

Investigating the needs of the recently unemployed

A report for Consumer Focus

14th August 2009

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The needs of the recently unemployed are diverse reflecting the many different circumstances and backgrounds of this group. Just as these needs vary, so do their experiences and expectations of the services in place to support them and help them get back into work.

The impact of unemployment

On a day-to-day level, **boredom**, **frustration** and loss of daily routine are seen as the most obvious impacts of unemployment.

It is clear the **financial impact** caused by loss of earnings affects all jobseekers, many of whom now need to budget carefully and adjust their lifestyles appropriately.

Of the other impacts raised by jobseekers some cite a **loss of confidence** in their employability. Others who do not raise this tend, instead, to blame **the wider economic situation**. These jobseekers remain positive they will find work when the job market improves.

Given the wide-ranging impacts of unemployment, the need for many to get back into work quickly was evident to alleviate boredom, improve their financial situation and build their confidence.

However, some jobseekers have found **positive impacts** of being unemployed, including the chance to spend more time with their family, to carry out home improvements and to pursue other interests.

Coping with the financial impact of unemployment

Those who feel prepared for unemployment financially tend to be those who budget and save when they are in work. Often, these will be those who have had jobs with higher salaries. Others who feel less prepared are those who live day-to-day or wage packet-to-wage packet.

Attitudes to preparation for financial implications of unemployment **mirror attitudes to finances generally**. Those who managed their finances well whilst employed feel they have made the most adequate preparations for unemployment.

For jobseekers who are renting their home or 'paying keep' to family, only minor lifestyle adjustments have so far been needed to budget whilst they are out of work. For those **paying mortgages**, the impact of unemployment on their household management has been much greater because of the increased financial commitment that such a loan represents.

There is **little stigma attached to claiming Jobseeker's Allowance** even amongst those who describe themselves as 'professionals' from more affluent backgrounds – although it is evident that there remains some **stigma related to using Jobcentre Plus** and a perception that it mainly caters for the 'unskilled'.

It is evident that unemployment impacts the recently unemployed in a number of different ways and circumstances (e.g. financial, emotional, personal). How jobseekers assess and approach their needs and how these needs are met through Jobcentre Plus was a key focus of the research.

Expectations of Jobcentre Plus services

Expectations are driven by how much customers know about Jobcentre Plus services generally.

Those that perceive themselves as '**professionals**' generally have **low expectations** of how effective Jobcentre Plus would be in their job search. This is mainly due to the perception that Jobcentre Plus would not advertise or be able to advise about appropriate 'professional'/salaried employment opportunities. Conversely, many who do not perceive themselves to be 'professionals' thought that Jobcentre Plus was, in fact, the best place to look for suitable work in the local area.

Generally, customer expectations of Jobcentre Plus do **not extend beyond the provision of Jobseeker's Allowance**, and potential assistance in finding work. Customers have little or no expectations of Jobcentre Plus providing help to cope with the impact of unemployment.

Experiences of Jobcentre Plus services

Customers do not feel they are getting the most out of their Jobcentre Plus experience because they are **not being made aware of all the services** that are available to them. Many are surprised at the range of services available when a list of available services was read out to them during the interview.

Many customers say they want Jobcentre Plus staff to be more **personal** and to provide more considered advice to them based on their individual situation, rather than treating everyone in a uniform way. They want staff to take more of an interest in them.

This points, broadly speaking, to **two main drivers of satisfaction** among those who have the most positive experiences of Jobcentre Plus. One is that they feel that they have had satisfactory contact with staff who are knowledgeable and helpful in their job search. The other relates to information: those who feel well-informed about the Jobcentre Plus services they are entitled to are more likely to be satisfied with the service provided by Jobcentre Plus.

Reflecting the variety of expectation and experiences of the recently unemployed, it is evident that expectations of Jobcentre Plus are being met with varying degrees of success.

In a climate where there are diverse needs for the recently unemployed, Jobcentre Plus' ability to meet the needs of this group are varied. For some, needs are being met. For others, especially those whose needs are perhaps more complex, needs are not being met to the same degree, particularly regarding training and re-skilling opportunities.

Evaluation of Jobcentre Plus services

Jobcentre Plus remains one of the most accessed sources of help and support in finding work, along with local newspapers, the internet and informal networks of family and friends, although many customers state that the collection of Jobseeker's Allowance is probably the primary motivation to visit the Jobcentre office. This means that, for some, use of Jobcentre Plus is an obligation rather than a choice.

Customers want Jobcentre Plus staff to take **more consideration** of the best job opportunities to discuss with them. Customers feel that staff are often keener to simply place a job with a candidate rather than consider the career ambitions of the jobseeker.

Customers want Jobcentre Plus to give them **information** about the services and support they are entitled to at the start. Currently awareness of the services available to them is inconsistent among customers.

The role of other service providers

For those who participated in the study, the most commonly cited referrals made by Jobcentre Plus are related to **job opportunities** – the internet (including the Jobcentre Plus website), recruitment services/agencies and training and skills. However, those who often

cite the internet or recruitment agencies often refer to the **information pack** they receive when they first visit Jobcentre Plus. Only a handful of respondents had experienced referrals such as the *Positive Moves* course¹ or computer training.

Jobseekers are frequently using both **online and high street recruitment agencies** to assist them with their job search – and often do this independently as they have used them in the past (if only to browse the market whilst in employment). Staff at high street recruitment agencies are often perceived to be more proactive than Jobcentre Plus staff, as well as offering a more bespoke service.

Jobcentre Plus needs to **more effectively signpost third-parties** and other providers of support services as customers are not receiving consistent information about these. Where a referral has been successful, Jobcentre Plus is suffering by comparison rather than being credited with leading the customer to the third-party service. These jobseekers question why Jobcentre Plus has not been able to offer the level of service that they have received from a third party provider creating a feeling of dissatisfaction with Jobcentre Plus. It is important that customers see a clear connection with Jobcentre Plus and their referral and the subsequent success of their re-employment.

Suggestions to improve customer experience

The research has uncovered a number of areas in which *customers* believe Jobcentre Plus can improve the service provided. The list below - based on **suggestions by those who participated** in the research - includes services which Jobcentre Plus may already be delivering, but this is contrary to some jobseekers' perceptions and experiences.

- Greater **consistency** in the **advice** given to customers of employment and support services available both across and within Jobcentre Plus offices
- More advice on **financial assistance** and how to budget whilst unemployed
- **Managing customer expectations** better, for example by informing jobseekers when they sign on of the six month threshold for training
- More **personalised advice** on job opportunities available, including an email service
- Ensuring **Job \kit²** is handed out to all jobseekers and discussing with them how the booklet will help their job search

¹ Positive Moves course is designed to empower participants to take control of their life and exude positivity in their outlook towards opportunities

² Job Kit is an introductory pamphlet given to new claimants and is also available on online

- **Forge more relationships with relevant employers** in growing sectors which could provide a greater number of job opportunities for those who describe themselves as 'professionals', as well as less highly skilled jobseekers

Introduction

Introduction

Background to the research

After a decade of relative prosperity, the UK is in the midst of a severe, and possibly long-lasting, recession. In a survey regularly conducted by Ipsos MORI with the general public, six in ten (59%) now cite the economy as the single most important issue facing Britain. In fact, concern about the economy has overtaken other key issues such as crime, immigration, the NHS, defence/terrorism and education. Although concern about 'unemployment' *specifically* is not keeping pace with fears about the economic climate, it is growing. Currently, 20% are worried about unemployment - rising from 14% in October 2008.³

Unemployment has risen dramatically over the last year - it is at its highest level since Autumn 1996 and estimated to reach three million by the end of 2009. At the same time, vacancies are drying up and redundancies are rising. In this context, Jobcentre Plus faces some real challenges. Staff will be under increasing pressure not only coping with higher footfall, but dealing with a wider range of customers than previously. The downturn is affecting the whole country; blue-collar workers, as well as those who consider themselves 'professionals', are suffering from rising unemployment. Youth unemployment is now at its highest level for 15 years, and the over 45s have experienced a rise in unemployment because they have fewer opportunities if they lose their jobs. Statistics show that manufacturing is one of the hardest hit sectors, but distribution, hotels and restaurants and business services are suffering too. It is widely reported that it will take years to recover from the recession and it is therefore imperative that the Government continues to tackle unemployment.

Consumer Focus commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct a research study investigating the needs of the recently unemployed. The aim of the research was to establish the efficiency and relevance of the services and advice that Jobcentre Plus offers its customers, with a particular focus on whether this meets the diverse needs of the recently jobless in the current recession. More specifically:

- Are the needs of the recently unemployed being met by Jobcentre Plus as they look for work?

³ Ipsos MORI Political Monitor (May 2009)

- What are the expectations that customers have of Jobcentre Plus services before and during their contact with it?
- How does Jobcentre Plus work with customers to meet those expectations?
- Are the wider needs of the recently unemployed being met by Jobcentre Plus to allow them to manage on a day-to-day basis?
- What are the differences in the quality of the services provided by Jobcentre Plus compared with those of third party providers?

Methodology

Ipsos MORI conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 40 customers of Jobcentre Plus across five locations in England, Scotland and Wales (locations are detailed within the appendices). Interviews were conducted between May and June 2009. All interviewees are recently unemployed, i.e. they had been unemployed for between three and nine months at the time of recruitment.

The interviews were undertaken using workbook discussion guides. The workbooks contained a series of both questions and discussion items organised within sections that traced the customer journey of an unemployed person. A copy of the workbook is in the appendices.

Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, with the researcher leading the discussion and recording responses. Where permission was granted, interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Whilst some 'tick box' questions were asked, the interview structures were mainly discursive, and interviewees were encouraged to talk frankly about their experiences of being unemployed.

Participant profiles

To capture a full range of experiences, quotas were set on age, gender, length of time out of work, and previous experience of Jobcentre Plus. Across the areas targeted, jobseekers have come from a wide range of backgrounds. Some have been unemployed for many months, others only three months. The professions in which they have previously worked vary considerably.

