Employment Adviser and they acted as their single point of contact in the ONE service. Meantime, others dealt with both their Personal Adviser and more infrequently with a specialist Adviser. Clients didn’t seem to object to either arrangement because they believed they were provided with continuity of service and the opportunity to build rapport and access specialist advice.

There was a high incidence of referral to a Disability Employment Adviser in many of the pilot areas and across sites, however there appeared to be a shortage of specialist Advisers in certain areas, which created difficulties for clients. Clients in these areas were given the impression that a Disability Employment Adviser was a limited resource and whilst efforts were made for clients to have contact with them to discuss specific matters it was not always possible in the immediate term. Very few clients were unaware Disability Employment Advisers were available, however those who were felt they should have been alerted to their existence and role.

The overwhelming view shared by the large number of clients that were referred to a specialist Adviser was one of reassurance. Clients were generally confident in the specialist knowledge and expertise, believing the Disability Employment Adviser was the most appropriate person to carry out the role of Adviser for sick or disabled clients. Clients believed they were in receipt of the most comprehensive, tailored and informed advice available through ONE. One client who suffered from anxiety attacks explained the merits of dealing with a specialist Adviser compared to seeing her Personal Adviser whom she felt had failed to appreciate her situation:

‘The first one I saw [Personal Adviser] didn’t seem to know what she was on about, she didn’t seem at all helpful, she wouldn’t listen to what I was trying to explain to her. But when I spoke to the other one [Disability Employment Adviser] that’s when I knew everything was all right and I didn’t feel so bad. She was actually looking at me and explaining things and I felt a lot better when I walked out. When the time comes, when I do feel better and I can work, then it’s nice to know there’s someone that can help me.’

(Basic Model, sick or disabled, female, age 53)
Support services

Where clients were making use of support services, such as counselling or specialist medical support, this had generally been arranged independently of ONE, although Advisers had often established such facts at the outset of meetings. For example, some of the clients referred to earlier in this section received advice about local and national sources of support from their GPs and/or specialist medical consultants prior to their meetings with ONE Advisers. Other respondents described the role their ex-employers had played in referring them to support services and organisations.

Training

However, ONE played a more proactive role when referring clients to suitable training provision. Several clients were effectively referred to basic courses. Those clients who embarked upon training courses generally viewed the provision favourably, particularly where the nature of a client’s incapacity meant they needed to consider an entire change in the direction of their career.

However, a number of clients received no mention of the possibility of referral to training. In these cases, clients reported feeling disappointed and excluded, believing their Adviser had judged training inappropriate because the incapacity they had rendered them unfit for work and therefore unfit for work preparation. A young woman suffering from Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.) had been unable to work for the past three years. She wanted to embark on training that she could do from home, with a view to ultimately working from home. The Adviser had sounded encouraging at the outset, but the client was later disappointed:

‘I was gutted really, because I thought at last somebody was going to help me make steps to get back to work, because she was really keen, and that was it ‘You’re too ill, go away’ sort of thing. It’s not really what you need is it? It doesn’t exactly fill you with confidence.’

(Basic Model, sick and disabled, female, age 29)

4.3.8 Work focus

It would seem that in most cases Advisers had deemed job searches inappropriate for clients in this group. Therefore, there were very few examples of job searches having been conducted during meetings. Whilst most clients felt such a judgement had been accurate, there were a few cases where clients expressed feeling disappointed at the lack of work focus to their meeting. Some clients felt if there had been an opportunity to consider a range of potential jobs that they might take, they would have felt motivated and encouraged.

The failure to conduct searches was interpreted by some as a lack of experience on the part of their Adviser, they felt their Adviser had been incapable of effectively assessing their needs. A view expressed by one
client about the inadequate work focus, was echoed by others in the sample:

*I know some guys who don’t want a job, who have been unemployed for a while and claim they can’t afford to work. Now I want to work, although I can’t at the moment I wouldn’t mind some help thinking about what I’m going to do when I’m on the mend, ONE don’t seem to help you in that way though.*

(Call Centre, sick and disabled, male, age 36)

4.3.9 Mandatory contact

When asked for their views on mandatory trigger meetings following a Personal Capability Assessment there was an overall consensus of opinion. Generally, the clients in this group believed rather than attending a one-off compulsory meeting, it was more appropriate for those suffering from an incapacity to attend regular meetings. Most felt they should be monthly so that progress could be monitored and access to on-going support and guidance forthcoming. They believed regular contact would enable clients and Advisers to develop informed strategies so that they could move towards greater independence in the future.

Clients believed that regular meetings would be especially beneficial to the long-term sick. One client had been on incapacity benefits for several years and had received no contact or engaged in any discussions about work until she failed her Personal Capability Assessment. She felt that if there had been some intervention in the past she might have considered work or training possibilities earlier. As she explained:

*I’m disappointed because for eight years I’ve been on benefit and during that time nobody has contacted me to tell me what was available or to help me get back in the workplace. If I hadn’t lost that Incapacity Benefit I would never have known what was available and I realise now that there are many things.*

(PVS, sick or disabled, female, age 55)

The contact she has had with ONE has been very constructive and useful, the client has since enrolled on an I.T. course for the disabled. The help and assistance she received from the Disability Employment Adviser has apparently raised her self-esteem and sense of inclusion. This was a view shared by other clients in the sample who had histories of long-term incapacity.

Similarly, clients believed that, regardless of the length of time they had been incapacitated, there was a recognisable danger of becoming excluded from the labour market and slipping into a rut. Therefore, regular contact with an Adviser was felt to provide a source of motivation and sense of hope for the future. A client awaiting an operation for a prolapsed disc articulated his views:
‘It gives you motivation to think ‘Right, well I’m not just going to sit at home, I’m sick, yes, but they’re telling me there’s a chance out there that I can do something.’ Just that bit of encouragement can make all the difference, I now know there are still things out there that I can do!’

(PVS, sick or disabled, male, age 43)

However, not all clients in the sample held these views. A number of clients felt that if a client is likely to be unfit for work for the foreseeable future then attending work focused meetings with Advisers, whose remit is to re-engage clients in the labour market, would prove irrelevant. These clients believed it was best to postpone a meeting until such a time that a client was fully recovered and in a position to benefit fully from a work-focused discussion. The following quote is indicative of views shared by a number of respondents interviewed:

‘I wouldn’t want to discuss work now or in the near future, I’m not fit enough. When and if I feel ready to go back to work I’ll sort it out myself. I don’t need to go and discuss it every few weeks or months, you know, what’s the point in that?’

(PVS, sick or disabled, female, age 32)

Where clients attended a mandatory meeting following a Personal Capability Assessment views were mixed. Most reported the meeting had not seemed compulsory, in fact several had instigated the contact themselves. Although a larger number received a letter from the Benefits Agency requesting their presence at a Personal Adviser meeting, which seemed confusing to most.

The content of such meetings was generally deemed constructive and useful, particularly where job searches were conducted and discussions about training took place. Clients felt optimistic about their futures and appreciated the support the Advisers gave. For example, a client with a long history of depression felt supported and encouraged by the contact she has with her Personal Adviser:

‘I think it’s a really good service because they’re not pushing me into finding work when I’m not ready, they care. I’m being given advice and not made to feel uncomfortable about not being ready to work, in a way I feel healthier in myself. ONE is helping me a lot by talking to me and giving me advice about college and that.’

(Call Centre, sick and disabled, female, age 29)

Another client, who had been claiming Income Support after breaking his foot at work, attended a Personal Capability Assessment and was deemed well enough to work. He was very positive about the service provided by his Personal Adviser:
‘She seemed very caring towards my needs, my choice of work for instance, I explained I didn’t want to go back into warehousing and she said ‘That’s fair enough, it’s your choice, we won’t bully you into anything you don’t want to do.’ She went out of her way to give me good ideas, such as going back into an office or changing job direction altogether, she was really positive.’

(Basic model, Jobseeker, male, aged 28)

However, there was a considerable incidence of clients being disgruntled, not at the meeting per se, but rather the verdict of the Personal Capability Assessment. Many felt the judgement that they ceased to be entitled to longer-term incapacity benefits, such as Disability Living Allowance or Severe Disablement Allowance, and by association were considered fit for work, was incorrect. Earlier discussions (see Section 4.1.5) where clients suffering from incapacities were deemed well enough for full-time work and therefore required to sign Jobseeker’s Agreements, illustrate the frustrations felt by many.

A number of clients believed the Personal Capability Assessment was wholly inadequate as a basis upon which to determine a client’s mental capability or illnesses that can fluctuate in severity. In these cases, Personal Advisers were reportedly sympathetic, but apparently lacking in knowledge about the appeals process. Many clients in this situation reported being referred to a Disability Employment Adviser which invoked a mixed response among clients in the sample. A client suffering from multiple psychological conditions including paranoia, agoraphobia, depression and insomnia was deemed fit for work, she was requested to attend a trigger meeting following the assessment. She described the reactions of her Personal Adviser and the Disability Employment Adviser when she attended the meeting:

‘They were just standing there scratching their heads more than anything, they just didn’t know what to do!’

(Basic Model, sick and disabled, female, age 31)

Some considered referral to a specialist Adviser to be a positive outcome; they felt the Personal Adviser acknowledged they were still incapacitated, despite the verdict reached by the Personal Capability Assessment. They took referral to mean the Adviser had understood they were still sick or disabled and therefore in need of specialist advice. There was evidence of Personal Advisers showing sympathy to some clients and addressing their situation in a realistic manner. One client who had not worked for ten years because he suffered from Angina attacks, recently sustained neck and hip problems as a result of a car accident, described the approach his Adviser took:

‘He did speak about work and what my plans were but he said ‘In your case, given your medical history and so on, it’s going to be very hard to go back to work, particularly the heavy manual work you have done.’ So it was discussed but there was no pressure, he could see I have problems so talking about work was put to one side.’

(Call Centre, sick or disabled, male, 42)
Meantime, others believed that their sickness or disability was ignored and they had been referred in order that the Disability Employment Adviser could push them into employment. They felt this was inappropriate because despite the verdict of the Personal Capability Assessment they felt too unwell to consider employment, a view often supported by their own GP or psychiatrist.

There were a few clients included in the sample who held different views about the Personal Capability Assessment. Where the assessment had shown they were entirely unfit for work and hence entitled to greater levels of incapacity benefits, clients had appreciated the meetings with an Adviser. It was felt that Advisers had comprehensively explained the purpose of ONE as providing a service to assist clients to make a claim and provide advice and guidance on work and training. Although none of the clients in the sample felt well enough for either work or training at the time of interview, many felt encouraged. One respondent received Income Support as well as Incapacity Benefit following an assessment. She suffered from Asthma, Diabetes, Osteoporosis, Arthritis and most recently depression, she felt ONE had been very encouraging:

‘I’d go back down there tomorrow if I felt I was ready for training, I don’t feel there would be a barrier, I know I can speak to them down there no problem, and they give the impression they want to help me to help myself.’

(PVS, sick and disabled, female, age 42)

Another client who had suffered from high blood pressure and depression following the collapse of his business, was keen to re-enter the labour market, although his Personal Capability Assessment had suggested he was unfit for work in the short-term. He was positive about the support provided by his Personal Adviser following the outcome of his assessment:

‘My ONE contact is super, I feel I have somebody on side who is trying to help me, putting me at ease, treating me like an individual. Following the medical she said ‘I think we’ve got to start thinking part-time and then gradually build up, and when you’re ready we’ll find an employer that needs help, I’ll come with you. I’ll explain to the employer the problems you’ve had, and the situation you’re in’. As I say all the way through she was magnificent.’

(PVS, sick and disabled, male, age 54)

4.3.10 Summary of experience and emergent issues

- This group was made up of a diverse collection of clients. Whilst some were suffering from physical incapacities; others had psychological problems. There were also variations in the projected length of illness. Some clients were still technically employed and others were considering a complete career change.

