

The views expressed in this report are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Employment Service or the Department for Work and Pensions.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS **GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS**

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Acknowledgements

This research project was a joint undertaking between ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd. and BMRB Qualitative as part of the Employment Service's Labour Market Research and Evaluation Research Partnership.

At ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd.

Thanks are due to the research team of John Bell, Zoey Breuer, Shaun Fielding and Katie Judge for all their work in the field, for their work on the in-depth analysis of transcriptions and for their assistance in drafting this report and other presentations. Also, to Pat Irving and Roger Sumpton for their advice and guidance, and especially to Lisa Hancox who put the final draft together. Finally, to Susan Leather, who proof-read the entire report.

At BMRB Qualitative

Thanks to Alper Hulusi and Joanna Turke for all their work in the field and for providing much of the initial analysis, and to Geraldine Courtney and her team for transcribing all the interviews in such a short space of time.

At the Employment Service

The research benefited from the invaluable help and assistance of Jane Francis during the setting up, planning and fieldwork stages, and this was continued by Nicola Moss during the analysis and report writing. The team are also grateful to Jenny Crook for her overall management and guidance over the course of the project, and to Ruth Wiseman and Pauline Heather for their additional support.

The team are especially grateful to the ES regional and district teams who helped them to select Jobcentres, suggest individual interviewees and make arrangements for interviews. Without their help, the fieldwork would not have run so smoothly.

Finally, the team are indebted to the members of the Employment Service, the Benefits Agency and the training providers who took time off from their busy schedules in order to speak to team members. We hope that the report does justice to their opinions and feelings.

Glossary of Abbreviations

APA	Annual Performance Agreement
BA	Benefits Agency
BM	Business Manager
CBT	Computer-based training
DIM	District Implementation Manager
DM	District Manager
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
DSS	Department of Social Security
ES	Employment Service
ESCOM	Employment Service Communication (System)
ESF	European Social Fund
IB	Incapacity Benefit
ICA	Invalid Care Allowance
IT	Information Technology
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
JSAg	Jobseeker's Agreement
JSAPS	Jobseeker's Allowance Payment System
JMT	Joint Management Team
LMS	Labour Market System
NDP	New Deal for Partners
NDPA	New Deal Personal Adviser
NDPU	New Deal for Partners of Unemployed People
NDYP	New Deal for Young People
NJI	New Jobseeker Interview

PA	Personal Adviser
QA	Quality Assurance
RIM	Regional Implementation Manager
SME	Small/Medium Enterprise

Executive Summary

1 Introduction

Joint Claims for JSA is a mandatory enhancement of JSA and applies to workless couples without dependent children, where at least one partner is aged over 18 and born after 19 March 1976 (i.e. under 25 when the enhancement was implemented on 19 March 2001). This research is the second of three stages of qualitative research and focuses on case studies of delivery. A separate programme of quantitative research is being carried out to estimate the net impact of Joint Claims for JSA.

2 Methodology

Face-to-face, in-depth interviews with 87 respondents were carried out. A variety of staff were interviewed from the Employment Service (ES), Benefits Agency (BA) and training providers. Interviews explored the introduction, implementation, delivery and impact of Joint Claims for JSA, together with training and barriers to work faced by claimants.

3 Aspects of Joint Claims for JSA

3.1 Strategy, planning and staff training

With a few exceptions, staff supported Joint Claims for JSA. Awareness-raising and the use of supporting information were generally praised, as was the knowledge of implementation staff. However, the time-lag between awareness-raising and 'go-live day' gave cause for concern, which was magnified by the poor usability and navigability of information contained in ESCOM (ES Communication System).

Opinions about training were polarised. On the one hand, respondents felt that training was comprehensive, when it included the theory *and* the practice, was backed up by useful supporting information, and was well-planned and timed. The sharing of good practice and joined-up thinking provided effective learning contexts. On the other hand, training was sometimes poorly planned, delivered and timed. ES and BA training rarely overlapped and did not encourage joined-up thinking.

3.2 Implementation

The majority of joint claims came from the stock of JSA claimants. There were fewer than anticipated, as an average of 40 per cent of stock claimants reported that they no longer met the criteria for Joint Claims for JSA. Fresh joint claims were also fewer than anticipated. Consequently, staff had yet to deal with a critical mass of joint claims and had not yet attained sufficient experience with the client group and the procedures to feel confident about delivering an effective service. The identification

process worked well, but a few joint claims were missed. This was often where there was a significant age gap between the partners.

Clients were often given the choice of a single or joint New Jobseeker Interview (NJI). However, this choice was rarely made explicit because a joint NJI was usually presented to them as a "fait accompli". Interviews were often longer than the guidance suggested. Attendance at NJIs was good for fresh claims and poor for stock claims, especially amongst previous dependent partners. A high proportion of previous dependent partners from stock claims failed to attend the NJI. Non-attendance was also high amongst ethnic minority couples. Registration of the claim was always based on the principle of 'benefits first then work'. Former claimants from stock claims usually became the nominated payee. For fresh claims, this was usually the male. There was a degree of 'cultural resistance' by both minority ethnic couples and traditional working class couples.

For the work-focused part of the NJI, the 'together but separate' interview was usually conducted, where the claimants were present together but were dealt with sequentially. Less frequently, couples experienced separate interviews, or 'truly joint interviews'.

Staff found it hard to distinguish between being exempt from the labour market conditions of JSA and being ineligible for the enhancement. The need for experienced, trained and confident reception staff was essential. Joint Claims for JSA has also directly increased the number of clients requiring language support. Staff were concerned about the impact of Joint Claims for JSA on the role of reception staff and about the resource implications for language support in those districts where higher than average numbers of couples came from minority ethnic backgrounds.

When Joint Claims for JSA was first implemented, deficiencies within JSAPS (the JSA Payment System) hampered the processing of claims, although this situation has improved since the research was carried out. Staff reported that up to 90 per cent of all stock claims faulted and were processed clerically. This increased workloads and curtailed inter-agency solutions. The situation had improved slightly for more recent fresh claims. Clients faced delays to payment, which affected their perception of the ES and their willingness to look for work. ES reception staff and BA staff have faced increased workloads, but staffing levels did not always reflect this. Whilst the JSAPS problems have now largely been solved, there are likely to be lingering negative views of Joint Claims for JSA amongst some clients and administrative staff.

4 Barriers to work

Staff identified the benefits disincentive as a significant barrier to work for joint claimants. Clients' lack of confidence in themselves or in 'the system', and, in a number of cases, their negative attitude to work, were also identified and were exacerbated by the clients' 'distance to travel' to the labour market. An addictive illness or a criminal record were also significant barriers. Labour market barriers included the general condition of the labour market, the attitudes of employers, and

poor public transport. Potential solutions identified included greater knowledge of available provision, and greater flexibility in the eligibility criteria for New Deal and training.

5 Inter-agency issues

When BA and ES staff are both located in a Jobcentre, inter-agency working is far more pronounced. Often, 'occupational territoriality' between ES and BA hampered joint working, as did poor communication, especially regarding clerical processing. The relationship between the ES and employers, employers' attitudes to workless people, and the information flow and delivery between ES, employers and training providers were highlighted as areas for improvement.

6 Overall impacts and conclusions

There was strong support for Joint Claims for JSA among respondents. However, outcomes remain potential and the following resolutions are suggested:

- staff need to deal with a critical mass of joint claims in order to build up experience and confidence in dealing with joint claimants
- the role of reception staff is crucial to the effective processing of joint claims and perceptions of the Joint Claims for JSA service. Greater recognition should be given to the importance of this role and staff workloads should be re-assessed accordingly
- greater flexibility within JSA legislation, especially in relation to access to New Deal, would facilitate better access to the labour market
- communication between ES and BA should be improved, particularly in relation to registering and processing joint claims
- the quality of information flow between the ES, training providers and employers hampers service delivery and client satisfaction, and should be more efficient.

Chapter one – Introduction

1.1 Joint Claims for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)

Joint Claims for JSA became part of the legislative framework on 19 March 2001. Its main aim is to help people in workless households to achieve a successful transition into employment, and to help those in part-time work to progress into full-time work.

Currently, Joint Claims for JSA applies to both partners in a couple without dependent children, where one partner is aged over 18 and born after 19 March 1976 (i.e. was under 25 when the enhancement was implemented on 19 March 2001).¹ Both partners are required to make a joint claim for JSA, and both have to satisfy JSA conditions.

If a couple make a joint claim for JSA for six months or more, those aged 18-24 will gain access to the New Deal for Young People². Older partners within a joint claim (i.e. those aged over 25) can join the New Deal or employment and support programmes available to them according to their age and duration of unemployment from the start of, or conversion to, a joint claim.

The requirement to make a joint claim is set with reference to the dates of birth of the couple. Thereafter, they remain under Joint Claims for JSA provision as long as they have a claim to JSA as a couple, unless they become responsible for a dependent child. In this way, Joint Claims for JSA will progressively over time cover older workless couples without dependent children.

1.2 The research objectives

The research was carried out as part of the Joint Claims for JSA evaluation programme. The ES commissioned the Labour Market Partnership to carry out quantitative and qualitative surveys of clients and Employment Service (ES) staff. The qualitative research into Joint Claims for JSA has two major elements:

1. in-depth interviews with potential and actual joint claimants
2. case-study research

¹ A number of jobseekers who are required to make a joint claim will be unable to meet certain JSA conditions (for example, those unable to work because of health problems or pregnancy). These jobseekers are still required to be part of a joint claim but can apply for an exemption from certain JSA conditions.

² This is the case for all fresh claims, i.e. those who have started claiming since 19 March 2001. For joint claimants identified from the stock of existing claims, the claimant would be eligible for New Deal six months from the date of the original claim. However, their partner would only be eligible for New Deal six months from the date of conversion to a joint claim.

These are part of a three-stage approach:

- Stage One: pre-implementation qualitative research with potential joint claimants
- Stage Two: case-study research on delivery (split into two phases)
- Stage Three: post-implementation qualitative research with joint claimants.

This report addresses findings from the case studies only. The qualitative research is complementary to:

- quantitative research into Joint Claims for JSA (with potential joint claimants and actual joint claimants – see Bonjour, Dorsett and Knight, 2001)
- the NDP evaluation programme (see Griffiths and Thomas, 2001).

This report assesses the impact of Joint Claims for JSA on the service delivery mechanisms in Jobcentres. The case studies were based on interviews with staff in different roles relating to Joint Claims for JSA in Jobcentres, along with informal observations and gathering of documentation.

The overall evaluation strategy for Joint Claims for JSA identified the following objectives for the qualitative research, with Stage Two concentrating on the final three of these:

- to identify whether Joint Claims for JSA assists young and long-term unemployed people and their partners into work and improves their prospects of staying in and progressing in employment
- to assess whether Joint Claims for JSA contributes to the long-term employability of young and long-term unemployed people, and their partners
- to identify whether Joint Claims for JSA helps couples in workless households to enter employment (and those already in part-time employment to access full-time work)
- to explore attitudes to work among young and long-term unemployed people
- to consider the perceived and actual barriers to work, and explore solutions
- to ascertain the attitudes of Jobseekers and their partners to finding work, in light of the implementation of Joint Claims for JSA
- **to assess the effect of Joint Claims for JSA upon the ES, related labour-market programmes and initiatives, and upon those involved in delivering Joint Claims for JSA;**
- **to assess the effect that delivery factors have on the success of Joint Claims for JSA**
- **to assess whether Joint Claims for JSA is helping to create the appropriate conditions to allow couples in workless households to secure the skills, confidence and social stability to compete effectively in the labour market.**

1.3 Structure of the report

The report contains the following chapters:

Chapter two describes the research methods adopted. Copies of the research tools are included in the Appendices.

Chapter three describes the awareness-raising that was carried out in Jobcentres by district and Jobcentre staff prior to 'go-live day', and how this awareness was maintained and sustained. Finally, the various types and methods of training that were adopted are accounted for, including the positive and negative aspects.

Chapter four focuses on implementation. It comments on the number of joint claims actually passing through the system, and then discusses organisation and management of the system. This is followed by an extensive examination of the procedures and protocols involved in Joint Claims for JSA. Staff's experiences of dealing with joint claimants are also tackled, followed finally by a discussion of staffing and resource issues.

Chapter five addresses the specific and general barriers to work experienced by joint claimants, from the point of view of staff dealing with such barriers. Further sub-sections deal with more generic personal and labour market barriers to work and also the steps that are being taken to help joint claimants (and other claimants) to address such barriers.

Chapter six focuses on issues relating to training providers. The particular emphasis is on what providers are doing to help clients to overcome barriers to work, and on providers' collaborative/partnership arrangements with the ES.

Chapter seven considers inter-agency working by the ES. Sub-sections deal with the BA; training providers; employers; and other organisations and funding sources.

Chapter eight examines the impacts from Stage Two (both actual and potential), together with the current problems that have been identified by staff and the potential solutions to these problems, giving consideration as to how their potential can be enhanced.

Chapter nine examines the implications of Joint Claims for JSA and identifies a series of operational and policy recommendations. Finally, an outline of the good practice identified is provided.

Chapter two – Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The research was split into two phases, separated by a period of six to eight weeks. Phase one of the study was designed to investigate immediate issues, such as how the stock of claimants was dealt with and any problems identified within the system. These themes were revisited in phase two of the study in order to gain a longer-term view, and also to identify which problems were more likely to be teething problems and which were more structural.

2.2 Interview techniques

The main method of inquiry was the in-depth interview. These interviews involved an exploration of topics through a series of questions with probing and follow-up responses by the interviewer, in order to elicit the responses and attitudes of the interviewees. One or two researchers in each location carried out the interviews. A total of 90 interviews were planned and 87 were carried out. Interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed.

2.3 Interviewee selection

The interviews were planned over six areas (with 15 interviews per area). The following staff were interviewed in each area; the target numbers are given in parentheses:

- regional implementation manager (RIM)/regional co-ordinator (1)
- district manager (DM) (1)³
- business manager (BM) (1)
- personal advisers (PAs) (4)
- reception staff (2)
- training providers (3)
- Benefits Agency staff (3).

2.4 Area selection

A total of six case study areas were selected. Four of these areas had been covered in Stage One of the research, thus providing continuity. The areas were selected according to the following criteria:

³ A number of district implementation managers (DIMs) were also interviewed, as they reported directly to the DM on Joint Claims for JSA. The DMs felt that the DIMs would have a clearer picture of implementation and process issues.

- geographic location – urban versus rural, plus a spread of areas over Great Britain
- labour-market conditions – high unemployment, low unemployment, and a tight labour market (defined as experiencing below-average unemployment)
- areas with unusual polarisation in male and female unemployment rates
- method of delivery – centralised versus dispersed. In addition, a ONE pilot area was selected, to highlight the differences from ‘traditional’ Jobcentres.⁴

The selection of the specific Jobcentres to be visited was decided on the following basis:

- size – a mix of large, medium-sized and small Jobcentres
- location – a number in the main towns, others in outlying areas
- specific labour-market conditions – Jobcentres in areas with large redundancies, new opportunities, or specialist requirements
- inter-agency issues – Jobcentres with BA staff on site, or on separate floors of the same site, and those where BA staff were in separate locations
- staffing issues – avoidance of Jobcentres with recognised staff shortages, or with absences because of holidays.

Below, Table 2.1 presents more detailed information on the selected areas.