Participants were previously in a range of occupations, from secretarial and factory-based employment, through to sales and telecommunications. Participants included those of white British ethnicity as well as ethnic minorities. Interviews were conducted among people who can be categorised into a range of social grades, from ABs through to DEs. The full participant profiles are listed in the appendices.

Note on interpreting qualitative data

This report is based on qualitative depth interviews. Qualitative interviewing provides a rich level of detail, allowing participants to talk freely about their experiences and attitudes. Due to the small sample size involved, though, and the semi-structured nature of qualitative interviewing, these findings cannot be generalised to the wider population. Our findings represent only the experiences of the jobseekers we have spoken to.

Note on verbatim quotes within the report

Within the report, verbatim quotes are provided. These quotes have been drawn directly from the interviews conducted. Whilst ensuring confidentiality, in line with Market Research Society (MRS) guidelines, we are able to provide relevant demographic details alongside the quotes given. The following example provides a key to the information displayed with verbatim quotes:

“Quote given by the interviewee”

Male, Telford, AB, 25-44 years old

Gender (male or female)

Area where interview took place

Social grading (AB, C1C2, DE)

Age (18-24, 25-44, 45yrs+)

The impact of unemployment

The impact of unemployment

This chapter discusses the impact of being out of work for those who have recently become unemployed. In this chapter, we discuss both the personal and financial impacts experienced by those out of work. We consider both the negative impacts and the positive impacts cited by jobseekers.

Chapter Summary:

- On a day-to-day level, boredom, frustration and loss of daily routine are seen as the key impacts.
- The financial impact caused by loss of earnings affects all jobseekers, many of whom now have to budget carefully and adjust their lifestyles appropriately.
- Being out of work is having a detrimental impact on the health of some jobseekers.
- Whilst some jobseekers have lost confidence in their employability, others blame the wider economic situation and remain positive they will find work when the job market improves.
- Some jobseekers have experienced positive impacts of being unemployed, including the chance to spend more time with their family, to carry out home improvements and to pursue other interests.

Personal impact

It is clear that unemployment has had a personal impact on each of the jobseekers that participated in the research. In almost all interviews, both **financial and emotional impacts** were spontaneously mentioned by jobseekers.

Boredom is cited by many as a key factor of being unemployed and is, for some, the biggest day-to-day impact. Many say that the **day-to-day impact** of actually being unemployed is what affects them the most. They feel that they are stuck at home and bored with it.

“There’s only so much daytime TV you can watch isn’t there? I used to wish I could stay at home some days and do that instead of going to work but the novelty wears off very quickly.”

Female, East Kilbride, C1C2, 18-24 years old

For many, their work had been the central activity of their daily routine and, without it, some struggle to maintain any routine at all. For others, the novelty of being 'off work' has quickly worn off and they are becoming increasingly **frustrated** with being unemployed. For some this has manifested itself as an increasing **lack of confidence** in finding employment. For others, the frustration is affecting their **personal relationships**.

“I mean, sometimes you wake up in the morning and it takes a lot to not just turn over and go back to sleep again.”

Male, Bridgend, C1-C2, 25-44 years old

“It is difficult. It’s one of two catch 22-things. The more jobs I don’t get the more frustrated I become. And then the more frustrated I become the less likely I am to find a job. And I know that is making me a nightmare to live with because I’m just frustrated all the time.”

Male, Bridgend, C1-C2, 25-44 years old

Many customers are spending their free time on their job search. However, following numerous unsuccessful applications, some are feeling increasingly **de-motivated** which simply adds to the boredom. For others, being out of work is having detrimental impacts on their own **health**. Some spoke of the stress and even depression caused by being unemployed.

“For a certain amount of time I was on the anti-depressants but I’ve took myself off them...it’s just causing a lot on the stress levels and everything because I’m stuck in the house.”

Female, Telford, DE, 25-44 years old

On a day-to-day level, the financial impact of being out of work is commonly cited by jobseekers. For some, being unemployed has meant that they now need to be very careful with what they spend on day-to-day items, and how they use them.

“I have to budget on everything, like with shampoo I just buy all the cheap brands and if I start running out I have to water it down. It’s horrible, I’ve never had to live like this before.”

Female, Telford, DE, 25-44 years old

Some jobseekers speak of the **emotional** day-to-day impact of being unemployed – such as feeling useless at not being able to contribute to their family or society as a whole. Some of the younger jobseekers who still live at home have negative feelings about having to 'live off

their parents' and for not being able to contribute as much as they would like to household management costs.

Case study: Male, Swindon- C1C2, 18-24yrs old

Since being made unemployed 3-4 months ago, this jobseeker has not been able to buy the food that he usually would and he is conscious that he has lost weight since being unemployed. He now goes jogging in the park rather than paying for the gym. He has also recently cancelled plans with his friends to go on holiday as he cannot afford this now. He is also struggling to fill the hours in the day. Having been used to working all day he now finds he gets bored throughout the day, made even worse by the fact he cannot afford to go out with friends as much.

He has also not been able to buy clothes. Previously this was something he did often, and enjoyed. He lives with his mum and sister but does not enjoy this situation as he feels he is a burden on his mum and is paying her less money than when he was earning a wage.

He is interested in going back to college and gaining an NVQ but expected Jobcentre Plus to be more helpful in giving advice on courses that he could take and is surprised to hear what services are either available at the Jobcentre Plus or to which it could signpost customers to, as he had not been made aware of any of them.

Confidence in looking for work

For many, being unemployed has damaged their **confidence** in their ability to find new work. Some jobseekers report that their lack of confidence has led them to not attend interviews. One man in Swindon explained how he could not afford to buy a suit or tie and felt that without being able to look presentable there was no point attending the interview.

“I wanted to go the interview but I know how important presentation is. You can’t go to a job interview without a suit or tie.”

Male, Swindon, C1C2, 18-24 years old

A woman in Warrington was offered an interview but was put off when the company asked her to bring a laptop and prepare a presentation on a computer. She did not own a computer,

and was not able to use another to prepare her presentation and so she decided not to attend the interview.

This impact on confidence is not universal. Some jobseekers, from a range of backgrounds, believe that it is not their fault they are currently unemployed; rather the only reason that they are not in employment is the current **economic climate**. They feel confident that they will find work when jobs become available.

As expected, levels of confidence fall the longer someone is unemployed. One jobseeker in Bridgend has been unemployed for eight months. He was an IT technician for a mortgage company and felt confident that he would find work in the immediate aftermath of his redundancy. However, having applied for approximately 200 jobs and attended 30 interviews, he is still unemployed and says that his confidence has now 'hit rock bottom'.

“It is a bit soul destroying going for lots of interviews and not getting anywhere. It’s getting close to a year now – how could I not be losing my confidence a bit?”

Male, Bridgend, C1C2, 25-44 years old

Jobseekers who are continually applying for jobs and then either not hearing back from the company (or making it to interview but then not being offered the job) have their confidence affected. In some cases this is to the point where jobseekers begin doubting their own skills and employability; when they were in work they were confident in these attributes.

“You start to think am I employable? Have I got any communication skills? Do I present myself well? You doubt yourself really.”

Female, Warrington, AB, 25-44 years old

“I’ve had no skills training or anything like that so when I do go for jobs and I get turned down, it just makes me feel worse.”

Female, Telford, DE, 25-44 years old

Lowering levels of confidence about finding employment also seem to affect other aspects of their lives and relationships. As discussed above, lack of confidence can have other emotional effects and even affect health.

Positive impacts

Some jobseekers, particularly those that claim to be more financially comfortable, do mention some positive impacts of being unemployed. These tend to be jobseekers from **more affluent backgrounds** (i.e. social class ABC1). Some have used the time out of work to pursue activities they never had the time to do while in employment, whilst those with young children describe enjoying being able to spend more quality time with their children. Some jobseekers have decided to carry out home improvements that previously they did not have the spare time to complete. Indeed, several jobseekers from more affluent backgrounds have now decided to take up activities such as gardening or going back to college to learn new skills or simply pursue hobbies or interests.

“I can pursue things I am interested in, like painting and gardening. That has been the biggest plus.”

Female, Swindon, AB, 45+ years old

“It’s nice to be able to do more for my family. I can cook a nice dinner for my husband everyday. I now run errands for my son and baby-sit my granddaughter lots more. It’s not like I’m bored with nothing to do.”

Female, East Kilbride, C1C2, 45+ years old

“Having time to do things other than going to work – it’s been brilliant in that respect.”

Male, Swindon, AB, 45+ years old

One jobseeker says that unemployment has actually had a **positive impact on their health**, and they are grateful to no longer be working at their previous place of work where they felt unhappy and dissatisfied.

“The positives have been better mental health, it’s true, and I don’t think I was in a good position by the time I was out the door. I can’t dredge up any sob stories about missing my work colleagues.”

Female, Telford, AB, 45+ years old

Coping with the financial impact of unemployment

Coping with the financial impact of unemployment

This chapter examines how the recently jobless are coping with unemployment. We discuss what preparations were made before losing their job and the financial impact of unemployment on household financial commitments while seeking work.

Chapter Summary:

- Attitudes to preparation for unemployment mirror attitudes to finances generally. Those who managed their finances effectively while employed feel they have also made the most adequate preparations for unemployment.
- For jobseekers who are renting or 'paying keep' to family, only minor lifestyle adjustments have been needed to budget while they are out of work.
- For those paying mortgages, the impact of unemployment on their household management has been much greater because of the heightened financial responsibility.
- Most of the jobseekers we spoke to are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance to help with household management costs or simply because it is available to them as a jobseeker. There is little stigma attached to claiming this allowance even amongst those who define themselves as 'professionals'; although there remains some stigma related to using Jobcentre Plus for some people because of a long-standing association of Jobcentre Plus with 'people that are not like them'.

Had jobseekers prepared for being out of work?

Some jobseekers are adequately **prepared** because they had been expecting their redundancy for a while; for others, unemployment had come unexpectedly. The differences in financial preparation seem to be driven by different attitudes and opportunities generally towards personal finances. Those who feel prepared tend to be those who budget and save when they are in work. Others who feel less prepared seem to be those who live day-to-day or wage packet to wage packet.