- In the first instance, client contact with ONE was typically indirect. Most had received advice and guidance about claiming from peripheral sources such as GPs, hospitals, solicitors and the CAB. This had implications for the awareness and understanding many clients had about ONE.
• Advisers were felt to have accommodated the needs of sick or disabled clients well, particularly where they had liaised with relatives when the client was unable to manage their own affairs.

• Dependent upon the severity of the sickness or disability, clients felt more or less encouraged by the work focus. However, the support offered with their claim for benefit had seemed inappropriately timed, because they had completed forms unaided when the peripheral sources mentioned above, had provided them with forms.

• During the implementation period, some clients had felt the initial Personal Adviser meeting should be deferred. As the pilot progressed, sick or disabled clients were more appropriately deferred which was due to Advisers receiving clearer guidance.

• Follow-up contact was most frequent with the more job-ready clients in the sample. Advisers maintained regular contact using the telephone which clients viewed favourably because leaving the home was problematic for some people but they still wished to discuss ways of overcoming barriers.

• Continuity of service was highly valued by sick or disabled clients. Although, as with other client groups, respondents felt happy to see alternative Advisers if they seemed familiar with their circumstances. Clients with sensitive or complex medical problems expressed a strong preference for continuity.

• Referral to Disability Employment Advisers was well received. As with lone parents, sick or disabled clients were catered for in different ways. Some were handed-off to the Disability Employment Adviser who then became their single point of contact. Others dealt primarily with general Advisers and less frequently with the Disability Employment Adviser.

• Referral to specialist training was arranged for some clients. Although many were disappointed that training provision was not discussed. Similarly, job searches were limited for sick or disabled clients.

• Sick or disabled clients believed contact with an Adviser should be regular. In particular, they believed clients suffering from long-term illnesses would benefit greatly, particularly in terms of boosting their self-esteem and fostering a sense of inclusion.

4.4 Carers

4.4.1 Expectations and awareness

For many respondents in this client group ONE represented their first experiences of claiming benefits and dealing with an Adviser. Perhaps their inexperience with the benefit system explains the reason most carers by-passed ONE in the first instance. Not unlike the sick or disabled respondents in our sample, carers generally became aware of ONE after they had put their benefit claim in using postal means.

A number of respondents realised they might be entitled to benefits for the full-time caring responsibility of relatives, when individuals and organisations on the periphery of the benefit system brought it to their
attention. Social Workers, Health Visitors, Macmillan Nurses, and charitable organisations such as Age Concern were among the external sources cited by respondents. Where these peripheral sources had issued clients with the claim form it was not uncommon for it to be out of date, which unsurprisingly caused processing delays later down the line. In nearly all cases, these external sources failed to alert clients to the fact they would have to make their claim through ONE, quite possibly because they were unaware it existed.

Meanwhile, others were made aware of the possibility to claim by leaflets attached to the claim forms of those they were caring for. Some found out about claiming from friends and neighbours in similar circumstances. In these cases clients had telephoned the local Benefits Agency office and were referred to ONE, from which point the ONE process had begun with Start-up and a short time after they attended the initial Personal Adviser meeting.

More typically though, carers in our sample received phone calls or letters from ONE inviting them to attend an appointed meeting with a Personal Adviser some weeks after they had sent off their claim. For many this was the first they had heard about ONE.

There was overwhelming support for Start-up by telephone among this group. Clients who had entered ONE via the Call Centre variant were appreciative of the convenience it offered. Clients who had entered via the other models were asked for their views on the Call Centre variant, there was overwhelming praise for the idea and many would have preferred Start-up using their telephone at home. Many expressed the view that caring for dependent relatives is an around-the-clock occupation. They felt any measures that might reduce time spent away from home, such as Call Centres or home visits would be preferable.

However, clients who attended meetings at a ONE site appreciated having an appointment booked, because they were able to make alternative care arrangements in advance. A number of carers voiced their surprise at the pleasant decor and atmosphere of the offices; many had been expecting ‘drab and dreary places.’ However, a number of respondents felt the open-plan layout had inhibited them from asking questions or talking freely about the intricacies of their circumstances. Like some of the lone parents involved in this study, a number of carers in our sample would have liked it if they had been made aware that private rooms were available. Many had felt that if they had known they might have asked to use them.

As mentioned elsewhere in this report the Advisers’ reluctance to promote the availability or make use of private facilities was largely because they were bound by restrictions of the host agency in which the ONE office was located.
Respondents found staff were generally amenable and polite. In particular, Personal Advisers were praised by a number of carers in our sample for the sensitive way in which they approached personal circumstances.

A number of clients had not known what to expect from the meeting and were pleasantly surprised to find an Adviser who made time for them and seemed to be genuinely concerned about how they might relieve some of the burden of caring full-time. For example, a mother who was caring for her chronically ill son, was offered referral to respite care services so that ‘she could have a break’, this client was surprised and impressed that her Adviser had suggested options otherwise unbeknown to her. There were numerous other examples of Personal Advisers offering clients referral to specialist Advisers and support services. This quote from a woman caring for her blind husband and severely disabled toddler, is suggestive of the comfort the offer of referral could provide:

‘It was so nice to have someone take time out to explain that there are options available to me, quite often when you’re in a situation like I’m in you’re in a state of shock and don’t know which way to turn...I was very satisfied to be honest, I felt I came away with everything I needed to know, I felt reassured.’

(Basic Model, carer, female, age 38)

In most cases, Personal Adviser meetings were not work focused. Clients felt their Adviser had accurately assessed their personal situation by deeming such discussions inappropriate.

In such cases clients were appreciative that their Advisers had used their discretion. However, there were some respondents who had discussed work and the range of training possibilities open to them in their locality and they generally felt encouraged, particularly where they had been caring for very elderly relatives for a number of years and felt they must at least make some provisional plans for their future.

Nevertheless, there were a very small number of occasions when Personal Advisers had misjudged clients’ circumstances and broached the subject of work at inopportune moments. A particular respondent in our sample had been caring for his common-law wife for over 15 years, unfortunately between the time he was recruited to the sample and the time we interviewed him his wife had died. He explained to the researcher the inappropriate work focused discussion that ensued during his Personal Adviser meeting which took place two weeks after his wife died:

‘He was more interested in getting me sorted in a job than finding out what was wrong with me, why I was ill or how he could help me...that’s basically what he wanted, he said ‘oh, we’ll get you back to work’ ‘Wo, wo, wo’ I said ‘I’m not ready to go back to work’. I think he was rude, he couldn’t understand my situation, he just wasn’t sympathetic, I wasn’t ready for that, my wife hadn’t been dead more than a fortnight, I could have done with not going at all, but I felt if I don’t go I won’t get any money...I’m unhappy now, four months later... I miss my wife.’

(Call Centre, Carer, male, age 56)
A number of respondents in our sample acknowledged that knowing the most effective strategies to judge each client’s needs must be a very difficult task, and the overwhelming sense was that Personal Advisers had, on the whole, assessed each client’s circumstances accurately and offered appropriate advice and referral. But for this client at least, a misjudgement was made.

The observational case studies and staff research (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) suggest Advisers generally felt very uncomfortable dealing with certain client groups, namely those with psychological problems, carers and widows. During meetings with clients they felt unable to deal with, some Advisers suggested they simply went through the process of sorting out the claim as efficiently as possible. Other Advisers felt they should introduce the work focus but as the pilots progressed such discussions were abandoned. Deferral was more widely used as the pilot progressed because Advisers felt it was inappropriate for carers to attend meetings when they were generally unable to consider work.

4.4.4 Dual claim

When carers’ views were sought on the overall principle of ONE many were very positive about the personalised approach available, and the service they had received. However, there was a recurrent suggestion for change. A number of carers became quite frustrated by the fact that they often put in claims for benefit on behalf of those they were caring for via one system, but their own claim had to go through ONE. Quite typically carers were responsible for relatives who were not of working age and therefore ineligible to go through ONE. Respondents felt they were already emotionally and physically over-stretched, and the possibility they might have to chase two separate claims should problems arise, seemed unacceptable. Respondents felt the obvious solution to this problem was to combine the benefits of carer and cared-for, or at least allow them to go through the same system.

4.4.5 Further contact

Many findings from the second phase of research with carers broadly mirrored those of the first phase. Generally, Advisers failed to make it clear to clients that ONE exists to provide advice, guidance and support as well as a means of helping clients back to work. A number of carers in the sample assumed their Adviser had failed to explain the service fully because they had felt only the benefit-focused element of the service was relevant. Where comprehensive explanations were provided some described feeling empowered, knowing they could discuss training and employment-related matters when they chose to, was viewed favourably. One respondent voiced this view lucidly when interviewed:

‘As I understand it, they give you practical support on knowing what benefit to claim. They give you assistance on filling in the relevant claim form, and then they pass the information onto the DSS, and then if there are any snags or queries they are dealt with by your Adviser, so that you deal with the same person throughout. Then they have schemes to help you back to work and training schemes that you can go on when you’re ready.’

(Call Centre, carer, female, age 38)
4.4.6 Empowering carers to make decisions about work-focused contact

However, where employment-related discussions ensued without prior explanation of the service in its entirety, several carers in the sample felt angry. Although not all carers in the sample had received a pronounced work focus, some that had felt it was inappropriate given their full-time caring responsibilities. They believed the Adviser failed to take into consideration their circumstances. Some felt that their Adviser had failed to discuss the financial and physical viability of balancing caring and paid employment. One carer in the sample described her sense of frustration:

‘You just get fed up of being asked about returning to work when you’ve made it quite clear that you’ve given up work to look after your sick child and that you don’t propose returning until she’s better.’

(Basic Model, carer, female, age 38)

Another carer has been caring for her husband for the past three years described how the work-focused discussion angered her:

‘I just thought they know my situation, they know what benefits I’m getting and they know there’s no chance at this moment that I can actually go to work. My husband would love to go back to work and so would I, because it does actually drive me crazy to be in the house with him day and night, but I just thought ’why are they pestering me when they know the situation?’

(PVS, carer, female, 30)

However, where discussions about employment were approached with a longer-term view a number of clients felt encouraged and optimistic about their future. A respondent who has been responsible for her elderly mother for a decade described her views on discussing work:

‘I don’t see my mum getting through another winter, I will need to take a job then for definite, but it’s too much at the moment caring and working. – But I was glad to talk over ideas with [Personal Adviser], she was just letting me know that I’m not heading for the scrap heap, that when the time is right I will be able to work.’

(Basic Model, carer, female, age 42)

On the whole, Advisers were considered sympathetic and caring. They were felt to have alleviated the feeling that claiming benefits is tantamount to scrounging – a view shared by some before their claiming experience with ONE. A carer with no previous experience of claiming benefits described the way her Adviser dispelled some preconceived ideas she had held about claiming:

‘I had the feeling claiming benefits would be a cold and regimented set-up, almost like jumping through hoops to beg for financial help. But the personal touch with ONE is very, very good and makes you feel you have every right to some help because of the role you have taken on and the sacrifices you make to take care of a relative.’

(Call Centre, carer, female, age 42)
The second wave of interviews showed there was greater evidence of private facilities being used in certain areas when carers became upset. Privacy was clearly important to many in this client group, and it was particularly appreciated by clients living in small towns or villages, as one respondent described:

‘I remember I sat down in the office and the desks are quite close together, I didn’t want other people to hear me because it’s my local town and there were people there who know me. As I started to speak I could feel myself starting to cry. My Adviser said: ‘We’ve got a wee separate room, do you want to go through there?’ I was so pleased, I was glad to go into a separate room, I didn’t want everybody knowing my business and seeing me in a mess.’

