

Jobcentre Plus or Minus?

Exploring the performance of Jobcentre Plus for non-jobseekers

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Abstract

Since April 2002 Jobcentre Plus has started to operate nationwide in the UK providing fully integrated benefit claiming and work placement/job-seeking activities for people of working age. This new organisation put an explicit work-focus in the delivery of the benefit system. Along with Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants who traditionally have been the focus of relevant work-focused policies, Jobcentre Plus targets a much wider group of clients including lone parents, disabled people and carers. Although the work-focus of the new organisation could be beneficial for clients who themselves have an explicit work orientation, its effect on clients for whom work is not a feasible option are far less clear. This paper explores whether the changes in the delivery of the benefit system introduced by Jobcentre Plus have been beneficial for claimants who are not jobseekers and assesses which aspects of the new organisation work well and which could be improved in order to address more effectively the needs of non-job-oriented clients.

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1. Introduction

In April 2002, Jobcentre Plus brought together the functions of the Employment Service and the parts of the Benefits Agency providing a single point for the delivery of jobs, benefits advice and support for people of working age including unemployed, lone parents, disabled people and carers. Along with several other measures, Jobcentre Plus has been a key element of the reform of the welfare state which since 1998 has had an explicit welfare-to-work orientation. Reflecting the ideal “work for those who can, security for those who cannot” (DSS, 1998), which has been central to the New Labour reform of the welfare system, one of the main objectives of the new organisation has been to put more benefit recipients in touch with the labour market through the intervention of their Personal Advisers.

The integration of the benefit claiming and work placements/job-seeking activities was piloted by ONE which started to operate in June 1999 in 12 areas in Great Britain. The ONE pilots were designed to test three separate models of service delivery: the Basic model, the Call Centre model and the Private and Voluntary Sector (PVS) variant. Following ONE, in October 2001, 56 Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices started to operate in 17 areas of Britain. Nationally, Jobcentre Plus started to operate in April 2002. At the time of its national roll-out only a limited number of offices offered fully integrated work and benefit service. It is planned that by 2006, new Jobcentre Plus offices will operate in all districts. In the meantime, services continue to be provided by separate local social security and Jobcentre offices which form part of the Jobcentre Plus network.

Along with the Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) claimants who traditionally have been the focus of work-focused policies, Jobcentre Plus aims at a much wider group of clients such as the lone parents and the sick and disabled. Unlike the group of JSA clients who already received an intensive work-focused service, the changes introduced by Jobcentre Plus altered dramatically the services delivered to the group of non-JSA clients. For the group of non-JSA clients who want to work the work-focused service can be beneficial since it may put more people “on the track” towards work, through involvement in training and other activities. However, less clear are the potential effects for the non-JSA clients who are further away from the labour market. Despite the inclusive nature of the original motivation for the creation of the new agency, concerns have been raised by academic commentators and by ex-Benefit Agency staff that addressing the needs of clients who are further from the labour market and for whom moving back to work is not a primary objective is being given a low priority (Millar, 2003). This is reflected in the targets which have been set out

for the new agency: “Sustainable employment is the primary target and consequently job outcomes will be the primary measure of success [...] ‘distance travelled’ in terms of employability is another key measure” (Jobcentre Plus, 2002).

Based on published performance indicators and customer satisfaction surveys of the Benefits Agency as well as existing evaluations of the Jobcentre Plus and its predecessor, ONE, this paper examines the impact of Jobcentre Plus for the group of non-JSA clients who are further from the labour market and for whom moving back to work may not be a primary objective. In section 2 we provide a brief description of the benefit claiming process under ONE and the Jobcentre Plus. In section 3, using available micro data from the ONE client survey, we assess the impact of ONE on the service delivered to non-JSA clients examining whether the changes introduced by ONE have had any differential impact on job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients. Given the explicit work focus of ONE the latter approach allows us to examine whether non-JSA clients who wanted to move towards work have benefited particularly from ONE, possibly to the detriment of the other non-JSA clients. In section 4 we provide evidence concerning the service delivery at various stage of the Jobcentre Plus. Data that would enable us to examine whether Jobcentre Plus has had any differential impact for job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients have not yet been released. Hence we make an overall assessment of the delivery of the Jobcentre Plus service putting particular emphasis on elements that are of particular importance for non-job-oriented clients.

2. The ONE and Jobcentre Plus benefit claiming process

Both Jobcentre Plus and the ONE pilots have introduced significant changes in the delivery of the benefit system. Under both these agencies all working age clients (aged 16 to 64 for men, 16 to 59 for women) claiming a benefit covered by ONE or Jobcentre Plus¹ had to go through a new unified process in order for their benefit claims to be processed. In this section we provide a brief description of the benefit claiming process of both these agencies. Given that

¹ Benefits included in ONE pilots were: 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. Benefits included in Jobcentre Plus were the Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA); Income Support (IS); Incapacity Benefit (IB); Widow’s Benefit. Due to the imperfect integration of the Local Authorities in the ONE pilots, HB and CTB were not included among the Jobcentre Plus benefits.

the design of the Jobcentre Plus process to a large extent was based on experienced gained by ONE we first describe ONE benefit claiming process.

2.1 ONE

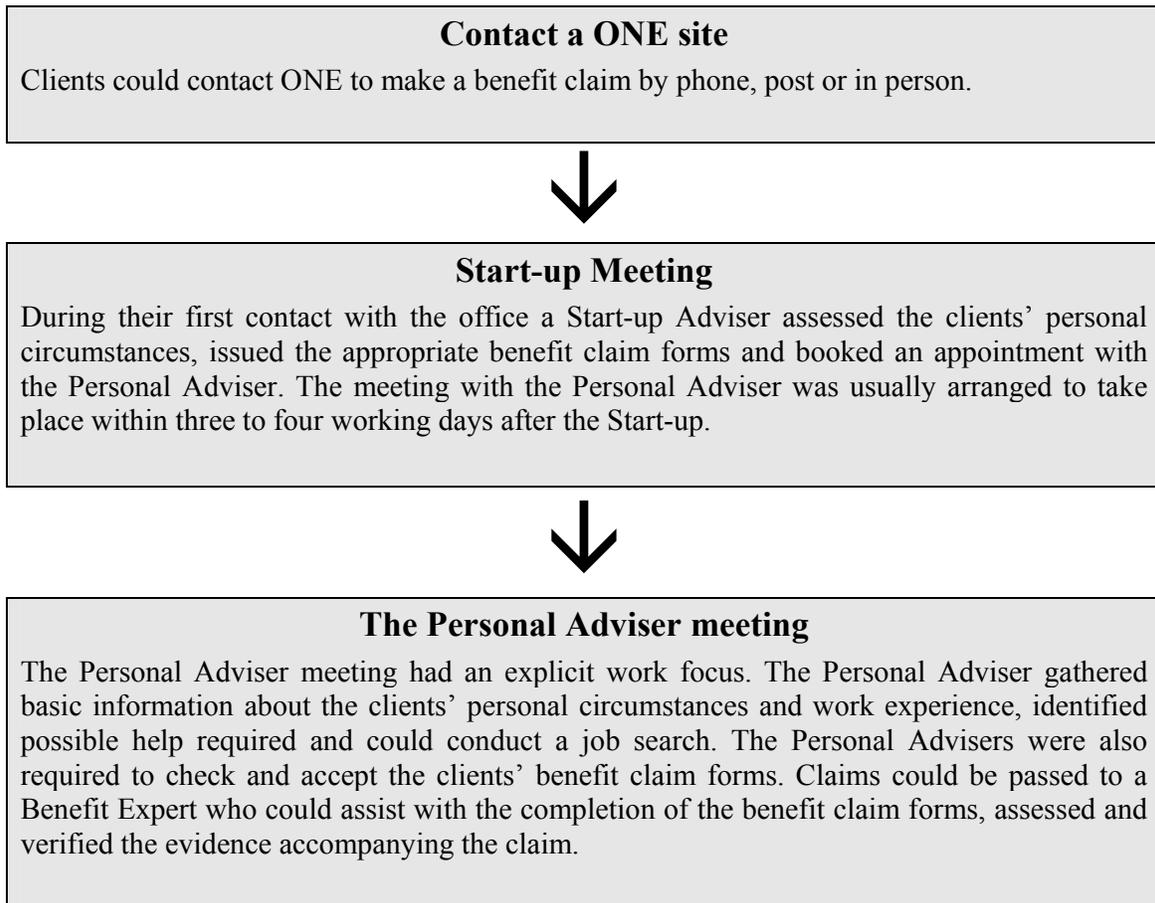
Until June 1999 clients seeking JSA were treated differently from non-JSA clients seeking other types of benefits such as Income support (IS) and Incapacity Benefit (IB). The former group of clients had to contact a Jobcentre or a local Social Security Office to make their claim and had to go through intensive work-focused process as a requirement for the receipt of their benefits. On the other hand, the group of non-JSA clients made their benefit claims contacting a local Social Security Office and their benefit claims were processed without any requirement of attending any work-focused meeting. From June 1999, a new unified service was offered in the 12 areas where ONE was being tried out. In order to adjust to changes, participation in ONE between June 1999 and April 2000 was compulsory only for JSA clients. For non-JSA clients participation became compulsory from April 2000.