Table 2.1: Description of Areas Selected for Case Study Research

Area	Phase	Criteria	Organisation conducting research	No. of interviews conducted
A	1	Rural/urban, high unemployment	ECOTEC	14
B	2	Rural, high unemployment	ECOTEC	15
C	1 (pilot)	Inner city, high unemployment	ECOTEC + BMRB	14
D	2	Urban, high unemployment	ECOTEC	15
E	1	Rural/urban, tight labour market	BMRB	14
F	2	Rural, tight labour market, ONE pilot area	BMRB	15

2.5 Recruitment

Each research team was responsible for recruitment in their own areas (see Table 2.1). ES recruitment was conducted in partnership with regional representatives

⁴ ONE is a new, fully integrated service for claiming benefit and looking for work. It is currently being piloted in nine areas across Great Britain, through three different models of delivery.

(usually from the Joint Claims for JSA implementation team).⁵ Once contact had been established, the Jobcentres to be visited and the dates for the study visit were agreed.

Usually, ES representatives first organised an interview with the DM and then contacted business managers in each Jobcentre, asking them to nominate appropriate members of staff who would be willing to be interviewed. Similar patterns were followed for BA and ONE staff.

Training providers were recruited via PAs, who provided a list of potential providers once their own interviews had been organised. A shortlist of potential contacts was then drawn up, and providers were contacted and interviews arranged to coincide with the rest of the fieldwork.⁶

2.6 Piloting

The interviews and topic guides were piloted in Area C one week before the start of phase one of the study. The aims were to trial the topic guides and to make adjustments where necessary, and also to check the logistical arrangements. A topic guide was constructed for each different type of interviewee.

All team members were involved in the pilot and in the team briefing held afterwards. Restructured versions of the topic guides were then agreed prior to the commencement of fieldwork. Copies can be found in Appendices A-F.

2.7 Interviewing

Field teams consisted of two researchers. Where possible, interviews were organised with district and regional staff first, so that the information could be mapped from district and region to individual staff in Jobcentres. In these initial interviews, both team members were present so that they could obtain the overall strategic picture and use that to inform their own interviews.

Most other interviews were carried out on a one-to-one basis, usually in a private room.⁷ Where possible, all the interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. A few interviewees refused to be tape recorded (despite the research having received trade union clearance); the majority of these were BA staff. In these cases, notes were taken as the most effective substitute to a transcribed interview.

Generally, interviews were straightforward, but in a few instances obtaining the relevant data was problematic. Generally, this was when:

⁵ This approach was used as the ES field representatives had a better knowledge of appropriate Jobcentre contacts. In some cases, regional representative identified a District representative who was better placed to deliver the information required.

⁶ This shortlist was based on ensuring a variety of provision, style, qualifications, location, types of client and so forth.

⁷ Occasionally, both team members were present at interviews. Here, one of the team would take notes and mop-up or double-check any information towards the end of the interview.

- the interviewee was not really the right person to speak to. For example, interviews were arranged with New Deal Personal Advisers (NDPAs) who had not seen any joint claimants⁸
- interviewees did not really know enough about Joint Claims for JSA – these interviewees had not been sufficiently involved, or had started work after ‘go-live day’
- interviewees had not seen enough clients.

2.8 Analysis

A generic analytical framework was drawn up, based upon the construction of and responses to the topic guide and is included in Appendix G. Teams used field notes and interview transcripts in conjunction with this framework in order to derive the main findings. These were then circulated within the research team and brought together by the authors to be edited into the final report.

⁸ The team suspects that this confusion arose because Jobcentres tend to use the term PA to refer to New Deal Personal Advisers (NDPAs) and not as a generic term for all advisory staff in the Jobcentre.

Chapter three – The strategy, planning and training for Joint Claims for JSA

3.1 Introduction

This chapter concentrates upon the awareness-raising of, and training for, Joint Claims for JSA in the period up to ‘go-live day’ on 19 March 2001. Using Table 3.1 (which describes the field implementation timeline for Joint Claims for JSA) as a guide, it details each of the above activities and highlights the positive and negative views of staff.

3.2 Awareness-raising

DIMs were appointed in each case study area to conduct awareness-raising presentations. DIMs (and their equivalent in the BA and ONE area) visited Jobcentres to raise awareness of Joint Claims for JSA. On occasions, the appointment of a DIM was bolstered by the addition of ‘joint claims co-ordinators’, usually in larger Jobcentres.⁹ Jobcentre staff praised the initial work of co-ordinators, especially if they produced flow charts and aide-memoires to help them illustrate Joint Claims for JSA.

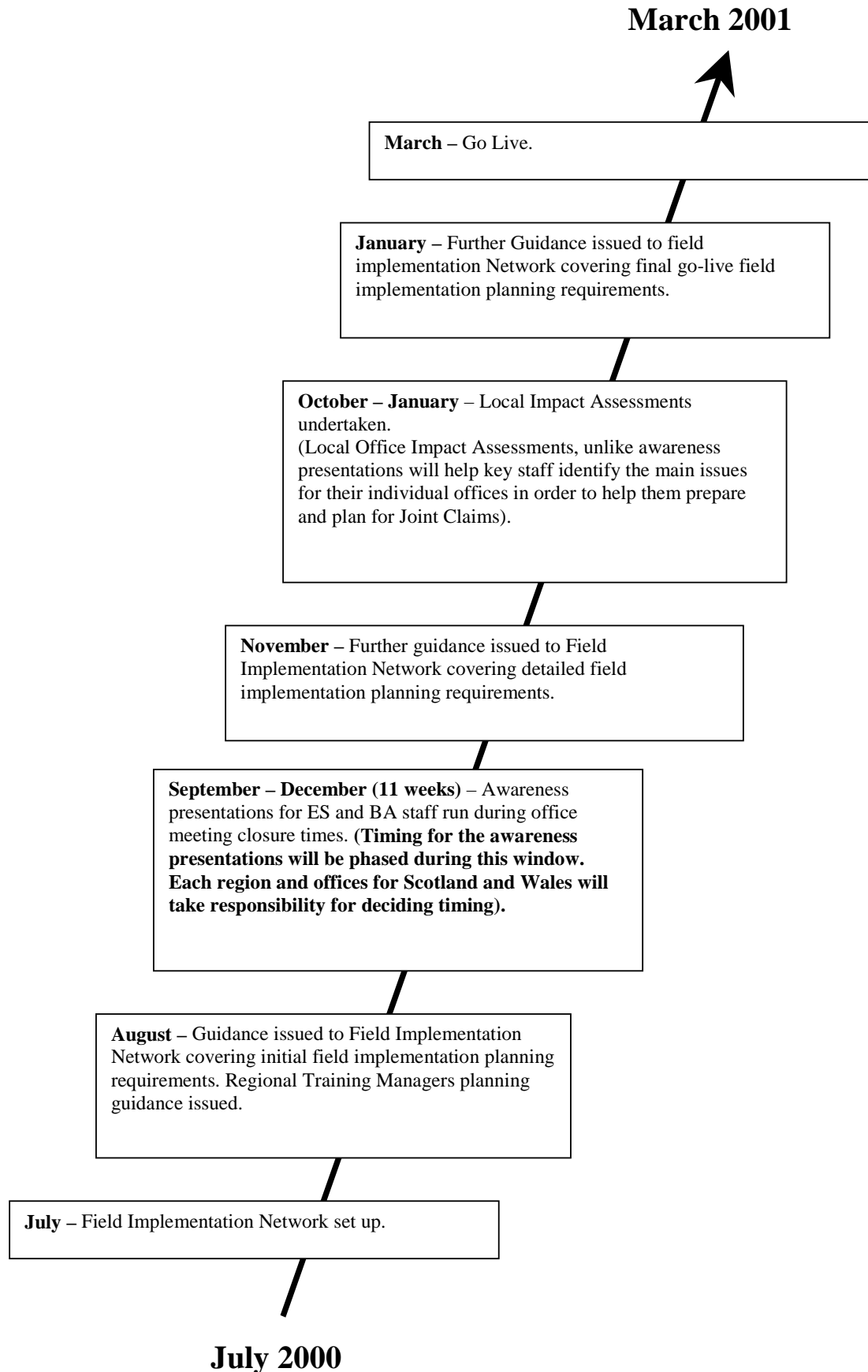
DIMs designed the awareness-raising presentations to suit the audience, but a number were critical of the lack of resources to help them with this. DIMs had to use valuable time, which could have been spent with staff on a one-to-one basis, constructing resources to support their presentations. They wanted to see a centralised template for presentations, which could be downloaded and tailored to suit an audience’s needs. The presentations themselves were praised for providing a clear, concise and practically relevant insight. Although a few ES staff criticised them for being excessive – especially for an enhancement where the numbers were likely to be small.

We had taken a very large mallet to crack this particular little nut ... and I was a little concerned at the amount of time and paper that was being generated in the planning. (Interview with a DIM)

There was some concern in the ONE area that the variations caused by the call-centre model had not been anticipated. It would be difficult, for example, for call centres to deal with joint registration and form-filling over the phone.

⁹ Where the numbers of joint claims in the schedule were too small to justify such appointments, Joint Claims for JSA was run as an integral part of Jobcentre functions.

Table 3.1: Joint Claims for JSA Field Implementation Timeline (source: Connect Magazine July 2000)



Another area of concern was the time-lag between the awareness-raising meeting and ‘go-live day’ on 19 March. As Table 3.1 demonstrates, this could be as long as six months. Staff criticised this gap, because they could not recall all the relevant information when they actually encountered a joint claim, which a few thought to be detrimental to the longer-term prospects of joint claimants.

It's gone from what was a big swimming pool of interest and publicity in the forefront of your mind to like a drop in a bucket. (Interview with PA)

A further important factor was how Joint for Claims for JSA was interpreted vis-à-vis the welfare to work agenda and then communicated to staff. It was common for less experienced DIMs to interpret it as ‘the most important enhancement to the Jobseeker’s Allowance legislation since it came into being’. They then relayed this interpretation back to staff in Jobcentres, who became anxious and apprehensive. With hindsight, if these staff had known that Joint Claims for JSA would involve relatively small numbers, they would have been far more receptive to it. Conversely, more experienced DIMs interpreted the message as ‘a change to the eligibility criteria for JSA and how it is registered for a few clients’. As a result, they ‘pitched it hard’ so that staff knew what was happening, but communicated it in such a way that staff would not worry too much about it. For BA and ONE staff, it was communicated to them as a straightforward change in the way in which JSA is registered and processed.

I mean, it's a couple of new dialogues and just a second screen in the same dialogue, which is no great hardship. (Interview with BA staff)

3.3 Maintaining and sustaining awareness

Maintaining awareness of Joint Claims for JSA right up until ‘go-live day’ was important. Here, the emphasis was on the delivery of, and access to, up-to-date information through ESCOM (ES Communication System). For example, immediately before ‘go-live day’, there was insufficient information regarding fresh claims, which raised concern in larger Jobcentres, where fresh claims were likely to be encountered within a few days of the implementation of Joint Claims for JSA. Despite an understanding of the difficulties associated with ESCOM, there were a number of concerns about its navigability and usability in relation to Joint Claims for JSA. For example, specific information was difficult to track down, and information was often hidden within sections or not identified as a Joint Claims for JSA issue. Information on Joint Claims for JSA was placed in two separate locations on ESCOM (Joint Claims Implementation and JSA Guidelines). Staff had to navigate between these two sites to get the relevant information, which was often laborious and time-consuming. Consequently, in the short-term, staff spent a lot of unproductive time on ESCOM, and time was something they lacked.

In the longer-term, the main concern for many PAs and receptionists was that they had to be confident in front of the clients to gain their trust, but could not

do this if they had to keep referring to lists or checking up on ESCOM. This would give the impression that they were not competent in dealing with the joint claim, which was bound to affect the couples' perception of the service. First impressions are an essential element in service delivery, and staff worried that the first impressions for many joint claimants were not very positive, and these could lead to longer-term negative perceptions.

In addition to the information contained on ESCOM, BMs tried to keep staff up to date with information on Joint Claims for JSA by cascading this via weekly communication meetings. They also highlighted the importance of reading Connect magazine, leaflets, bulletins and various circulars. Generally, staff appreciated this informal approach and praised the information for being clear, concise and well-delivered. Furthermore, the process of providing a range of information in different formats seems to have been successful overall. Any criticisms were focused upon the volume of information, especially among reception staff, many of whom felt that they were being overloaded.

3.4 Training for Joint Claims for JSA

3.4.1 Introduction

Training requirements differed according to a number of criteria, such as the number of people able to attend, the distance they had to travel, the different grades and experience of staff involved, and the level of their likely involvement in Joint Claims for JSA. As a result, staff in the same Jobcentre often had very different experiences of training. ES and BA staff identified the following methods of delivering training:

- 'chalk and talk' sessions – Joint Claims for JSA was explained in a didactic style, backed up by worksheets and paperwork;
- 'walk throughs' – staff took a 'dummy' joint claim with the group and shared experiences and views
- computer-based training (CBT) – staff ran through the Joint Claims for JSA procedures on screen. Part of this CBT route also involved a small amount of workbook training.

3.4.2 The organisation of training

For ES, training was organised at a regional level. PAs usually received two days training and reception staff one day. However, not all the staff who needed training received it because of Jobcentre staff shortages and illness during early 2001. For BA staff in larger offices, a team to deal solely with Joint Claims for JSA had been pre-identified and these people all attended training. For smaller BA offices/staff teams, allocation of training places tended to be on a more ad hoc basis. However, managers tried to ensure that a senior or more experienced member of staff attended.

Training for ES and BA staff in ONE offices was delivered separately. BA staff were very satisfied with the skills and competencies of those who delivered their training. However, ES staff were concerned that their training was not as comprehensive as BA training, which created a sense of unfairness and a degree of occupational jealousy, which was felt to have an effect upon service delivery in the short-term. Training for staff in the ONE call-centre model was more sporadic and was limited to a small number of full time/permanent staff. Discussions about training produced very varied and diverse opinions, which are outlined below.

3.4.3 Comments about training

Staff were positive when training combined theory with innovative practical activities. Here, staff could try out scenarios that they might encounter in reality. Moreover, it gave staff the opportunity to discuss issues and share solutions within teams and thereby solve short-term problems through dialogue. Staff, especially ES receptionists and BA staff, praised the training for its comprehensive coverage, insight and management. Staff were also impressed by the depth of knowledge of some trainers, especially around exemptions and sanctions. Training was enhanced by the use of flow charts and aide-memoires.

[They are] *quite simple, you can sit down and you can start, you can see exactly which dialogues you can do and in what order.* (Interview with BA staff)

These supporting materials presented models of good practice, and enabled staff to find practical solutions to potential problems before they encountered them. They also enhanced learning when combined with 'walk throughs' and role-plays.

Occasionally, managers were praised for their flexibility, foresight and for having good longer-term and contingency plans. For example, managers identified people to attend the training as a back up should the specialist PA/receptionist be off sick or on holiday. In smaller offices, a few managers ensured that staff who missed training received mop-up training (where available), or organised work-shadowing opportunities. From the above, two facts are clearly evident:

1. there is no substitute for practical experience
2. the opportunity to talk to colleagues and share ideas is highly favoured.

Nevertheless, there were a number of negative perceptions. Training was either too long and the key points were lost, or it was too short and the key points could not be distilled. Criticisms of the training were greater among staff who attended earlier sessions. Unfortunately, these were likely to be the staff who had been pre-identified to deal with Joint Claims for JSA. The lack of mop-up training compounded these difficulties and frustrated staff and

managers. Here, staff had to rely on those who had been to the training to disseminate information and guidance. Similarly, there were few reports of any on-going training for new staff or for staff needing a refresher course, which was especially important in smaller Jobcentres which had not seen many joint claimants since 'go-live day'.

The time-lag between awareness-raising and training, and then between training and 'go-live day' was problematic. Staff found it difficult to recall information across these periods, and forgot procedures and protocols as a result. Conversely, the training was also criticised for being too late/too close to 'go-live day', where staff had no time to take in relevant information, to study training materials or to practise.