(Basic Model, carer, female, age 47)

Advisers were felt to be flexible in a number of other respects. Several carers reported liaising with Advisers over the phone and appreciated not being expected to attend face-to-face meetings. For this reason ONE was regarded positively as it was more convenient to carers who often do not have freedom from their responsibilities to attend meetings. One carer whose elderly father was almost entirely dependent upon her help both night and day, described the benefits of using the telephone to discuss matters with her Adviser. She had been in regular contact and over a three-month period had spoken to an Adviser on 15 separate occasions and had attended four face-to-face meetings:

‘At the outset I was really anxious about my financial situation, I asked her if I was worried about anything could I just pop in, she said ‘anytime’ and she’s actually called a number of times to see how I’m doing. Now my finances are sorted I feel she can help me think about careers I might want to look at or training I might need, we’ve spoken about it over the phone and she’s told me to come in to discuss it more when I feel ready.’

(Basic Model, carer, female, 42)

4.4.7 Flexible service  However, clients also indicated that they liked to have the option of attending face-to-face meetings, which some felt represented a chance to build a relationship with the Adviser dealing with their case and enable them to take a greater sense of ownership over their finances. A number of clients mentioned the peace of mind gained by attending meetings, especially when they are feeling anxious about their financial circumstances.

One client experienced recurrent problems when claiming benefits. His wife had been caring for their disabled son until she fell ill with cancer, the client then assumed caring responsibility for both his wife and son. However, the ICA his wife received ceased and the client had to apply for ICA for caring for his wife and son. This apparently caused untold confusion at a time of great personal stress. The crux of the problem seemed to stem from a poor flow of information between ONE and
other involved agencies. He described the value of attending a face-to-face meeting:

‘There were so many problems, so it was a case of giving me peace of mind. To sit down and go through it all with a fine tooth comb, every little detail so I was confident I got all the facts across to her and I was able to see from her reactions that she understood. She made phone calls to ICA whilst I was there and I saw her put this set of forms in an envelope to be posted — I felt reassured that things would finally be sorted out.’

(Call Centre, carer, male, age 32)

4.4.8 Continuity of service

The level of continuity was limited among carers in the sample. Although a small number received continuity and were appreciative, it was more common for carers to see different Advisers each time they attended a meeting which resulted in them having to explain their circumstances afresh each time. One of the few respondents to receive continuity described the perceived merits:

‘You didn’t need to go through the whole story with different people again, I was quite emotional and the girl understood what was going on, I didn’t need to re-explain, she just asked me how I was and we got on with it.’

(Basic Model, carer, female, 38)

Several carers interviewed described the ways in which they had to explain to different Advisers, the reasons paid employment was not a viable option to them in the short-term. These carers felt quite annoyed at having to justify their decision not to work and felt they were being harangued into looking for work when they neither wanted to, nor felt that paid employment was a feasible option. Carers often had complex cases, like that described above by the male carer who assumed caring responsibility for both his wife and son, attempting to convey complicated scenarios to different Advisers reportedly created unnecessary additional stress for clients already under great strain. For these reasons, carers generally expressed a preference for continuity of service.

Many felt, given their situation, the chance to build rapport and trust with a single Adviser was very important to their self-esteem, and provided an effective means of alleviating additional sources of stress. One respondent attended a total of six meetings and saw a different Adviser each time, she described how initially she felt angry, then disillusioned with the service:

‘I thought it was pointless because I’d already got the impression they weren’t really interested and they seemed to lack knowledge of my benefit entitlement. They don’t seem to know what I should be getting, they seem even less knowledgeable about work or training opportunities. I just presumed there was no point in talking to him about gaining further qualifications, so I didn’t even go down that road because it just seemed so negative in there.’

(PVS, carer, female, age 54)
While many carers in the sample described the work-focused nature of the meetings they attended, there were equally as many clients who only dealt with benefit issues. Several clients experienced processing delays with their claim and felt that, although ONE was not directly responsible, Advisers seemed to have poor relationships with staff at ICA. Clients spoke of attending several meetings with their Personal Adviser to resolve financial difficulties incurred as a result of poor communication between ONE and other parts of the benefit system. One carer described the sense of powerlessness he felt when faced with such a predicament:

‘There was just no communication. I was there when he phoned ICA, they informed him the case was under review and that they couldn’t give him any details. You know, if somebody working for a similar body can’t get information then I’ve no chance. The biggest flaw is the breakdown in communication between the agencies. The Adviser tried his best but as I say was told they wouldn’t divulge information, it just seemed hopeless at the time.’

(PVS, carer, male, age 43)

When asked about the mandatory trigger meeting clients have to attend following a change in circumstances, views were mixed. Some felt a meeting at the time caring responsibilities cease would prove useful and the work-focused nature of the ONE service may prove encouraging at that point. However, others shared the view that contact should be more frequent and where carers had expressed an interest in re-entering the labour market when their caring responsibilities cease, they should be in receipt of regular information about training provision and local job fairs. Carers who seemed optimistic about life after caring were at the same time quite fearful; believing long periods of caring had distanced them considerably from the demands of a modern labour market. For these clients ONE represented a potential means of accessing work-focused assistance, hence, they were hopeful of becoming more job-ready with the help of an Adviser.

There were others in the sample who felt more able to secure employment by themselves when their caring responsibilities ended. Clients with greater confidence tended to be those who had cared for relatively shorter periods and those who had left professional careers to take care of a relative. For these clients, the prospect of re-entering the labour market did not represent a challenge.

4.4.9 Diversity of the client group

The findings from both phases one and two of this study suggest the needs of carers are very diverse. It is clear that whilst some welcome work-focused discussions others find them entirely inappropriate. Therefore, it is important for Advisers to acknowledge the heterogeneity of this group, to take heed of each client’s unique circumstances and to listen carefully to their preferences, and then to identify the best way to address both short- and longer-term needs. There are several examples
outlined above where Advisers appear to have followed this approach, and in these cases clients have felt suitably supported and confident about their futures. There are, however a number of cases where the individual needs of clients have been misjudged and as a consequence some carers have felt frustrated and irritated by the inappropriateness of the service they received.

4.4.10 Mandatory contact

Some carers are required to attend a trigger meeting when they have been relieved of their caring responsibilities because the person in their care has either recovered, been admitted to residential care, or died. Carers in our sample who attended a mandatory trigger meeting following such a change in circumstances were mostly bereaved. There were only three carers in the sample that attended a trigger meeting following a change in their circumstances.

At the time of the fieldwork (late 2000) deferral was in greater use. Most sites, according the findings from the staff research, were making use of deferral in the case of carers in general and especially where a respondent’s caring responsibilities had ceased. Advisers and managers believed it was untimely and inappropriate to conduct meetings at these times because they felt clients were unlikely to appreciate a work-focused discussion. For these reasons it is perhaps unsurprising that only three respondents were recruited during the second phase of the study with those who had mandatory follow-up contact. To fully appreciate and understand the experiences and views of each respondent it is best to firstly view them as singularities. Case studies 12, 13 and 14 outline the broad experiences and views held by the respondents who attended a trigger meeting following the end of their caring responsibilities.

Case study 12

The respondent gave up her job as a textiles machinist to care for her dying husband. She first made contact with ONE when her husband’s Statutory Sick Pay expired, she attended a meeting to apply for Incapacity Benefit on her husband’s behalf and Invalid Care Allowance for herself. She had no prior experience of claiming benefits and was grateful for the assistance her Adviser gave:

‘I went down and she helped me with the forms, I must admit she was very good because I was in tears throughout the entire interview because we’d just found out he was going to die. I felt sorry for her but she was really good and within a couple of weeks it was all sorted out, the money was going in the bank.’

Continued
Her Adviser gave her contact details and encouraged her to call. However, the client had no further contact with ONE until her husband died. Six weeks after the death of her husband she received a letter from ONE inviting her to attend a meeting. The client had not thought the meeting was mandatory, she had intended to instigate contact anyway to inform ONE she was no longer caring for her husband, therefore she felt the timing was appropriate.

The client had not expected to see the same Adviser, continuity of service had not been explained to her. However, she was appreciative of the continuity she received. The Adviser was supportive and helpful, she provided a series of leaflets on bereavement counselling.

Shortly after the meeting the client returned to her previous employment.

Overall, the client believed the service she received was perfectly adequate. The Adviser was felt to be knowledgeable, sensitive and caring. The client was pleased that the contact she had was minimal, she did not feel more contact would have been necessary. In summary, this client believed her Adviser had accurately assessed her needs and delivered a tailored service.

(Basic Model, Widow, female, age 52)

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Case study 13

The respondent had cared full-time for her disabled mother for a decade. Her husband was also unwell and had recently made a claim for Incapacity Benefit and Income Support through ONE. She had accompanied him to his Adviser meetings and was therefore aware that she would need to notify them if her mother were to die.

The respondent phoned her husband’s Adviser when her mother died to inform ONE of her change in circumstances. A few days later she received a letter to attend a meeting, the client was impressed by the tone of the letter:

‘It wasn’t stern and official as I’d expected, it was just a letter asking me if I wanted to go and get help filling in some new forms and to have a chat about the future, work and whatever.’

Continued
The meeting had apparently not seemed mandatory to the client because of the invitation and also because she had instigated the contact in the first instance. During the meeting the Advisers calculated hypothetical in-work scenarios. Although strategies to get back to work were not discussed at length.

The Adviser phoned to invite her to a subsequent meeting whereupon a jobsearch was conducted. However, the client had decided to find work as a care assistant independently of ONE.

The client did not feel she needed any additional help and was satisfied with that her Adviser had dealt with her situation compassionately.

(Basic Model, Carer, female age 52)

Case study 14

A respondent had cared for a friend who had been suffering from acute Rheumatism for 12 years. Her caring responsibilities ceased following a visit from Social Service, whereupon they deemed the respondent’s home to be damp and exacerbating her friend’s illness. The client had worked in a hospital as an Auxiliary Nurse for eight years prior to assuming full-time caring responsibility for her friend.

She was very upset when her role as full-time carer ended, she had become emotionally attached to her friend and found the idea of residential care distressing. The client continued to care for her friend, she reportedly spent several hours each day visiting the care home. Less than a week after the change in her circumstances she received a letter inviting her to attend a meeting at ONE. She received no explanation about the service and was anxious about the meeting. She did, however, attend the meeting and was upset that she was regarded available for work. She tried to explain her circumstances to the Adviser but didn’t feel they had been adequately taken on board:

‘I think they should improve their attitude, I mean that some people they have to deal are not nice but they should not treat everyone the same. They should treat each applicant as an individual because everybody’s circumstances are different. I think they should listen to the applicant and the applicant should listen to them because it is a two-way thing.’

Continued
The client felt hurt by the Adviser’s apparent lack of understanding for her circumstances. She believed she should still be entitled to Invalid Care Allowance and had a strong desire to continue caring for her friend. She believed the Adviser had failed to explain fully the reason she was required to sign a Jobseeker’s Agreement and therefore resented and resisted the job searches conducted on her behalf.

This client clearly represented a challenging case to the Adviser but it appears he failed to patiently make clear to the client the implications of her change in circumstances and rather forged ahead with finding her an alternative occupation. The client did not feel her views and opinions had been taken into consideration. Instead she was handed-off the Employment Service and felt harangued into finding paid employment at a time of emotional upheaval.

(PVS, Carer, female, age 50)

Although these case studies represent quite different experiences of mandatory trigger meetings a number of cross-cutting issues emerge. Firstly, it appears that like other groups ONE caters for, clients whose caring responsibilities cease, cannot be treated as a homogenous group. In the cases of recently bereaved clients, Advisers appear to have judged the degree of support and encouragement needed quite accurately. Both respondents seemed confident about their work prospects and competent at managing their affairs. The sensitivity and compassion displayed by Advisers also appeared to be appropriate. In fact, the recently bereaved widow said of her Adviser:

‘She was really nice, she was really understanding and she wasn’t very old. I bet you she wasn’t more than 25, for somebody that age to be so understanding was very impressive, I think she must have had some good training on how to deal with tearful widows.’