This new unified service consisted of two stages. From April 2000 when participation in ONE became compulsory, all clients had to go through these two stages in order to claim their benefit. Figure 1 shows the process that new or repeat customers of working age benefits were intended to follow under ONE. At the first stage, the claimant had a meeting with a Start-up Adviser. This meeting was designed to provide basic information about the clients' personal circumstances and work experience. In the case of job-oriented clients the Start-up adviser discussed the clients' employment preferences and helped them to consider the appropriate vacancies whereas in the case of less job-oriented clients the Start-up Adviser should recognise any needs of special support and refer clients to appropriate services (e.g. New Deal etc). The Start-up Adviser then had to issue the appropriate benefit claim forms and to arrange a meeting with the Personal Adviser informing the clients about the evidence that they had to bring at their Personal Adviser meeting in support of their benefit claims. Alternatively the Start-up adviser could defer the meeting with the Personal Adviser if clients' circumstances made an immediate work-focused meeting inappropriate.

The second stage of the ONE process consisted of the initial meeting with the Personal Adviser. This meeting was usually arranged three to four days after the meeting with the Start-up Adviser and had an explicit work orientation. The task of the Personal Advisers was to assess the job-readiness of the clients and to work with them in order to overcome barriers to work by considering suitable training opportunities and support to help them towards labour market participation. In addition the Personal Advisers meeting also involved discussions about additional financial and other help available for clients with

special circumstances such as lone parents with dependent children and sick or disabled clients. The Personal Advisers were also required to check and accept the clients' benefit claim forms. In some cases claims could be passed to a Benefit Expert who could assist with the completion of the benefit claim forms, assess and verify the evidence accompanying the claim. According to the original vision of ONE, the Personal Adviser should have an ongoing relationship with the client monitoring his/her progress and offering support through a series of meetings. For this purpose several triggers for compulsory meetings were in place. For the JSA clients these were every three, six and 12 consecutive months of unemployment and then every six months whereas for lone parents and sick or disabled the mandatory "trigger" meetings were intended to take place a year and three years respectively after the initial Personal Adviser meeting (Osgood et al., 2003).

Figure 1: The benefit claiming process under ONE



The ONE pilots were delivered through three different models in order to test three separate models of service delivery: the Basic model, the Call Centre model and the Private and Voluntary Sector (PVS) variant. The Call centre

variant was designed to test the use of telecommunication technology in the benefit system whereas the Private and Voluntary Sector (PVS) variant was intended to test the delivery of the service, when organisations from the private and voluntary sector are involved. The PVS variant has a very similar set-up to the Basic model, whereas in the Call Centre variant the Start-up was carried out over the telephone and benefit claims were dealt with during the call. In addition Start-up Advisers offered assistance by completing claims electronically during the phone call.

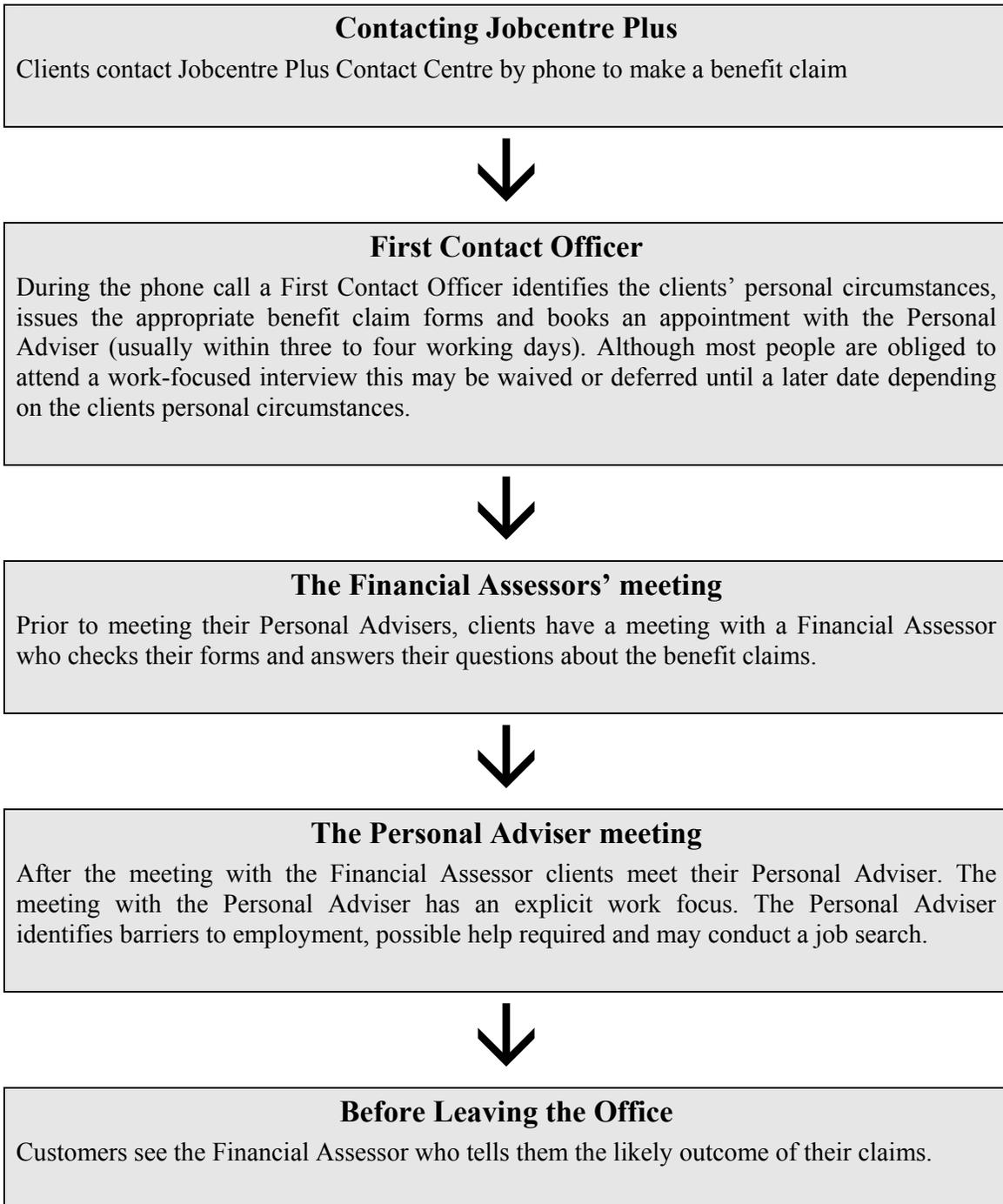
2.2 *Jobcentre Plus*

The Jobcentre Plus process is very much similar to that tried out in the ONE pilots and especially the Call Centre variant. However, building on experience gained by ONE, the stages through which the clients have to go through in order to make their benefit claims had been redesigned in order to address more effectively the aims of the new organisation.