These differences also affect how people manage their redundancy money, some have budgeted to ensure that it lasts for as long as possible while others had already *'blown it on a treat'*, such as a holiday. Saving for the future is something that is most familiar to those from more affluent backgrounds, and this seems to be because they could afford to put money aside while they were earning. A few describe how they were prepared for unemployment and made appropriate changes to their lifestyle in the months prior to becoming unemployed. For example, one jobseeker in Swindon cut down expenditure on 'luxuries' a whole year *before* being made redundant. Another paid off his bills several months in advance while he was earning so that he did not have this additional financial constraint while he was unemployed.

“I could see what was going on with our own business, with the share price, etc... so we did start saving last year anyway, in case something went wrong this year. And I guess really in some ways, whilst that was quite hard to do last year, it's made this year not quite so difficult. Because once we got used to saving, reduced our outgoings, essentially because we did save, we've quite a bit more money this year, so it worked out.”

Male, Swindon, AB, 25-44 years old

Case study: Male, Swindon, AB, 45+yrs old

This jobseeker is currently enjoying being out of work. He feels financially secure as he paid off his mortgage completely using redundancy money so he no longer is burdened by these payments. As a single man with a grown up daughter he has no dependents and therefore does not have the additional pressure of having to provide for others. He has found that unemployment has given him time to do the things he never had time for while working, such as renovating his house. From being made unemployed earlier in his career, he feels he has learned a lot and he is now fairly relaxed about his job search. Where previously he used a 'scatter gun approach' applying for every job he could, he is now being more selective about the jobs he is applying to. He feels that unemployment during this recession is unlike previous times of high unemployment because there are more 'professionals' out of work than before. He therefore believes that especially among his circle of friends there is less stigma attached to being unemployed as they are more understanding.

He does not perceive Jobcentre Plus as being able to deal with his demands for job seeking. In his experience, they do not have vacancies appropriate for him and are not geared towards helping 'professionals'. He accepts that this is because previously there would not have been such demand for these types of jobs, but questions whether in the current climate they should be able to do more for 'professionals' in his situation.

Financial concerns and impact

For others, unemployment has come later in their career and with their children no longer needing financial support, managing the household costs has been easier.

“I’ve worked and worked and worked and my 40s were particularly difficult trying to pay for everything like school fees and university fees but now I don’t need to pay those anyway.”

Female, Telford, AB, 45+ years old

Nearly all of the jobseekers that we spoke to say there is a financial impact caused by being unemployed. This is perhaps the most acknowledged reality of being unemployed and **information on financial assistance** is therefore a real need. Having said that, we spoke to people in a range of different situations, and so the financial impact varied. For those who are the second earner in the household or in a more secure or stable financial situation, the financial concerns can simply be the need to sideline certain ‘luxurious’ habits such as eating out regularly or using more expensive products in the home.

“Of course you notice the changes to your finances. I used to be able to go to the Lancôme counter in John Lewis and spend £100 on products without thinking about it but I can’t do that now.”

Female, Bridgend, C1C2, 45+ years old

There seems to be little stigma attached to **claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance** even amongst those who describe themselves as ‘professionals’; although there remains some stigma related to using Jobcentre Plus for some people because of a long-standing association of Jobcentre Plus offices with ‘people that are not like them’. Perceptions are grounded in anecdotal experiences and media portrayals rather than anything more substantial.

When discussing the financial impact of unemployment, almost all jobseekers, unprompted, speak first about paying for their **housing**. Whether renting or paying mortgages, anyone who has payments to make for their accommodation sees this as their greatest financial commitment, and their biggest worry when unemployed. Many who live in rented accommodation, either social or private, are gaining support with their rent from their Local Authority, in the form of Housing Benefit. This can help take pressure off their financial situation. In fact, a few lower earners say that they are actually in a similar, or better, financial position compared to when they were employed because of the additional support they now have with these large outgoings. However, they are not clear about how long this feeling would last.

“I’m still not worrying about my finances, I just manage; just the same as before. I’ve never had loads of cash and I’m no worse off now.”

Male, East Kilbride, DE, 25-44 years old

However, some of those with mortgages, especially, the few who have 100% mortgages set up in recent years, are very **worried about their finances**. Even for jobseekers who are no longer making mortgage payments, unexpected large household expenditures remain a real concern, as such outgoings are unpredictable and difficult to plan for.

“If you were to tell me that the boiler was going to blow up and it would cost £1000 that would stress me enormously.”

Female, Telford, AB, 45+ years old

Those with **children** are under extra pressure to provide for their families. Being unemployed has had a big impact on parents, particularly single parents or where *both* parents are now unemployed. One woman in Warrington was forced to make her 21 year old son live with his grandparents as she cannot afford to ‘keep him’ in the family home. Other parents have had to cut back on spending for their children, and feel guilty for not being able to take them out or treat them as much as they would like to. Parents find it difficult to explain to young children why they cannot afford to buy them what they want.

Case study: Male, Bridgend, C1C2, 25-44 years old

This jobseeker has been unemployed for nine months having been made redundant by a small mortgage company where he had worked as an IT consultant. He has been investigating a wide range of job possibilities and admits that his confidence has been hit by the number of rejections he has had for work.

He lived with his partner in a house which they had a 100% mortgage on. He had mortgage insurance but this was only for a year and he says that he is now very worried about what he will do when this comes to an end.

Furthermore, there is the added concern that he has had his home valued and it has lost 15% of the price that he paid for it. He admits that he has not investigated the possibility of government support regarding his mortgage payments because his partner earns a salary which means that he is not claiming any money on Jobseeker’s Allowance. This dependence on his partner financially is creating some problems for their relationship.

Expectations of Jobcentre Plus services

Expectations of Jobcentre Plus services

This chapter explores the expectations held by the recently unemployed about the services offered by Jobcentre Plus, both in relation to finding suitable work, and offering appropriate support during unemployment.

Chapter summary:

- Expectations are driven by how much customers know about Jobcentre Plus services generally. Those who have previous experience of Jobcentre Plus have greater expectations, those with no previous experience are not sure what to expect.
- Those who consider themselves as ‘professionals’ (social class ABC1) generally have low expectations of how effective Jobcentre Plus would be in their job search. This is mainly due to the perception that Jobcentre Plus would not advertise or be able to advise about appropriate professional employment opportunities.
- For most customers, expectations of Jobcentre Plus do not extend beyond the provision of Jobseeker’s Allowance, and potential assistance in finding work. They have little or no expectation of Jobcentre Plus providing help to manage the household or referring them to other agencies who may be able to provide support.

The jobseekers we spoke to have varying levels of previous experience with Jobcentre Plus. Whilst some are first time users of Jobcentre Plus services, others have been unemployed previously and therefore have more experience to draw on. With this in mind, it is important to note that expectations of services are not driven by **previous experience** alone (although this is important). Many views are also shaped by the experiences of **friends and family**, as well as **media perceptions** and **stereotypes**.

Finding work

There is a wide **range of expectations** regarding Jobcentre Plus’ ability to assist customers in finding work. Generally, expectations are vague; very few can think of specific services which they expect Jobcentre Plus to offer in helping them find work. Their expectations are centred more on perceptions of the Jobcentre Plus office itself.

“I expected it to be horrid. All I knew of it was the stereotype of the drug addicts and all the rest of it.”

Female, East Kilbride, C1C2, 18-24 years old

“From previous experience, I really expected very little. I just wanted to make sure that I got my national insurance covered and my Jobseeker’s Allowance.”

Male, Bridgend, AB, 45+ years old

Some who view themselves as ‘**professionals**’ (i.e. those who were from social class ABC1) **have lower expectations** of how effective they consider Jobcentre Plus to be in their job search. This is mainly due to the perception that Jobcentre Plus would not advertise or be able to advise on appropriate job opportunities. The following example is a participant from a more affluent background (social class AB) who feels she needs an annual salary of at least £50,000 to match her previous employment, and that Jobcentre Plus would simply be unable to provide this.

“I had a view that they would not be so helpful on a certain level of job, I’m not putting that properly, I thought that they would carry a lot of £13,000 a year jobs.”

Female, Telford, AB, 45+ years old

Case study: Male, Telford, C1C2, 25-44 years old

This jobseeker had no savings when he was made redundant. He is currently living with his parents and unable to visit his infant son as much as he would like to as he cannot afford the train fare to reach the town where his son lives with his ex-partner. Since being unemployed he has had to make lifestyle adjustments such as cutting back on buying clothes and toiletries. He is a qualified joiner but feels it is impossible to get another position in carpentry because “the work is just not out there”. He also expected Jobcentre Plus to list more *locally-based* job vacancies. This can be irritating when searching for relevant opportunities. He expects Jobcentre Plus to have more specific details about jobs rather than the limited information that he feels he has been given when visiting the office. He expects more support from Jobcentre Plus regarding household management, debt advice and training opportunities. For example, he wants to have re-skilling training. His experience since has shown these expectations have not been met. The only training referral he has had is details of a Learndirect centre, 5 miles away. He feels the course does not meet his needs because it does not provide practical training. He also feels that Jobseeker’s Allowance does not provide financial support to manage a household on while out of work, when taken into consideration alongside his travel costs in order to visit his son, who lives in the north of England.

Helping jobseekers to manage households

Most jobseekers have little expectation of how Jobcentre Plus would be able to help them cope with being unemployed, beyond the provision of **Jobseeker's Allowance** which the majority of jobseekers interviewed claimed. However, there was considerable demand for further support from Jobcentre Plus as discussed below.

Generally, customers' expectations of Jobcentre Plus did not extend beyond the provision of Jobseeker's Allowance, and potential assistance in finding work. Many have little or no expectations of Jobcentre Plus providing other forms of help while unemployed.

“Well, when you think of going into a Jobcentre, you're thinking about Jobseeker's Allowance aren't you? You don't imagine that there is much else that they could do for you.”

Female, Bridgend, C1C2, 45+ years old

Some have expectations of support with **rent and Housing Benefit**. This is primarily driven by being informed or knowing through previous unemployment that this existed, rather than an uninformed expectation. We usually find in other research conducted that increased information leads to greater expectations of services. If customers had known more, they probably would have expected more from Jobcentre Plus.