(Basic Model, carer, female, age 52)

It appears that striking the correct balance between providing practical advice in a sensitive way, and allowing clients the autonomy to make decisions about their own future, is highly regarded.

Neither of the bereaved clients in this group felt their Adviser meeting had been compulsory. They felt that if they had not been invited for a meeting, they would have made an appointment with their Adviser at that time anyway. It can, therefore, be assumed that the length of time between the death of a dependent relative and the invitation to discuss the change in circumstance is appropriately timed. The tone of the letter had also seemed non-threatening to these clients and they therefore felt encouraged to attend.
However, the third client’s needs were not as sensitively dealt with. She assumed there were two possible reasons for the way the Adviser disregarded the sensitivity of her case. Firstly, she was not related to the dependent in her care, and secondly the dependent was still alive. The client was grieving for the loss of her friend and her role as carer. The timing of her meeting was not as well timed or appropriately pitched. Although it is not possible to draw inferences from one client’s negative experiences, when her experiences are contrasted to the others in this group it is clear she was not extended the same sympathy, time to grieve or adjust to her change in circumstances. Unlike the two bereaved clients, she was not permitted the freedom to forge ideas for herself about her future, rather she felt pressured into finding paid employment in the immediate future.

In order that a broader range of issues and patterns could be identified concerning clients whose caring responsibilities have ceased, further and more in-depth research should be conducted.

4.4.11 Summary of experience and emergent issues

- Carers in the sample had very limited experiences of claiming benefits before their experience with ONE. Many were made aware they were entitled to claim from peripheral sources who were themselves unaware of ONE. Others made their claim by completing forms for Invalid Care Allowance that were attached to the form belonging to the person in their care. In either case, they became aware of ONE some time later, then they were invited to attend a meeting.
- The Call Centre variant was viewed positively. Carers appreciated the flexibility and convenience of making their claim from home. Using the telephone was also felt to be invaluable where clients maintained regular contact with Advisers. However, carers felt the option of face-to-face meetings should also be available.
- The pleasant ambience and décor of the ONE sites was appreciated. Although the lack of privacy available in an open-plan setting was a cause of distress for many.
- On the whole, Advisers catered for carers in a sensitive, friendly and supportive manner.
- There was evidence of referral to support services such as respite care and counselling.
- In the main, discussions were not work-focused which most carers felt was appropriate. They believed their Advisers had been perceptive and responsive to their situation. However, where clients were provided with full and comprehensive explanations about the entire service they felt confident to raise work and training with their Adviser. Many felt even if the entire service was not considered relevant by all carers, they should be in a position to make informed decisions.
Some clients were appreciative of work-focused discussions, particularly where they felt they may be relieved of their caring responsibilities in the near future, and wanted to forge plans for their future.

Continuity of service was felt to be very important to carers in the sample. Clients felt where their Adviser had understood their circumstances they felt adequately supported and positive about the future. Where clients saw more than one Adviser they found explaining their circumstances distressing.

Some felt the relationships and lines of communication between ONE and other agencies were poor, which had implications when problems with benefits occurred.

Views were mixed about a mandatory trigger meeting for carers when their caring responsibilities ceased. Some felt a meeting at that time would be encouraging and useful. Although some felt they would not need help to find employment because they had only been caring for a short while and therefore didn’t feel too distanced from the labour market. However, those who attended trigger meetings had in fact instigated the contact to notify ONE of their change in circumstances. Therefore it seems the principle of making such meetings compulsory is unnecessary.

There were very few widows included in the study (see Appendix B, Tables B.1 and B.2 for details). This client group had very vague recollections of the initial stages of the ONE process. This is perhaps unsurprising given the distress and emotional strain they were under following the death of their spouse. The overwhelming view expressed by respondents about the timing of their encounter with the ONE service was the timing of the Personal Adviser meeting was inopportune. As described by a widow in our sample:

‘I went to register my husband’s death, they gave me some forms, I think I sent the forms off for Widow’s Benefit, I’m sure I did, but to tell you the truth everything that happened around that time is very hazy. I can’t honestly remember the details… although he was ill for a long time it was such a shock, such a traumatic time and I’m really not sure. I was getting forms left, right and centre. I was going round in a daze most of the time.’

(PVS, widow, female, age 59)

A number of respondents failed to understand the reason they were required to attend a Personal Adviser meeting. Most had either gone to notify the authorities of their spouse’s death, or taken claim books back to the DSS. In either case, they were notified they were entitled to Widow’s Benefit and helped to complete the relevant claim forms by the staff at the DSS offices. As far as the widows in our sample were concerned they had made their claim for benefit at that point. There had been no mention of ONE to respondents in our sample at this stage.
In many cases it was several weeks after they had made their claim for Widow’s Benefit that clients received a letter from ONE inviting them to a Personal Adviser meeting. The invitation had seemed quite perplexing to a number of widows in our sample. They were unaware that ONE existed and unclear about the purpose of attending a meeting. A number of respondents felt there was insufficient information available about ONE. Some respondents felt that leaflets or explanations about the ways ONE might be relevant to them should be made more readily available. However, clients attended the meeting because they felt it was compulsory and were afraid they would not receive benefits if they failed to attend. One respondent explained how she felt confused by the invitation to participate in ONE:

‘They sent me a letter saying would I go and see this person and it just said it was this ONE system. I didn’t know what ONE system was or why they were sending me letters, but I knew I had to go and see them but I didn’t know why. I’d already filled in the forms, I’d given them all the information I had and I thought well why do I have to do this now?’

(Call Centre, widow, female, age 58)

4.5.3 Views of ONE in principle

Many respondents felt positive about ONE in principle, particularly the idea of having a Personal Adviser who could assist widows with completing the claim form. However, most objected to the timing. Some felt it might have been better to defer a personalised meeting, at least in the short-term, whilst others felt a home visit may have been more appropriate several weeks after the death of their spouse, thereby allowing them to focus more clearly.

Reference has been made elsewhere in this report to the discomfort Advisers felt when dealing with certain clients. The staff research showed that there was overwhelming apprehension on the part of Advisers when catering for the recently bereaved. Most felt ill-equipped and as the pilot progressed there was a greater incidence of meetings with widows being deferred.

Concerns were raised by a small number of respondents about the lack of privacy available in the open-plan offices. Many felt emotionally unfit to attend Personal Adviser meetings, however they felt if a private room was available it might make discussing sensitive issues less harrowing.

The idea of a work-focused element to a Personal Adviser meeting seemed quite inappropriate to a number of respondents. This was because they were intending to return to employment (after a brief period of caring for their spouse) or because they felt too old to work, or believed they were too mature to consider taking up training or a career change. However, some respondents felt that it was important for widows to know there was an opportunity to discuss work and training during a Personal Adviser meeting. Although the respondents in our sample were
older widows, some drew attention to the fact that a work-focused discussion might be welcomed by younger clients in their situation. Most felt it was important for the Personal Advisers to be well trained and capable of identifying which clients might appreciate a work focus.

4.5.4 Further contact

It proved almost impossible to recruit widowers to the second phase of the study, and thereby, experiences of further contact. In fact, only one widow who attended a non-mandatory follow-up meeting was interviewed. The reason for the apparent lack of widows maintaining contact with ONE can partly be explained by the decision of Advisers to defer meetings with widows because they felt the clients would find them inappropriate, a view broadly shared by widows included in both phases of the study.

There were other widows interviewed during phase two of the study, but they were very recently bereaved and had been carers up until the death of their spouse. They had typically dealt with ONE as carers prior to their change in circumstances. As such their experiences and views are included in an earlier section of this chapter which focused on the experiences of carers who attended a trigger meeting following the change in circumstance (see Section 4.4).

The limited sample makes drawing conclusions about widow’s experiences from the second phase of the research difficult. However, it is important to note it is indicative of the minimal follow-up contact widows received. The findings from phase one of the study outlined above offer some explanations for the lack of follow-up. Widows in phase one generally felt their dealings with ONE had been confusing, others did not feel they needed help to find employment and most could not envisage a time when they would return. Therefore, Advisers’ decisions to defer meetings with widows can be viewed as entirely accurate. The experiences of the lone widow included in phase two of the study are presented as a case study to highlight the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the follow-up features of the ONE service as she experienced them:
Case study 15

The respondent, a young mother of three children aged nine, three and one, recently lost her second husband to cancer. She had extensive experience of claiming Income Support in the past. However, at the time of the interview she had put a claim in for Widowed Mother’s Allowance, and Child Support Agency payments from her first marriage.

Her late husband was incapacitated for some time prior to his death and had claimed Incapacity Benefit through ONE, therefore the client was aware of the service before making her claim. Start-up was conducted over the telephone, the Adviser provided a clear and comprehensive explanation of the service. She was impressed by Start-up:

‘I think it’s really good, it’s done over the phone which is so convenient, they give you a time, you can get all the information ready in front of you to tell them. It saves you a lot of form filling, looking through booklets trying to make sense of what it all means. Then I got the forms through and I just signed it and took it to the meeting with me.’

Her first Adviser meeting was arranged to take place two days later. She was offered the opportunity to defer the meeting but at the time she was desperate to secure income for her family and suspected if she had not attended the meeting she would not have received benefit for some time. Although she was not offered a home visit, she stated it would have been preferable to a meeting in an office.

Whilst she found the Adviser sensitive to her immediate needs, by rushing her claim through, she felt the Adviser lacked sensitivity in other ways. The respondent felt there shouldn’t have been a work focus to the meeting, as she explained:

‘I can remember thinking ‘what a stupid question.’ I’d just lost my husband and there she was asking what work I wanted to do, and nursery places and gaining more qualifications. But I also thought that’s her job, she obviously has to ask everybody these routine questions.’

The Adviser seemed not to have tailored the meeting to the client’s needs at that point.

Continued
The client attended one other subsequent meeting when she encountered difficulties with CSA payments. She was anticipating continuity of service but upon arrival she was informed she would be seeing another Adviser. She felt it would have been better to have seen the same Adviser:

‘If you see the same Adviser they get to know you, but it didn’t really matter because I don’t go there very often, but for somebody who needs to see them a lot I would think it would be important to see the same one.’

The respondent does not envisage another occasion when she might contact ONE. Overall, her experiences with ONE compared favourably to past experiences because she found it less faceless and her benefits came through relatively quickly.

(Call Centre, Widower, female, age 29)

4.5.5 Summary of experience and emergent issues

- In general widows had very little awareness of understanding of the ONE service.
- Like many of the sick or disabled and carers included in the research, widows typically bypassed ONE in the first instance. Most, typically went to the DSS to make their claim, at which point they were not told about ONE and first became aware some weeks later when invited to a Personal Adviser meeting.
- Many widows felt uncomfortable by the lack of privacy available in the open-plan offices.
- Work-focused discussions occasionally took place, however, the work-focus was considered irrelevant. Many clients had employment to return to whilst others were not considering taking work because of their age.
- Follow-up contact was minimal. Advisers made the decision to defer meetings with widows because they felt they were inopportune and inappropriate.
- Those who did attend trigger meetings (see Section 4.4) also had mixed experiences, but Advisers were felt to have approached their situation with sympathy.
From this study it is possible to identify a number of significant features relating to the model variants in operation. Although, as discussed elsewhere in this report clients’ experiences are shaped by their personal circumstances and particular expectations, a number of significant findings relate directly to the model clients experienced. Therefore, this section attempts to distinguish between the strengths and weaknesses of each model. Although it must be emphasised that there were examples of area, and even office variation.

5.1 Private and Voluntary Sector variant

Most clients who had experienced the delivery of ONE through the Private and Voluntary Sector variant were unaware of the private or voluntary sector involvement. However, when probed about the reception they received at ONE offices a number had felt that the receptionist had seemed very knowledgeable and displayed an obvious customer care approach. This is most likely an effect of the dedicated receptionists in post at certain Private and Voluntary Sector sites who sought to ensure clients were provided with clear and comprehensive explanations of the service on offer. However, others in the sample felt they had received insufficient information about ONE. Some respondents felt that leaflets or explanations about the ways ONE might be relevant to them should be made more readily available.