Once operational, staff had to keep referring back to materials collected at training and to the guidance on ESCOM. However, guidance was constantly being updated and staff had to keep checking that they had the correct information, which was time-consuming and frustrating. Due to the amount of temporary staff employed in Jobcentres, a number of staff received training after 'go-live day'.

Often the actual claim form to be used for a joint claim was not available during training, especially in the early sessions where key personnel were present. The training staff were criticised for their lack of knowledge and this was amplified by the poor quality of supporting documentation such as handouts and worksheets, which were poorly designed, difficult to engage with and had little depth or breadth. Staff in the ONE area felt that the trainers lacked an understanding of the ONE variances relating to the call-centre model.

There were a lot of queries and a lot of problems, which didn't seem to be sorted out. I mean the trainer had reams of paper and [had to] go back to the section that had devised the training with queries and problems. (Interview with PA)

The methods of delivery were criticised, principally the didactic 'chalk and talk' method, which was felt to be boring and unpalatable, particularly for such a complex subject. Many staff could hardly remember anything from the training, which defeated the object of having it. Consequently, the opportunities for staff to reflect and to learn from each other were limited. This was particularly true for reception staff, who, according to BMs were given less time for training.

I would have preferred it if all my interventions team were trained and not just some of them. (Interview with BM)

Similarly, in the ONE area, the lack of training for the call-centre staff responsible for identification and form filling was also an issue. Both these criticisms were based upon the potential impact of Joint Claims for JSA at the 'front end'. If 'the front end' worked smoothly, then so would everything else,

but if it did not, then many other problems could snowball on to other staff along the process.

BMs had to ensure that the staff they wanted to handle Joint Claims for JSA were able to attend training. For smaller Jobcentres, organising cover for training was difficult, which hampered their longer-term contingency planning for holidays and staff absence. Consequently, there were cases of staff taking a joint claim who had not had the training. Occasionally, the person who had received the training had left prior to 'go-live day' and mop-up training could not be arranged in time for their replacement.

The potential to share good practice was often lost because ES and BA training were separate. Consequently, both ES and BA staff spent a lot of time double-checking information sent between them and there was concern about the impact of this on a client's perception of the service. Finally, it is important to note that similar criticisms of training have been raised for other ES initiatives, such as New Deal for Partners of Unemployed People (NDPU) (see Griffiths and Thomas, 2001) and the introduction of senior advisers (see ECOTEC, 2001).

3.4.4 The use of computer-based training

Responses to CBT were generally positive, especially in relation to the way it fostered a more relevant and realistic context to the training by providing practical 'real-time' examples of cases that staff might encounter. As a result, CBT enabled more dialogue amongst participants at training sessions and people were much more able to share ideas and good practice. The use of the computers also negated reliance on didactic delivery.

However, there were some negative comments. For example, BA staff complained that the CBT was not JSAPS (Jobseeker's Allowance Payment System) based.

It gave more of an overview, but it didn't tell us anything about how to input it on JSAPS, I mean, the essential bare bones of what we are going to do when we get back to the office were not really covered.
(Interview with BA staff)

A number of the practical activities were criticised for being based on far-fetched examples that would very rarely present themselves to staff, especially for cases relating to exemptions and sanctions. Also, the relevant claim form was often missing. Finally, there were no reports of CBT taking place in the ONE area and no reports of mop-up training in any of the districts.

3.5 In summary

The awareness-raising of Joint Claims for JSA prior to 'go-live day' was largely successful. Awareness-raising presentations were praised, but more resources for DIMs to design these would have been appreciated. The maintenance of awareness through informal discussions and the use of departmental literature were viewed favourably. However, the use of ESCOM was problematic.

Opinions on training varied. It was praised for being comprehensive, clear and well-timed and planned. The combination of theory and practice was successful, especially where supporting information and interactive tools were available. These encouraged joined-up thinking, inter-agency solutions and the sharing of good practice. However, didactic teaching methods were heavily criticised, and even more so if they were combined with an overuse of paperwork. These problems were compounded by poor planning and timing and the lack of supporting information, most significantly, the claim form itself. Consequently, learning opportunities were stifled. The lack of mop-up and/or on-going training was also criticised, as was the time-lag between receipt of training and 'go-live day'.

Chapter four - The implementation of Joint Claims for JSA

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four focuses upon the implementation of Joint Claims for JSA. It examines the actual numbers of joint claimants, followed by a discussion of organisation and management, with a particular emphasis upon the arrangement and conduct of New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs) for joint claimants. The extent of inter-agency work in relation to implementation is also dealt with, especially the relationships between ES and BA staff. Finally, the chapter discusses staffing and resources.

4.2 Numbers of joint claims

The majority of joint claims encountered were those converted from the existing stock. However, the actual numbers converted to a joint claim were significantly lower than those anticipated. **On average, staff estimated that the number of stock cases to be converted from the original schedule was reduced by 40 per cent¹⁰.** The main reason was that once a claim had been checked against JSAPS and LMS, it did not meet the criteria for a joint claim. Largely, this was because the couple now had dependent children or because the claim was now an individual one because the couple had split up.

Furthermore, when stock claimants and their partners were contacted about Joint Claims for JSA, the information that they presented to the Jobcentre meant they could not be considered for a joint claim. For example, they had dependent children; one of them had found a job¹¹; or the couple had split up. **Staff suspected that a number of these stock claims were fraudulent and that Joint Claims for JSA was helping to address fraud by encouraging the couple to sign off.**

We've had a lot of partners that have recently signed off saying they've started work ... we do get a lot of benefit fraud here. (Interview with PA)

The number of fresh claims meeting the Joint Claims for JSA criteria varied from Jobcentre to Jobcentre. Usually, this related to the size of the Jobcentre, with larger ones recording as many as four a week, whereas smaller Jobcentres had not had any fresh joint claims through the door. **Overall, the**

¹⁰ The schedule was sent to Jobcentres by district offices and contained a list of couples who met the criteria for Joint Claims for JSA.

¹¹ The general trend is for those who are recently unemployed to find work relatively quickly. The Joint Claims for JSA schedule was run five weeks before 'go-live day' and therefore many potential joint claimants may have already moved off benefit and into work.

numbers of fresh claims were slightly lower than staff had been led to expect.

4.3 Systemic issues for Joint Claims for JSA

4.3.1 Organisation and management

A few districts were involved in Joint Management Team (JMT) piloting. This is designed to develop joint management models for the ES and the BA for implementing new initiatives. In these districts, a joint delivery management team involving the DM, their equivalent in the BA and other managerial staff met regularly to organise the implementation of Joint Claims for JSA. Occasionally, provision was made for liaison with the BA over delivery, through regular meetings. **Significantly, districts with JMT piloting were much more likely to record positive comments about inter-connected training and sharing of good practice.**

4.3.2 Identification

Stock claims were pre-identified from a schedule sent to Jobcentres from district offices. The schedule contained all those couples meeting the criteria for a joint claim. It was checked against LMS and JSAPS to ensure that these criteria had been met. When it was agreed that a couple had met the criteria, they were contacted in order to organise the conversion of the claim. For a fresh claim, reception staff usually identified whether the criteria for Joint Claims for JSA had been met and whether it was an exemption case, usually in consultation with a PA. In the ONE offices, both stock and fresh claimants could either visit the office or phone, but only the former were contacted directly by the call-centre staff. **Generally, experienced reception staff who had received training were confident that they could identify a joint claim.**

It hasn't actually changed my job because I was already doing it, it's just another little bit of legislation ... I'd be asking the questions anyway, because in the past I would want to know if they had a partner ... the only extra question I slip in now, is that I tend to ask the age of the partner ... you could have a 55-year-old man that might have a 22-year-old partner; it's not likely, but you could (Interview with receptionist)

However, a few BMs reported that joint claims were being missed and were not being identified until the New Jobseeker Interview (NJI), and that a number of stock claims were going undetected.

...we've had occasions where it's got past reception ... either because the receptionist hasn't picked up on the fact that they've got a partner, or because they've not mentioned a partner or put anything down on the form about a partner. (Interview with New Claims Adviser Manager)

A common example of a missed joint claim was when there was a significant age gap between clients in a couple, particularly between an older male claimant and a younger female partner. The feeling was that receptionists saw the older man making the claim and assumed that he would not be claiming for a partner aged under 25.

I had one where, sometimes there's a hiccup at reception, but they don't see it as a joint claim, or it's not always their fault, it's the lack of information or what have you. So you get a guy in front of you and I think they'd probably forgotten the age, because the guy was in his forties...you'd think somebody's partner would be of a similar age, but in actual fact she was twenty-one, something like that. So he was sat there in front of me and it was a joint claim. (Interview with PA)

Largely, claims were missed because of the shortage of reception staff and the overuse of temporary staff, many of whom were not trained in Joint Claims for JSA.

They are temporary staff on reception; I've only got one full-timer and they've had very little training and there's such a wealth of information that they've got to deal with that I can quite see where they missed things like that. (Interview with new claims adviser manager)

The fewer than anticipated numbers of joint claimants also meant that these staff had yet to see a critical mass of clients to enable them to build up a bank of experience in identifying a joint claim. The feeling was that this situation would have a longer-term impact upon staff - in terms of their self-confidence and confidence in the service - but also upon couples.

I wouldn't say that confidently we deliver a superb service to joint claims because people haven't got through the barrier of being completely familiar with the process ... It makes it very difficult for staff, because they don't acquire the level of confidence that experience brings. (Interview with DM)

4.3.3 Contacting clients

Stock claimants and their partners were contacted separately via a standard letter explaining Joint Claims for JSA. The former claimants were invited to the Jobcentre separately, where they were given an explanatory interview. 'Partners', who had previously had no contact with the Jobcentre, were invited separately and on a different day.

Claimants could also be forewarned about Joint Claims for JSA by fortnightly review staff before 'go-live day'. Less frequently, stock couples were contacted by phone, though naturally this was the accepted method of contact in the ONE area.

The organisation of letters or phone calls usually fell to reception staff (or call-centre staff in ONE areas). Consequently, the transitional period before 'go-live day' where letters were sent out was a particularly stressful time, as the claims to be converted had to be confirmed, couples contacted and interviews arranged. In turn, this was hampered by other factors. For example, the form used during training was coded differently to the forms now being used. Other Jobcentres did not receive enough new claim forms, and standard JSA forms had to be sent out instead.

One good practice was the hosting of an explanatory event for all stock claimants and partners in one Jobcentre. PAs and training providers attended this event. The event provided an informal space for clients and staff to discuss issues and seek solutions. It was well received by staff, who also recalled positive feedback from clients.

..pretty much okay all of them. There was some concerns ... one partner was concerned because she was in college full time. But yes they all seemed reasonably happy about it. We only have one of the couples left as we've said... or gone off to do different things. (Interview with Receptionist)

4.3.4 Exemptions

At the outset, it is important to note that **staff found it hard to disentangle 'being exempt from the labour market conditions for Joint Claims for JSA' with 'being exempt' (i.e. ineligible) from the enhancement itself.** Many stock claimants, but very few fresh claimants, applied for exemptions. The most common of which were when one partner was pregnant, claiming IB or ICA, or was in full-time education or training.

there's so many categories. They're not very well labelled, I mean you've got exclusions, exemptions and excuses. (Interview with PA)

Although the guidance on exemptions was considered to be comprehensive, there was still some confusion and staff would have preferred to see a brief synopsis on ESCOM.

People's circumstances aren't necessarily nice and straightforward as they're laid down in the guide ... it took the BA lady forever to try and decide whether it [this claim] should have been a joint claim or not. (Interview with receptionist)

Good practice involved the co-operation of ES and BA staff to resolve exemption issues, but this was less frequent where the ES and the BA worked in separate locations or on different floors of the same location.

4.3.5 Registration and choosing the nominated payee

As noted previously, staff often used the wrong form or lacked the correct form during the period of initial contact. In these cases, the 'proper' form had to be filled in as part of the NJI, much to the annoyance of staff and the bemusement of clients.

I think in the transitional period, the system that was operated was farcical – these forms and everything. Surely there's got to be an easier way ... things could have been a lot clearer for us as well as the client and partner. (Interview with receptionist)

For both stock and fresh claims, three models of delivery were encountered during registration:

1. Reception staff carried out a completeness check of the form, and addressed any gaps and/or mistakes with the couple. Clients were then passed to a PA who registered the claim on JSAPS as part of the NJI.
2. Once completeness checks had been completed by reception, clients were passed directly to BA processing staff based in the Jobcentre. These staff then registered the claim on JSAPS *and* began to process the claim, with a different member of BA staff carrying out each stage. The thinking here was that PAs could more readily concentrate on the work-focused part of the interview. **Often this became the 'default model', whether BA staff were based in the Jobcentre or not, because of problems encountered with the JSAPS systems.**

The Benefits Agency did both [registering and processing of claims] because of the problems we're having. I was just told that we were having problems putting it on the system and we were just to send the whole lot. So presumably it was them [BA] that decided that was the best way to do it. (Interview with PA)

In these two models, there was a degree of confusion as to which person in the couple should complete the claim form.

After the transitional period the JSA 1 was adapted so that everything now is on the one form, but during the transitional period there was a form that they had to complete so the claim became a joint claim. We hadn't seen the JSA 1 and the transitional one so the first few that we actually had, we were getting them to fill them in the wrong way round. Because it said the client, we presumed that was the person who was claiming, but it wasn't, it should have been the partners. So that caused a knock on problem because we had to call all these people back in, to complete the forms in the correct way. (Interview with Receptionist)

3. In the ONE call-centre model, call-centre staff carried out completeness checks over the phone. The claim form was then passed to the on-site BA staff for checking and then to a ONE PA in preparation for a later work-

focused interview. Here, the claim was registered as the first part of a work- focused interview and was then processed on site.

Deciding who should be the nominated payee was less complex. Usually it was the case that staff suggested that the former claimant from a stock case and the person who made the fresh claim should be the nominated payee. **However, it was evident that staff presented these suggestions as a 'fait accompli' to clients, without offering any real choice or discussion.**

BA processing staff in ONE offices complained that claim forms were being poorly filled in by call-centre staff, which created a problem in processing the claim. Secondly, BA processing staff complained that JSAPS flags up a joint claim with a special 'identifier' in the bottom right-hand corner and that this was being missed by call-centre staff. The BA staff believed that this was because of poor training for call-centre staff.

The people are looking and thinking, gosh, what's a joint claim? They don't know whether to tick the top boxes for joint claims. (Interview with PA)

Good practice was identified when staff in one district wanted both parties in the claim to have equal access to information in order to establish eligibility, set up an appointment and comply with data protection issues. Therefore, if a fresh joint claim was identified and the other person was not present, both people were encouraged to come in together for a further explanatory interview *before* the NJI was booked. Other good practice concentrated on ways to ensure that a joint claim was more readily distinguishable from the other JSA claims.

We discussed with supervisors in the signing section how they would identify claim forms for their own. I suggested that we use a different coloured garter like orange, so that when they're looking through it would be easily identified. So, we started doing that as well. (Interview with BA processor)

There was a good deal of uncertainty about registering exemptions and the use of JSAPS. Often, staff would delay registration until after the NJI, so that they could consult ESCOM. Unfortunately, this resulted in clients not knowing whether their benefit claim would be resolved immediately, which staff felt was likely to affect clients' perception of the service. In addition, staff were unsure about the procedure if the partner was physically unable to attend the interview and whether they should book an NJI for both people in a couple when there was a clear exemption case.