Figure 2 shows the process that new or repeat customers of working age benefits are intended to follow under Jobcentre Plus. Significant changes have been made in the design of the Start-up meeting in order to provide clients with a clearer picture concerning the scope and the nature of the work-focused meeting with the Personal Adviser. Similarly to the Call Centre variant of ONE, customers are encouraged to make their first contact with Jobcentre Plus by phone.

During the phone call a First Contact Officer (FCO) takes details concerning the personal circumstances of the clients, checks the clients' eligibility, books a meeting with the Personal Adviser and arranges to send out the appropriate benefit claim forms. In the case of job-oriented clients, the FCO also provides information about work and where appropriate performs a job search on behalf of clients. Another way in which the design of the Jobcentre Plus attempted to build on lessons gained by ONE was the introduction of a meeting with Financial Assessor prior to the work-focused interview with the Personal Adviser (Lissenburgh and Marsh, 2003). Evidence from ONE suggested that clients were first and foremost interested in sorting out their benefit claim forms. Thus, the introduction of the Financial Assessor meeting was motivated by the belief that this would allow the Personal Adviser to focus on discussions concerning work and the steps that should be undertaken in order to overcome possible barriers to work. In addition under Jobcentre Plus special emphasis is put on referrals to New Deal programmes, and the provision of on-going help and support from the Personal Advisers.

Figure 2: The benefit claiming process under Jobcentre Plus



3. Evaluation of the performance of ONE

In this section, using data from the ONE client survey we assess the performance of ONE in addressing the needs of non-JSA clients. The ONE client survey is part of a large-scale evaluation exercise set up by the Department of Work and Pensions aiming to assess the feasibility of delivering ONE in the different models and its effectiveness in improving both the quality and quantity of labour market participation. The ONE client survey was implemented in several phases. The first stage of the client survey (Cohort 1 Wave 1) was carried out when ONE was voluntary for non-JSA clients. Interview at this stage took place in four ONE pilot areas and four control areas. The second stage of the research was a follow-up interview with the respondents of the first wave about six months after their initial interview. The third and fourth phases (Cohort 2 Waves 1 and 2) took place when the meeting with the Personal Adviser was compulsory for all clients and interviews in both these stages took place in all 12 ONE pilot areas and 12 control areas. The first wave interviews for the Cohort 2 took place about four to five months after initial claiming while interviews for the second wave were carried out about six months later. The third and final wave of the research was conducted with lone parents only.

In the remaining part of this section we analyse data from the first wave of cohort two because that is when ONE became compulsory for all clients. Given that changes introduced by ONE affected mainly non-JSA clients we restrict our analysis to this sample of clients. Within this client group we distinguish between clients who at the time of their interview reported that they wanted to move towards work (job-oriented), clients that are further from the labour market (non-job-oriented) and clients who were not working when first contacted their local Jobcentre or Social security office but have found a job by the time of the interview (working).² The distinction between job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients refers to clients' preferences with respect to work at the time of their interview and not to their skill levels or the work readiness in other respects. Basic statistics concerning the percentage of non-JSA clients classified as job-oriented, non-job-oriented and working in control and pilot areas are

² The questions used to identify job-oriented clients are the following: 1) May I check, are you looking for work at the present? 2) Even though you are not looking for work at the moment, would you like to have a paid job in the future? 3) When do you think you may start looking for work? Using information from these questions we have defined as job-oriented clients those who are currently looking for a job or who even though not currently looking for job would like to start looking for job in the future (provided that they report that would like to start looking for a job in the next year).

presented in Table 1. Comparisons of the figures in this table suggest no significant differences between pilot and control areas in the percentage of job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients. Although the percentage of clients that have found job is higher in the pilot than in control area the difference is not significant. Since this wave of the survey took place 4-5 months after clients' initial benefit claim, this finding indicates that ONE had no significant impact either on the changing clients attitudes towards work or on moving more people back to work at least in the short term. In section 4.2 we examine further the delivery of the work-focus service in the ONE pilots.

Table 1: Percentage of non-JSA client groups in pilot and control areas

	Pilot	Control
Job-oriented	34.5 [1457]	35.5 [1551]
Non-job-oriented	49.7 [2100]	50.1 [2183]
Working	15.7 [665]	14.5 [631]

Source: Author's calculations using the sample of non-JSA claimants of the ONE client survey (Wave one Cohort two). Figures in square brackets show the number clients falling in each group.

In the next sections we restrict our analysis examining differences between job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients. Given the work-focus of the policy intent for the creation of ONE we expect the effects of ONE among these two client groups to be different. The remainder of this section is structured as follows: In section 3.1 we present evidence concerning the impact of ONE on the benefit clearance times and the end-to-end time for benefit receipt. In section 3.2 we present evidence concerning the overall effectiveness of ONE in addressing the special needs of the non-JSA client group. Finally in section 3.3 we review the level of customer satisfaction with several aspects of ONE service.

3.1 The impact of ONE on the benefit claim process

One of the most significant aspects of service for an agency dealing with benefit claimants is to provide its customers a quick and effective service by producing the correct benefit amount quickly, without unnecessary contacts and without clients having to double-handle documents in support of their benefit claims.

Among the main advantages of uniting agencies providing benefits into a common service should be that claimants do not have to provide the same information over and over again (Green et al., 2001). According to a report

summarising the main findings of the ONE service delivery, ONE had a small positive impact on the process of gathering evidence to support claims for IS and IB, by reducing the number of cases in which Benefit Agency staff had to contact clients to get additional information in support a claim (Osgood et al., 2003). Further evidence concerning the impact of ONE on the process of gathering evidence is presented in Table 2. This table presents the percentage of clients in pilot and control areas that had to provide documents more than once separately for job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients as well as a statistic measuring the differences in the changes experienced by the two groups. Looking at the figures in this table we see that although the percentage of clients that had to provide documents more than once is lower in ONE pilot areas than in control areas the difference between the two is insignificant. Comparisons between job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients suggests that although the decrease in the percentage of clients that had to provide documents more than once was higher among the non-job-oriented clients, the difference between the change for the two groups is insignificant. Improvements in the procedures of information gathering which can mainly be attributed to the introduction of Benefit Experts is a very positive development for an agency aiming to provide an efficient benefit service.

Table 2: Proportion provided documents among non-JSA clients

Proportion provided documents more than once	
Job-oriented	
Pilot	0.378
Control	0.385
Difference	-0.007
Non-job-oriented	
Pilot	0.362
Control	0.376
Difference	-0.014
Difference-in-Difference	0.006 (0.786)

Source: Author's calculations using the sample of non-JSA claimants of the ONE client survey (Wave one Cohort two). p-values are reported in parenthesis.