There were a number of cases where clients had felt their Personal Advisers had lacked training or adequate knowledge of the benefit system, and many cases where Advisers had consulted with colleagues during Personal Adviser meetings. Although it is impossible to attribute this directly to Advisers who had come from a private sector background, this research illuminates clients’ experiences and views and all that can be concluded is that some Advisers in this variant had seemed unfamiliar with the benefit system. The quotes below were typical of many respondents’ views of the service they had received:

‘It seems to me as though the Government have brought in this new ONE scheme and some of the staff running [it] don’t know what they’re doing.’
(PVS, sick or disabled, male, age 25)

‘The dole office had said ONE would sort everything out, they’ll sort out a job, help you look for work, they’ll put it all on computer and they’ll help you with your claim, but when I went in it wasn’t like that at all, not like they’d explained it or the picture I’d got in my head.’
(PVS, Jobseeker, male, age 25)
‘To be honest, I never got any sense out of any of them, someone tells you one thing and then you speak to someone else and you get a completely different story, so you never really know what is happening.’

(PVS, lone parent, female, age 31)

When clients were questioned about the ways in which they had become aware of ONE, many recalled having seen quite high profile advertising in the areas where the PVS variant was in operation. However, many had not realised the significance of the advertising they had seen until they had been through the ONE process, or until the researcher had probed them for details.

As the pilots progressed the flexible approach adopted in a number of the PVS sites was acknowledged and appreciated by many clients. Although time pressures and resource issues did not permit continuity of service with an assigned Adviser some of the PVS sites successfully overcame this by ensuring all Advisers were familiar with the entire ONE process by alternating between Start-up and Personal Adviser roles. This had reportedly given many clients the impression that Advisers in PVS sites were knowledgeable.

This approach to delivering ONE was very well received by clients. The use of Call Centre technology was found to make the initial stage of the process generally much more convenient for all categories of client.

A number of clients found using their home phones offered greater privacy than either the option to use the hotlines or face-to-face Start-up at ONE sites. Many expressed the view that conducting Start-up from their home phone had only taken a matter of minutes, whereas going to the ONE office might have taken up most of their day, particularly where alternative care arrangements had to be made for dependants and travel to and from the ONE office involved several bus journeys.

Where clients had made use of the hotline mixed views were expressed. Whilst some found them unproblematic, many wondered why, if they had made the effort to go to a ONE site, the Start-up meeting could not take place there and then. Meantime, others accepted the facility on offer but felt the offices were too noisy and distracting to concentrate fully. One respondent who had used the hotline facility explained the problems he encountered:

‘I found it very difficult to hear in there because of the noise, there were quite a few children in there running around and screaming and I found it very difficult, because it was one of those hooded things, it was very hard to actually hear what they were saying...I didn’t find it satisfactory, in hindsight I would have done it from home and had the peace and quiet then I could have gathered my thoughts better.’

(Call Centre, sick or disabled, male, age 43)
There were some clients who made use of the hotline but found they were not equipped with relevant documentation. For them calling from home would have provided the opportunity to gather together all the necessary paperwork between the initial telephone call and call-back. Which was precisely what a number of other respondents did. The opportunity to collate all the necessary documentation beforehand had reportedly made them feel prepared and unflustered.

However, there were a large number of clients in our sample who found, to their own financial cost, call-back was not being used. For many clients in two areas where the Call Centre variant was being piloted, call-back had not worked effectively. Some clients had not been told that a call-back service was on offer and so footed the bill for the cost of the telephone call, which in some cases lasted 45 minutes. In one of the areas, call-back was arranged but failed to materialise. Unsurprisingly, this angered a number of respondents who had waited in for a call at a specified time only to be let down and have to call ONE at their expense.

These two areas experienced other difficulties, which negatively affected a number of respondents’ views of the service they had received. A number of clients reported being told there were ‘technical difficulties’ or that ‘the system was down’ and on these occasions Start-up did not occur over the phone. Clients were sent claim forms to complete unaided at home, although arrangements for a Personal Adviser meeting were arranged in all appropriate cases, others were deferred. Despite these negative experiences, clients were still generally positive about the idea of Call Centres for the Start-up stage of the process.

The research with Advisers (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) provides explanations for the difficulties encountered in some areas. Delays were thought to be the consequence of information technology glitches created by the client appointments, information and diary system which was often slow and unreliable because it frequently crashed.

In another of the Call Centre areas, a number of respondents reported waiting unreasonably long periods between initial contact and call-back because the Call Centres had been very busy. As one Jobseeker explained:

'It could be five days before call-back, depending on how busy the ONE Call Centres are, it can then be another four days before you get your interview, which is what happened to me last time...with the old system you went down there, they arrange a date for you straight away, that person would interview you straight away and then you’d be sorted in about a week, with this new system everything seems to take so much longer.'

(Call Centre, Jobseeker, male, age 22)

Where systems had been operational, clients voiced their appreciation for the help they received with the claim forms. There was an overwhelming sense of relief expressed by respondents in our sample.
that they had not been faced with the task of completing, what many considered to be, unwieldy and confusing claim forms. Respondents found the Start-up Advisers to be very friendly, competent, efficient and on some occasions apologetic for the technical difficulties experienced. There was also much evidence that Start-up Advisers in the Call Centre variant had provided clients with a brief, but often comprehensive, explanation of ONE.

Several clients stated their personal preference for the clear distinction between Start-up and their Personal Adviser meeting in the Call Centre variant. There was a sense that the administrative tasks of form completion had been dealt with at the initial stages over the telephone, thereby allowing clients to focus more clearly on discussions about their personal circumstances face-to-face.

There was a small group of respondents, from across the client groups and who had varying degrees of claiming experience, who simply favoured doing all their business in person. Many were keen to maintain ownership over their claim by being able to ‘put faces to names’ and to complete their own forms. This group was also concerned about data protection issues related to imparting personal information over the phone. A view expressed by one particular respondent was typical of this group:

‘I prefer to deal with things personally rather than with somebody on the end of a phone. You know I can get my story across better looking at somebody than I can on the phone...you are a nobody, you are just a voice. Had they asked me these questions in the office I could have asked any questions I wanted at the time...you know is this right or is that right.’

(Call Centre, sick or disabled, male, age 55).
6 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

6.1 Awareness

The ways in which clients became aware of ONE clearly had implications upon their expectations of the service. Therefore, it is important for the peripheral sources through which clients access the benefit system to be aware of ONE, and its purposes. The groups mentioned by respondents in our sample included GPs, previous employers, the Citizen’s Advice Bureau, solicitors, social workers, nurses, charities, and funeral directors. If these groups had been equipped with current sources of information about ONE, a number of clients felt they would have been saved unnecessary inconvenience and stress. Therefore, it might be advisable to make peripheral groups aware of ONE and equip them with the necessary information to effectively direct clients towards ONE.

A number of respondents also indicated advertising needed to be more explicit. Many had confused ONE with the One-to-One phone service. Others had not recognised what was being advertised until they had been through the entire process, or in some cases until they were probed for their views by the researcher. Likewise, many respondents felt explanatory leaflets should be more readily available. They suggested leaflets should be issued with claim forms and available in doctors’ surgeries, hospitals and post offices. As such it might be beneficial to make advertising and leaflets clearer, more readily available and distribute more widely than ONE sites.

6.2 Making the ONE process explicit

It became clear from this research, that many clients felt the different stages of the process had not been made clear to them. Clients were often confused, and sometimes resentful, about attending seemingly unnecessary meetings. This was particularly true of Start-up. Where clients had been made aware of the reason for the two distinct stages of the process they were generally appreciative of resolving the administrative side of their claim during Start-up. It is important for clients to be made aware of the entire process at the outset to ensure they are in a position to make the most effective use of their Personal Adviser meeting. Findings from this study indicate it would be beneficial to clarify the two-staged process of ONE to clients.

Similarly, clients felt the purpose of the Personal Adviser meeting and the role of the Adviser should be made clear at the outset. A number of clients had misunderstood the reason for the meeting, and as such they had not maximised the opportunity to discuss their personal circumstances, and where appropriate, explored ways in which they might overcome barriers to employment. Many respondents were unaware that their Personal Adviser could refer them to training or support services. Many
felt they would have appreciated referral and taken up the offer had they known it were an option. Therefore, the purpose of the Personal Adviser meeting and the role of the Personal Adviser should be clarified to ensure the potential of the service can be realised.

6.3 Resolve financial concerns

In almost all cases Personal Advisers dealt with the clients’ benefit needs first during the meeting. Most clients appreciated dealing with their claim for benefit first, some welcomed the help their Personal Adviser offered when checking the forms believing their claim would be more efficiently processed. Other clients felt that dealing with their claim at the outset of the meeting left them free to discuss employment-related issues more unreservedly because their short-term fears about their financial situation had been alleviated.

However, for some clients this meant there was little or no time remaining to discuss issues surrounding their intention to work, help and support they might need to become more employable, or strategies to overcome obstacles that were preventing them from working in either the short- or long-term.

It is important to ensure that a client’s claim for benefit is dealt with first to alleviate fears and allow clients to focus on work-related discussion. Although Advisers must also ensure there is adequate time to discuss employment issues and barriers.

6.4 A greater work focus

Some of the clients considered not job-ready by their Personal Adviser, felt they should have been made aware of the work-focused element of ONE. Some believed that the opportunity to discuss employment options available to them in the long-term would have been very encouraging. However, there was wide appreciation among respondents who did have work-related discussions, for the sensitive way in which it had been approached by their Personal Adviser. Clients were keen that they should not be pressured into finding employment, but rather that they should be made aware that Personal Advisers were available to offer guidance at a more appropriate time. As such, all clients should receive a sensitive, yet work-focused Personal Adviser meeting tailored to both their short- and long-term needs.

6.5 Advisers not always effective

Although clients generally acknowledged the sensitive and friendly way in which their Advisers dealt them with, there was a sense that the outcome of meetings had not been satisfactory. For example, where Advisers had been efficient and polite when checking clients’ claim forms, there were some examples of forms being lost or delays in benefit being efficiently processed, although these short comings are not entirely attributable to the ONE teams delivering the service they were interpreted as such by many clients in our sample. Also, where job searches were conducted they had often been inappropriate. Referral to training was frequently mentioned during Personal Adviser meetings but rarely came to fruition.
Many clients felt let down, while they reported receiving friendly and encouraging advice the outcome of meetings rarely met their expectations. Findings from the research presented here highlight the importance of keeping clients fully informed. Therefore, **clients should be notified of likely delays in benefit processing times and Advisers should make efforts to exercise honesty about the scope of job searches and training provision available.**

On many occasions clients reported being uncertain where ONE featured in the overall structure of the benefit system. Several respondents felt frustrated when there were delays between putting their claim in during their Personal Adviser meeting, and receiving payment. Quite often Personal Advisers had failed to explain fully that ONE was not directly responsible for processing clients’ claims, but rather was responsible for passing them on to the relevant agencies.

This misunderstanding caused many clients to feel angry and frustrated. They felt going through ONE had compromised the degree of control they had over the claim making process. They had believed ONE offered an alternative means of claiming benefit and therefore expected greater efficiency. Where comprehensive explanations had been given about the service ONE offered, and likely delays clients could expect, clients reported feeling prepared and reassured.