What services were expected?

Jobseekers tend not to have detailed expectations of the services that they may be able to access from Jobcentre Plus. This seems to be directly related to a **lack of awareness** or information about what services are available.

However, some respondents did have specific expectations which are mainly focused on **returning to work**, such as for CV assistance, financial aid, skills training and interview help.

“I've got to admit, I did expect there to be quite a lot of information about training. You hear on the news about all these training courses that you can get on at the Jobcentre so I thought that would be something that would be there.”

Male, East Kilbride, C1C2, 25-44 years old

Since his first visit to Jobcentre Plus, this respondent discovered that there are training opportunities, but only ones that can be accessed after six months of unemployment.

It is important to note that lack of awareness often leads to expectations of services Jobcentre Plus does not currently provide, especially among those who have no previous experience of using the services. This group, therefore, are more likely to be dissatisfied with the service as they expect it to be something more than it is. This highlights the importance of customers' expectations to be managed appropriately by Jobcentre Plus, as the case study below illustrates.

Case study: Male, Telford, C1C2, 25-44 years old

This jobseeker had arrived in the UK from Belgium five years ago and had been working as a skilled labourer. He is originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo and so speaks English as a second language. Although his partner and younger siblings have remained in Belgium, they rely on his income. He is renting with friends from a private landlord but is receiving housing benefit, having received advice from Jobcentre Plus about this. He is also receiving Jobseeker's Allowance but he does not think that he will be able to cover his living costs. He is looking for any job available, having applied to areas such as social care, cleaning and security. He rings Jobcentre Plus every day, looks online for jobs and visits recruitment agencies to look for work.

He is not satisfied with Jobcentre Plus, although it appears he has a complete misunderstanding of Jobcentre Plus' purpose. He had expected that Jobcentre Plus finds you a job, not that they assist you in the process: *"they are not helping you get a job, they just show you them on a computer"*.

He only expected that Jobcentre Plus could help with finding employment and had no idea that there are other services available. Jobcentre Plus staff have been giving him advice to take up training courses but he does not understand why they are doing this as his main concern is finding immediate work. He had not previously used an equivalent service, either in the Democratic Republic of Congo or Belgium, and simply associates the name of Jobcentre Plus as being somewhere which will find you a job.

This example clearly demonstrates how misinformed or unrealistic expectations can directly impact on levels of satisfaction.

Experience of Jobcentre Plus services

Experience of Jobcentre Plus services

This chapter looks at the experiences of the recently unemployed when using Jobcentre Plus services and examines whether they match up to the expectations held by jobseekers.

Chapter summary:

- Customers do not feel they are getting the most out of their Jobcentre Plus experience because they are not being made aware of all the services that are available to them.
- Many customers say that they want Jobcentre Plus staff to be more personal and to provide more considered advice to them based on their individual situation, rather than treating everyone in a uniform way. They want staff to take more of an interest in them.
- There is a perceived variability of staff quality and some customers comment that the service provided depends entirely on who they see on each visit to Jobcentre Plus.
- There are mixed views on whether expectations are being met. For example, for some customers (e.g. professionals) their expectations - and needs - are minimal and therefore are being met. Jobcentre Plus is perceived to be performing less well for those who require training opportunities.

Knowledge of services

There is **low awareness** of specific services offered by Jobcentre Plus. No jobseekers feel they know 'a great deal' about the services offered as illustrated in the following table; the majority feel they know either 'a fair amount' or 'a little'. However, when discussing what services jobseekers had actually accessed, many state that they are not actually aware of the services that are available to them.

I would have said I knew quite a lot because I've been going to the Jobcentre on and off for years but I had no idea that there was half as much available as you've just shown me on that list.

Male, Bridgend, B, 45+ years

Table 1: Knowledge of Jobcentre Plus services

A great deal	0
A fair amount	19
A little	16
Nothing at all	4

Customers were shown a list of services offered by Jobcentre Plus to establish which they had *accessed*, and which they had found *most useful*. The key finding from this exercise is that most jobseekers are not aware that some of the services are available to them, and they are very surprised to see many of services listed, especially regarding **support services** such as assistance paying utility bills and information about childcare provision. The full list discussed with jobseekers is in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Services accessed at Jobcentre Plus and services found most useful

	Accessed	Most useful
Information about employment opportunities	21	3
Information about financial support whilst looking for work	16	3
Help with CV, application forms and interview techniques	12	2
Referrals to other agencies and local organisations	11	3
Benefits payments and related financial assistance schemes	7	0
Information about in-work financial assistance (e.g. Tax Credits)	5	1
Information and signposting on debt and other household costs – e.g. mortgage interest scheme	5	1
Training to refresh and learn new skills	3	1
Assistance in paying utility bills and debts (e.g. information on Fuel Direct, Water Direct)	2	0
Information about childcare provision	1	0
Information about flexible working opportunities	1	0
Apprenticeships, volunteering	0	0
<i>Don't know</i>	0	1
<i>None of these</i>	4	25

“Now you’ve told me about these things I’m going to go in and ask about them.”

Male, Warrington, C1C2, 18-24 years old

Some customers have expectations of **training and skills services** based on previous experience but are disappointed that these are not offered when they enquired at Jobcentre Plus during their most recent period of unemployment. However, for some, it is as much a case of not being aware that there is a six month threshold for such training. This example demonstrates the importance of informing customers at the start when services can be accessed. It also raises the question of whether such services should be provided earlier to meet the needs of jobseekers.

“From what I know, years ago the Jobcentre used to do training courses and things like that. They don’t seem to do anything like that anymore though because I asked them and they said they didn’t.”

Female, Telford, DE, 25-44 years old

For some customers who have little knowledge of the services or support offered, they have actually been pleasantly surprised to receive extra help such as **assistance with paying council tax**.

“Yes, I didn’t know they can help, but they have helped me with council tax payments.”

Male, Warrington, C1C2, 45+ years old

Using Jobcentre Plus services

It is clear that the customers of Jobcentre Plus who we spoke to are *not* accessing a wide range of services. The most commonly used service is ‘**information about employment opportunities**’, as shown in Table 2.

This reiterates the perception that Jobcentre Plus is primarily available as a service to help customers find work.

There are three services accessed by more than ten of the jobseekers we spoke to:

- Information about financial support whilst looking for work
- Help with CV, application forms and interview techniques
- Referrals to other agencies and local organisations

Other services are not widely used among the Jobcentre Plus customers we spoke to. No customers have accessed services relating to apprenticeships or volunteering, and only a

few people recall receiving any assistance in paying utility bills and debts, information about childcare provision or information about flexible working opportunities.

A few customers have a clear knowledge of the services they can access through Jobcentre Plus, and these customers are confident in asking for these services when they speak to staff. This knowledge is either gained from friends or family who have used Jobcentre Plus, and informally passed on to others and not because Jobcentre Plus has been effective in communicating this.

Case study: Male, East Kilbride, DE, 25-44 years old

This jobseeker used to be employed in a factory where he had worked for the majority of his working life. He lives on his own in a small privately rented flat in East Kilbride and has one child who lives with her mother. He sees the child regularly but has stopped contributing to the child's maintenance since becoming unemployed. He says that he is not particularly worse off financially than when he was employed.

Through friends and previous experience, he is aware of a number of Jobcentre Plus services and is making the most of this knowledge. He had requested to access the Positive Moves course straight away (rather than waiting for six months of unemployment), received funding to do a European Computer Driving Licence Course and received financial assistance regarding his housing. In his words, 'the help is there if you know to ask for it.'

The role of Jobcentre Plus in looking for work

For many, **Jobcentre Plus is a central feature of their job search.** However, the usefulness of Jobcentre Plus differed markedly by geographical location. For a number of jobseekers in both Bridgend and East Kilbride, Jobcentre Plus is cited as the most useful source in seeking employment. These jobseekers, from less affluent backgrounds (primarily social grades C1C2 or DE), feel that if a relevant job is advertised, they would find it at Jobcentre Plus.

“Oh yeah, if there is going to be a job advertised, it'll be in the Jobcentre. That's got to be the main place you're looking for something in this local area.”

Male, East Kilbride, D, 25-44 years old

In other areas, such as Telford, Jobcentre Plus is seen to offer **little more than what the high street and online recruitment agencies already offer**. In some cases, jobseekers feel Jobcentre Plus simply lists the same roles already advertised in agencies, especially for lower-skilled jobs. Whilst, for many, Jobcentre Plus remains their first port of call when they become unemployed; this is as much due to their desire to claim Jobseeker's Allowance entitlement as it is a reflection of their confidence in Jobcentre Plus successfully finding them work.

“I use their website everyday to search for jobs.”

Male, Warrington, C1C2, 45+ years old

“I go in there every few days and use the machines and the phone.”

Male, Warrington, DE, 25-44 years old

For those looking for 'professional' jobs (jobseekers more likely to be from ABC1 social grade), Jobcentre Plus plays a very small role. In fact, for the most part, they do not use it at all in their job search. This is because they do not believe Jobcentre Plus caters for the jobs they are looking for and does not list the vacancies relevant to them. Some respondents in this group are actually relaxed in their attitude that Jobcentre Plus is not geared towards them. They do not think that its purpose should necessarily be to meet their needs as a 'professional' and do not expect it to help them. These jobseekers feel they have the knowledge, skills, confidence, and capacity to manage their own job search and access specialist agencies.

“For me it's really just somewhere to go and sign on, it's not an active part of my job search... It could have a professional section or something, without sounding kind of snobbish or whatever but something which is catering for people who've come out of professional jobs and are looking for work... I don't think particularly that Jobcentre Plus is geared up for that.”

Female, Swindon, AB, 25-44 years old

Jobcentre Plus Staff

Reflecting the subjective nature of individual contact with staff, customers express **a range of opinions about staff** at Jobcentre Plus.