However, since in many cases, the Benefit Experts were staff who had been re-located from the benefit processing sections there was no net increase in the resources available for checking and processing of claims and thus improvements in evidence gathering were not translated in decreases in benefit clearance times overall (Osgood et al., 2003). Evidence concerning benefit clearance times presented by Osgood et al. (2003) suggests that in the ONE pilots 83 percent of IS claims were processed by the Benefits Agency within its target of 13 days. Since this figure is slightly lower than the overall percentage of IS claims that the Benefits Agency processed within the target of 13 days (according to the Benefit Agency (2000), 89 percent of IS claims were processed within the 13 days target), one can conclude that ONE had a negative impact on benefit clearance times.

Table 3: Time between claim and receipt of first payment for non-JSA clients

Proportion of clients whose benefit claim took more than 4 weeks	
Job-oriented	
Pilot	0.348
Control	0.257
Difference	0.091
Non-job-oriented	
Pilot	0.361
Control	0.292
Difference	0.069
Difference-in-Difference	0.022 (0.349)

Source: Author's calculations using the sample of non-JSA claimants of the ONE client survey (Wave one Cohort two). p-values are reported in parenthesis.

Although the increase in the time needed for a benefit claim to be processed once the claim had been made was small, ONE had a significant effect on the total time that elapsed between the clients' first contact with the agency and the first payment of their benefits. This was especially the case for clients claiming IS and IB benefits, since their benefit claiming process was changed in ONE pilots by the requirement to attend a work focused interview. The introduction of this additional stage in the benefit claiming process had a significant effect

on total time taken for these clients to receive their benefits. Analysis of data from the client survey suggests that for both job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients the average time between the claim and the receipt of the first payment was significantly longer in the ONE pilot than in control areas (Table 3).³

The main reasons behind the increase in the total end-to-end time for benefit receipt were the considerable delays before meetings with the Personal Adviser could be fixed. The meeting with the Personal Adviser was originally intended to take place within three days after the Start-up meeting. The initial target of three days between the Start-up meeting and the meeting with the Personal Adviser was later increased to four days. Although the substantial increases in the total end-to-end time for benefit receipt in the ONE client survey may reflect particular operational difficulties during the survey period, extended delays before Personal Advisers meetings could be fixed and consequently benefits could be paid were serious given the vulnerable situation of many of the ONE clients. Research conducted with staff suggested that the delays between the Start-up and the Personal Adviser interviews and lags in processing the benefits claims resulted in an increase in the number of Social Fund applications. Staff thought that the rise in crisis loan applications associated with ONE occurred mainly in the early stages of the pilot and at the peak of the claiming periods during the year (Kelleher et al., 2002).⁴

Another reason behind the delays in benefit receipt, for those who were sick or disabled, was the procedure for checking eligibility for Incapacity Benefit. According to Green et al. (2001), by the time of the survey a smaller percentage of clients in pilot areas than clients in control areas had received a medical questionnaire (50 percent of pilot area clients compared to 57 percent in control areas) and fewer had completed the process – only 12 percent of clients in the pilot areas had had an assessment and been notified of the outcome, compared with 17 percent in the control area clients.⁵ Despite the longer time taken to check eligibility in ONE pilot areas there did not seem to be any significant

³ Additional evidence concerning the impact of ONE on total end-to-end time for benefit receipt is presented in Osgood et al. (2003). According to this paper analysis for a sample of IS claims indicated that the total end-to-end time was 22 days for about 83 percent of the cases. The additional nine days on top of the processing time (13 days) include the waiting time for a Personal Adviser meeting (about) 4 days, plus the time for the claim form to be sent from ONE to the Benefits Agency, and the time taken for evidence requirements to be satisfied (about 3 days).

⁴ According to Kelleher et al. (2002) internal analysis of administrative data showed that the effect on crisis loans was confined to a small number of pilot areas while other pilot areas experienced no change or even a decrease in crisis loans.

⁵ The time between the first contact and the interview is between 4 and 5 months.

difference between pilot and control areas in the assessment of the final outcome, so there is no indication that assessments were more accurate in ONE pilots.

3.2 The delivery of other aspects of the ONE service

In this section, examining the experience of clients in pilot and control areas we seek to analyze the effectiveness of ONE in terms of the quality and the quantity of information and help that provided to its clients. The questions that we address are the following:

- i) Did clients receive more help about benefits in ONE pilots and if so is there any difference between the job-oriented and non-job-oriented client groups?
- ii) Have clients in ONE pilots received more help and advice about health-related and childcare issues and if so is there any difference between different client groups?
- iii) Have clients in ONE pilot areas with special needs been referred to other services designed to provide specialised help (e.g. social services, voluntary sector, New Deals)?

Information on the extent to which clients in ONE pilot and control areas discussed benefit related issues is provided in Table 4. A positive finding to draw from this table is that the percentage of both job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients who discussed benefit-related issues is much higher in ONE pilots than in control areas. The higher percentage of clients in the ONE pilot areas receiving information about benefits stems from the changes in the ONE benefit claiming process under which clients receive information about different benefits and get help completing their benefit claims during their Start up and Personal Advisers meetings.⁶

Comparisons of the increase across different benefits reveals that the benefits for which the increase was higher are the Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, in-work benefits, Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB). Although a higher percentage of both job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients have received information about benefits there are some differences between the two groups in the types of benefits discussed. These mainly reflect differences in their employability prospects. For example, according to the figures of this table the percentage of job-oriented clients that discussed in-work

⁶ Despite the original design concerning the scope and the nature of the Personal Adviser meeting, both qualitative and quantitative research suggest that Personal Advisers meetings for most non-JSA customers have been devoted mainly to sorting out the benefit claims. This was usually the case because Personal Adviser felt uncomfortable about bringing up the prospect of employment to non-JSA clients with emotional and social problems.

benefits and Jobseeker’s Allowance was higher than the respective percentage of non-job-oriented clients. The increase in the percentage of clients discussing JSA and in-work benefits especially among the job-oriented clients is positive, demonstrating the work-focused aims of this new agency. Another positive finding is the higher percentage of clients in ONE pilots that received information on HB and CTB. Since both these benefits are usually claimed in addition to other benefits this finding may indicate that information about benefits in ONE pilots were not only in direct relation with clients’ main benefit claims but covered additional benefits that clients could potentially claim.⁷

Table 4: Proportion of non-JSA clients who discussed benefits

Benefits Discussed	Any	JSA	IS	IB, SDA	In work	Other	HB, CTB
Job-oriented							
Pilot	0.849	0.159	0.682	0.167	0.126	0.232	0.455
Control	0.653	0.077	0.558	0.145	0.065	0.147	0.266
Difference	0.196	0.082	0.123	0.022	0.060	0.085	0.189
Non-job-oriented							
Pilot	0.842	0.077	0.722	0.285	0.060	0.189	0.393
Control	0.620	0.041	0.552	0.219	0.025	0.120	0.231
Difference	0.222	0.035	0.169	0.065	0.035	0.068	0.162
Difference-in-Difference	-0.026 (0.206)	0.046 (0.001)	-0.046 (0.051)	-0.043 (0.030)	0.025 (0.033)	0.016 (0.374)	0.027 (0.242)

Source: Author’s calculations using the sample of non-JSA claimants of the ONE client survey (Wave one Cohort two). p-values are reported in parentheses.

Not only did a higher percentage of clients receive information about benefits but also clients’ views about the service were more positive in ONE pilots than in control areas. As we can see in Table 5 both job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients in pilot areas were more likely to say that they received all or some of the advice and information needed and generally held more positive views concerning staff knowledge about benefits compared to clients in control sites.

⁷ Comparable survey data for the Jobcentre Plus have not yet been released. However, it will be interesting to see whether increases in the percentage of clients discussing HB and CTB has been sustained given that Local Authorities have been dropped from the Jobcentre Plus partnership.