However, a large number of respondents in our sample felt they had not been given any explanation. There were many examples of clients receiving official, and sometimes threatening, letters from their local Council or Local Authority when clients fell into arrears with their rent and/or Council Tax payments. Because these respondents felt ill-prepared for the delays they apportioned blame for the delays directly to ONE. A number of clients felt that if ONE had provided more explicit explanations about its purpose and role they would not have felt so let down. As such, Advisers should seek to **provide explicit explanations about the purpose and scope of the service and prepare clients for likely delays in claiming process.**

Although many clients felt the ONE office offered a pleasant environment, and distinct advantages over other buildings in the benefit system, there was a general view that clients should be made aware of the private facilities available in ONE offices. There were certain circumstances, outlined elsewhere in the report, where a private room would have reduced inhibitions and therefore ensured clients made full use of their Personal Adviser meeting. There were very few examples in this research of private rooms being used and the research with staff (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) highlights a number of reasons for this. Even where respondents had felt private facilities were not necessary for them, many felt they should have been made aware of the option, particularly if they had intended to go back to their Personal Adviser to discuss matters at
greater length sometime in the future. Hence, private facilities should be available to ONE staff and Advisers should make all clients aware of the availability of private facilities and allow the client the opportunity to decide whether to use them.

6.8 Model variation

The Call Centre variant was very well received by many clients involved in this research, mainly because it offered great advantages in terms of convenience in the initial stages of the claiming process. Many felt it was favourable to attending face-to-face Start-up. Allowing clients the opportunity to claim from the comfort of their own homes was perceived to be a particular strength. Many clients found leaving their home to attend Start-up problematic, particularly carers, lone parents and clients suffering from immobility. The Call Centre variant was said to provide clients with the opportunity to prepare themselves by collating relevant information before call-back. Respondents reported feeling very well supported by the Start-up Advisers, and relieved that they didn’t face completing daunting claim forms alone.

Meantime, the Private and Voluntary Sector variant was not as well received. Some clients felt Advisers were lacking in expertise and there was little evidence of innovative modes of delivery at the time of this research. The Basic Model was generally working satisfactorily according to respondents in our sample. Although it must be acknowledged that in each of the variants there were significant area and site variations. Findings from this evaluation suggest the Call Centre variant could be effectively employed for Start-up in all areas, however, the option of face-to-face Start-up should be maintained for those with a preference for personalised service at all stages of the process.

6.9 ONE serves a gateway function

There was overwhelming confusion about what ‘caseload’ meant and how it could best be implemented. Staff research (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) revealed definitions and interpretations varied greatly from Adviser to Adviser, site to site and region to region. The original intention of caseload was to ensure all clients could access advice and support with an Adviser (knowledgeable about their case), with a view to identifying ways they could overcome barriers. However, the application of the principle was limited. Rather than providing a tailored and supportive service to all clients, caseload was extended almost exclusively to the most job-ready clients only. Whilst many clients, in need of other forms of support, were not effectively referred to relevant services, or training with recognisable accreditation. Overall, the gateway function of the service was not working effectively and ONE was seen to abandon longer-term objectives at the cost of addressing short-term needs. It is imperative that the gateway function of the ONE service is effectively translated/re-iterated and staff are equipped with the necessary resources to appropriately refer clients.
6.10 Continuity of service

The extent to which clients received continuity of service with the same Adviser was generally limited. Observational case studies of, and interviews with, staff (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) illustrated that it was rarely possible to deliver continuity due to resource limitations, therefore many sites adopted a team-based approach. Clients’ views varied about continuity, it was more important for some than others, particularly where circumstances were sensitive or complex. However, there was a general consensus of opinion that where an Adviser seemed knowledgeable about their case, capable of offering tailored support, and were competent in their role, then clients held no strong views about discontinuity. Where sites had adopted a team-based approach, clients felt the above prerequisites were present and as such felt very well supported by the team. It can be concluded that continuity is only necessary where circumstances are particularly delicate. In most other cases it is acceptable for teams of Advisers to cater for an individual providing they are familiar with the case.

6.11 Effective referral to Specialist Advisers

In general, internal referral to specialist Advisers was working very well. Clients especially appreciated having contact with specialists where their circumstances were sensitive or complex. Specialist Advisers were felt to have in-depth knowledge and understanding of the options available to clients. In some cases clients were handed-off to Specialists Advisers who then took over their entire caseload and maintained regular contact. Others maintained contact with their Personal Adviser as their first port of call, whilst attending meetings with the Specialist Adviser on an infrequent and ad hoc basis. Both approaches were well received. Where appropriate clients should be referred to Specialist Advisers to access in-depth information and advice about their particular circumstances.

6.12 Referral to training/work trials working well for some clients

External referral to training received a mixed response from clients. Some of the more job-ready and qualified clients felt the training provision available was generally inadequate. However, other clients who felt quite distanced from the labour market found the provision suitable to their needs. This was particularly true of lone parents where they were offered referral to basic I.T. courses. Many lone parents were also referred to ‘work trials’. They appreciated the opportunity to experience different types of unpaid work for short periods without the fear of losing their benefits. They believed they would be in a position to make informed decisions about the most sustainable employment options available to them. However, other clients were disgruntled that they were not offered the opportunity of work trials, they too believed it could provide an effective means of identifying sustainable work options. Advisers should have a wider knowledge of the range of training provision available in the local area. Currently training provision is too basic for many clients, for others training or unpaid work experience is not raised.
Early referral to New Deal programmes was limited for many clients included in the study. Many clients expressed an interest in early referral but were informed by Advisers that it was not possible and they would have to wait until they had been unemployed for six consecutive months. These clients, typically Jobseekers, were frustrated by this and felt their Advisers had not been as proactive as they might have been, especially in terms of finding accredited training, because they were waiting for them to go onto a New Deal programme after 26 weeks.

However, there was evidence of several lone parents being referred to New Deal for Lone Parents. But it was more common for lone parents in the sample to reject the idea of going on New Deal for Lone Parents after preliminary enquiries because they found ONE to offer a greater degree of flexibility because non-accredited courses tended to be shorter and fitted around their domestic responsibilities. Though many anticipated going on New Deal for Lone Parents in the future when their domestic responsibilities eased, they felt more structured training programmes leading to recognisable qualification would help them to secure work in the future. Advisers need clear guidelines about a client’s eligibility and preferences for early referral to a New Deal programme.

Although there was evidence of clients being referred to outside agencies for support, it was generally lacking. The research with staff (Kelleher et al., 2001, 2002) illustrates the lack of information Advisers generally have about local support services. Despite compiling directories Advisers were uncertain precisely what each organisation provided. Where representatives from support organisations paid visits to ONE sites and forged links, referral occurred more often. For clients to effectively access support services when ONE is their first point of contact when seeking to overcome barriers, Advisers need to foster closer relationships with local providers.

Clients made full and extensive use of ONE when they understood all that was on offer. However, it was common for clients to have misunderstood the service because they had only received a partial or cursory explanation. Where clients received clear explanations and were encouraged to instigate contact to devise strategic plans to overcome barriers, they felt both supported and empowered. For clients to make the most of the service they must be made aware of their rights and responsibilities. Clients need to be informed so they can make autonomous decisions about their own futures.
Figure A.1  The ONE process
### Table B.1 Sample profile of respondents included in Phase One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Benefit</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Jobseekers</th>
<th>Lone Parents</th>
<th>Sick or Disabled</th>
<th>Others (Carers and Widows)</th>
<th>Basic Model</th>
<th>Call Centre</th>
<th>Private/Voluntary sector</th>
<th>New Claim</th>
<th>Repeat Claim</th>
<th>Short-term deferral of Personal Adviser meeting</th>
<th>Failed to attend Personal Adviser meeting</th>
<th>Problem telephone access</th>
<th>Ethnic minorities</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>46</td>
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<td>73</td>
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<td>Age Groups</td>
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**RESEARCH METHODS**

**APPENDIX B**

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**Table B.1 Sample profile of respondents included in Phase One**
### Table B.2  Sample profile of respondents included in Phase Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>Lone parents</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sick or Disabled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others (Carers and Widows)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Basic Model</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Call Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private/Voluntary sector</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mandatory - part-time work ends</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory - part-time work begins</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory - part-time work begins</td>
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<td>18-25 year olds 35</td>
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<td>Age Groups</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Groups</td>
<td>46-59 year olds 46</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Groups</td>
<td>60-75 year olds 35</td>
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| Ethnic minorities                     | Asian 3 |
|---------------------------------------|       |
| Ethnic minorities                     | Black 4 |
| Ethnic minorities                     | Other 1 |

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<td>New claim</td>
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<td>Mandatory - part-time work begins</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandatory - part-time work begins</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory - part-time work begins</td>
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<td>Mandatory - part-time work begins</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The table includes a sample profile of respondents included in Phase Two, detailing various demographics and characteristics of the respondents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fieldwork areas</th>
<th>Basic Model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southwark</td>
<td>Private/Voluntary sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Nottinghamshire</td>
<td>Call Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Cheshire</td>
<td>Model</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leeds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarense</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calderdale and Kirklees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckinghamshire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyremsdshire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lea Rodung</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle Coast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Essex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table B.3: Fieldwork areas
An evaluation of the delivery of the A1 component of ONE which explores individual experiences of participants using three different methods of delivery: the Basic model, the Call-Centre model and the Private / Voluntary sector model (PVS).

**Aims:**
- To consider clients’ views and experiences of the service.
- To identify barriers to delivering 'ONE' in the different models and to the different client groups.
- To consider ideas for improving or developing the service.

1. **INTRODUCTION**
   - About BMRB International
   - Aims of the research – about clients’ recent experiences of claiming benefits
   - Study being carried out on behalf of
     - Department for Education and Employment;
     - Department of Social Security;
     - Employment Service; and
     - Benefits Agency
   - Confidentiality
   - Tape recording

2. **BACKGROUND** (Enter answers to this section on PROFORMA)
   **ABOUT THE RESPONDENT**
   - Age
   - Household (living with family, friends, partner, alone)
   - Ages of children (if dependent)
   - Ethnic group (self-describe)

   **OVERVIEW OF CURRENT AND PAST EMPLOYMENT AND CLAIMING EXPERIENCE**
   - How would they describe their main occupation
   - Are they currently employed (probe for details, e.g. part-time, temporary etc)
   - If not working, are they in training or education
   - Check employment status of other household members
   - What benefits are they currently claiming (read out list of ONE benefits on proforma and tick benefits claimed. Also ask about any non-ONE benefits being claimed).

Looking back over past 2-3 years:
- Main activities (employment, education, training, caring responsibilities, health problems)
- What type of work, training etc
- Benefit claims (prior to most recent claim)
- how much time on benefit
- experience of New Deals
- experience of Employment Service advisers
- experience of specialist advisers (e.g. Disability Employment Advisers or Lone Parent Advisers)

**Looking back further, since leaving school**
- Main activities (employment, education, training, caring responsibilities, health problems)
- What type of work, training etc.
- Benefit claims
- how much time on benefit
- experience of New Deals
- experience of Employment Service advisers
- experience of specialist advisers (e.g. Disability Employment Advisers or Lone Parent Advisers)

**BACKGROUND TO CURRENT CLAIM**
- Reasons for claiming
- New or repeat claim (new claim = never having claimed benefit before)
- What were their plans when making their claim
  - To look for work (PROBE: what kind of work, likelihood of finding work they want)
  - To consider education or training
  - To stay at home (PROBE for reasons)
  - Were they considering work at time of making the claim / at some point in the future / how far ahead were they planning

3. **EXPERIENCE OF ONE**
   **PUBLICITY**
   - Did they know about ONE prior to making the claim
   - Were they aware that there was a new way of claiming benefit
   - Did they have any expectations about the new service (i.e. ONE)
   - Prior to making the claim, had they seen any advertising for ONE
   - What was their attitude towards ONE from this advertising
   - Did their experience of ONE fit with their impression from publicity.
The **START-UP INTERVIEW** – explanation for researcher

The Start-up interview is the first stage of the ONE Process. However, the respondent may not be aware of the term ‘Start-up’. The initial contact may, or may not, be the Start-up interview. The interviews may be conducted in person or over the telephone. At this stage, basic information about the client is collected, such as personal details, reasons for claiming benefit and previous work experience; a Personal Adviser is allocated to each client and a Personal Adviser meeting arranged (unless there are reasons for deferral or for the PA meeting to be waived).