There was some confusion about whether they actually go through the full interview if they're claiming an exemption. We've sort of done what we thought was best. (Interview with New Claims Adviser Manager)

4.3.6 Arranging interviews

The arrangement of NJIs varied between Jobcentres. Joint claimants were given the choice of a joint or single interview and most chose the joint interview, often when the other person was not present to decide. **However, it was accepted that the single interview was rarely pushed as a viable option because of the extra work that this would involve. In other words a joint interview was presented as a 'fait accompli'**. Significantly, there were no reported cases of couples requesting separate NJIs.

....We try to ask them to come in together, even though we're not supposed to, just because it makes managing the forms a lot easier. right... You can't send anything off to BA, until they've both been in, and that sort of increases the risk of forms going astray and things....So we do encourage them to come in together if at all possible. (Interview with New Claims Adviser Manager)

They could be seen separately, but it's easier if it's a joint one from the claim taker's point of view, but they could be seen separately. There's nothing to say that they can't be seen separately.

Interviewer: *Is that made clear to them that they have that choice?*

No, we don't. (Interview with receptionist)

the powers that be decided that we would have joint interviews, so that's what we've got ... they didn't take our individual preferences into account. (Interview with PA)

Conversely, on rare occasions, the single interview was pushed as the most viable option. In these cases, staff wanted to avoid potential conflict within couples, despite this being contrary to the spirit of Joint Claims for JSA.

I think if you have two people together, I mean they often tend to back each other and then you can have a lot of difficulties interviewing two people together ... but it can make it difficult for you as an advisor ... you get a lot of arguments (Interview with PA)

The time booked for an NJI varied. Both stock and fresh claim NJIs were supposed to last no longer than one hour. However, **longer interviews were commonplace, usually lasting around 80 to 90 minutes**, the equivalent of two single NJIs.

I would usually book them in for an hour and 20 minutes altogether. We usually allow 35 to 40 minutes for a normal claim. (Interview with receptionist)

One good practice was when all joint claim NJIs were arranged to take place in a Jobcentre on the same day. A specifically identified and more experienced PA would be set aside to conduct these NJIs. This ensured that all the joint claims for the week were dealt with at once by an experienced PA, which would reduce the risk of potential errors and, in

theory, improve efficiency and client satisfaction. Other Jobcentres, especially smaller ones, preferred their PAs to have experience of a joint claim and therefore took a more ad hoc approach to interview arrangements.

All advisers now do the joint claims. There were the four that had had the specific training. But they all need to be able to do it, because some people are off on leave or sick or anything, so it's no good sort of delaying people's appointments just because they haven't got an adviser that can do it. ...it's better for the advisers, more experience.
(Interview with New Claims Adviser Manager)

4.3.7 Attendance at NJIs

Non-attendance was a significant problem for previous dependent partners in a stock claim, with as many as 85 per cent failing to attend the first NJI.¹² The use of additional letters and reminders were relatively futile strategies in encouraging attendance. It was often the case that a couple's benefit had to be reduced, or threatened to be reduced, for them finally to attend an interview. **Non-attendance was also high amongst partners from minority ethnic couples.** Staff believed that a number of couples had problems reading the letters.¹³ Others felt that there was a degree of 'cultural resistance' based on religious and cultural beliefs about women working.

We didn't manage it [the processing of stock claims] in two weeks because they just didn't come in, they didn't want to know. They didn't see why they had to after they'd been not coming in for so long, to be suddenly told that you've got to come in for an interview ... I think it's more the Jobseekers that don't want their partners to come in and go to work, rather than the actual partners not wanting to do it ... I think it's down to culture ... the wives do stay at home in Asian culture and look after the house and they don't go out to work and that's why we've had sort of big problems. (Interview with DIM)

Additionally, non-attendance was also attributed to fraudulent claims and couples trying to extract as much money out of the ES and BA as possible.

It's your repeat claims more than anything that have perhaps signed off and are now coming back onto the register and saying well I haven't had to do this before, why has she got to come down now. There's certain fraud issues that may be the cause of it, which I think, due to the number of people that signed off before we got to joint claims I would say that that is quite a high percentage, but it's only speculation.
(Interview with New Claims Adviser Manager)

¹² This figure was for an individual Jobcentre, but was not anomalous, as many other Jobcentres reported high non-attendance.

¹³ It was unclear whether letters were sent out in minority languages.

4.3.8 Conducting interviews

Within the NJI, PAs firstly dealt with the benefit and any queries relating to it and treated this as a group activity. This reassured couples and made them more open to talking about work. ONE PAs were concerned that, because there was a BA processing team on site, they could lose their detailed knowledge of benefits and that this would become evident during an NJI and affect clients' perception of the service and potentially have a negative impact upon their labour market activity.

At the beginning of the ONE pilot I think the idea was that their personal adviser, like me, was there to sort of give them advice and support on their benefits to make sure that they're claiming the right benefit, but it's all been tailored down now, and we're not meant to get involved in anything like that. We're solely there to get them back out to work.
(Interview with ONE PA)

It was good practice to arrange a couple's fortnightly reviews to take place on the same day so that their benefit could be processed as soon as possible thereafter.¹⁴ However, a number of partners did not attend fortnightly reviews and this led to couples' benefit payments being affected.

Time management and prioritisation were very important. Where there was a complex claim or a potential borderline exemption case, this dominated proceedings rather than the work-focused interview. Likewise, when there was a clear case for exemption (such as being heavily pregnant, having severe health and mobility issues, or when the couple presented incontrovertible evidence of full-time education and training), much of the interview time was focused on discussing and assembling the paperwork for the exemption. This, combined with a lack of follow-up work, resulted in the work-focused part of the NJI being reduced to a short informal chat after the JSAG had been constructed. The result was that one of the couple, usually the one that was most likely to be moved into work (especially if they were a fresh claim), received significantly less attention. It was felt that this situation could have had an impact upon couples in the longer-term.

Most PAs had a degree of previous experience interviewing people in the presence of partners, friends or family members. However, despite this experience there were few instances of PAs enabling a truly joint interview – i.e. one containing three-way dialogue – to take place. **Three main types of interview practice were encountered, each based on a differing interpretation of the guidance.** As with the arrangement of interviews, no couples challenged either of these formats - it was accepted as the norm, or clients did not have any clear expectations as to what would happen.

¹⁴ In larger Jobcentres, staff made exceptions to the rules that fortnightly reviews had to be organised alphabetically, in order that couples with different surnames could sign together.

The ‘together but separate’ interview – couples sat together, but the PAs talked to them separately, first one then the other. This format was preferred in order to build rapport, obtain information and avoid interference from the other person.

You have to do it individually. Although the two of them are sitting there, you’ve got to do one and then the other...it’s two separate claims you’re bringing on ... although they’ve been paid jointly, they’re both in different job searches and the only thing they have in common is the one claim form ... they’re both going to need the job seekers agreement ... they both need to do job searches for ES ... you have to explain the signing and the way they pay the money. It took me 90 minutes, two appointments ... I mean the two of them, they were chatting to each other about it and things ... I think you’d have to have them there together because if there is anything, they can at least resolve it there and then (Interview with PA)

You do your introduction to both and you ask them “How do you want to do this? You’ve both got to have a Jobseeker’s Agreement. So would you like us to do it one at a time and then we’ll go back over at the end what happens from here on in?” So although you’ve actually made the decision for them that you are going to do them one at a time, it does sound like you’re giving them a choice. (Interview with PA)

For both partners, PAs discussed skills; qualifications; aspirations; barriers to work; remedies; and potential employment and training opportunities, and then they set up the Jobseeker’s Agreement (JSAg).¹⁵ Job-search issues, particularly CVs, were common topics for discussion. Staff reported referring couples to programme centres for help with CV writing and interview skills. A few PAs encouraged couples to look on the job boards or job points before coming to the interview.

PAs would often begin the work-focused part of the NJI with the nominated payee and then spend more time with this person rather than the other member of the couple. In other words, the nominated payee was treated as ‘the de facto claimant’, even though Joint Claims for JSA is meant to dispense with such distinctions. Given the process of selecting the nominated payee, discussed above, this raises questions about the equal treatment of people within a couple, and also the treatment of the ‘target audience’ of Joint Claims for JSA.

You need to keep addressing the correct person. You need to keep aiming the questions at the person who is making the claim, the person who is going to be claimant and not the partner. Only a couple of times have I actually asked the partner to go and wait in the waiting area while I have been doing the interview, and it was purely because we could not conduct the interview with the person there. (Interview with PA)

¹⁵ In areas where claims were passed directly to BA staff in the Jobcentre for registering and processing, clients discussed job search with reception staff before their NJI.

The separate interview – This seemed to defeat the object of Joint Claims for JSA because one of the couple was asked to sit away during the work-focused part of the interview while the PA talked to the other person. They then swapped over after a period of time.

I've seen it before where you're asking a person a question and they can reply for the partner. And they can take over all the interview times. So sometimes maybe on those occasions you might think to yourself, I'll tell you what just to make it easier for you maybe go and take a seat in reception and I'll deal with you separately and then I'll see you later. And do it that way. (Interview with PA)

Although not especially common, separate interviews occurred in Jobcentres where staff had missed out on training and were still unsure what to do, or when they had previous experience of dealing with the couple and felt that this would be the best way to deal with them. However, this 'best way' was usually the 'best way' for the PA and not for the couple. A few PAs in the ONE area felt that a separate work-focused interview for each person would enable them to think more creatively on their behalf. However, this necessitated effective follow-up work which was severely lacking in all districts.

The 'truly joint' interview – Here, PAs saw the NJI as an opportunity to instigate three-way dialogue between the adviser and the couple, and to address the issues facing workless households. In these few instances, the PAs appeared to make an ideological interpretation of the legislation, choosing a format that was bound up with the key policy messages rather than one grounded in day-to-day practicalities. Where possible, PAs involved each joint claimant in all aspects of the other's interview and JSAG in order to encourage them to share ideas and look for work together. Noticeably, these interviews were more common in smaller Jobcentres where a more personal service could be delivered.

Well it's something that I think I would prefer to deal with it, to deal with people as a couple in every instance, 13-week review or restart or whatever ... The way I see it best working, is not only joint claims, but joint interviews. (Interview with PA)

4.3.9 Processing and payment

Very few positive comments were made about processing and payment, during the research visits, although some positive comments were made by staff interviewed during phase two. **Most negative comments referred to deficiencies within the IT systems at the ES and the BA, but especially JSAPS.** In the immediate term, this was seen to be *the* major problem impacting on service delivery. Indeed, a number of BA staff went so far as to say that if JSAPS had worked, Joint Claims for JSA would have run smoothly. The fact that the research identified such widespread negativity was largely because of its timing. Both phases were carried out within three months of 'go-live day'. This did not really give the systems and structures enough time

to bed down and for staff to become familiar with them. This was also further complicated by the smaller than anticipated numbers of joint claimants, which restricted the number of 'learning opportunities' for staff.

At the time of the fieldwork and since then, a number of fixes to the IT systems have been implemented, in order to make the service much more efficient in the longer-term. At the moment, it appears that these fixes are likely to enhance service delivery, once staff become comfortable with them. Nevertheless, it is important to examine the complaints of staff, both in the short-term and in the longer-term. These crystallised around three issues:

1. The most telling complaint, especially in the longer-term, was the impact upon couples and their perception of the service. **The clerical processing of claims resulted in increased delays to payment.** Moreover, couples facing such delays were far less likely to be looking for and moving into work. Consequently, in cases in which a claim had to be processed clerically, **there is the very strong possibility that the couple will be unlikely to engage in a process that has specifically designed to help them.** The fact that large numbers of claims were processed clerically in the first few months means that there is a large group of joint claimants whose confidence in the service needs to be restored as soon as possible. If not, the longer-term effect of this disaffection is potentially damaging.
2. Having to deal with a large number of clerical claims **increased workload and stress levels for staff.** This was particularly the case when inputting a claim.

I've got a lot of clerical ones that I can't work on the system which obviously causes a lot more work. We do spend time trying to get them on the system first and then obviously because they're not on the system ... they've then got to have everything done like preparing for the giros or whatever to go out ... it's got to be done by hand then which takes more time and a lot more man hours because it involves a lot of people, obviously with giros for security reasons ... It has to go through several people to actually prepare and write the giros. (Interview with BA processing staff).

It's increased mine [stress levels] personally by quite a lot, a substantial amount really. I'd say at least an extra two hours a day of having to try and fit in doing joint claims work as well as my existing work. (Interview with BA staff)

In the short-term, this created the problem of staff 'getting off on the wrong foot'. They were automatically negative about a joint claim when they encountered one, less likely to be confident in their abilities to deal with it and more likely to feel removed from the systems and structures that were there to help them in their job.

In the longer-term, it was clear that it was going to take a long time for staff to recover their own self-confidence, but also their confidence in these systems

and structures. Although the fixes to the IT systems are now in place, staff will take time to come to terms with these and to be completely confident in handling them. This will be compounded by the smaller than anticipated number of joint claims. **In this respect, it is likely to be some time before joint claims are processed to the standards expected.** Once more, the impact of this upon couples, especially in the longer-term, needs to be given due thought - not least when considering its proposed extension to older couples.

Many of the workload and stress issues facing staff (both short-term and longer-term) were exacerbated by ES and BA staff working in different locations. In these cases, for a claim to be processed clerically, fortnightly review staff at the ES had to fax information to the BA. Often this information would get lost in transit between the two, resulting in a delay in payment and frustration for clients, once more impacting upon their longer-term interaction with the Jobcentre.

The partners have signed, confirmation of them signing is faxed to the benefits agency for them to do a clerical payment and post.. It's quite straightforward, except that then the client comes in 2 days late and say they haven't had their payment.. benefits agency say they haven't received the stencil ... That happens quite a bit...they have a lot of work, benefits agency....paper as they say can go astray. (Interview with Receptionist/Finance Officer)

3. A shorter-term issue was that 80 to 100 per cent of converted stock claims faulted and had to be processed clerically during the early months.

I haven't had one where I've been able to put it on the system. (Interview with BA processor)

The first week I don't think any of them went through correctly; the system faulted them at some point. (Interview with BA staff)

Processing staff recalled a number of faults and rejections that led them to spend over two hours going through a claim that normally took ten minutes to process and even then, was often rejected. **Significantly, no one reported receiving any training in how to process a clerical joint claim.** Again, the fixes to the IT systems have been designed to address these issues, but once more, there is also the longer-term issue of staff confidence in these fixes and the systems and structures to consider.

4.3.10 Follow-up

Follow-up work was very rare, for both stock and fresh claims. A few PAs indicated that they would do a small amount of follow-up work with couples before they were invited in for their 13-week reviews.¹⁶

If you're referring them to a job and they're not attending, they haven't returned a form, then that would get back to me to action if they've not attended an interview, and by way of follow up that would happen, but I haven't done any other specific follow up. (Interview with PA Team Leader)

4.4 Staffing and resource issues

Staff agreed that the role of reception had to be taken much more seriously, and that much more value should be placed upon it. This was partly because the transitional period before and after 'go-live day' created a lot of additional work for reception staff.

When somebody is worried about getting the process right and you know, making sure they fill in the right forms and press the right buttons to make sure that people get their money, I'm not sure you're in the best frame of mind to be really doing a sell job. (Interview with DM)

The need for experienced, trained and confident reception staff was essential. Reception staff reported that all these processes for which they had responsibility under Joint Claims for JSA could take as long as half an hour compared to the eight minutes allocated for a standard JSA claim.¹⁷ However, current staffing levels did not reflect any of these considerations. Large numbers of temporary staff were being used, and a few BMs reported reception being under-staffed by as many as four full-time equivalent staff.