- Some are impressed with their professionalism and dedication and so are satisfied with the way that they are treated;
- Others feel that they are impolite or disrespectful when handling customers; and
- There are also a number of customers whose views are more mixed. They sympathise with what they see as ‘a difficult job’ given current pressures in terms of increased workloads and they feel that the quality of staff varies both from centre to centre, and within each Jobcentre Plus office.

Dissatisfaction with staff appears to be a principal driver of wider dissatisfaction with the Jobcentre Plus experience. When people describe unsatisfactory experiences at Jobcentre Plus centres, detrimental treatment by staff is commonly cited. For example, one woman in East Kilbride says that she is dissatisfied with Jobcentre Plus despite only using (or wanting to use) minimal services. She says that she does not feel that staff members demonstrate ‘*basic customer service*’ and this has influenced her wider dissatisfaction towards Jobcentre Plus generally.

A common complaint about Jobcentre Plus staff is that customers sometimes feel they are ‘looked down on’ and not given what they see as an appropriate level of respect.

“I think they’re stuck up to be honest. Like they think they’re better than me for having a job and I’m just lazy.”

Male, Bridgend, DE, 18-24 years old

Not all customers give negative appraisals of staff. Many say that staff are, generally, polite and respectful.

“In my experience they are polite, they don’t look down on you.”

Female, Swindon, C1C2, 45+ years old

However, some customers feel that staff do no more than provide a basic service in their interaction with them. They feel that some staff fail to take an interest in individuals and their specific situation. Many customers say that they want staff to be more personable and to give more considered advice.

“They are polite, courteous and knowledgeable on the process – but don’t go any further.”

Male, Swindon, AB, 45+ years old

“They are friendly but they just don’t take an interest in you.”

Female, Warrington, AB, 25-44 years old

Case study: Female, Bridgend, C1C2, 45+ years old

This jobseeker used to be employed as a PA within a social services department. She lives comfortably in a house which she owns with her husband outright. She misses the social side of work and ‘having a reason to get up in the morning’ but has not felt a large financial impact of being made redundant. She has cut down on some of the ‘luxuries’, such as expensive beauty products, but her day-to-day expenditure has not been affected.

Since being made unemployed, she has been very satisfied with the service provided at the Jobcentre Plus office. She had no previous experience of Jobcentre Plus and did not know what to expect but assumed *‘it would not be a very nice place’*. She has since found staff to be welcoming, polite and helpful, showing a genuine interest in her situation. At her first consultation, staff made her aware of the referrals available and provided her with information leaflets and brochures. One staff-member even told her of an opportunity of a vacancy at the Jobcentre Plus office that she should consider applying for.

This is one example of how a personalised and interested service from staff has been a major driver of customer satisfaction.

It is clear that the perceived variability of staff quality is such that customers can sometimes feel the quality of their staff contact is entirely dependent on who they see, even within the same Jobcentre. Contact with staff is the key physical interaction for customers within Jobcentre Plus, and this lottery-effect does little to improve confidence in the service generally.

“It depends on who you actually see on the day you go in. Some of them are just lazy I think, a few weeks ago one of them actually looked to see if there was anything for me but more often when I go to sign on they don’t even look, they just give me the card and say, here you go, sign.”

Female, Telford, DE, 25-44 years old

Case study: Female, East Kilbride, C1C2, 18-24 years old

This jobseeker is 20 years old and had been working in telesales since leaving school but had left this position due to its location in the centre of Glasgow which necessitated a long and expensive taxi ride when she finished late. She had been living with her mother until she recently moved in with her partner who undertook two jobs. They are privately renting and her partner is paying the rent, which she says is difficult as she dislikes being dependent upon him.

She has no previous experience of Jobcentre Plus before this period of unemployment but she says she is disappointed with the service she is receiving. She has very negative feelings about the Jobcentre based on its image in the local area. It is evident that these views have affected her judgement regarding her current assessment of the service. She says she dreads going to the Jobcentre office and finds staff are disrespectful and damage her confidence. She wants some support and direction but does not feel it is being offered by Jobcentre Plus. When she is given details of job opportunities, she is told there are lots of applicants in competition which makes her feel that she has no chance. When she asked the Jobcentre staff about training opportunities she was just given the Learndirect telephone number and told to call them.

Are expectations being met?

Expectations of Jobcentre Plus vary across jobseekers as discussed earlier. Furthermore, these jobseekers do not exhibit the same needs, nor the same knowledge of the support and advice that is available to them from Jobcentre Plus. With this in mind, it is evident that Jobcentre Plus is meeting the expectations of those who participated in the study with **varying degrees of success**. It is clear, whether articulated as expectations or needs, that Jobcentre Plus is under pressure to meet the demands of a wider variety of jobseekers now than it has previously.

For many customers - particularly those who describe themselves as 'professionals' - expectations *are* being met, but that is because their expectations are low initially. These customers had never expected to use Jobcentre Plus as a way to find work before becoming unemployed and have very little experience or information to base their expectations on.

Now, when they use Jobcentre Plus, it is predominantly to collect Jobseeker's Allowance. Due to the fact they do not expect Jobcentre Plus to be able to cater for their needs (both with seeking work and with offering wider support) these customers' low expectations are being met (even if their needs are not).

“I never thought about using it before. But I didn't think they'd have jobs for me. I use it as a transactional process only... so they are meeting expectations because I didn't have any.”

Male, Swindon, AB, 25-44 years old

Some professionals who previously held low expectations of how Jobcentre Plus could meet *their* needs have been impressed by what they see as an effective system working within an extraordinary economic climate. They feel that there is only a limited amount that Jobcentre Plus can actually do to assist jobseekers as unemployment continues to rise, and competition for jobs increases further.

“My view of the Jobcentre before I went is different from that which I now hold. I think it is a very professional set up and it is staffed by people who of necessity must have a difficult job with the people that are their customers but there is unfailing courtesy, staffing levels are tight sometimes but the system, if I can call it that, runs very efficiently.”

Female, Telford, AB, 45+ years old

One jobseeker in Bridgend had a negative experience of using Jobcentre Plus eight years ago. Based on this poor experience, she had low expectations of Jobcentre Plus for this period of unemployment. However, she admits to being genuinely impressed by the improvements she has experienced, especially related to the atmosphere of the centre itself.

“I thought it would be horrible and dirty like it used to be. But it's nice now and really easy to use. It's just a nice place to be and spend time.”

Female, Bridgend, C1C2, 25-44 years old

An older respondent in Warrington is also pleased with the improvements; he is pleasantly surprised by **Job-Point stations** available to use (which allow jobseekers to interactively search for jobs).

Not all customers, however, feel their expectations have been met. **Younger jobseekers** in particular say that the Jobcentre Plus experience used to be better. Many even express a longing for 'the way it used to be'. They feel staff took more time to advise customers before,

and generally took more of an interest in individuals. In some cases, the services are still available but customers are not being informed about them, perhaps because of the heavy workload of staff.

“They should go back to how it was. They used to sit down with you and talk to you. Now they just want you out.”

Male, Warrington, DE, 25-44 years old

“They used to offer you things like a shirt and tie so you could go to an interview.”

Male, Swindon, C1C2, 18-24 years old

When considering why these comments have come from younger jobseekers, in particular, we can look to the **wider economic climate**. For most, this is their first experience of the job market and Jobcentre Plus in a recession. These customers have only experienced a more buoyant job market where Jobcentre Plus was not faced with such large demand, and where more job vacancies were available. With this in mind, it is not surprising that these younger jobseekers are less satisfied with the service they are now receiving in a climate where there are less job opportunities for Jobcentre Plus to advertise and advise on, as well as increased pressure on staff in terms of dealing with the rise in jobseekers.

Case study: Male, Warrington, D, 25-34 years old

This jobseeker has spent much of the last few years in prison. However, when he was in prison he took several courses, which he was told would make finding employment easy. He therefore left prison optimistic about his chances of getting back into work. However, he says it very difficult to find employment. Being unemployed means that he is unable to save any money and cannot afford to buy his daughter any presents; this has had a negative impact on his self-confidence.

Having used Jobcentre Plus as a teenager and having had a good experience, he believed the Jobcentre Plus would be able to help him. Despite acknowledging a general shortage of jobs he still expects more from the Jobcentre Plus, particularly in terms of helping him find appropriate courses. However, he is disappointed with the response from Jobcentre Plus who simply gave him a college prospectus when what he wants is some advice and someone to talk to. Due to what he says feels like a lack of effort on the part of the Jobcentre Plus this jobseeker feels his best option is to go out himself and ask people for jobs. He now frequently hands out his CV and asks people if they know of any vacancies he could fill. He believes that he is not getting the help or advice he needs.

The needs of the recently unemployed are diverse. For some customers, Jobcentre Plus *is* meeting their expectations especially where their needs are minimal and manageable. For those customers whose needs are much greater, Jobcentre Plus is perceived to be performing less well, especially where jobseekers are keen for **re-skilling and training opportunities** (soon after they become unemployed).

Some customers are quick to acknowledge the current economic climate and believe that while such uncertainty exists, there is only a certain amount that Jobcentre Plus can actively do to meet their needs anyway.

For many jobseekers, particularly those previously from **lower-skilled jobs**, Jobcentre Plus is **not seen as meeting their needs**, simply because they remain unemployed. These people view Jobcentre Plus as a tool to help them find work and if it is not fulfilling this need then they feel like Jobcentre Plus is not meeting their needs generally.

“They’re not doing anything to help me get a job and that’s what they’re there for.”

Male, Warrington, C1C2, 45+ years old

For other jobseekers who would like **more hands-on assistance**, there is a perception that Jobcentre Plus is not providing the necessary support they would like to help them apply for job opportunities. The customers who are the most in need are often not those who describe themselves as ‘professionals’, who are generally confident they know how to apply for the jobs they want, but lower-skilled jobseekers who do not have the necessary skills or support to help them get back to work.

“No, I’m having to do everything myself.”

Male, Warrington, C1C2, 18-24 years old

“I’ve come from a violent marriage, had to start over again looking for work. I’ve got no skills or anything and they haven’t helped at all.”