Clients may be directed to employment or job vacancies at this stage if appropriate. At Start-up the client may be given a claim form to fill out and bring to the Personal Adviser meeting OR the form may be filled out electronically during Start-up (this happens in Call Centres, Basic Model in Paisley only, and some PVS areas).

(There may be individual cases where a respondent has had a Personal Adviser running on from the Start-up interview so they may not differentiate between them.)

- How did they make contact with the system (telephone, face-to-face, form, letter, third party)?
- Through which office did they make the initial contact (PROBE: Benefits Agency, Employment Service - Jobcentre, Local Authority, Call Centre, ONE office)?
- Did they get the benefit claim form from this office too; If not, where did they get it from?
- Was ONE located at the office of initial contact; if not, at what office?
- How were they told about ONE (when were they told, who told them, what were they told)?
- From the explanation given, what was their understanding of the ONE service (allow respondent to describe in own words before probing)

**PROBE:** Did they understand what was being offered
what was required of them
what was different to the usual system
the potential benefits

- Did they understand that they had to participate in a work-focused meeting?
- Did they have any concerns?
- Did they have their Start-up interview (i.e. when they were told about ONE and when they had to give some basic details about their circumstances) in person or over the telephone?

**ELECTRONIC CLAIM FORM (ECF)**

This is an innovation being used in **Call Centres** and also in **Paisley (Basic Model)**, **Leeds**, **Suffolk** and **North Cheshire (PVS)**. Use of these may affect the speed of Start-up interviews and Personal Adviser meetings. Some of the questions below are designed to tease out experiences of using this new method.

**FOR THOSE WHO HAD START-UP FACE TO FACE**

- How soon after the initial contact did they have the Start-up interview / or did they have it at the same time?
  - Views of the reception process
  - any problems with access
  - did they know where to go
  - did they have to wait long before being seen waiting time any views on the waiting environment
- Perceptions of Start-up adviser (behaviour, friendliness, helpfulness)
- What sort of information did they have to give (anything sensitive)

**PROBE:**
- Did they discuss employment, job readiness, suitable job vacancies
- support needs (e.g. childcare, financial problems, special needs)
- child maintenance issues
- What sort of advice and information were they given (quality, appropriateness)
- Did the staff have any difficulty answering their questions
- Were their needs understood
- Did they object to any of the questions they were asked
- Were there any delays between questions (e.g. associated with entering data into the computer)
- Was the benefit claim form filled out by the ONE adviser on the computer. If so,
  - views on this (e.g speed, efficiency, helpfulness, comparisons with previous experience)
  - were they shown the claim form to check its accuracy
  - did they take it away and bring it to the Personal Adviser meeting
- If not, were they given a claim form to take away to fill out on their own
- How long did the Start-up interview last
- How soon after the Start-up interview was the Personal Adviser meeting arranged for
FOR THOSE WHO ENTERED VIA CALL CENTRE

- Initial phone call
- What was their reaction to being asked to use the telephone to claim benefit
- Where did they telephone from (home, relative or friend’s house, ONE office, elsewhere)
- Any problems associated with making this call
- Did ONE staff call them back / how was that arranged / how quickly did they call back
- Were there any problems with the call-back arrangements (Probe for waiting time, privacy, convenience)
- Do they own a mobile phone (views on using a mobile phone to deal with benefit claim)

Start-up interview

- How soon after the initial contact did they have the Start-up interview / or did they have it at the same time
- Perceptions of Start-up adviser (behaviour, friendliness, helpfulness)
- How was ONE presented during the interview
- What sort of information did they have to give (anything sensitive)

PROBE: Did they discuss … employment, job readiness, suitable job vacancies
 … support needs (e.g. childcare, financial problems, special needs)
 … child maintenance issues
- What sort of advice and information were they given (quality, appropriateness)
- Did the staff have any difficulty answering their questions
- Were their needs understood
- Did they object to any of the questions they were asked.
- Were there any delays between questions (e.g. associated with entering data into the computer)
- What did they think about the benefit claim form filled out by the ONE adviser over the telephone (Probe for speed, efficiency, helpfulness, comparisons with previous experience)
- How long did the Start-up interview last / did they spend long on the telephone
- Views on giving out personal details over the telephone
- Was there anything in particular that clients did not wish to discuss over the telephone
- Did they receive the claim form in the post to check – how long after Start-up interview did it arrive, any views on checking the form, any errors
- How soon after the Start-up interview was the Personal Adviser meeting booked for
- Overall impression of making a claim over the telephone

ALLOCATION OF PERSONAL ADVISER

- What were they told about meeting with a Personal Adviser
- From the explanation given did they understand what would happen at a Personal Adviser meeting
- What did they see as the purpose of the Personal Adviser meeting
- What was their attitude towards it (positive/negative, timing)
- Was a Personal Adviser meeting arranged for them

If yes:

- Did they agree to attend
- How was the meeting arranged (in person, by telephone, by post)
- How long after Start-up was the Personal Adviser meeting arranged for (views on this)
- Were they asked to bring any documents to the meeting (e.g. evidence or benefit claim form)
- Did they attend the Personal Adviser meeting.

(If they attended a Personal Adviser meeting skip the next section)

FOR THOSE WHO DID NOT ATTEND A PERSONAL ADVISER MEETING

(People will either have had a meeting deferred or they will have had a meeting arranged and they failed to turn up – PROBE for how many meetings were arranged/ not attended)

- Why did they not attend a Personal Adviser meeting
- Were they told that the meeting would be deferred / delayed (for how long, indefinitely)

PROBE as to why the meeting was deferred (this needs to be asked very sensitively depending on circumstances of respondent - one of the reasons would be terminal illness)

- Did they feel that the Personal Adviser had made the right decision
- Would they have liked a Personal Adviser meeting at this time
- Were they asked to make contact / told they would be contacted, at a later stage (if so, why)
- Did they want any further contact
- Was there any further contact (PROBE for details – eg any follow up tel calls, letter etc)
- Did they know how to contact their Personal Adviser
- Were they given a business card, anything official with contact details
- If they failed to attend their Personal Adviser meeting – how many meetings were arranged
PERSONAL ADVISER MEETING
- How long after Start-up did they meet with Personal Adviser
- Were there any problems associated with attending the meeting (location, access, reception process, knowing where to go, waiting times, environment)
- What happened at the Personal Adviser meeting (allow respondent to describe in own words before probing)
PROBE: For each of the following headings, ask if a discussion took place and what their views were on that discussion.
  - Personal circumstances (anything sensitive)
  - Employment (job readiness, suitable job vacancies)
  - Calculation of in-work benefits
  - Barriers to work (e.g. lack of confidence, childcare issues, disability, domestic problems, anything else)
  - Support needs (e.g. childcare, financial problems, special needs, referral to specialist services, were any referrals made)
  - Training needs (Ask Jobseekers especially if they understood that they would have earlier access to training under ONE; were they submitted to training)
  - Personalised action plan (what was agreed, any referrals planned)
  - Arrangements for future contact
Were they offered a caseload meeting (i.e. a further meeting with their Personal Adviser)
Did they want one
If yes, was a future meeting arranged — views on this
If not, were they aware that they could get further help and advice from their Personal Adviser
Did they know how to contact their Personal Adviser
Were they given a business card, anything official with contact details
Benefit claim (was it checked, were all entitlements confirmed)
How long was spent completing / checking their claim form
- Ask for comments on the balance of time spent on work-related activities and checking the claim or talking about their circumstances.
- Views on the order in which things were dealt with
- How did the Personal Adviser come across (sensitive, helpful, friendly, efficient, officious)
- Did the Personal Adviser have any difficulty answering their questions
- Did the Personal Adviser have to go to anyone for advice during the meeting (E.g Disability Employment Adviser, Lone Parent Adviser, Benefits specialist, any other) — how long did it take, views on this.
- Did they speak to a specialist adviser themselves
- Would they have preferred a meeting with a specialist adviser instead of with a general Personal Adviser (e.g Sick or disabled, lone parent, older people in labour market)
- Did they see the Personal Adviser as more work-focused than a specialist adviser
- Did they object to any of the questions they were asked by the Personal Adviser
- Were they able to ask questions themselves or seek advice during the meeting
- What did they think of the advice and information they were given (quality, appropriateness)
- Did they feel that it was a ‘personal’ meeting, that it was tailored to their needs
- Did they have enough time
- Did they feel that the timing of the Personal Adviser meeting was appropriate for them (PROBE for reasons)
- Did they have any further contact with Personal Adviser (Eg follow up tel calls, letters etc)

SUBMISSIONS TO SPECIALIST SERVICES
- Were they referred to specialist services
- If so, has the referral been effective, has it helped them
- What have been the outcomes of any referrals

FOR SICK OR DISABLED Respondents ONLY (or anyone claiming Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Income Support on the grounds of incapacity, or Housing Benefit /Council Tax Benefit who have been awarded a disability premium based on the grounds of incapacity)
- Did they have a Personal Capability Assessment (PCA) examination
- had they previously had any medical examination in order to claim benefits
- if so, was it different (PROBE for positive/negative views)
- did they have any concerns / objections to having a PCA examination
- was this discussed with them at their Personal Adviser meeting

SUBMISSIONS TO JOBS VACANCIES.
- Were they submitted to job vacancies during / or following Personal Adviser meeting
- If so, were they appropriate
- Have they secured employment as a result
- Did the Adviser use a Jobs Database on the computer to look for jobs (views on usefulness)
FOR THOSE IN PVS MODELS ONLY

Some innovations being tried out include trained advisers on reception, self-help kiosks, job malls, jobs databases, home visits after clients fail to attend a Personal Adviser meeting and PROBE for views on innovations in place in specific areas as indicated below:

1. Reception manned by trained Personal Advisers (Deloittes – Leeds and Suffolk)
   - Thinking back to the person you encountered at Reception when you came into the Jobcentre, how helpful or unhelpful were they in answering your initial queries.
   - Did they ask you many questions

   - During the Personal Adviser meeting did the Adviser go through a Jobs database with you
   - Do you know if more than one database used (Pro for efficiency, usefulness)

3. Self-help electronic kiosk (Reed – North Nottinghamshire) – offering electronic jobs mall, search by pay, job type and geographical area, access to own CV and e-mail facilities to prospective employers
   - Did they have any experience of this; if so was it used during the Personal Adviser meeting, or did they use it on their own (Pro for details) what did they use it for overall views of usefulness

4. Home visit after failure to attend Personal Adviser meeting (All PVS ? – CHECK)
   - Did respondent receive a home visit
   - How many Personal Adviser meetings had they failed to attend before receiving the home visit
   - Probe for reactions to home visit, and what happened afterwards

4. OVERALL VIEWS ON PRINCIPLE OF ONE
   - What do they think overall of the ONE service
   - Does ONE offer any improvements over previous experience
   - PROBE for advantages / disadvantages of ONE
   - What do they think about the one-stop shop approach to work, benefits and support services
   - In particular:
     - dealing with one person for benefit claiming and work-related issues
     - dealing with the same person for advice relating to specific needs or for referral to specialist services
     - Would they prefer to deal directly with a specialist adviser (for example, disability adviser, or lone parent adviser)
     - Do they have any preference for dealing with Benefits Agency, Employment Service, Local Authority, Private Sector in order to claim benefit / to access the benefit system
     - Has ONE changed their perceptions of the above agencies
       - do they see ONE as a more efficient (seamless?) process
       - do they see the ONE staff as being any different
     - Views on using CALL CENTRES to deliver ONE service
     - Views on using PRIVATE SECTOR to deliver ONE service

Views on FULL PARTICIPATION

FULL PARTICIPATION – explanation: Under ONE, everyone must attend a Personal Adviser meeting before their claim for benefit can be processed, unless there are good reasons for deferring, for example, serious illness, bereavement. However, only Jobseekers will be required to look for work. No non-Jobseeker client will be forced to look for work or take any step following a Personal Adviser meeting.