I've got nothing but the ultimate respect for new claims receptionists, because there's so much that they need to know. And there's so many questions that they need to ask without sounding like a robot or reading from a list. And quite a fair bit of knowledge that they have to have simply to make sure that person's eligible. To make sure that person's not in a joint claim or isn't a joint claim. And then explain what a joint claim is. That doesn't happen at the advisory stage that happens at reception so, they've got to have quite a vast knowledge to actually get the person ... in front of the advisor for the right time and the right person. (Interview with District Implementation Manager)

¹⁶ Unfortunately, because of the timing of the research, the teams spoke to PAs before they had begun to plan for these.

¹⁷ Under reception staff's remit were the checking of eligibility criteria; explaining Joint Claims for JSA; handling queries; arranging appointments; sending initial and reminder letters; explaining the interview process; and, finally, checking the claim forms.

The more information the receptionist can give to the adviser before they come in ... you know, checking up before they come in, the better chance you've got with starting the interview on the right foot ... so you're not asking them to go over things that may be personal or whatever, it's just ensuring that the clients are comfortable with knowing what they've got to do. (Interview with PA Team Leader)

But there are temporary staff on reception, I've only got one full timer and they've had very little training and there's such a wealth of information that they've got to deal with that I can quite see where they missed things... (Interview with New Claims Adviser Manager)

Once more, the potential longer-term impact of this upon couples has to be considered, especially if they have a less than favourable experience when they make initial contact with the Jobcentre. First impressions are vital in these situations and the negative longer-term impacts upon couples that could flow from this situation were felt to outweigh the financial considerations of ensuring a well resourced 'front-line'.

All of the above creates an interesting resource question in terms of risk assessment. Managers need to decide whether to devote more resources at 'the front end' to ensure that no mistakes are made and that there is effective service delivery. Alternatively, if they decide not to put so much resource there, they then rely on the training, experience and goodwill of the staff and hope that mistakes are minimised and thus do not snowball. In turn, there is also an issue of the balance/imbalance between the resources devoted to PAs vs. those devoted to 'the front end'.

A significant point was that PAs were concerned that they had been unable to build up a bank of experience in dealing with joint claims because of the lower than anticipated numbers. In addition, they felt that in order to achieve this, they needed to increase and hone their interviewing skills and to enable couples to talk about issues.¹⁸ However, the fact was that they had not yet seen a sufficient number of couples to be confident in delivering the service to them.

The longer-term impacts of this upon couples are potentially damaging if the flow of claims continues to be smaller than anticipated. Until staff have reached a critical mass of 'hands on experience', joint claimants are not going to be enthused by the service offered and are less likely to be looking for work. Consequently, there is the very real danger that joint claimants, especially former dependent partners are being marginalised by the very service that was designed to help them. Additionally, in areas where there is a relatively high turnover of PAs, achieving this 'critical mass of experience'

¹⁸ Staff also dovetailed this need with the extension of Joint Claims for JSA to 'older couples'. Partners in older couples are likely to have been away from the labour market for a long time, and PAs would therefore need a greater range of interview skills to encourage them to participate fully.

could be very difficult as there may be an insufficient flow of joint claimants for new advisers to gain enough experience.

BA staff faced considerable increases in workloads and stress levels during the first few months of Joint Claims for JSA, purely because of the problems connected with JSAPS. On a positive note, these pressures have forced the ES and the BA to work together more closely, which has made BA staff feel more as if they are part of an overall team. In addition, stress levels are being reduced by the introduction of the fixes to the IT systems and structures.

Staff identified insufficient English as an Additional Language support within districts with higher than average numbers of couples from ethnic minorities, especially staff with experience of Kurdish, Pushtu and Somali and for Kosovan Albanians. Often these couples contained partners who had been brought over from 'the mother country' to the UK for arranged marriages. Before Joint Claims for JSA, it was likely that the men would have used family contacts to secure employment. However, by ensuring that they have immediate contact with the Jobcentre, **Joint Claims for JSA has directly increased the numbers of people requiring language support.** As a result, Jobcentres now have an additional resource issue to address.

4.5 Experiences of dealing with a joint claim

There was a general level of acceptance of the principles of Joint Claims for JSA - particularly amongst former dependent partners. They were particularly positive about their equal treatment and equal access to ES facilities and services.

The last couple that came on, the girl was absolutely delighted that it was a joint claim. I think it made her feel more involved in it. To look at it another way as well, it then becomes their money as opposed to being the claimant's money. (Interview with receptionist)

It's very, of the ones I've seen have just been very noncommittal when they've come for the interviews, they've come in and they've signed what they've had to sign and come and sign when they've got to sign, and that's about it, but there's no real effort. I mean some of them have been really pleased that we're doing job search with them and quite looking forward to it, but that's a minority. (Interview with New Claims Adviser Manager)

At the other end of the spectrum, a few stock claimants were reluctant to accept that their partner had to be actively seeking work, which in turn could impact upon their attitude to seeking work.

People who have been able to sign individually and the partner stay at home for so long, but with it being introduced they say why, I've not done this before. It's your repeat claims more than anything that have

perhaps signed off and are now coming back onto the register and saying well I haven't had to do this before, why has she got to come down now. (Interview with New Claims Adviser Manager)

Negative perceptions of Joint Claims for JSA were often founded on a cultural resistance. This was especially the case for male claimants from the Asian sub-continent whose cultural traditions are founded on the female partner not having to work. However, claimants from white working-class areas also resisted, especially where the 'traditional' culture of the male breadwinner and female housewife was particularly embedded.

There was indignation, resentment, "Why me, why us?" – they weren't particularly easy to deal with. There were rather sexist comments coming up, "How am I expected to earn a job [sic] so that my partner can sign off, for a woman like her, how could I earn enough money to keep a house going?" (Interview with PA)

Staff felt that couples were accepting of the practices involved in Joint Claims for JSA, though this was largely because these were presented to them as a 'fait accompli'. However, former dependent partners from stock and fresh claims were often confused, especially about whether their attendance at the fortnightly reviews was a specific condition of their benefit. Again, the potential negative impact of this upon couples over the longer-term cannot be ignored.

A common complaint was the unfairness attached to entry into New Deal. Stock claimants could access New Deal six months from when they started the original claim, but their former dependent partners could only get access to New Deal six months from when they claimed as part of the joint claim. This differential access to New Deal was felt to fly in the face of helping couples into work, and be somewhat opposite to the spirit of Joint Claims for JSA. This is all the more significant when one considers the importance of the benefit disincentive highlighted in the Stage One report (see Fielding and Bell, 2001).

4.6 Reported outcomes

There were no reported cases of people moving off benefit and into work as a direct result of Joint Claims for JSA. This lack of labour market impact was not surprising given the timing of the fieldwork (six to 12 weeks after 'go-live day') and the lower than anticipated numbers. Nevertheless, there was the feeling that there was potential for Joint Claims for JSA to help couples in the longer-term. However, this could only be achieved with continued improvements to the service, in terms of PA/receptionist skills, information delivery, training, and IT capability. Without these improvements, the negative impacts experienced in the short-term by both staff and couples, could be expanded into the longer-term.

In addition, an indirect effect of Joint Claims for JSA had some support, both in the short-term and the longer-term. For the short-term, staff suggested that the lower number of converted claims than set out on the schedule was the result of fraudulent claims being stopped. In the longer-term, staff felt that 'word of mouth' was a powerful tool, especially in smaller, closely-knit communities. If they could deliver a good service and make couples feel at ease and welcome, then word of mouth could be helpful in encouraging people to take Jobcentres more seriously. In addition, it might also help to boost participation in NDP.

The lower than anticipated numbers of joint claims and the problems of inputting claims onto the system have also meant that **Joint Claims for JSA has had a negligible impact on the Annual Performance Agreement (APA) targets.** The fact that this is not likely to change over the longer-term could be problematic. For example, BMs could be inclined to devote less or insufficient resource to Joint Claims for JSA, when the exact opposite is required if the longer-term success of the enhancement is to be guaranteed. How BMs and DMs balance the short-term demands of APAs and the longer-term requirements of their staff and clients will require monitoring over time, and will have to be borne in mind when any proposed extension is implemented.

4.7 In summary

The number of joint claimants was significantly lower than originally anticipated. This has had implications for PAs and receptionists being unable to build up a bank of experience to deliver an effective service because they have seen very few couples. The identification of joint claimants varied and a significant minority were slipping through undetected. Staff found exemptions difficult to deal with despite good guidance. Three models of registration were identified, one of which became the default model due to problems with processing. The choice of who was to be the nominated payee was presented to couples as a 'fait accompli'. Joint NJIs were arranged in the vast majority of cases and were also presented to couples as a 'fait accompli'. Interviews were usually longer than the guidance indicated. Attendance at the first NJI was very poor for former dependent partners especially those from minority ethnic couples.

At the NJI, benefits were always dealt with before work, and the arrangement of a couple's fortnightly reviews to be on the same day was viewed positively by clients. For the most part, interviews were conducted jointly but separately, with more time being devoted to the nominated payee despite the fact that they were less likely to be a former dependent partner and the focus of the enhancement.

The processing of payment was fraught with difficulties relating to the use of IT, with JSAPs faulting a large number of joint claims. Workloads and stress levels for processing staff have increased, which are compounded by the geographical separation of ES and BA staff. Payments to clients were often

delayed which has affected their perception of the service and their willingness to look for work. Follow-up work was rare.

Staff were concerned about the impact of Joint Claims for JSA on the role of reception staff and about the resource implications of additional requirements for language support in those districts with higher than average numbers of couples from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Clients agree with the principle of Joint Claims for JSA, especially the equal treatment of partners. A few do see it as an extended monitoring exercise, and others object to it on cultural grounds. To date, there have been few labour market impacts, but Joint Claims for JSA has probably played a role in reducing the number of fraudulent cases.

Chapter five – Barriers to work

5.1 Introduction

When talking about the barriers to work faced by joint claimants, staff found it difficult to separate out those that were specific to the circumstances of a joint claim. This was partly because staff had yet to see sufficient numbers of joint claimants and partly because the barriers that required resolution for many joint claimants were the same generic barriers encountered by other jobseekers. This chapter will attempt to disentangle the specific barriers for joint claimants (both personal and labour market barriers) from the more generic barriers, by addressing them as separate sub-sections. As many of the generic barriers were dealt with in detail in the stage one report (see Fielding and Bell, 2001), these will only be touched upon in the case studies report. This is not to suggest that these barriers are less important, but that the focus of this report are those circumstances pertaining specifically to Joint Claims for JSA and to staff experiences of dealing with joint claimants.

However, it is important to note that staff did not treat these barriers as though they existed in isolation, but as a whole series of multiple and interconnected obstacles. In addition, it must be noted that this report refers to comments from PAs concerning the interviews they conducted with clients. Clients may not see the situation in the same way.

5.2 Barriers relating specifically to joint claimants

The benefits disincentive was a particular concern for staff, especially in the way that this was allied to the current state of the local labour market. Frequent comments were made about the depressed state of the local labour market and the very poor quality of the jobs currently available. Generally, jobs were low-skilled, at the minimum wage, and often involved unsociable hours. Many jobs were also of a temporary, part-time or fixed-term nature, and the associated conditions of service rarely went beyond the statutory minimum.

Staff empathised with the difficult decision faced by many joint claimants about whether to accept a job under such conditions, given the benefit disincentive of losing housing benefit/having to pay rent, council tax and the associated costs of working (transport, lunches and so on). This disincentive was further disconcerting when it was preventing joint claimants from seeing a job as a series of stepping-stones to the right job, or in an instillation of the social benefits of work compared to claiming, largely because of the poor quality of work available. Staff felt that clients did not want to risk taking an unstable or low paid job when this would be supporting two people. Consequently, joint claimants were more reluctant to sign on with an agency, take work and then sign back on. This was especially the case if a couple had

experienced difficulties with their joint claim payment. It would also effect their eligibility for New Deal – hence the call for equal eligibility.

As indicated earlier, former dependent partners were reluctant to participate in Joint Claims for JSA. Staff recalled that these partners were very reticent about having to look for work and that this was acting as a barrier to work. A lack of self-confidence, self-esteem or self-worth was a particularly debilitating barrier for former dependent partners from stock and partners in fresh claims because they had hardly ever worked and were thus particularly unsure of themselves. Often, this was combined with claimants' patchy employment history, which made it more difficult for them to find work. This was often combined with a lack of confidence in 'the system' with joint claimants believing that nothing could be done to help them, even before they walked into the Jobcentre.

Allied to this was a distinct fear of change, particularly amongst stock claimants, who were reluctant to engage with new ideas and procedures. Joint claimants were felt to be a relatively conservative group of clients that were less likely to take risks with their job searching. Likewise, staff recognised that former dependent partners from stock claims would have a significant 'distance to travel' from their current labour-market position to one where they would be able to take work and that this acted as a barrier for the couple.

5.3 Generic personal barriers

One of the biggest barriers was when clients had to admit to having a problem that could seriously affect their chances of finding work. Those recognised by staff are listed below.

1. **An addictive illness** – usually alcoholism or a form of drug dependency. However, knowledge of where clients could be referred was somewhat limited, and PAs often had to seek out a specialist adviser. PAs also hinted that employers' attitudes to recovery needed to change.
2. **A criminal record** – especially if it related to fraud, robbery or drug offences. Knowledge of potential referrals to training providers was good, as were the links to training providers. PAs felt that employers' attitudes to offending behaviour, especially more 'petty' offences, were beginning to change for the better.¹⁹
3. **Mental health and learning difficulties** – especially if the condition meant that clients could experience changes in behaviour. The identification of such difficulties, particularly the latter, was very tricky for many PAs. In addition, awareness of support services and referrals was

¹⁹ For both the first two problems, a number of PAs suggested that access to New Deal should be immediate because the potential for re-offending or relapsing during the first six months was very high *and* it was highly unlikely that clients would find legitimate work during that period.

poor. Staff were concerned that these clients should actually be claiming IB and therefore be exempt from Joint Claims for JSA.

It took a significant amount of courage from clients to admit to any of the above and this encouraged staff because for that to happen, clients had to have had some faith that the Jobcentre could help them. In addition, the satisfaction for staff when they managed to assist these 'harder to help' clients was highly significant. Indeed, for many staff, this was why they had taken the job in the first place.

Above all else, employers wanted experience. Training and voluntary work were identified as useful substitutes to this. However, the latter was not always a popular route among younger clients, who make up the largest proportion of the joint claims constituency.

Voluntary work is a useful route to employment and benefits are unaffected. A lot of the candidates have decided they will like to do some voluntary work with organisations ... It gets them known to the employers and a few of them, that's how they've worked to get the employment. (Interview with training provider)²⁰

A lack of basic or core skills, but especially literacy and numeracy, was a common barrier to work. PAs indicated that it was difficult to get clients to see the connections between basic skills and employability. In the ONE area, by having the call-centre staff fill in the claim form, PAs reported that they were losing vital evidence of clients' basic skills capabilities. This made their initial assessment of skills and aptitudes much more difficult.

The 'softer indicators' such as trustworthiness, punctuality, politeness, presentation, personality, communication and teamwork were beginning to be championed by some employers and staff felt that many clients, especially men, were deficient in these skills.

5.4 Labour-market barriers

ES staff were very frustrated with employers' attitudes, especially to longer-term unemployed people. Staff felt that employers did not want to spend time and resources training up and supporting individuals. Likewise, employers saw clients with any of the personal problems above as a risk.

The availability of public transport did not impress staff, especially in rural areas. There were few services to out-of-town industrial estates, and services were unreliable, infrequent and costly. The provision of public transport was also criticised, particularly its inability to coincide with the shift patterns that

²⁰ This statement about benefits being unaffected is not necessarily true. JSA entitlement is not affected by voluntary work provided the Jobseeker: continues to look for work; can be contacted in the event of a job opportunity; can attend a job interview or start a job within 48 hours notice; and, is willing and able to give up or rearrange their voluntary work at any time to start a job.

many employers were using. However, staff also criticised clients for not being creative enough with their travel-to-work plans and in their attitudes to transport. Examples included rejecting the train because of the cost, not looking to buy travel passes to save money, not using bicycles and not asking about travel-to-work grants.