Table 5: Non-JSA clients' views concerning the advice they received and staff knowledge about benefits

	Proportion needed advice about benefits	Proportion got all or most of advice	Proportion said staff were knowledgeable about benefits	Proportion said were treated very or fairly well
Job-oriented				
Pilot	0.606	0.790	0.745	0.659
Control	0.563	0.652	0.667	0.562
Difference	0.043	0.137	0.078	0.097
Non-job-oriented				
Pilot	0.653	0.792	0.752	0.659
Control	0.556	0.604	0.611	0.577
Difference	0.096	0.187	0.140	0.082
Difference-in-Difference	-0.052 (0.030)	-0.049 (0.082)	-0.062 (0.034)	0.015 (0.519)

Source: Author's calculations using the sample of non-JSA claimants of the ONE client survey (Wave one Cohort two). p-values are reported in parentheses.

Despite improvements in terms of both the quality and the quantity of information about benefits, a relatively high percentage of clients in ONE pilot areas felt that they would need more help and advice with their benefit claims. According to Table 6 about 13 percent of both job-oriented clients and non-job-oriented clients said that needed more help and advice with their benefit claims. The high percentage of clients that wanted more help with their benefit claims may reflect staff difficulties in dealing with the more complicated requirements of some clients. Research conducted with staff has shown that in many cases staff had not always got the skills to address complex benefit issues of some non-JSA clients (Kelleher et al., 2002; Osgood et al., 2002; Osgood et al., 2003). The figures in Table 6 also suggest that job-oriented clients were more likely to mention that they would like more help with job search, childcare, career guidance and training. Although the percentage of job-oriented clients that said that would like more help and advice with issues relating to job search, career guidance, training and childcare issues is small, indicates the incomplete delivery of the ONE service.

Table 6: Whether there was something particularly wanted which was not covered

	Job-oriented	Non-job-oriented	Difference
Percentage of clients who said that there was something they wanted but was not covered	0.254	0.218	-0.035 (0.035)
What clients wanted more of			
More help with benefits	0.124	0.130	0.006 (0.656)
More help with finding a job	0.049	0.007	-0.041 (0.000)
More help with childcare	0.045	0.012	-0.033 (0.000)
More help with career guidance	0.032	0.011	-0.021 (0.000)
More help with training	0.044	0.013	-0.031 (0.000)
Other	0.083	0.080	-0.003 (0.761)

Source: Author's calculations using the sample of non-JSA claimants of the ONE client survey (Wave one Cohort two). p-values are reported in parentheses.

Further evidence on the extent to which clients in the ONE pilots received help and information on work-related, childcare and health related issues is provided in Table 7. This table suggests that the percentage of clients that discussed work-related issues in control areas was very low. Although the percentage of both job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients that discussed work-related, childcare and health-related issues increased substantially in the ONE pilot areas the majority of clients (more than 75 percent) still did not have any substantial work-related discussions. Comparisons between the two groups we consider here suggest that although the increase in the percentage of clients who discussed work-related issues was significantly higher among the job-oriented clients, when it came to health-related and childcare issues, the difference between job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients was not significant. This mainly reflects the fact that for both client groups the increase in the percentage of clients discussing childcare and health-related issue was much more limited. Since, for the client groups we consider here, health related and childcare issues are the main barriers for work, the fact that there was only a small increase in

the percentage of clients discussing health related and childcare issues demonstrates that the ONE vision of delivering a work-focused service was not being as efficiently met as it would be.

Table 7: Proportion who discussed work-related, childcare and health related issues with staff

	Discussed work related issues	Discussed childcare issues	Discussed health issues
Job-oriented			
Pilot	0.348	0.234	0.191
Control	0.169	0.132	0.117
Difference	0.179	0.102	0.074
Non-job-oriented			
Pilot	0.183	0.202	0.164
Control	0.074	0.082	0.094
Difference	0.110	0.121	0.121
Difference-in-Difference	0.068 (0.002)	-0.019 (0.534)	0.004 (0.913)

Source: Author's calculations using the sample of non-JSA claimants of the ONE client survey (Wave one Cohort two). p-values are reported in parentheses.

Incomplete delivery of the work-focused service is also reflected in the limited increase in the percentage of referrals to specialist agencies and training schemes. Interviews with staff suggested that some of the staff lacked the necessary skills and were broadly unaware of the local provisions to which they could refer clients for additional help or support (Kelleher et al., 2002; Osgood et al., 2003). The incomplete delivery of the work-focus element of the ONE service may explain why ONE had no significant impact on either the job entry outcomes or on changing claimants' attitudes towards work (Green et al., 2001; Kirby and Riley, 2003).

Table 8: Proportion of non-JSA clients who received help or advice received from staff

	Received help or advice	Said advice was very helpful	Said some or all advice was new	Said were more optimistic following advice	Said were treated as individual
Job-oriented					
Pilot	0.666	0.847	0.458	0.620	0.767
Control	0.432	0.819	0.400	0.596	0.663
Difference	0.234	0.028	0.058	0.037	0.103
Non-job-oriented					
Pilot	0.638	0.870	0.539	0.582	0.788
Control	0.425	0.820	0.487	0.623	0.661
Difference	0.214	0.050	0.051	-0.027	0.128
Difference-in-Difference	0.020 (0.538)	-0.021 (0.393)	0.006 (0.860)	0.065 (0.191)	-0.025 (0.419)

Source: Author's calculations using the sample of non-JSA claimants of the ONE client survey (Wave one Cohort two). p-values are reported in parentheses.

Despite the fact that there was room for improvements, overall, clients in ONE pilot areas received more help and advice compared to clients in control areas. Table 8 provides evidence on the extent to which clients received any help and advice. About 67 percent of job-oriented and 64 percent of non-job-oriented clients received help or advice from staff in the pilot areas compared to about 43 percent for both client groups in the control areas. Although a slightly higher percentage of job-oriented clients received help or advice, the differences in the experience between the two groups are not significantly different. In addition to the increase in percentage of clients receiving help and information, clients' views concerning the quality of the information received and the way they were treated, were more positive in ONE pilots than in control areas. Below we will examine in more detail customers' views concerning the service they received in the ONE pilots.

3.3 Customers' satisfaction

Given that one of the most important indicators of the success of an agency like ONE is the satisfaction of its customers in this section we examine how different client groups rated the service they received in ONE. Overall,

according to the figures in Table 9 clients in the ONE pilots had quite positive views concerning the ONE service. About 54 percent of job-oriented clients and 48 percent of non-job-oriented clients found a feature in ONE that they particularly liked.

Table 9: Proportion of clients who particularly liked a feature of ONE

	Job-oriented	Non-job-oriented	Difference
Percentage of clients that particularly liked something about ONE	0.539	0.481	-0.058 (0.004)
What clients particularly liked about ONE			
Staff helpful and understanding	0.293	0.269	-0.024 (0.181)
More personal service	0.246	0.219	0.026 (0.117)
Help with job	0.019	0.003	-0.015 (0.000)
Different benefits sorted out	0.149	0.156	0.006 (0.652)
Other	0.103	0.080	-0.023 (0.041)

Source: Authors' calculations using the sample of non-JSA claimants of the ONE client survey (Wave one Cohort two). p-values are reported in parentheses.

The fact that the percentage of job-oriented clients who found that there was something that they particularly liked was significantly higher than the corresponding percentage of non-job-oriented clients possibly reflects the work focus of the new organisation and the weaker representation of the needs of the non-job-oriented clients. Although there are some differences between job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients the features that have been mostly favoured by both client groups were the following: staff were helpful and understanding; they were treated as individual; they could get all different benefits sorted out at one office.