Views on SANCTIONS

SANCTIONS – Explanation: Under ONE, a penalty will be applied if a client fails to attend a Personal Adviser meeting without good reason. Either their claim to benefit will not be processed or, if they are already receiving benefit, it will be stopped. They will receive a warning before the penalty is applied.

- Can they think of any effects of the ONE system changing the behaviour of people claiming benefits.
- PROBE: effects on security benefits system (for example: fewer people putting in fraudulent claims or claiming when able to work.

5. SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

- Do they have any ideas for how the delivery of ONE could be changed or adapted
- Ask respondent if they would be willing to have another research interview in the future (probably February or March 2001 – INSERT RESPONSE IN PRO-FORMA
THANK AND CLOSE
An evaluation of the delivery of the A1 (second phase) component of ONE which explores participants’ experiences of using different methods of delivery: the Basic model, the Call-Centre model and the Private/Voluntary sector model (PVS).

Aims:

- To consider clients’ views and experiences of the service.
- To identify barriers to delivering ‘ONE’ in the different models and to the different client groups.
- To consider ideas for improving or developing the service.

1. INTRODUCTION

- About BMRB International
- Aims of the research – about clients’ recent experiences of claiming benefits
- Study being carried out on behalf of DfEE, DSS, ES and BA.
- Confidentiality
- Tape recording

2. BACKGROUND

ABOUT THE RESPONDENT

- Age
- Household (living with family, friends, partner, alone)
- Ages of children (if dependent)
- Ethnic group

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT AND PAST EMPLOYMENT AND CLAIMING EXPERIENCE

- How would they describe their main occupation
- Are they currently employed (probe for details, e.g. part-time, temporary etc)
- If not working, are they in training or education
- Check employment status of other household members
- What benefits are they currently claiming

Experiences over past 2-3 years:

Main activities (employment, education, training, caring responsibilities, health problems)

Benefit claims (prior to most recent claim)

PROBE: time on benefit, experience of New Deals, experience of Employment Service advisers, experience of specialist advisers (e.g. Disability Employment Advisers or Lone Parent Advisers)

Experiences since leaving school

- Main activities (employment, education, training, caring responsibilities, health problems)
- Benefit claims

PROBE: time on benefit, experience of New Deals, experience of ES advisers, experience of specialist advisers (e.g. Disability Employment Advisers or Lone Parent Advisers)

BACKGROUND TO CURRENT CLAIM

- Reasons for claiming
- New or repeat claim (new claim = never having claimed benefit before)
- What were their plans (e.g. to look for work, to consider education or training, to stay at home PROBE for reasons)
- Were they considering work at time of making the claim/at some point in the future/how far ahead were they planning
- Are they looking for work at the moment.

3. EXPERIENCES OF ONE

- What sort of advice and information have they been given (about ONE, about claiming benefit, looking for employment)
- What do they understand the ONE service to be
- Did they feel their needs were understood by ONE staff (details, e.g. benefit advice, job readiness, support needs)
- Did the staff have any difficulty answering their questions (details)

Probe for speed, efficiency, helpfulness, comparisons with previous claiming experiences
4. INITIAL PERSONAL ADVISER MEETING

- When was their first Personal Adviser meeting
- What happened at the first Personal Adviser meeting (allow respondent to describe in own words before probing)
- What was broadly discussed
- Rough estimate of balance of time spent on work focused issues, time spent talking about benefits and time spent talking about their personal circumstances.
- What were they told about future contact (purpose, frequency),
- How were clients told to contact advisers (by phone, coming into the office), were they given contact details for their Personal Adviser (e.g. in a business card)
- Did clients understand they could initiate contact with their Personal Adviser

5. ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUBSEQUENT MEETING

Were they told they might have to attend a subsequent meeting with their Personal Adviser
(Needs to be explored in relation to relevant triggers e.g. probe: lone parents attending annual meeting, those starting or finishing education and training)
- Were arrangements made for subsequent meetings during the initial Personal Adviser meeting
- Who instigated contact (Personal Adviser or respondent).
- How was client contacted
- Did they attend subsequent meetings (PROBE for reasons/expectations, timing, appropriateness)

6. SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS

[Note to researcher: to explore the sequence of subsequent Personal Adviser meetings, why they took place, how they were arranged and what was discussed]
- What was the reason for additional Personal Adviser meetings (allow respondent to describe in own words before probing: work, benefit, referral related or change in their personal circumstances)
- What did they think about going to more Personal Adviser meetings
- What did they expect to get from more contact with ONE
- What did clients get out of the meeting/s
- Did they feel that the timing between Personal Adviser meetings was appropriate (PROBE for details and reasons)

7. FUTURE MEETINGS

- Did they have to attend another meeting
- How were they invited to the meeting (PROBE letter, phonecall)
- What explanation was provided
- What was the reason for the meeting, was it made clear to them by Personal Adviser
  (PROBE did they have a change in circumstances: in work or training, ending caring responsibilities, ending work/training)
- In the case of mandatory (trigger) meetings what was the change in their circumstances
  PROBE:
  - Trigger A – following Personal Capability report (PROBE what do they know about the report, what was discussed in relation to the report)
  - Trigger B – Caring responsibilities end (PROBE how was this discussed, was discussion related to work)
  - Trigger C – Part time work begins (PROBE did Personal Adviser discuss in-work benefits, in-work support)
  - Trigger D – Part time work ends (PROBE what were reasons behind finishing work did Personal Adviser discuss reasons for change in work)
  - Trigger E – Training and education through ONE ends (PROBE did Personal Adviser discuss work, what was outcome of training/education)
  - Trigger F – Had 18th birthday (PROBE was this discussed)
- Did they feel a meeting was appropriate at that time
- How did they feel about having to attend the meeting
- What else was discussed:
  Work focused issues (e.g. jobsearch, submission to job vacancies, training needs, barriers to work)
  Benefit focused issues (e.g. was comprehensive information provided, were claim forms checked, in-work benefits calculated, eligibility to other benefits discussed)
  Referral (e.g. Lone parent advisor, sick & disabled advisor, CSA, other support agencies: debt counsellors, drug rehab, alcoholics anonymous. Referral to other employment initiatives: New Deal)
  - Did they feel the meeting was ‘personal’, tailored to their needs, if not how could it have been (PROBE for details)
  - Was the meeting useful/appropriate (PROBE for details)
  - Did it live up to their expectations
  - Did they feel enough time was spent dealing with their case
  - Is there anything they would have liked that didn’t happen (e.g. referral, submission to job vacancies, training, arranging another meeting)
8. VIEWS ON FOLLOW UP MEETING/S

Arrangements for follow up meeting/s.
- Were there any other meetings, how were they arranged (PROBE letter, phone, during previous meeting,)
- Who instigated other meetings: their Personal Adviser or themselves.
- If arranged by Personal Adviser how did they feel about being invited to more meetings
- If arranged by them, why did they want it
- How easy was it to arrange
- How many follow up meetings have they had
- Was follow up with the same Personal Adviser, or different Personal Advisers (PROBE views on continuity of service, advantages/disadvantages)
- If not, would they have liked contact with the same Personal Adviser (PROBE for reasons)

Content of follow up meeting/s
- What was discussed during follow up meetings (PROBE employment, benefit, referred)
- Were they able to ask questions or seek advice during the meeting
- What did they think of the advice and information given (quality, appropriateness)

Outcome of follow up meeting/s
- What was the outcome of the Personal Adviser meeting (e.g. job, training, referral)
- What did they feel about the outcome
- Was follow up arranged e.g. another meeting, phonecall (PROBE who wanted it Personal Adviser or them, what type of contact: meeting, phone – how did they feel about more contact)

Perceptions of follow up meeting/s
- Did they feel each meeting was tailored to their needs (PROBE for details)
- Did they feel the service they got was seamless and efficient (PROBE for details).
- Were the meetings useful/appropriate (PROBE for details) Did they live up to their expectations
- Did they feel that the timing of the Personal Adviser meetings were appropriate (PROBE for reasons)

Perceptions of the Personal Adviser/s
- How did the Personal Adviser/s come across (sensitive, helpful, friendly, efficient, officious)
- Have Personal Adviser/s had difficulty in answering any of their questions
- Did they object to any of the questions asked (PROBE for details)

10. OVERALL VIEWS ON PRINCIPLE OF ONE

- What do they think overall of the ONE service
- Does ONE offer any improvements over previous experience (PROBE advantages/disadvantages)
- What do they think about the one-stop shop approach to work, benefits and support services
- Would they prefer to deal directly with a specialist adviser (Provide explanation of range of specialist advisors available to clients)
- Where did clients claim before (e.g. Benefits Agency, Local Authority, Employment Service, or than one), where did they go when they started their claim through ONE, have they started going to a new office (why or why not change? PROBE for convenience, office environment, better service)
- Has ONE changed their perceptions of the benefit system (PROBE efficiency, staff, tailored to needs)
- Views on using PRIVATE SECTOR to deliver ONE service (PROBE for views about different innovations offered in PVS model – self help kiosks, job databases)
- Views on TRIGGER MEETINGS: what do they think about people having to go to meetings after change in circumstances (such as part-time work beginning or ending, when someone recovers from ill health, when someone stops being a carer, when training or education ends, when someone reaches 18). (PROBE what circumstances should trigger meetings, perceived advantages/disadvantages, timing: should it be after specified period – 3 months/6 months rather than when circumstances change, should contact be regular and on-going – advantages/disadvantages).
- For LONE PARENTS: when do they think they should have meetings with Personal Adviser to discuss work (PROBE annually, only when circumstances change – e.g. when children start school at 5 or 11, other circumstances, would clients prefer to initiate a meeting when they feel appropriate, or should meetings occur at fixed times)
- For SICK or DISABLED: when do they think they should have meetings with Personal Adviser to discuss work (PROBE would clients prefer to initiate a meeting when they feel appropriate, or should meetings occur at fixed times)
- Views on SANCTIONS
- Views on whether it is reasonable to make the condition of receipt of benefits conditional on attending work-focused meetings (nice to know question)

11. SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

- Do they have any ideas for how the delivery of ONE could be changed or adapted

THANK AND CLOSE
The ONE evaluation comprises four complementary elements: a delivery evaluation; a policy evaluation; cost-benefit analysis and a database.

The **delivery evaluation** has two components: social research and operational research. Social research is being conducted with ONE clients, staff and stakeholders to assess people’s experience and views of the service and difficulties with delivering the service. Operational research will examine the cost and operational efficiency of the service and difficulties with delivering the service. Operational research includes surveys, interviews and focus groups to assess people’s experience and views of the service and difficulties with delivering the service. Operational research includes surveys, interviews and focus groups to assess people’s experience and views of the service and difficulties with delivering the service.

The **policy evaluation** is testing the impact of ONE on improving labour market participation of people of working age. It comprises a programme of quantitative and qualitative research including a survey of ONE clients (in pilot areas) and equivalent in control areas; in-depth interviews with ONE clients, and research with employers.

The **cost-benefit analysis (CBA)** will assess the overall impact of ONE for the period of full participation. This includes measures of employment additionally and cost-effectiveness. The CBA consists of a combination of in-house analyses and contracted out research.

The **ONE evaluation database (OEDB)** has been set up to support the formal evaluation of ONE and provides a database to help monitor the formal evaluation of ONE. The OEDB comprises data that have been taken from the Employment Service’s Labour Market System (which is used to record employment information) and Department of Work and Pensions benefit systems that are used to pay and administer the various benefits that can be claimed through ONE. The OEDB is constructed from data that have been taken from the various IT systems that support the operation of ONE and the provision and payment of benefits through the Department of Work and Pensions. This data is being analysed by various strands of the evaluation, in particular the cost-benefit analyses and operational research.
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