Staff criticised the availability of training courses in a number of areas, largely because of insufficient breadth. Training did not offer clients different, new or exciting opportunities and did not cover enough areas of expertise to offer clients any real choice in new career paths.

5.5 Addressing barriers to work

PAs felt that there were gaps in their knowledge of the provision and activities to which clients could be referred. In turn, training providers reported that the ES often referred clients to unsuitable courses. More specific criticism was directed at PAs' lack of awareness of opportunities for people with mental health difficulties, addictive illnesses and confidence issues. In addition, many training providers felt restricted at the beginning of a client's programme because they had insufficient assessment information. Training providers were keen to see better data collection on assessment within the ES, such as a basic skills assessment at point of entry.

Training providers championed the construction of a personally tailored training programme for each individual, but noted that the procedures they had to adhere to made this extremely difficult. Often there was a gap between what the client wanted and what the provider could offer. Similar sentiments were also expressed about the provision of support. This required co-operation and flexibility, attributes which training providers felt were lacking in the ES and accreditation bodies.

5.6 In summary

The benefits disincentive is the biggest barrier to work being faced by joint claimants. Staff were keen to emphasise this and the multi-levelled and interconnected nature of barriers. Barriers affecting the attitudes of former dependent partners are also reducing the effectiveness of Joint Claims for JSA, as is the fear of change that comes hand in glove with such attitudes.

More generic personal barriers for joint claimants, were, in many cases, the more pressing barriers that staff felt need to be addressed. Addictive illness, criminal record and mental health and learning difficulties were all debilitating barriers to work, which were coupled with poor employer attitudes to these difficulties. A lack of core or basic skills was also common, as was a client's lack of understanding of the need for these skills to get and stay in, a job. Labour market barriers were also identified at this more generic level and focused upon employers attitudes to worklessness and the overall poor condition of many of the local labour markets in terms of rates of pay and

conditions of service. Finally, the poor quality of public transport was identified.

When addressing barriers, the working relationship between ES and training providers was an area of concern, especially the lack of effective communication, information delivery and support.

Chapter six – Specific issues relating to training providers

6.1 Introduction

Information was obtained from training providers in order to get a better understanding of their working relationship with the ES and to examine the steps that they were taking to make people ready for work. However, it was rare that training providers had sufficient knowledge and information about Joint Claims for JSA for them to form any firm opinions about it. Consequently, interviews tended to address more generic issues in relation to jobseeking. Hence this chapter contains little material specific to the experiences of joint claimants, but instead focusing on more generic issues identified by training providers.

6.2 The working relationship with the Employment Service

The majority of training providers had good working relations with ES, which bodes well for awareness-raising in relation to Joint Claims for JSA. Providers recalled opportunities to visit Jobcentres to make presentations to staff in order to raise awareness of their services. These presentations were well received by ES staff as they enabled them to think more strategically.

We have regular meetings with them anyway, and I think that's probably the most important thing, because we all know what we're doing then and it's important particularly when you've got a changeover of staff. I think from our point of view, we could do with someone regularly visiting Jobcentres and actually speaking to Jobseekers as they come in.
(Interview with training provider)

Equally, ES staff were keen to foster improved relationships with providers. A number of PAs were given non-contact time each week to pursue such activities.

The New Deal advisers visit, but not all of them, and that would be on an ad hoc basis, so they'll get information that way, but no there's no process. (Interview with training provider)

Providers criticised the ES for its limited knowledge of the training marketplace, especially for more specialist training.

The Jobcentres aren't 100 per cent clear necessarily on what we've got and what the right thing is. (Interview with training provider)

Many providers criticised the ES, and PAs in particular, for their apparent inability to share information relating to clients referred to them.

So they'll say maybe that they've been to an interview somewhere else. Sometimes it would be beneficial to know a bit of the history as far as, you know, if they went for an interview and you don't know why they didn't take up that option. (Interview with training provider)

There was particular criticism regarding a lack of information on skills, qualifications and aptitudes, and the lack of follow-up activity.

The only monitoring that happens with the Employment Service, would be lead dates, when they're due to finish because obviously they'd have to re-register. (Interview with training provider)

The poor quality of information delivery by the PA resulted in providers having to do their own initial baseline assessment to determine the types of training that would suit each client. Additionally, individuals were often referred to courses that were inappropriate for them, and providers had to find suitable alternatives. Moreover, clients did not even know why they were going to the training providers in the first place.

I think sometimes the Jobcentres haven't got the time to explain enough [to clients], so they don't know why they're there or why they're here ... My first question is, "Do you know what you've come for?" and it's like, "The Jobcentre's told me to come". (Interview with training provider)

There was a mixed reception amongst training providers to partnership-working with the ES. Both the ES and providers were keen to explore new avenues and work together to address the needs of workless people. However, unfortunately, many providers felt that the partnership consensus was an unequal one, with the burden of responsibility falling on them, as ES was failing to meet them halfway. A few training providers felt marginalised by PAs who already had contacts and a historical relationship with other providers. Others felt that the sector which they provided training for was not being pushed as much as others, because of a perceived stigma associated with that type of work. Call centre work was a common example. Training providers were also keen to emphasise their partnership-working with other agencies involved in the welfare to work agenda and not just the ES.

We work with Employment Zones. We do a lot of work with them. We've been doing pre-placement courses, which is preparing them for going onto work experience with our more difficult clients. (Interview with training provider)

6.3 Identifying and addressing barriers to work

Overcoming barriers to work was training providers' 'bread and butter'. Many providers were extremely skilled in identifying and assessing individual need and encouraging clients to address these. They were highly tuned to the

effect of individuals' barriers upon their lives. This is interesting on a number of counts.

Providers were able for example to champion a more multi-levelled approach to overcoming barriers to work, with an emphasis on the softer indicators of punctuality, personality, presentation, communication skills and so forth.

You know there's a lot of what we term as softer skills, they don't have, and even though they have qualifications behind them, they often can't communicate very well or can't present themselves very well, but it's far more difficult to change. We run motivational courses with them, which helps, but it's keeping it up, and sort of, you know, keeping the momentum. (Interview with training provider)

Providers agreed that more specialist skills and experience would get clients an interview, but the softer skills would ensure that they got the job and stayed in it. They sympathised with the lack of time that the ES had to explore these issues in sufficient detail.

Training providers also recognised that the provision of in-work support to clients was vital in ensuring sustainability of employment and that clients did not fall back into the system after a short space of time. Providers identified that enhanced sustainability would also enable clients to make more rapid progress in their job, thereby freeing up lower-level positions for others. This was such an important element for providers that they were giving ad hoc support on an unpaid basis.

Finally, providers were more able than PAs to join up their thinking on training and work. They appeared to be much more aware of the inter-linkages between training/education and work and their restorative benefits to clients. Providers also appeared more able to think laterally and creatively when it came to finding solutions to individual problems. They seemed much less constrained by rules and regulations, procedures and protocols, and were thus able to provide a personal (and personable) service to clients when matching aspirations to opportunities.

6.4 Awareness of Joint Claims for JSA

A few Jobcentres had taken the time to contact training providers about Joint Claims for JSA. Consequently, a few providers knew of its existence and what it was trying to do. These providers agreed that it was a good idea and long overdue. However, because Joint Claims for JSA had not been running long, and because when clients came to providers they would not know whether the client was a joint claimant or not, providers felt that there was no need to investigate changes to their provision at this stage. However, they recognised the importance of monitoring the situation and of trying to obtain more information from the ES so that they could change this stance if required.

6.5 In Summary

Joint Claims for JSA is yet to have a significant impact upon the structure and organisation of training provision and is unlikely to do so in the short-term. The working relationship between providers and ES is fundamental to the successful delivery of training and, ultimately, to ensuring that clients find and stay in, work. However, the opportunities for both parties to foster these relationships are limited and constrained by the quality of available information, the flow of this information between ES and providers, and the constraints this places upon partnership activities and addressing barriers to work by more creative and innovative means.

Chapter seven – Inter-agency issues

7.1 Introduction

The ability of the ES to work in partnership with others in helping both partners within a couple into work means that partnerships have to be robust and flexible. The working relationships between the ES and other organisations are described below. Again, it was difficult for respondents to disentangle inter-agency issues specific to the delivery of Joint Claims for JSA from generic issues around inter-agency working. As a result, some issues will be presented as generic ones, and some as being specific to Joint Claims for JSA.

7.2 The ES and the BA

The inter-relationship between the ES and the BA was fundamental to Joint Claims for JSA delivery, and the report has already highlighted specific aspects of this relationship. For example:

- The delivery of Joint Claims for JSA was more effective and efficient when ES and BA staff worked closely together in registering and processing a joint claim, or helped to smooth these processes. For example, an early warning of an impending joint claim made by ES to processing staff eased potential stress

We're really lucky in here, we've good liaisons with the advisers because they just sit across from us and then the benefit signing section downstairs as well, we help them out with enquires etc. so it is really good. (Interview with BA staff)

- the physical separation of the ES and the BA staff, either in separate buildings or on separate floors of buildings, had a negative impact upon the possibilities of inter-agency working. Furthermore, this reduced the efficiency of registering and processing a claim
- Jobcentres with staff willing to forge inter-connections between the ES and the BA fared much better in delivering Joint Claims for JSA (for example sharing information from training courses, or observing other aspects of the process)

They [ES staff] are quite interested in how it's going. They come round and ask "Did you get the claim on" and "How did you get on?". And if there is another one due to come in, they'll say, "We've got another joint claim coming in". Also, one of them sat with us and showed us the process and things like that. (Interview with BA staff)

We've got a good working relationship in this office, we're one of the most fortunate, we don't have to go as high as management, we would just go and speak direct to the claims takers. (Interview with BA staff)

In addition, staff made a number of additional observations about Joint Claims for JSA and the potential for inter-agency working between ES and BA. Firstly, poor communication between ES and BA staff was commonplace in a number of Jobcentres. Consequently, certain staff – specifically reception staff, less experienced PAs and less experienced BA processing staff - were isolated from good practice. Moreover, the opportunities for senior staff to share good practice with these staff in their own and other organisations were limited.²¹

ES and BA staff were often reluctant to accept overlapping responsibilities for Joint Claims for JSA. This produced an 'occupational territoriality', where the ES found people work and the BA processed benefit. Jobcentres where this occupational culture prevailed tended to experience greater difficulties with Joint Claims for JSA. More surprisingly, this occupational culture was commonplace in the ONE area, despite the fact that inter-agency working is its *raison d'être* and that it had two years to embed itself. Staff indicated that ES and BA staff in ONE offices were reluctant to work with ONE PAs and this made the resolution of problems relating to Joint Claims for JSA very difficult.

7.3 The ES and training providers

Chapter six detailed a number of the difficulties that training providers have experienced in initiating closer ties and working practices with the ES at a general level. Overall, the development of better information delivery and assessment at point of entry was a key aspect of inter-agency working. Providers felt that they and the ES had to collaborate to devise formal assessment procedures to enable individual training and learning programmes to be drawn up much more effectively. A number of providers had experienced a degree of unwillingness from PAs to facilitate inter-agency working between them and employers. Improving relations with employers was a key aspect of business development for providers. They were keen to change employers' attitudes to workless people, particularly small/medium enterprises, as a large percentage of their clients would be looking to them for work. However, providers were critical of the ES for not meeting them halfway in these activities to date.

7.4 The ES and employers

A number of ES staff criticised employers' attitudes to workless people, especially the 'harder to help' clients. Employers were also criticised for not

²¹ This mirrors other partnership organisations where occupational hierarchies mean that people of the same status in one organisation tend to talk to those of similar status in the other. Moreover, it is rare that staff talk to anyone below their status in the other organisations.

disclosing enough information about particular jobs, and not informing the ES when vacancies had been filled. The ES was especially concerned about the impact of this on clients' confidence. For example, a job was available, and was something a client wanted, then the client took away an application form, but did not hear from the potential employer. The client asked the ES to chase it up, only to find out that the position had been taken *before* the application was filled in, but the employer had not informed the ES.

7.5 The ES and other organisations

Many Jobcentres were involved in other initiatives to help people off benefit and into work. The accessing of additional funds within the ES, such as the barriers grant in Area A, was often cited. Staff also mentioned their ties with the voluntary sector and recognised that these ties could be improved and widened, especially if Joint Claims for JSA were to be extended to cover older couples. A number of positive comments were also recorded about Employment Action Zones and Action Teams for Jobs. ES staff also praised the use of external funding and other agencies, such as initiatives emanating from the European Social Fund (ESF), which often provided enhanced opportunities, particularly for young people.

7.6 In summary

The inter-agency relationship between the ES and BA is the key to delivery of Joint Claims for JSA. At the moment, this is hampered by the geographical separation of ES and BA staff charged with its delivery but also by the occupational separation of these staff so that they do not know the 'ins and outs' of the other aspects to delivering the enhancement. These are further complicated by reluctance to engage in inter-agency working because of 'occupational territoriality' and by poor communication activities (largely influenced by the degree of geographical separation). The inter-agency working of ES and training providers is largely dependent upon the quality of information and the flow of that information between the two parties. Similarly, inter-agency working between ES and employers has been stifled by this lack of information, or the failure to communicate up to date information, coupled by negative attitudes of a number of employers.

Chapter eight – Perceptions, current problems and suggested solutions

8.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the impacts of Joint Claims for JSA (both actual and potential), together with the current problems identified by respondents. It also explores why some of these impacts remain potential and generally unrealised and draws up a number of possible future solutions to realise this potential.

8.2 The perceptions of Joint Claims for JSA

At the outset, it is vital to understand that there was overwhelming support for Joint Claims for JSA.

I think the idea of Joint Claims is very good and about time too, and I think it should also apply to other benefits. (Interview with PA)

Staff praised the potential to encourage both partners in a couple into the labour market, and the advice, help and support for those previously isolated from it. The equal treatment of both partners and the focus on workless households were well received, as was the encouragement of joint activities and communication between couples and within communities. Finally, it was seen as a potentially useful way to combat benefit fraud and as a potential avenue of staff promotion by increasing their skills and expertise.

8.3 Current problems

Potential joint claimants recorded the same positive comments as those above during stage one of the qualitative research (see Fielding and Bell, 2001). The one caveat they applied was that any such idea had to do exactly what it said it was going to do, or there would be no point to it. This has been *the* issue for the case studies. ES and BA staff have recognised that poor service delivery is likely to have a significant impact on a client's perception and use of that service. Moreover, they accept that the delivery of Joint Claims for JSA has not matched expectations. Consequently, the following caveats should be considered before any judgement about the success (or otherwise) of Joint Claims for JSA can be established.

- it is still too early to tell whether Joint Claims for JSA can make any lasting impression on the numbers of people out of work and/or claiming benefit. To date, staff have reported negligible labour-market impacts

- the actual number of registered joint claimants has been lower than originally anticipated. Consequently, ES and BA staff have not yet seen enough joint claimants to build up a sufficient bank of experience for them to deliver the service effectively. Moreover, each claim differs from the next one and so building up this bank of experience is doubly difficult because there is no 'typical' joint claim. This lack of experience is likely to continue for the foreseeable future in many small/medium sized Jobcentres. Furthermore, staff turnover and the need to balance the demands of APAs and the demands of staff and couples will also complicate matters
- workloads and pressures were extremely intense for BA staff during the transition period. These have eased somewhat, but are still significantly higher than before Joint Claims for JSA. Similar increases have been experienced by reception staff, which, given the concerns about the function of the front end, is a concern
- the rhetoric about Joint Claims for JSA has not matched the day-to-day realities of service delivery. This has caused stress and anger among ES staff, a good deal of which had not dissipated when the survey was undertaken
- paperwork has increased, especially at 'the front end', where the importance of a good first impression for couples is vital
- the IT systems, especially JSAPS, had problems during implementation and the early period post 'go-live day'. Service delivery was hindered, which raised concerns about a negative longer-term impact upon joint claimants. In addition, staff are not yet confident in their ability to deal with systems nor in the systems themselves to work, despite the recent fixes. Given the potential impact upon joint claimants, this still is a concern
- a cultural resistance among clients to Joint Claims for JSA has been identified. This has been most significant among couples from Asian communities, but also to a lesser extent among 'traditional' white working-class communities.