Table 10: Proportion of clients disliking a feature of ONE

	Job-oriented	Non-job-oriented	Difference
Percentage of clients who disliked something about ONE	0.329	0.280	-0.049 (0.007)
What clients disliked about ONE			
Not enough time	0.047	0.042	-0.005 (0.497)
Not enough information about training /childcare/ job issues	0.047	0.020	0.026 (0.000)
Poor knowledge of benefits by staff	0.052	0.050	-0.002 (0.813)
Had to repeat a lot of information	0.059	0.068	0.009 (0.327)
Had to contact more than one office	0.043	0.056	0.013 (0.135)
Felt forced to think about work	0.016	0.010	-0.006 (0.149)
Other	0.146	0.108	(-0.037)

Source: Authors' calculations using the sample of non-JSA claimants of the ONE client survey (Wave one Cohort two). p-values are reported in parentheses.

Despite these positive attitudes towards ONE, about 30 percent of clients said that there was something that they particularly disliked about ONE (Table 10). The most common criticisms were the following: had to provide the same information more than once, had to contact more than one office, the Personal Adviser's knowledge of benefit issues was poor and the information about training, childcare and job-related issues was not enough. Job-oriented clients were more likely than non-job-oriented clients to identify an element that they particularly disliked. This mainly reflects the higher percentage of job-oriented client reporting that they would like more information about work-related, childcare and training issues. This finding again indicates the deficiencies in the work-focused service of the ONE pilots.

Similar conclusions concerning customer satisfaction are drawn from the research with staff. According to Kelleher et al. (2001) staff identified the delays in meeting with the Personal Adviser or the benefit clearance times as the elements that usually created negative attitudes towards ONE. On the other hand staff perceived that clients liked the change in the office atmosphere, the

more personal service they received, and the help they received in completing their benefit forms. Staff thought that ONE was particularly favourably valued by clients who might previously have claimed benefits through the Benefits Agency. These clients liked the new office atmosphere and the more personal service they received in ONE (Kelleher et al., 2001).

Further evidence concerning ONE service delivery is drawn from qualitative research with clients. This research aimed to identify how clients rated different components of the ONE service and what factors influenced their perceptions of the ONE service. Clients' perceptions of the Start-up meeting were mainly affected by their experience concerning the waiting times, and the assistance they received from the Start-up adviser (Osgood et al., 2002; Osgood et al., 2003). Although the majority of clients held positive attitudes about their meeting with the Start-up Advisers some clients were particularly dissatisfied by the long waiting times for their Start-up meeting. Especially for non-JSA clients who have claimed benefits before through the post the Start-up meeting seemed to be an unnecessary additional stage to the claiming process (Osgood et al., 2002; Osgood et al., 2003).

The majority of clients felt that their Personal Advisers were polite, more attentive to their needs, respectful for their views and helpful on issues of importance to them (Osgood et al., 2002; Osgood et al., 2003). Many clients especially appreciated the Personal Advisers' help in completing the benefit claim forms, believing that their claim would be more efficiently processed (Osgood et al., 2002; Osgood et al., 2003). However, some less job-oriented clients felt that the work-focused interview was not appropriate at the time of the meeting. Some felt that their Personal Advisers failed to appreciate their personal circumstances fully, particularly in terms of their work readiness (Osgood et al., 2002; Osgood et al., 2003).

3.4 Summary of findings from ONE

In the analysis of this section it has become clear that ONE, which was the first agency to integrate benefit claims and job seeking activities for people of working age, introduced significant changes in the delivery of the benefit system. The changes in the benefit claims process introduced by ONE affected all clients but significantly more the non-JSA clients who sought inactivity benefits. The main aim of this section has been to assess whether the new arrangements introduced by ONE were beneficial for clients who are further from the labour market and for whom moving back to work is not a primary objective. Below we summarise the main findings of the section:

- ONE had a positive effect on the process of information gathering by reducing the amount of double-handling of information.

- ONE had a negative impact on the total end-to-end time for benefit receipt. Increases in total end-to-end times affected all clients, mainly through the requirement of attending the work-focused meeting. Extended delays before interviews could be fixed and consequently benefits could be paid – which were more severe with the Call centre variant of ONE – were a major problem which in some cases resulted in an increase in the number of applications for Social Fund Crisis Loans.
- Despite the improvements in evidence gathering, benefit clearance times have remained unaffected. As argued by Osgood et al. (2003) the fact that improvements in evidence gathering were not accompanied by similar improvements in benefit clearance times mainly resulted from the relocation of staff from the benefit processing section.
- Clients in the ONE pilots received more help and advice on benefit related issues. Despite this improvement, some problems concerning the quality of the service to clients with complex benefit needs remain.
- Although clients overall had positive views concerning the service they received in ONE there was scope for further improvement on issues related to staff understanding, politeness and helpfulness.
- Although there was an increase in the amount of specialist advice this was mainly on job-seeking activities and did not cover broader issues that would be more beneficial to clients groups without a definite work-focus.
- Despite the increase in the percentage of clients that received some information and advice about work-related issues, it is not as high as we would expect from a service designed to help people move back to work. The incomplete delivery of a work-focus service may be the main reason why ONE had no significant impact on either job entries or on changing claimants' attitude towards work (Green et al., 2001; Green et al., 2003; Kirby and Riley, 2003).
- Although we would expect that non-JSA clients who wanted to move towards work would have benefited particularly from ONE, possibly to the detriment of the other non-JSA clients, the difference-in-difference calculations do not indicate many significant differences in the changed experience of these two groups. Perhaps the incomplete implementation of the intended “work-focus” for non-JSA clients means that the distinction between the two groups was less pronounced.

4. Evaluation of the Jobcentre Plus performance

Data that would enable us to examine whether Jobcentre Plus has had any differential impact for job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients have not yet been released. Given data constraints in this section we make an assessment of the delivery of the new Jobcentre Plus service for different client groups. We

start our analysis with section 4.1 where we provide evidence concerning the speed and accuracy of the benefit claiming process. Then in section 4.2 based on qualitative and quantitative research implemented at several stages of the Jobcentre Plus we examine several aspects of the Jobcentre Plus service in order to assess its effectiveness in addressing the needs of different client groups. Finally in section 4.3, based on the first Jobcentre Plus customer’s satisfaction survey, we examine variations in levels of satisfaction with different parts of the Jobcentre Plus network.

4.1 The impact of Jobcentre Plus on the benefit claim processing

In this section we examine issues relating to the Jobcentre Plus business delivery by presenting evidence on the speed and the accuracy of benefit claims processing. Comparisons of benefit clearance times before and after the national implementation of the Jobcentre Plus (Table 11) indicate that Jobcentre Plus had a small negative impact on benefit clearance times.

Table 11: Comparison of Benefits Agency and Jobcentre Plus clearance for main benefits: Mean number of days

	Benefit Agency (2001/02)	Jobcentre Plus (2002/03)
Social Fund Crisis Loan	1.2	1.2
Income Support	9.4	10.6
Incapacity benefits	15.1	15.8
Jobseeker’s Allowance	9.8	10.1

Source: Jobcentre Plus Annual Report and Accounts (2002/03)

Although the differences are small, total end-to-end time for benefit receipt in Jobcentre Plus is higher than in Benefit Agency since clients have to attend a work-focused meeting with a Personal Adviser before their claims can be processed. Evidence from qualitative research with staff and clients (Davies et al., 2004) showed that for most customers the work-focused meetings with the Personal Advisers were booked within four days. According to the same research delays in the bookings of Personal Advisers meetings were mainly reported for some lone parent customers for whom the meetings were scheduled to occur within five days or more after the initial contact with the contact centre. These delays were mainly attributed to the allocation to and availability of specialist lone parent advisers (Davies et al., 2004).