Female, Telford, DE, 25-44 years old

Evaluation of Jobcentre Plus services

Evaluation of Jobcentre Plus services

In this chapter, we evaluate the role of Jobcentre Plus, looking at how it is perceived by those who have used it. We analyse how it fits into the customer job search and what improvements they would like to see made to the service, so that it can better meet their needs.

Chapter summary:

- Jobcentre Plus remains one of the most commonly accessed sources of help and support in finding work, along with local newspapers and the internet, although many customers state that the collection of Jobseekers Allowance is probably the primary motivation to visit the Jobcentre Office. For some, visiting Jobcentre Plus is simply a fulfilment of the obligation for receipt of Jobseekers Allowance.
- The customers we spoke to want Jobcentre Plus staff to take more consideration deciding which job opportunities to discuss with them. Customers often feel that the staff are often keener to simply place a job with a candidate rather than consider the career ambitions of the jobseeker.
- Customers want Jobcentre Plus to better inform them about the services and support they are entitled to. Currently service is inconsistent, depending on how aware customers are of the services available to them.

What sources are the unemployed using to seek work?

Jobseekers are using a **wide range of sources** to help them find work. Some comment that the scarcity of employment opportunities in the current economic climate means they have to use several sources. Jobseekers say this contrasts with previous periods of being unemployed, when they had found new employment more easily.

“The last time I was made redundant, I was only unemployed for a few weeks. I went into the Jobcentre and got the first job I applied for. You can’t do that now, you have to look around and get help from anywhere you can.”

Male, East Kilbride, DE, 25-44 years old

When presented with a list of possible sources they may access to seek employment, it is not unusual for jobseekers to say that they use eight or more. The most commonly used sources are:

- Jobcentre Plus – both at the office and online;
- The internet – using both search engines and online recruitment sites, such as monster.co.uk;
- Local newspapers; and
- Family and friends.

The most *useful* sources, according to jobseekers, are Jobcentre Plus and the internet (both search engines and online recruitment websites) although participants are divided when selecting this. For example, a minority say that high street recruitment agencies are the most useful.

Table 3: Sources used to obtain help and support in finding work

	Used	Most Useful
Jobcentre Plus	36	11
Google/search engine	34	7
Local/national newspapers	34	4
Family or friends	28	4
High street recruitment agency	23	5
Online recruitment agency	21	7
Your local authority	19	0
Careers Advice Services	13	0
Directgov	13	3
Learndirect	10	0
CAB/similar advisory body	7	0
Local community organisation or charities	2	0
Other	3	2
<i>None of these</i>	1	6
<i>Don't know</i>	0	0

The actions taken to find work

Most jobseekers are using at least a few of these sources on a daily basis in seeking work.

It is interesting to note that, despite some tending to say that they would 'do anything' to get employment, many jobseekers do have **barriers** that would prevent them from taking certain work. For example, some say they will only consider full-time work as part-time work would affect their benefits claim, others do not want to work night-shifts because they have young children.

“The job has to be one that suits me and my life. I’m not going to work night-shifts because I don’t have a car to get there and my son is epileptic. I wouldn’t want to leave him at night”

Female, Bridgend, C1C2, 45+ years old

The need for a more bespoke service

The improvement most sought after by customers is for a **more personalised and attentive service** from Jobcentre Plus. For some, this is about simply increasing the number of staff to cope with the increased demand at Jobcentre Plus offices. Customers feel that this would help 'free-up' the current staff, allowing them to spend more time with individual customers. Many jobseekers say they are made to feel like *'just a number'* when they are dealing with Jobcentre Plus staff (they are simply asked the standard questions in order to collect their Jobseeker's Allowance and then 'moved on'). Many customers want the service to be more personalised, with the staff taking an interest in them and their situation, suggesting what services would be useful to them and actively helping them with their job search. Several jobseekers even suggest having more 'one-to-one' meetings where they can sit with an adviser and receive specific help and advice tailored to *their* individual needs.

“Surely it’s not asking for much just to show a bit of interest and enthusiasm for finding me work.”

Male, Bridgend, AB, 45+ years old

“Sometimes they just treat you like a number, get you in and out as quick as possible.”

Male, Warrington, DE, 25-44 years old

“They could improve by looking more closely at individuals, by tailoring what they offer more to each person.”

Female, Swindon, C1C2, 45+ years old

Helping customers meet career aspirations, not just jobs

Some customers want support and advice to be more **career-orientated**. They feel that the current offering is too focused about getting them into any employment rather than helping them to review their options and potential training needs to help them to achieve an actual career goal.

Case study: Female, East Kilbride, C1C2, 25-34 years old

This jobseeker had been working in telesales but had quit her position because she became unwell from the stress of the position. She has been looking at alternative work but only has telesales experience so has been struggling to gain interviews for other types of work. She has been out of work for four months and despite the implications for her health, she had an interview booked with another telesales company.

She said that despite being friendly and trying to be helpful regarding other work, Jobcentre Plus staff are encouraging her to apply just for telesales jobs as this is her *‘best chance of getting work’*. She feels that they are more interested in closing her case quickly by securing her a job rather than addressing her career aspirations.

She is potentially vulnerable as she lives alone in social housing since her aunt died three months previously. She has been left in charge of all financial aspects of managing the household and is unsure how to deal with this.

Some of those who are seeking what they describe as more ‘professional’ posts (such as in IT or business management) suggest that Jobcentre Plus should develop beyond its traditional jobs remit and **offer jobs of more suitability** for this group. These customers believe that currently Jobcentre Plus is able to better address the needs of lower-skilled jobseekers. Whilst some accept that the recession has caused a diversification of the Jobcentre Plus’ customer base, they argue that Jobcentre Plus needs to react to this appropriately by diversifying its offering beyond those lower-skilled jobs most frequently associated with it.

“They should have a professional section to cater for the needs of professionals that are looking for work.”

Female, Swindon, AB, 25-44 years old

“It’s like they don’t know what this recession is, they need to be gearing towards senior professionals as well.”

Female, Swindon, AB, 45+ years old

Improving awareness of the services available

Many customers feel that the service could be improved by simply making those that are unemployed more aware of the variety of services available to them. Many are surprised by the number of services and referrals that Jobcentre Plus could offer when prompted with the list.

“I just think they need to make us all more aware of what it is that they can offer. Who knows all this stuff exists? Definitely not me! And if other people are being offered it, why are they getting it and not me? I want to know what I’m entitled to! Now I know, I’m going down the Jobcentre tomorrow.”

Female, East Kilbride, C1C2, 25-44 years old

Customers feel that staff could be **more proactive and forthcoming with information**. Many say that if you ask the right question then usually you will get a ‘good answer’ from the staff and generally they are helpful. However, there is a perception that staff do not offer this information without being asked. Participants explained that they did not ask for several reasons, including embarrassment, not knowing what to ask or simply having no idea that anything else is on offer other than what they see in the Jobcentre Plus office and on the website.

It is evident that there is inconsistency regarding the type of information that is made available to new customers. Some customers suggest Jobcentre Plus could provide information leaflets or booklets detailing exactly the services on offer and how to find out more information. Jobseekers describe a document similar to the Job kit that is given out at an initial appointment at Jobcentre Plus. Some customers are either not receiving this information or do not recall having been provided with it. Respondents feel that ensuring everyone has this information up front would encourage other customers to ask more questions about what advice and support they could receive from Jobcentre Plus.

“They should tell you more things and not wait to be asked. Give out leaflets, set up meetings, just being more proactive really.”

Female, Swindon, C1C2, 45+ years old

“They should tell you more what they can do. Make it less transactional and actually be proactive in telling you things.”

Male, Swindon, AB, 25-44 years old

Learning from other recruitment agencies

Customers who use online and high street employment agencies believe that Jobcentre Plus could follow some of the good practices of private recruitment agencies. In particular, they suggest sending **regular emails with job adverts** that match individual jobseekers' career criteria. For those with internet access, this would be an easy and convenient way to receive job adverts that they can then investigate further if they choose to. It would help tailor the vacancy offerings through Jobcentre Plus, providing a more bespoke service.

“They should keep you more informed, maybe send emails with jobs in them or something”

Female, Warrington, DE, 25-44 years old

“I get regular emails from job agencies with jobs that they think are suitable for me. Why can't the Jobcentre do that? You get in on your computer, can look at it when you like, apply to it there. It encourages you apply and you get to see the jobs that come in.”

Male, Swindon, AB, 45+ years old

Larger employers

Some of those who describe themselves as 'professionals' believe that part of the responsibility lies with **larger employers to post more vacancies** at Jobcentre Plus, especially now that they feel many people like themselves are searching for employment. They feel that larger employers may have an outdated view of the calibre of potential employees they can draw from the Jobcentre.

“It would be very nice if the big employers felt in the position to use the Jobcentre more. I suspect they are in an old fashioned position of believing that they won't be able to recruit from Jobcentre. They might believe they were going to be trawling the depths of recruitment opportunities. That is not necessarily so I think.”

Female, Telford, AB, 45+ years old

The role of other service providers

The role of other service providers

This chapter examines the role of other service providers in helping the recently unemployed with their job search, and supporting them whilst they are out of work. We discuss customer experiences of the referrals made by Jobcentre Plus and consider how these can be improved. The referrals discussed with participants are wide-ranging, including employment services (e.g. training and skills, careers advice) as well as other services to help them return to work (e.g. debt advice, children's services and counselling).

Chapter summary:

- Jobseekers are frequently using both online and high street recruitment agencies to assist them with their job search. Staff at high street recruitment agencies are often perceived to be *more proactive* than Jobcentre Plus staff, as well as offering a *more bespoke*, individual service to customers.
- Some jobseekers feel confident coping with the impacts of unemployment and their job search by themselves, seeking out services they require independently of Jobcentre Plus. For these jobseekers, other service providers are there to assist them just as Jobcentre Plus is. For those less aware of other service providers, and of their entitlement to these services, Jobcentre Plus could do more to signpost relevant referrals.
- Currently, where Jobcentre Plus is making successful referrals customers are not consistently acknowledging the role the service plays. Jobcentre Plus is suffering by comparison rather than being credited with *leading* the customer *to* the third-party service.

What referrals is Jobcentre Plus making?