8.4 Future solutions

The lack of focus on 'partners' during the NJI is worrying. Treating the nominated payee as the de facto claimant, and the subsequent unequal allocation of time to the two people, requires further investigation. This occurs especially when the nominated payee is the former claimant from a stock claim or the one most likely to find work (usually the male) in a fresh claim. Thus, the group of people, which Joint Claims for JSA has been designed to target, is often not given sufficient attention.

Many staff recognised the importance of 'the front end' and the role of reception staff for effective service delivery. However, reception points were often understaffed, or contained temporary, inexperienced and poorly trained staff. The role of reception staff should be given greater value within the Jobcentre, and more resources need to be allocated to 'the front end', either for more staff, or the strategic use of PAs on reception.

The potential of Joint Claims for JSA is still affected by the benefits disincentive. At the moment, the quality of available work is not sufficient to encourage people to take on work rather than claiming, nor is there sufficient security to encourage people to take one job as a stepping stone to another. A few staff identified the need to challenge the benefit disincentive through benefit run-on and other measures.

Since the implementation of Joint Claims for JSA, a number of multiple fixes have been made to the IT systems in order to address the deficiencies noted previously. In light of these fixes, staff interviewed during phase two of the study recognised that some slight improvements had been made. Improved IT capability would provide better customer service, improve efficiencies and raise staff morale. Staff were appreciative of the problems inherent in JSAPS and the problems of trying to improve it, but there were clear signs that their levels of patience were running thin. The longer it takes for staff to become comfortable with these fixes, the greater the potential for a more negative longer-term impact upon couples.

The call-centre model in ONE areas has caused difficulties for joint claimants. They have had to make additional journeys to the ONE office, despite the fact that the call centre was meant to eradicate these. Joint claimants have slipped through the system unnoticed and have had to be recalled. Forms have been filled in incorrectly, resulting in delays to payment and increased tension between clients and staff. A few ONE PAs called for the call-centre model to be removed from Joint Claims for JSA.

Staff wanted to be able to offer joint claimants more incentives and more options earlier on in their claim, and a number felt somewhat constrained that they could not do so. They wanted to see a greater flexibility within, and accessibility to, New Deal and/or equivalent training and support. For example, partners of stock claimants should have accessibility to New Deal at the same time as the former claimant, to help each other to find work, and to render redundant the benefit disincentive.

There are also implications for the extension of Joint Claims for JSA to older couples. Most staff were aware of such plans and agreed that this should take place as soon as possible, principally because this would enable them to build up the bank of experience required to be sufficiently confident with the enhancement. It would also be an excellent opportunity for staff to be up-skilled in advice and guidance and to build better links with training providers. A few staff felt that the age increase should be as high as 50, so as to coincide with New Deal 50+ as those clients (especially those with children who had left home) had the softer skills and experience that employers really wanted. However, there were resource concerns relating to having more people in the system. **More significantly, some staff recognised that because the current numbers had been so much lower than anticipated, any future roll out may have a budget that was lower than originally planned – even though many of the new clients would require more support, advice and guidance, and therefore, more time.** In addition, ES staff would need to undergo more sophisticated training, especially in advice.

8.5 In summary

There is significant support for the principle of Joint Claims for JSA. To date, unforeseen circumstances – the functionality of JSAPs, the lower than anticipated numbers – have reduced the exposure of staff to joint claims and peoples' ability to make empirically based judgements upon its successes. In addition, other operational issues are clouding perceptions of the service and a less than robust adherence to guidance is effecting delivery and clients' perceptions of the service. Solutions to these issues should be sought as a matter of urgency.

Chapter nine – Recommendations and good practice

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the implications of this report are put forward, along with operational and policy recommendations for the improvement of service delivery, and the good practice that has been identified. This is so that the reader can see clearly the improvements that have been carried out to date, and use this in conjunction with the recommendations to improve delivery.

9.2 Operational recommendations

9.2.1 Strategy, planning and training

- the navigability and usability of ESCOM for Joint Claims for JSA should be revisited
- the appointment of a Joint Claims for JSA co-ordinator for each enhancement in each Jobcentre provides support for staff in the early stages and enables them to deal with clients more effectively and efficiently
- supporting information such as flow charts and aide-memoires should be available centrally as a template for DIMs and co-ordinators to download and tailor accordingly. Supporting information should also be tailored to the needs of staff
- a responsive helpline for future enhancements would be appreciated
- Joint Claims for JSA should become part of the standard training package delivered to new recruits and temporary staff
- the interpretation of an enhancement before 'go-live day' and its likely impact on staff requires re-assessment in order to avoid unnecessary stress and tension for staff before it becomes operational
- the actual forms and materials that are going to be used in reality should be available when training starts
- broadly, the quality of training and supporting information for the ES should be revised by phasing out didactic methods of delivery and replacing these with more interactive and group work that uses practical activities in 'real life' situations
- opportunities for dialogue with colleagues during training should be enhanced
- the quality and usability of supporting materials should be revisited
- mop-up training should be widely available
- contingency planning for training in smaller Jobcentres should be encouraged or should be more creative

- the timing of training should be re-assessed - large and small time-lags between receipt of training and 'go-live day' should be avoided
- staff training in ONE should be combined into one package to avoid occupational jealousy between the ES and the BA
- training for the call-centre operators needs to be improved
- trainers need more training on the variations within ONE
- the interconnections between the ES and the BA should be flagged up and communicated to all staff
- CBT should be available to ONE staff.

9.2.2 Implementation

- communication between the ES and the BA should be enhanced to enable claims to be registered and processed more efficiently – locating ES and BA staff dealing with Joint Claims for JSA in the same office would be a significant step forward.
- fewer than anticipated numbers have not decreased the problems encountered, and this has to be taken into account in the resources allocated to any future roll out
- greater priority needs to be given to the role of reception staff. They should be more valued and better resourced, with more experienced staff encouraged to take up this role
- procedures for arranging and conducting interviews should be re-examined
- the better-off calculation at NJIs should be more widely used than at present
- PAs need to build up a bank of experience in dealing with joint claims; they need to see a critical mass of couples in order to become more confident
- a brief synopsis of exemption criteria should be posted in a relevant location in ESCOM
- IT systems, especially JSAPS, should be monitored and staff confidence with the fixes to these should be assessed on an ongoing basis. The longer-term impacts of the early processing and payment problems upon joint claimants should be monitored
- the use of specialist/more experienced PAs for Joint Claims for JSA may curtail the potential prospects of other PAs
- the lack of specialist language support for particular languages requires attention
- the creation of additional demand for language support by having partners of former claimants from ethnic minorities now signing on needs to be taken into account
- the use of temporary call-centre staff is problematic, and their role in registration and/or form filling in ONE call centres should be reviewed
- the quality of information delivery and form filling by ONE call-centre staff should be investigated

- the use of call-centre staff for form filling in the ONE area takes away vital evidence for PAs of clients' basic skills levels. The call-centre model for Joint Claims for JSA should be re-assessed.

9.2.3 Barriers to work

- greater encouragement should be given to employers to change their attitudes to worklessness
- the growing emphasis on softer skills should be taken into account in client referrals and in the development work of PAs with training providers and employers
- a system of immediate baseline assessment of clients' basic and softer skills is essential to provide an individually tailored programme.

9.2.4 Training providers

- the effectiveness and efficiency of the relationship between the ES and a few training providers is constrained by time and resources, and requires a re-examination
- training providers should be receptive to changes in the labour market and adjust their provision accordingly; there is no point in providing training for jobs that do not exist
- the quality and volume of dialogue and joint planning between ES and training providers should be improved.

9.2.5 Inter-agency working

- the physical separation of ES and BA staff hinders the facilitation of a joint claim - locating ES and BA staff dealing with joint claims in the same office would be a significant step forward.
- greater emphasis should be placed on partnership across, down and through organisations
- occupational territoriality and occupational jealousy are potentially damaging and steps need to be taken to eradicate them.

9.2.6 Outcomes and performance measures

- outcomes should be closely monitored over a longer period of time, to coincide with staff building up the bank of experience required to deliver the service effectively
- explicit QA measures should be put in place, for example mandatory checks on joint claim forms and observation of registration and NJIs, especially the dynamics of these interviews.

9.3 Policy recommendations

9.3.1 Implementation

- the greater acceptance of Joint Claims for JSA by fresh claimants bodes well, but the continued reticence and resistance of stock claims requires monitoring
- the potential for cultural resistance requires monitoring. Equally, with the advent of the new Human Rights Act, possible contraventions within Joint Claims for JSA regarding religious and cultural expressions should be investigated.

9.3.2 Barriers to work and training providers

- barriers to work do not exist in isolation but are multi-levelled, and thus solutions to overcome them must reflect this
- addressing clients' self-confidence (especially that of 'partners') is key
- the benefits disincentive has a major impact and should be dealt with as a matter of urgency
- the poor condition of the labour market and poor quality of jobs are not appealing to clients. Greater incentives into work in more depressed employment areas should be given consideration
- clients with a criminal record, addictive illnesses or mental health or learning difficulties face almost certain exclusion from the labour market. Immediate access to New Deal may combat re-offending or relapsing. The attitudes and knowledge of staff *and* employers should to re-examined to help clients in these situations
- "you cannot get a job without experience, you cannot get experience without a job" is a fundamental issue, recognised by all the different stakeholders. More imagination is needed to break into this viscous circle by, for example, encouraging more experience providing placements or training
- public transport is poor and does not join up with employees' needs (such as shift work timings). A more integrated and smarter public transport system is required, but employers should also be encouraged to set up their own transport services, through tax breaks and so on. Clients also need more information and encouragement about alternative transport strategies to access available employment
- the provision of better information at referral by the ES is essential.

9.3.3 Inter-agency working

- there is a lack of partnership when trying to tackle the attitudes of employers

- employers should revise their work practices with the ES. Many need to be more efficient about disclosing information regarding filled vacancies, and need to be more accurate in the information given about vacancies
- relationships between ES and training providers should also be improved and made more focused on clients' needs.

9.4 Good practice identified

9.3.1 Strategy, planning and training

- use of communication meetings for information transfer
- appointment of DIMs at district level and Joint Claims for JSA co-ordinators at Jobcentre level
- pre-identification of key staff to deal solely with interviewing joint claimants
- use of supporting information such as flow charts and aide-memoires
- communicating Joint Claims for JSA to BA and ONE staff as a slight change to the way in which benefit is processed rather than as a vital or the most significant change to JSA legislation
- the greater/more realistic number of days given to BA training to enable them to familiarise themselves with the procedures and protocols at a speed that optimises and maximises their learning
- enhancing learning through a combination of theory and practice and the use of realistic examples, walk throughs and group activities, rather than the use didactic pedagogy
- the presentation of complex issues in easy-to-understand formats, especially if used in conjunction with CBT
- effective management arrangements re contingency planning and staff cover
- ES and BA observing various parts of the process, thus embedding learning opportunities and enhancing inter-agency working.

9.3.2 Implementation

- contacting stock claimants by phone to arrange an NJI
- the success of JMT pilots in improving communication and strategic decision making between the ES and the BA
- organising an explanatory event for all stock claims
- suggesting an explanatory interview for people who come to make a claim without their partner
- having BA staff register and process a claim, thus enabling PAs to spend valuable time on work-focused activities – though note fears that PAs' overall experience of benefit could be reduced
- arranging a couple's fortnightly review to be in the same place at the same time
- effective follow-up activities

9.3.3 Barriers to work

- the diligence and commitment of training providers and the ES
- training providers being given time to present their services to the ES, which raised PAs' awareness of available provision
- focusing on the 'partner' to overcome barriers, which was likely to encourage the other person in the couple to do the same, especially where the former is female and the latter male.

9.3.4 Training providers, Inter-agency working, outcomes and performance measures

- gradually improving partnership-working with the ES
- providers being extremely skilled in addressing barriers to work (especially the more specific barriers), and well attuned to their multi-levelled nature
- providers' greater capacity for joined-up, creative and lateral thinking.
- the presence of ES and BA staff in the same office, enabling the registration and processing of a joint claim to be better facilitated.
- BMs ensuring that at least one of their mandatory checks was of a joint claim.

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Appendix A: Topic guide – District Manager and Regional Implementation Manager

Aims

- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA assists young and long-term unemployed people and their partners into work and improves their prospects of staying in and progressing in employment
- assess whether Joint Claims for JSA contributes to the long-term employability of young and long-term unemployed people and their partners
- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA helps couples in workless households to enter employment (and those already in part-time employment to access full-time work).
- explore attitudes to work among young and long-term unemployed people
- consider the perceived and actual barriers to work and explore solutions
- ascertain the attitudes of Jobseekers and their partners to finding work in light of the implementation of Joint Claims for JSA

NB – It might be *helpful* to have two people present at this interview in order to get *an overview* of the bigger picture before talking to other members of staff.

Introduction

Introduce yourself and your organisation

Describe the study – aims and objectives, timetable etc. Stress that we are evaluating policy at the national level and not the performance of individual Jobcentres

Confidentiality assurance

Quick run through of key themes to be explored in interview

[Be prepared to discuss the positive aspects of tape recording interviews if the respondent feels uncomfortable]

Background information

Job title (grade)

Length in post and previous experience

Current duties

Details of district – number of Jobcentres, set-up etc.

Local labour-market conditions, unemployment rates etc.

Number of joint claimants on register

Strategy and planning

Planning and introduction of Joint Claims for JSA
Strategies adopted
Implementation
Resources
Training

Organisation and management of Joint Claims for JSA

Local organisation and delivery of Joint Claims for JSA (include IT support)
Management structure
Roles of staff in delivering Joint Claims for JSA
Overall view of delivery. Any improvements
Concerns for identifying joint claimants
Any issues around referring joint claimants to programmes such as NDYP, 25+ (though less likely)

Resources

Budget allocation for Joint Claims for JSA

Decisions on budgets
Autonomy for spending at district and Jobcentre level
Sufficient resources available to meet the additional demand (e.g. increase of claimants likely to want to take up training, need to increase numbers of staff)
Any effects on other programmes, e.g. NDYP

Staffing

Personal advisers

Number of PAs in this Jobcentre/district
Average caseload
How many of them deal with joint claimants
Do they receive specific training for their role
Key characteristics of effective PA

Receptionists

Number of receptionists in Jobcentre/district
Their role in identifying new joint claimants

Other staff who have a role in Joint Claims for JSA

Specify

Collaborative arrangements

Which of the following do you work with in close partnership with respect to Joint Claims for JSA/NDYP: Training providers, local employers, local authorities, Benefits Agency, any other organisations (please specify)

Training provision for joint claimants

What training is available for joint claimants

Who provides it

How do you select training providers, e.g. local contracts etc.