4.2 Evidence concerning the delivery of the Jobcentre Plus service

In this section, based on findings from evaluations implemented at several stages of Jobcentre Plus, we assess its effectiveness in addressing the needs of different client groups.⁸

FIRST CONTACT OFFICERS

Evidence from early evaluations of the Jobcentre Plus Pathfinders suggests that First Contact Officers faced difficulties in establishing the correct benefit and issuing the correct claim forms to clients. This was mainly due to their lack of experience and some staffing problems created by industrial action at the time of the early evaluation of the Jobcentre Plus Pathfinders (Lissenburgh and Marsh, 2003).⁹ Evidence from later stages of Jobcentre Plus Pathfinders and after the Jobcentre Plus national roll-out suggested that significant progress had been achieved in the knowledge and experience gained by First Contact Officers in identifying the most appropriate benefits for clients' circumstances (Davies et al., 2004).

FINANCIAL ASSESSORS

In all stages of the Jobcentre Plus evaluation the element of the service that was most favourably rated by clients was the meeting with the Financial Assessors. In the early stages the work of the Financial Assessors was undermined by the staff's lack of knowledge and industrial action (Lissenburgh and Marsh, 2003). Although problems were not completely eliminated the service had been significantly improved in the later stages of the evaluation. Further improvements were identified after Jobcentre Plus was implemented nationally. According to qualitative research with staff and clients the service of the Financial Assessors has been progressed from being limited to a benefit claim check (as was found in earlier research) to a more thorough and comprehensive service (Davies et al., 2004). Evidence at this stage also suggested that the Financial Assessors felt more knowledgeable and confident in giving customers information and advice about entitlements to other benefits and financial help

⁸ The Jobcentre Plus studies drawn on for this section are the following: 1) a report based on qualitative and quantitative research carried out from October 2001 to May 2002 in the Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices (Lissenburgh and Marsh, 2003) 2) a report summarising findings from the qualitative evaluation of the Jobcentre Plus conducted between July and September 2003 (Davies et al., 2004), 3) a report based on the quantitative survey of customers which conducted between April and June 2003 and aimed at obtaining customer views and experiences of various aspects of the service provided by Pathfinder offices and offices of the second stage of the Jobcentre Plus national roll-out (Coleman et al., 2004).

⁹ The period during which the evaluation research has been implemented was marked by an industrial action.

(Davies et al., 2004).¹⁰ Although there were some instances in which customers received better information about additional benefits and financial help, customer research highlighted that information about other benefits and financial help was only received by some customers and others were disappointed because their FA did not provide them with information about further benefits they could claim (Davies et al., 2004). Limited information about additional benefits and financial help at this stage of the research probably reflects time constraints faced by staff. A clear and consistent picture emerging from the research with staff was that the 20 minutes allocated for the meeting with the Financial Assessor was insufficient for staff who had to deal with benefit claims of non-JSA clients groups particularly in cases of clients with health conditions who had to apply for both IS and IB (Davies et al., 2004). Additional problems were also created in some cases because customers did not receive their claim forms in the post or have received wrong claim forms and thus they could not complete the forms prior the meeting with the Financial Assessor.

PERSONAL ADVISERS

Evidence from the Jobcentre Plus Pathfinders has shown that Personal Advisers had particular difficulties in delivering the intended work-focus to non-job-oriented clients (Lissenburgh and Marsh, 2003). Many of the Personal Advisers felt that they had neither the suitable expertise to deal with some clients with particular complex needs nor the adequate knowledge to give the clients relevant information or to make the appropriate referrals (Lissenburgh and Marsh, 2003). Evidence concerning the effectiveness of the service delivered by the Personal Advisers after the Jobcentre Plus national implementation is mixed. One positive finding is that there has been an increase in the Personal Advisers' knowledge about the different organisations, training courses and programmes to which they could refer customers (Davies et al., 2004). A further finding which suggests some progress in the delivery of the Personal Adviser service is that there have also been examples in which customers were given information on additional financial assistance. Despite these positive developments several issues suggest that the work-focus is not efficiently delivered. First, evidence from the qualitative research with staff and clients indicates that although PAs were more aware of external support groups and voluntary organisations to which they could refer clients, the amount of information that they provided clients was limited in terms of describing its

¹⁰ Evidence from research with staff and clients (Davies et al., 2004) suggested that Financial Assessors felt more confident providing information on a range of benefits (including Social Fund, Disability Living Allowance, Child Benefit and tax credits, Housing Benefit Council Tax Benefit), and other sources of help such as Citizens Advice Bureaux.

content and how this could benefit them (Davies et al., 2004). A second issue relates to the delivery of the work focus to a wider range of clients. Although, according to the client survey the majority of clients (about 84 percent for all client groups) had a work-focus in their Personal Adviser meeting (Coleman et al., 2004) the extent to which discussions about work were meaningful and substantive largely depended on the interest and motivation of customers (Davies et al., 2004). Clients that had substantive work-related discussions felt that the advice that they received from their Personal Advisers left them feeling more hopeful about the future and more motivated and confident about finding work (Coleman et al., 2004). Clients that have particularly benefited by these positive developments were the more job-oriented clients given that they are more likely to engage in more substantive work-focused discussions. On the other hand, given that work is not a feasible option for most non-job-oriented clients the progress achieved in delivering the work-focused service would not be particularly beneficial for them.

4.3 Customer satisfaction

After the Jobcentre Plus national roll-out (April 2002) a Jobcentre Plus National Customer Satisfaction Survey (Sanderson, 2003) and supplementary qualitative research were undertaken to examine levels satisfaction with the Jobcentre Plus network (Dowson et al., 2004). At the stage that both these surveys took place only a limited number of offices – other than the Pathfinder offices – offered the new integrated Jobcentre Plus service while the majority of clients were still dealing with the old Jobcentres and Social Security Offices. In this section, based on findings from the Jobcentre Plus National Customer Satisfaction Survey (Sanderson, 2003) and the supplementary qualitative research (Dowson et al., 2004), we exploit variation in the experience of different client groups dealing with different parts of the Jobcentre Plus network (Social Security Offices, Jobcentre and Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices) in order to assess whether the service delivered by Jobcentre Plus was better than the one delivered by Jobcentres and Social Security offices. Although differences in the customer satisfaction may provide some indication of the quality of service, we have to bear in mind the fact that to some extent costumers' satisfaction is influenced by their perceptions about the quality of service they should receive and the level of understanding of what they are entitled to expect.

The National Customer Satisfaction Survey (Sanderson, 2003) suggested a high level of satisfaction from clients dealing with Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices (83 percent of clients were very or fairly satisfied with the service). Interestingly clients dealing with Social Security offices appear to be equally satisfied whereas Jobcentres' clients show a somewhat lower level of satisfaction (79 percent reported themselves as being very or fairly satisfied). Despite their high level of satisfaction, the figures in Table 12 show that a

significantly higher percentage of clients in Pathfinder offices felt like complaining and actually made a complaint compared to clients of Social Security offices and Jobcentres (34 percent of clients in Pathfinder offices felt like complaining as compared to 12 and 18 percent of clients in Social Security offices and Jobcentres respectively). Comparisons of differences in the attitudes of different client groups suggests that the JSA clients were significantly more likely to feel like complaining than clients claiming either Incapacity Benefit or Income Support. Although it would be informative, the lack of micro-data does not allow us to examine differences in the percentage of clients who felt like complaining by type of claimant and part of the agency.

Table 12: Percentage of clients who felt like complaining and made a complaint

	Felt like complaining	Made complaint
Main benefit		
JSA	22	7
IB	12	3
IS	13	4
Part of Agency		
SSO	12	4
Jobcentre	18	7
Pathfinder	34	10
All	14	4

Source: Reproduced from Sanderson (2003).