Only a handful of customers say they have received referrals to other service providers from Jobcentre Plus, and of these, most customers say it is because they have personally *requested* the referral. As shown in Table 4, the most commonly cited referrals made by Jobcentre Plus are related to job opportunities. The top mentions are:

- The internet;

- Recruitment services/ agencies;
- Training and skills; and
- Local Authority (regarding council tax/ housing benefit).

As can be clearly seen in Table 4, most customers we spoke to say there have **not been any third-party referrals** either from Jobcentre Plus or from other organisations. When asked about the referrals that were being offered, customers said they were most likely to use:

- The internet (including the Jobcentre Plus website);
- Recruitment services/ agencies; and
- Local authorities (regarding council tax/ housing benefit).

Table 4: Service referrals made by Jobcentre Plus and/ or other organisations

	Offered by Jobcentre Plus	Used	Offered by another organisation	Used
Internet	14	11	1	3
Recruitment services/agencies	12	9	4	9
Training and skills	9	5	1	1
Local authority (council tax and housing benefit)	8	7	0	1
Housing services	5	4	0	0
Career advice	3	3	1	1
Self-employment schemes	2	2	1	0
Debt advice services	2	2	0	0
Children's services	2	2	1	0
Counselling	2	2	0	0
Energy efficiency and fuel bills	2	2	0	0
Volunteering	2	0	0	1
Less formal networks (self help groups etc)	1	0	1	1
Connexions	0	0	0	0
Business Link	0	0	0	0
Relevant charities	0	0	0	0
<i>None of these</i>	15	-	27	-
NB: The totals in column 5 exceed those in column 4 for some areas where that referral has not been made by another organisation (for example where self-referral/ referral by friends/ family has been made)				

Many of those who cite internet and recruitment agencies are referring to the information pack which they receive when they first go to Jobcentre Plus. Therefore, although they are technically referrals, this does not correspond to a detailed or concerted referral as compared with those which are discussed below.

Training & Skills

A number of jobseekers had been referred to different training and skills courses. These include those which aim to develop their 'employability' (e.g. **CV and interview help**) and those which are to aid them in furthering their career prospects (e.g. **computer training**).

Case study: Male, Bridgend, C1C2, 16-24 years old

This jobseeker is twenty years old and had been unemployed for four months. He has worked in telesales but wants to work in construction. He lives with his brother, who is his landlord, and pays only minimal rent to cover the basic bills. He has no savings and previously 'lived for the weekend' when he would spend up to £50 on a night out with friends.

He says he is very dissatisfied with Jobcentre Plus because they do not offer him the sort of personalised service which he wants. He has been referred to the recruitment agency Manpower, with whom he is very satisfied. Manpower offers a course which helps the unemployed to improve their 'employability' through CV help, one-to-one advice and job interview practice. He was given very little information by Jobcentre Plus about the service initially and is not actually sure why he was referred. However, he says that the referral has been very good, as Manpower have been able to offer the personalised service and access to training that he had hoped for from Jobcentre Plus.

Ironically, despite Jobcentre Plus making this referral, his experience of Manpower has actually made him *more* dissatisfied with Jobcentre Plus when their service is viewed in comparison with Manpower. He gives Jobcentre Plus no credit for the service he is now using.

In East Kilbride, a number of jobseekers are using the *Positive Moves* course (a training and empowerment course) – with varying levels of satisfaction. One man requested access to the course despite not having been unemployed for six months. He had initially mentioned to Jobcentre Plus that the support he most needs is CV and interview advice and he feels that this need is now being met by the *Positive Moves* course.

Not all customers have been satisfied with this referral though, another jobseeker describes it as a '*waste of time*' because it is not teaching her anything new.

Housing

A number of jobseekers have asked their Jobcentre Office about **housing benefit** and have since been referred to the Housing department of their Local Authority for more information. There seems to be some **variation in the service provided** in making referrals regarding housing. Some are very satisfied because Jobcentre Plus staff dealt with their enquiry efficiently and sent the relevant documentation to the Housing Department without needing the jobseekers to do anything. Others describe how they were just given the name of the relevant department rather than any real support. These customers feel that, although the service provided did meet their basic needs, more detailed information and support would have been helpful. Many customers were unsure whether it was appropriate for them due to the lack of detail in the information they received, and this needs to be improved to ensure greater clarity for customers.

Debt advice and support

As Table 4 shows, the vast majority of jobseekers we spoke to do not receive any referrals regarding **debt advice** services. While for many these referrals are not requested or needed, there are those jobseekers who would appreciate services and support in this area as many find it difficult to cope with the financial impact of unemployment, as discussed earlier. One jobseeker in Telford comments that he would like Jobcentre Plus to provide coaching on how to budget while on Jobseeker's Allowance as he feels he wastes his allowance unnecessarily.

Case study: Male, Bridgend, C1C2, 25-44 years old

This jobseeker previously worked within sales promotion. His work was well-paid but he did not save as much whilst employed as he now feels he should have. He is confident he will find a job and feels he is doing everything he can to be proactive with this search but he is currently struggling with serious debt problems.

Bailiffs are turning up regularly and while he has so far kept them at bay with his confidence that he will soon be able to pay, he is worried the visits will become more frequent. Alongside this, his wife is 8 months pregnant and no longer able to physically continue her part-time job.

Whilst he is confident he can manage his own job search, he is disappointed that Jobcentre Plus has not done more to offer support and relevant referrals regarding his debt problems. With his wife pregnant, he is concerned about his situation and feels that Jobcentre Plus need to be much more thorough in carrying out individual consultations so that they can make better referrals to help people in similar situations.

Are the recently unemployed accessing other services without the referral of Jobcentre Plus?

Where jobseekers are **proactive** about their job search, they are using other services without an initial referral from Jobcentre Plus. This is most notably the case where jobseekers are using **online and high street recruitment agencies** which they have independently sought. Even among those who have been given information about agencies from Jobcentre Plus, there is a tendency to seek agencies independently (often which are different to those Jobcentre Plus has suggested).

For these jobseekers, the services offered by recruitment agencies are seen as easily accessible and useful for their job search. They did not require a referral, as they already knew of such services and had used them in the past, if only to browse to see what was on the market while in employment.

Less encouragingly, Jobcentre Plus referrals are generally not being made for jobseekers who are less aware of the services that may help them, both with their job search and with coping with unemployment. It is often the jobseekers who are least aware who are the ones who most need referrals as they are least able to successfully find relevant services themselves.

Are referrals from Jobcentre Plus sufficiently signposted?

Jobcentre Plus needs to do more to ensure that **the referrals** it does make are sufficiently branded and **adequately signposted**. Some jobseekers we spoke to are utilising referrals made by Jobcentre Plus but they were completely unaware that Jobcentre Plus had initiated them. This is a perceptions issue that Jobcentre Plus needs to address, as better awareness of these referrals could improve satisfaction, especially where they have been successful.

One jobseeker from Telford explained that he has been disappointed with the lack of referrals and information supplied by his local Jobcentre Plus office. He has found the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) much better at informing him of what referrals he is entitled to, compared to Jobcentre Plus. For this jobseeker, his job search needs are being met mostly by recruitment agencies, whilst his other unemployment needs are being met most effectively by the CAB, through providing advice and referrals such as further contacts that can assist with re-training opportunities. Although he was claiming Jobseeker's Allowance at the time of interview, issues regarding his application are still to be resolved and so he has yet to receive any payments.

Appendices

Appendices

Interview locations (including targets and totals)

The following table details the five locations where interviews took place.

Location	Target	Achieved
Bridgend	8	8
Swindon	8	8
Warrington	8	8
Telford	8	11
East Kilbride	8	5
Total	40	40

Participant profiles

Below are the demographic profiles, where made available, for the participants who took part in this research.

Nb. Where totals do not add to 40 this is due to that data not being available or else participants not giving permission.

Gender of participants

Male	21
Female	19

Age of participants

18-24	7
25-44	20
45+	13

Ethnicity of participants

Ethnicity	
BME	6
White	31
Not stated	3

Social grading of participants (based on details of most recent employment)

AB	7
C1C2	26
DE	7

Length of time out of work

Less than 3 months	5
3-5 months	18
6-9 months	17

Former employment of participants

Manager	10
Construction worker	4
Sales executive	3
Cleaner	2
Factory/warehouse worker	3
Painter	1
Skilled machinist	1
Engineer	1
Personal Assistant	1
Insurance Clerk	1
Secretary/admin assistant	2
Customer service agent	2
Student	2
Other	7

Discussion guide

Investigating the Needs of the Recently Unemployed

Final Discussion Guide: May 29th 2009

The main objectives of the study are to understand:

- Are the needs of the recently unemployed being met by Jobcentre Plus as they look for work?
- What are the expectations that customers have of Jobcentre Plus services before and during their contact with it?
- How does Jobcentre Plus work with customers to meet those expectations?
- Are the wider needs of the recently unemployed being met by Jobcentre Plus e.g. housing, debt, health services to allow them to manage on a day-to-day basis
- What are the differences in the quality of the services provided by Jobcentre Plus compared with those of third party providers?

Interviewer please note: This discussion guide uses both qualitative and quantitative questions. Please be sure to record as much detail as possible in the spaces provided, including relevant quotes where possible.

Transfer details from recruitment questionnaire:

Name	
Location	
Gender	
Age	
Ethnicity	
Social class	
Educational attainment	
Previous experience with Jobcentre Plus	
Length of time out of work	
Former industry	
Former position	
Satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus	



2. Impact of unemployment (3 mins)

I'd now like to ask you to some questions about what impact being unemployed has had on you...

Overall, what impact has being unemployed had on you personally?

What impact has being unemployed had an impact on your personal confidence?

What impact has it had on your confidence in your ability to find work?

And what about the confidence you have in managing your household?

How has you being unemployed affected the rest of your household?

Has your unemployment affected their confidence in you? How?

3. Managing your household until you return to work (5 mins)

I now want to ask you a few questions about the **financial** impact of being unemployed.

Thinking about your finances, did you prepare for potentially being out of work? IF SO Does this affect how you feel about being unemployed? Does it make you feel more optimistic?

What kind of things are you worried about in relation to your finances?

PROBE: Finding work, paying the bills, paying the mortgage/rent, how you feel about yourself, your confidence, relying on others, being a burden

Just thinking about your finances in more detail, how are you getting by, financially, at the moment?

PROBE ON THE FOLLOWING LIST: What sources of income are you using/do you think you will use?

- JOBSEEKER'S ALLOWANCE, tax credits, redundancy money, insurance, savings;
- (IF HAVE A PARTNER) Partner's income
- Credit cards, loans
- Help from family, friends e.g. a loan
- Hardship grants from charities

And to what extent are you taking measures to budget financially? Have you had any financial advice on budgeting from anyone (PROBE: Is this advice from friends, family etc or more formal advice from banks, IFAs etc)

What changes are you having to make to the way you live?

Are you having to go without or limit the use of certain things? What kind of things are you changing?

PROBE: Less socialising/holidays/'luxuries'/ gym subscriptions, reducing children's education budget (e.g. school fees, school trips, university fees etc), downsizing housing, cars, insurance/service agreements etc, servicing debt, Day-to-day living expenses (food, heating, bills etc)

What other essential commitments could present difficulties for you in managing your household until you find work? PROBE: Larger expenditure such as car maintenance or boiler repair?

What has been the biggest day-to-day impact of being unemployed compared to when you were working?

What kind of support do you think you need to help you?

Are there any positive outcomes you have found through being unemployed?

PROBE: starting a business, change in career, becoming a carer, looking after children, having more time?

4. Finding work (6 mins)

In thinking about returning to work can you tell me...

Q **SHOWCARD: Which of the following sources have you used to obtain help and support in relation to work?** Just read out the letter or letters that apply. MULTICODE OK

Q **And which source have you found MOST useful?** SINGLE CODE ONLY

		Used	Most useful
A	Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)/similar advisory body	1	1
B	Learndirect	2	2
C	Careers Advice Services	3	3
D	Directgov	4	4
E	Google/search engine	5	5
F	Local/national newspapers	6	6
G	Your local authority	7	7
H	Local community organization or charities	8	8
I	Family or friends	9	9

J	High street recruitment agency	10	10
K	On line recruitment agency	11	11
L	Jobcentre Plus		
	Other (WRITE IN)	12	12
	None of these	13	13
	Don't know	14	14

You said _____ is most useful, can you tell me why that is?

Is there anything that might stop you from getting back into work? PROBE: Childcare, caring responsibilities, lack of suitable vacancies, don't know where to look for work, need to update skills, few contracts

Are you changing the kind of work you are looking for? IF YES In what way?

What actions, if any, have you taken so far to look for work? What prompted you to take these actions?

What did you do first? Why did you do that first?

Why did you decide to do this as opposed to something else?

What was your experience of taking these actions? What was good/not so good?

How useful have they been?

How confident do you feel about finding employment?
PROBE FULLY Why do you say that?

What types of support would be most useful to you? PROBE: Support finding work and support in overcoming potential barriers to work

How does Jobcentre Plus fit in with your job search?

What other services do you use in your job search?

How does your use of other services differ from your use of Jobcentre Plus?

5. Expectations of Jobcentre Plus services (6 mins)

I now want you to think back to *before* you used a Jobcentre Plus service when you first became unemployed and the problems you may have been experiencing with day-to-day routines.

What were your views on Jobcentres generally on finding work for you?

And what were your views on Jobcentres supporting you in managing your household while you look for work?

What services did you hope Jobcentre Plus would offer? PROBE FOR GENERAL SERVICES AND SERVICES THAT WOULD BE PERSONALLY USEFUL?

Did you think Jobcentre Plus would be able to find you work? PROBE: Why/why not?

(IF DID NOT THINK THE JOBCENTRE PLUS WOULD FIND THEM WORK) Is this because you did not think Jobcentre Plus advertises suitable jobs for you or that they wouldn't give suitable support?

Did you think Jobcentre Plus would be able to provide support for you to manage your household until you return to work? (PROBE: Help you find suitable benefits payments, prompt payments, financial debt advice, job focused counseling, other kinds of counseling

How much contact have you had with Jobcentre Plus in the past before this period of unemployment?

6. Experience of Jobcentre Plus services (7 mins)

We've talked about your expectations of Jobcentre Plus, now I want to ask some questions about your actual experiences.

Q **Overall, how much do you feel you know about the services provided by Jobcentre Plus?** READ OUT SCALE + SINGLE CODE ONLY

A great deal	1
A fair amount	2
A little	3
Nothing at all	4

Don't know | 5

SHOWCARD On this card are some types of support offered by Jobcentre Plus that may help people like yourself whilst looking for work.

Qa For each, please say whether you have accessed this type of support from Jobcentre Plus? Just read out the letter or letters that apply. MULTICODE OK

Qb ASK IF ACCESED ANY SUPPORT AT Qa
And which type of support have you found **MOST useful?** SINGLE CODE ONLY

		Qa Accessed	Qb Most useful
A	Training to refresh and learn new skills	1	1
B	Help with CV, application forms and interview techniques	2	2
C	Information about employment opportunities	3	3
D	Information about in-work financial assistance (e.g. Tax Credits)	4	4
E	Information about financial support whilst looking for work	5	5
F	Information about childcare provision	6	6
G	Information about flexible working opportunities	7	7
H	Referrals to other agencies and local organisations	8	8
I	information and signposting on debt and other household costs – e.g. mortgage interest scheme	9	9
J	Assistance in paying utility bills and debts (e.g. information on Fuel Direct, Water Direct)	10	10
H	Benefits payments and related financial assistance schemes	11	11
I	Apprenticeships, volunteering	12	12
	None of these	13	13
	Don't know	14	14

How often do you now use Jobcentre Plus? What do you use it for? INTERVIEWER
NOTE: REFER TO TYPES OF SUPPORT INDICATED ABOVE

Are there any services you use now that you didn't expect to be available to you?
PROBE FULLY Why is that?

Can you tell me, how does your actual experiences of Jobcentre Plus compare with what you expected? Why is that? REFER TO TYPES OF SUPPORT INDICATED ABOVE AND ANY OTHER SERVICES USED. PROBE FULLY ON SPECIFIC SERVICES USED

INTERVIEWER NOTE: THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT QUESTIONS WITHIN THE RESEARCH

Is Jobcentre Plus meeting all your needs? IF NOT is another organisation/someone else meeting your needs? PROBE: Which needs are they meeting? In what way?

What do you think of the staff at Jobcentre Plus? Are they knowledgeable, helpful? Why? Why not?

Do you feel the staff treat you with respect? PROBE MEANING OF RESPECT TO RESPONDENT – polite, appropriate jobs, appropriate assistance, time spent with staff, interest in non-work issues

7. Evaluation of Jobcentre Plus services (6 mins)

We've talked about your expectations of Jobcentre Plus and your experiences of the service you receive, I'd now like to discuss how well Jobcentre Plus is meeting your needs.

How would you sum up the role of Jobcentre Plus in helping you in your current situation in relation to finding work?

And how would you sum up its role in helping you with other aspects of being unemployed, e.g. managing your household while you are looking for work? Is there anything else Jobcentre Plus is helping you with?

NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: Probe for financial and other issues

How do you think Jobcentre Plus could improve its service to you?

Is there anything Jobcentre Plus *isn't* providing that it *should* be? PROBE: JOB-RELATED SUPPORT AND OTHER TYPES OF SUPPORT

8. The role of other service providers (7 mins)

I would now like to talk about whether other organizations and service providers apart from Jobcentre Plus have been able to help meet your needs while you have been unemployed.

Q Firstly, has Jobcentre Plus or another organisation referred you to any of these services?

		A	B	C	D
		Offered by Jobcentre Plus	Used	Offered by another organisation	Used
Job related					
A	Recruitment services/agencies				
B	Career advice				
C	Connexions				
D	Training and skills				
E	Self-employment schemes				
F	Business link				
Other					
G	Housing services				
H	Debt advice services				
I	Children's services				
J	Counselling				
K	Internet				
L	Energy efficiency & Fuel bills				
M	Local authority (council tax and housing benefit)				
N	Relevant charities				
O	Volunteering				
P	Less formal networks (self help groups etc)				
None of these					

INTERVIEWER NOTE: ASK IF YES TO ANY OF ABOVE IN COLUMN A: Why did Jobcentre Plus refer you to this service? Could you tell me a bit about your experience of being referred to this service? Did you ask Jobcentre Plus to do this? Was it helpful or not? PROBE FULLY

Service:
Experience:

Service:
Experience:

Service:
Experience:
(Add further if necessary)

INTERVIEWER NOTE: ASK IF YES TO ANY OF ABOVE IN COLUMN C:
Why did another organisation refer you to this service? Who was that organisation? Could you tell me a bit about your experience of being referred to this service? Did you ask for that organization to do this? Was it helpful or not? PROBE FULLY

INTERVIEWER: REFER BACK TO LIST: Did you find any of these services *yourself*? (without being referred by Jobcentre Plus or another organisation) If so, how did you find them? PROBE: Did you contact the service directly, or did someone else refer you?

ASK FOR SERVICES USED: Could you tell me about your experience of using this service? What was good about it? What was bad about it? Did it meet your needs?
Service:
Experience:

Service:
Experience:

Service:
Experience:
(Add further if necessary)

INTERVIEWER NOTE: ASK WHERE JOBCENTRE PLUS OFFERED A SIMILAR SERVICE. How did the service compare with your experience of Jobcentre Plus?

Would you have used the service if Jobcentre Plus had referred you to it? Would it have been useful if Jobcentre Plus referred you to this service?

9. Conclusions (1 min)

We're coming to the end of the interview now, so I just wanted to ask you what else are you planning to do in the future to help you find work? Why might you do this? Where might you go for help?

Is there anything else you are doing to manage until you return to work?

Is there anything you'd like to comment on regarding Jobcentre Plus and/or finding employment that you haven't yet had a chance to mention?

Thank and close

-End of discussion guide-