The breakdown of the reasons for which clients felt like complaining (presented in Table 13) suggests that the main reasons were related to staff attitudes (26 percent), benefit application procedures (15 percent), late or incorrect payment of benefits (15 percent), waiting times or queues (15 percent), staff lack of knowledge (13 percent) and benefits payments procedures (11 percent). Focusing on differences among clients dealing with different parts of the Jobcentre Plus network we observe that the sample of clients in the Pathfinder offices are much more likely to feel like complaining for issues relating to benefit application procedures, late or incorrect benefit payment, staff lack of knowledge and the general standards of service.

Table 13: Reasons for feeling like complaining (% of respondents by column)

	All	SSO	Jobcentre	Pathfinder
Staff attitudes	26	27	27	25
Benefit application procedures	15	16	14	18
Late/incorrect benefit payment	15	14	13	29
Waiting time/queues	15	18	11	7
Staff lack of knowledge	13	13	9	23
Standards of service	13	13	12	20
Benefit payment procedures	11	12	8	10
Job vacancies/job finding	6	2	16	8

Source: Reproduced from Sanderson, 2003.

Table 14: Desired changes in service (% of respondents by column)

	All	SSO	Jobcentre	Pathfinder
Of all respondents:				
Nothing/don't know	45	46	41	42
Base	3174	2342	642	62
% respondents indicating a desired change				
Shorter waiting time/quicker service	12	13	11	5
Improve staff attitudes	11	11	9	14
More money/better benefits	8	9	5	5
Answer phone quicker	6	7	2	-
More information on benefits/entitlements	5	5	3	5
Fewer/shorter/clearer form to fill in	5	6	2	-
More privacy	5	4	8	5
More personal attention from dedicated adviser	4	4	4	3
Improve office environment/facilities	4	4	5	3
Quicken/shorter claim process	3	4	2	5

Source: Reproduced from Sanderson, 2003.

A similar pattern is revealed examining the clients' views concerning the aspect of the service that they would like to change (Table 14). Those dealing with Social Security Offices were less likely than the others to identify any desired change in the service compared to clients in the Jobcentre and the Jobcentre

Plus Pathfinders. Comparing the views of those wishing some change in the service they receive we observe that the main desired improvements in Pathfinder offices are improved staff attitudes and a shorter claiming process. On the other hand the claimants dealing with Social Security Offices and Jobcentres identified the need of shorter waiting times and improvements in the staff attitudes as the most desired changes in service.

Analysis of the supplementary survey (Dowson et al., 2004) re-enforce the above findings. Although evidence does not allow us to examine differences among clients dealing with different parts of the Jobcentre Plus network, two elements of the service attracted most of the criticism. The first element related to the lack of continuity of service from the same member of staff while the second related to staff inexperience that led to inaccurate assessments about benefit eligibility. Clients with more complex needs tended to express more negative views concerning the effectiveness of the service in identifying their needs and providing the appropriate help. Although there has been a substantial variation in customers' perceptions of staff helpfulness, politeness and friendliness, a positive finding was that customers who experienced the Personal Adviser meeting tended to be more satisfied. Another positive outcome of the supplementary survey is that clients dealing with Jobcentres and Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices were much more satisfied with the office environment than clients dealing with Social Security offices. However, some customers expressed concerns about the lack of privacy, especially in offices with an open plan layout. Other customers, whilst welcoming the improved environment, felt that it had made little difference to the service provided.

Overall, evidence from both these surveys suggests that in Pathfinder offices better office environment and the help provided by Financial Assessors in filling the benefit claim forms have been the main improvements in the service. On the other hand, the high percentage of clients that felt like complaining about delays in benefit application procedures, the late and incorrect benefit payment and the inadequate knowledge of staff about benefits suggest several deficiencies of the service delivered by the Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices. Given that both the National Customer Satisfaction survey and the supplementary survey took place at very early stages of the Jobcentre Plus national roll-out the deficiencies may reflect transitional problems.

5. Emerging findings and questions for further research

Jobcentre Plus has introduced substantial organisational and operational changes in the delivery of the benefit system to all working age claimants. It aims to encourage more people to see work as a realistic and desirable objective

and moreover to help them achieve this objective. The Jobcentre Plus goals emphasize that while for many clients the goal will be independence, those who need long-term support should receive the benefit to which they are entitled and should be helped to become aware of the support available to them. Thus, the new arrangements introduced by Jobcentre Plus allow non-JSA claimants with an explicit work focus to engage in job search, training and other work-related activities, which will help them to overcome potential work barriers. For those non-JSA claimants who are further from the labour market the “support for those who cannot” part of the Jobcentre Plus vision focuses on the need to deliver a quick and effective service with appropriate referrals to advice and other organisations. The original motivation for the creation of Jobcentre Plus was that all clients should receive a service tailored to their personal circumstances. But the explicit work-focus of the new organisation, reflected in the high weight attached to job entry outcomes, raises questions as to whether the new organisation is wholly beneficial to less job-oriented client groups. In order to examine the impact of Jobcentre Plus on less job-oriented clients in this paper we examined two issues. First we compared the experience of job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients in order to examine whether the service had any differential impact on these two client groups. Given its work-focus the hypothesis that we sought to test was whether clients who wanted to move towards work have benefited to detriment of the other non-JSA clients. Secondly, we examined the quality of elements of the Jobcentre Plus service: benefit clearance times, the extent and the quality of information about benefits, financial help, support groups and voluntary organisations. Given that non-job-oriented clients cannot benefit from the work focus service the efficient delivery of these aspects of the Jobcentre Plus service is the crucial determinant of the extent to which the new organisation is beneficial to them. Below we summarise our main findings:

- Neither the work focus nor other elements of the ONE service had any differential effect on job-oriented compared to non-job-oriented client groups.
- Although we could not test directly the effect of Jobcentre Plus on job-oriented and non-job-oriented clients, findings from previous evaluations suggest some progress in the delivery of the work-focused service to more job-oriented clients.
- Jobcentre Plus had no significant impact on benefit clearance times. Given that for the non-JSA clients the benefit claiming process was changed by the requirement to attend a work focused interview, it did have a significant effect on the total time that elapsed between the clients’ first contact with the agency and the first payment of their benefits. Evidence from ONE suggests that increases in total end-to-end time for benefit receipt in ONE pilots were caused mainly by severe delays in arranging Personal Adviser meetings. Comparable data that would enable

us to examine total end-to-end time after the Jobcentre Plus national roll-out are not yet available. However, evidence from qualitative research suggests some delays in booking Personal Adviser's meetings for some lone parents. This may indicate that delays in benefit receipt may continue to be a problem for Jobcentre Plus. The increase in the total end-to-end time for benefit receipt is a clear example where the work-focus of the new organisation has been to the detriment of non-job-oriented claimants, for whom speedy and accurate benefit payment is likely to be a priority.

- Evidence from the Jobcentre Plus and the ONE pilots suggested that a higher percentage of clients received more information about benefits than in past arrangements. Evidence from later stages of the Jobcentre Plus suggests that there has been a progress in staff understanding about different benefits and some increase in the percentage of clients receiving information about additional benefits and financial help. Despite this progress, evidence from research with customers suggests that information about other benefits and financial help was limited and some customers were disappointed their FA did not provide them with information about other benefits they could claim.
- Both evidence from ONE and Jobcentre Plus suggests that the extent and the quality of advice and information on issues covering the needs of non-job oriented clients such as health issues and childcare were not effectively met.

The generation of more data as the new organisation matures will allow us to examine whether the problems and inefficiencies that were identified both in terms of the delivery of the work-focus and other elements of the Jobcentre Plus are transitional problems or permanent features of the new system.

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