How is training provision funded

Performance and outcomes

Arrangements for recording, monitoring and evaluating Joint Claims for JSA

Quality checks

Number of referrals to NDYP

Barriers to work

What are the barriers

How significant are the barriers

Local barriers

Impact on workless households

Success factors

How could delivery of Joint Claims for JSA be strengthened

Any identified good practice

Suggested improvements for the future

Any thoughts on an extension of this policy

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank the respondent and close the interview

Appendix B: Topic guide – Business Manager

Aims

- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA assists young and long-term unemployed people and their partners into work and improves their prospects of staying in and progressing in employment
- assess whether Joint Claims for JSA contributes to the long-term employability of young and long-term unemployed people and their partners
- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA helps couples in workless households to enter employment (and those already in part-time employment to access full-time work)
- explore attitudes to work among young and long-term unemployed people
- consider the perceived and actual barriers to work and explore solutions
- ascertain the attitudes of Jobseekers and their partners to finding work in light of the implementation of Joint Claims for JSA

Introduction

Introduce yourself and your organisation

Describe the study – aims and objectives, timetable etc. Stress that we are evaluating policy at the national level and not the performance of individual Jobcentres

Confidentiality assurance

Quick run through of key themes to be explored in interview

[Be prepared to discuss the positive aspects of tape recording interviews if the respondent feels uncomfortable]

Background Information

Job title (grade)

Length in post and previous experience

Current duties

Number of staff responsible for

Local labour-market conditions, unemployment rates etc.

Number of joint claimants on register in Jobcentre

Strategy and planning

Planning and introduction of Joint Claims for JSA

Strategies adopted

Implementation

Resources

Training – them, other staff

Organisation and management of Joint Claims for JSA

The organisation and delivery of Joint Claims for JSA in the Jobcentre

(include IT support)

Management structure in Jobcentre

Roles of staff in delivering Joint Claims for JSA in Jobcentre. Any changes and/or improvements

Overall view of delivery. Any improvements

Concerns for identifying joint claimants

Any issues around referring joint claimants to programmes such as NDYP

Resources

Do they have responsibility for their own budgets in any way. If yes, continue, if no, explore why and move to next section

Decisions on budgets

Autonomy/flexibility for spending at Jobcentre level

Sufficient resources available to meet the additional demand (e.g. increase of claimants likely to want to take up training)

Any effects on other programmes, e.g. NDYP

Staffing

Personal advisers

Average caseload – impact of Joint Claims for JSA upon this

How many of them deal with joint claimants

Key characteristics of effective PA, current levels of experience

Any change in training needs – RELATE

Impacts on other activities/responsibilities

Receptionists

Number of receptionists in Jobcentre

Their role in identifying new joint claimants – any problems encountered

Impacts on other activities/responsibilities. Any emphasis on needs –

RELATE

Other staff who have a role in Joint Claims for JSA

Collaborative arrangements

Which of the following do you work with in close partnership with respect to Joint Claims for JSA/NDYP cross-working: training providers, local employers, local authorities, Benefits Agency, any other organisations (please specify)

Training provision for joint claimants

What training is available for joint claimants

Who provides it

How do you select training providers, e.g. local contracts etc.

How is training provision funded

Any potential changes to provision as a result of Joint Claims for JSA

Performance and outcomes

Arrangements for recording, monitoring and evaluating Joint Claims for JSA

Quality checks

Number of referrals

Barriers to work

What are the barriers

How significant are the barriers

Local barriers

Impact on workless households

Success factors

What are the critical success factors for Joint Claims for JSA

How could delivery of Joint Claims for JSA be strengthened

Any identified good practice

Suggested improvements for the future

Any thoughts on an extension of this policy

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank the respondent and close the interview

Appendix C: Topic guide – Personal Adviser

Aims

- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA assists young and long-term unemployed people and their partners into work and improves their prospects of staying in and progressing in employment
- assess whether Joint Claims for JSA contributes to the long-term employability of young and long-term unemployed people and their partners
- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA helps couples in workless households to enter employment (and those already in part-time employment to access full-time work).
- explore attitudes to work among young and long-term unemployed people
- consider the perceived and actual barriers to work and explore solutions
- ascertain the attitudes of Jobseekers and their partners to finding work in light of the implementation of Joint Claims for JSA

Introduction

Introduce yourself and your organisation.

Describe the study – aims and objectives, timetable etc. Stress that we are evaluating policy at the national level and not the performance of individual Jobcentres.

Confidentiality assurance

Quick run through of key themes to be explored in interview

[Be prepared to discuss the positive aspects of tape recording interviews if the respondent feels uncomfortable]

Background information

How long have you been a PA

Describe your role and responsibilities

Responsibilities in relation to Joint Claims for JSA

Other responsibilities (mainstream or New Deal)

Length of service/previous experience

Main motivations for becoming a PA

Joint Claims for JSA implementation

Any thoughts on this new initiative

How was it introduced in this office

Training received – when was this

Guidance

Joint Claims for JSA process

The process for dealing with Joint Claims for JSA – including provision of IT
Management structure – who does what
How initial contact is made
Number of interviews undertaken with joint claimants – length
Any follow up
Impact of talking to new claimants upon advisory process
Preference for individual/joint interviews
Non-attendance and any associated difficulties
Outline the range of services offered
Details of questions asked and information given at interviews
What works well
What works least well
Gaps
Referrals to NDYP or other programmes
What types of jobs have you been able to place joint claimants into

Training for joint claimants

Is training available adequate for the client group:
breadth
quality
relevance
level
accessibility
location
Any changes to training provision

Joint claimants as a client group

What are the barriers to work
Will Joint Claims for JSA help workless households
What difference has offering support and advice to partners made

Potential impact of Joint Claims for JSA

Reactions of previous dependent partners to 'signing-on'
Appropriate help, advice and training available – examples
Numbers of joint claimants into work/types of employment
What has happened to those who have not found work

Overall impressions

Strengths and benefits of Joint Claims for JSA
Any disadvantages/adverse effects

The good practice that has been identified
Any improvements for the future
Any effects on the local labour market
Thoughts on extending the initiative

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank the respondent and close the interview

Appendix D: Topic guide – Receptionist

Aims

- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA assists young and long-term unemployed people and their partners into work and improves their prospects of staying in and progressing in employment
- assess whether Joint Claims for JSA contributes to the long-term employability of young and long-term unemployed people and their partners
- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA helps couples in workless households to enter employment (and those already in part-time employment to access full-time work).
- explore attitudes to work among young and long-term unemployed people
- consider the perceived and actual barriers to work and explore solutions
- ascertain the attitudes of Jobseekers and their partners to finding work in light of the implementation of Joint Claims for JSA

Introduction

Introduce yourself and your organisation

Describe the study – aims and objectives, timetable etc. Stress that we are evaluating policy at the national level and not the performance of individual Jobcentres

Confidentiality assurance

Quick run through of key themes to be explored in interview

[Be prepared to discuss the positive aspects of tape recording interviews if the respondent feels uncomfortable]

Background information

How long have you been working on reception. Previous work experience

Why started working for Employment Service

Responsibilities in relation to Joint Claims for JSA

Other roles and responsibilities

How much of their current workload is devoted to Joint Claims for JSA – is it enough

Joint Claims for JSA implementation

Any thoughts on this new initiative

How was Joint Claims for JSA introduced in this office

Training received

Guidance from other colleagues

Joint Claims for JSA process

How have they dealt with the current stock – provision of information
Identification of joint claimants
How initial contact is made
Dealing with joint claimants in face-to-face situations
Number of joint claimants they have dealt with – how many come as a couple
Non-attendance
Any stated preference for individual/joint interviews
Reactions of previous dependent partners to ‘signing-on’
Any factors they take into account when allocating a PA
Details of any other questions asked/information wanted from joint claimants
Any impacts on their own workload, or other roles and responsibilities

Joint claimants as a client group

What are the difficulties in finding work in this area
Can Joint Claims for JSA help workless households to find work

Overall impressions

Strengths and benefits of Joint Claims for JSA
Any disadvantages/adverse effects
Good practice they have experienced or identified
Any improvements for the future

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank the respondent and close the interview

Appendix E: Topic guide – Benefits Agency staff

Aims

- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA assists young and long-term unemployed people and their partners into work and improves their prospects of staying in and progressing in employment
- assess whether Joint Claims for JSA contributes to the long-term employability of young and long-term unemployed people and their partners
- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA helps couples in workless households to enter employment (and those already in part-time employment to access full-time work).
- explore attitudes to work among young and long-term unemployed people
- consider the perceived and actual barriers to work and explore solutions
- ascertain the attitudes of Jobseekers and their partners to finding work in light of the implementation of Joint Claims for JSA

NB – This is likely to be either an administrative member of staff, or an executive officer, but it is important to ensure that interviews are spread out among these types and perhaps to include a visiting officer, though this is likely to be difficult, even in the second phase.

Introduction

Introduce yourself and your organisation

Describe the study – aims and objectives, timetable etc. Stress that we are evaluating policy at the national level and not the performance of individual Jobcentres

Confidentiality assurance

Quick run through of key themes to be explored in interview

[Be prepared to discuss the positive aspects of tape recording interviews if the respondent feels uncomfortable]

Background information

How long have you been working for the BA

Describe role and responsibilities in relation to Joint Claims for JSA

How much of their time is spent/allocated to Joint Claims for JSA – is this enough

Describe other responsibilities – any overlap or conflict

Length of service/previous experience

Joint Claims for JSA implementation

Any thoughts on this new initiative
How was it introduced to them, and in this office (if applicable)
Training received – including IT
Guidance

Joint Claims for JSA process

The process for dealing with Joint Claims for JSA – including use of IT
Management structure in the BA – who does what
Extent of inter-agency working with the ES – good practice
Main difficulties in relating claims that have been identified
Types of queries and situations they have had to deal with
What works well
What works least well
Gaps in benefits procedures

Overall impressions

Strengths and benefits of Joint Claims for JSA
Any disadvantages/adverse effects
Good practice identified
Any improvements for the future

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank the respondent and close the interview

Appendix F: Topic guide – Training providers

Aims

- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA assists young and long-term unemployed people and their partners into work and improves their prospects of staying in and progressing in employment
- assess whether Joint Claims for JSA contributes to the long-term employability of young and long-term unemployed people and their partners
- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA helps couples in workless households to enter employment (and those already in part-time employment to access full-time work).
- explore attitudes to work among young and long-term unemployed people
- consider the perceived and actual barriers to work and explore solutions
- ascertain the attitudes of Jobseekers and their partners to finding work in light of the implementation of Joint Claims for JSA

Introduction

Introduce yourself and your organisation. Stress your independence from the ES/BA

Describe the study – aims and objectives, timetable etc.

Confidentiality assurance

Quick run through the themes to be explored in interview

Background information

Describe your organisation

Your role

Nature of the training provided

Targets groups, e.g. JSA joint claimants

Aim of the training

The current condition of the local labour market

Training for jobseekers (NB – training providers may not be able to identify joint claimants)

What training and advice do you offer

Specific needs of the client group (probe for levels of literacy among client group)

Style of training offered (formal classes, work placements etc.)

Which styles work well

Volume of throughput and price

Describe the process of taking on a jobseeker (joint claimant)
Referral from personal adviser
Information forwarded on the Jobseeker
Scope for tailoring the training to an individual's needs
Attendance and/or drop-out rates
Monitoring of the Jobseeker's progression (by provider and PA)
Referral onwards from the training into employment.

How could training provision be improved

Any major differences in training offered pre- and post Joint Claims for JSA

Collaborative arrangements

What contact do you have with the PAs
Do you consider the role of the PA to be a positive development in helping Jobseekers
Any development work with PAs/employers to design specialist training

Contact with local employers

Any contact with other initiatives (ESF, voluntary sector, etc.)

Motivation of joint claimants

The main motivations for participants
Does motivation match skills and expertise of participants

Barriers faced by joint claimants

Barriers to work
How significant are the barriers
Local barriers
Barriers to training – basic skills levels
The role of training in overcoming the barriers
Gaps between work available and the training courses provided

Joint Claims for JSA – solutions found

What difference does training make (any examples)
Outcomes from training (e.g. employment, further education etc.)

Complete the interview and thank the individual

Appendix G: Joint Claims for JSA Stage Two – Analysis Framework

The aim of this framework is to pull out the salient points from the interviews and place them in a framework to unpack the write-ups and transcriptions of the interviews.

As stated on each topic guide, the main aims of the research were as follows:

- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA assists young and long-term unemployed people and their partners into work and improves their prospects of staying in and progressing in employment
- assess whether Joint Claims for JSA contributes to the long-term employability of young and long-term unemployed people and their partners
- identify whether Joint Claims for JSA helps couples in workless households to enter employment (and those already in part-time employment to access full-time work).
- explore attitudes to work among young and long-term unemployed people
- consider the perceived and actual barriers to work and explore solutions
- ascertain the attitudes of Jobseekers and their partners to finding work in light of the implementation of Joint Claims for JSA

This framework has been constructed in order to use the various topic guides and their sub-headings as signposts to the main issues. In addition, these will be crosscut with the above research aims and objectives to provide breadth and depth to the analysis. This entails breaking down the research into a number of areas, which are described below.

Strategy and planning

The construction of the strategy and involvement of staff; temporal effects; levels of consultation; resolution of practical concerns; planning and delivery of staff training – adequacy/helpfulness, and would anything else have been helpful; views on CBT; concerns for future (staff and clients).

Implementation

Number of claims processed; issues arising from that; availability, accessibility and quality of 'pre-go-live day' information (depth and breadth); level and quality of staff training, including missing elements and value added; temporal questions; impact on workloads; differences in ONE areas to other units of delivery; IT systems.

Process, organisation and management

Breakdown of the procedures and protocols as understood by interviewees, especially re processing and filling in forms and identification of stock at initial

stages; length of time for interviews (and differences and why); issuing of 'informal directives' re interviewing; where the initial focus to be (claimant or 'partner'); concerns for staff and clients; oversights and missed opportunities; any interesting outcomes (referrals to programme centres, etc.); levels and quality of feedback received; budgetary questions; experiences of dealing with a joint claim (+ve/-ve); separate or joint interviews – PA preferences; mixed messages re what to do with partners; follow up (or lack thereof).

Staffing and resources

Sufficiency of levels; interview skills adaptation; contact with increased variety of clients (those with longer 'distance to travel'); caseload management; strategic use of experienced PAs; impact at 'the front end' of the service; increased workloads/'things' to remember; qualities of effective staff; availability for training re joint interviews; differences between large and small Jobcentres; spatial relations within offices (layout and privacy issues).

Barriers to work (Including personal and local labour market)

'Distance to travel' for 'partners' who have been away from labour market; length of claim; health; basic skills; soft indicators; key skills; need for in-work support and attitudes of employers to this; fear of change; transport; pro-activity of clients (or lack thereof); provision of information; confidence levels; low wages; difficulties involved in clients having to admit to something (such as addictive illnesses); difficulties with seasonality; specific barriers for partners.

Inter-agency working/collaborative arrangements

Raison d'être of ONE; disability links; further education; employers; discontinuity between stock and availability; differences between ESJs, ONE and training providers; closer integration of BA and ESJ staff (+ve/-ve); bridging gap between labour market and benefit (or not); cultural discontinuities; support agencies (especially for housing and addictive illnesses); speed of service delivery; contact with agencies re Joint Claims for JSA (or lack thereof); territoriality; locally specific difficulties.

Training provision and gaps

Any targeting; benefits and disincentives; collaborative arrangements among trainers; knowledge of PAs re availability, quality and clients' suitability; variety, breadth and depth of availability; types of training available and differences between them; referred unless job guaranteed; attendance and drop-out rates; models that work well (and those that do not); resistance (being sent there by Jobcentre); confusion because of recent changes; clarity of rules and regulations; role of micro-labour markets; outreach to clients.

Overall impressions/potential impacts

Good/bad thing; rhetoric versus reality; complications of the system; views on extensions; tailoring to meet needs of other clients; joint or separate interviews; differences in resourcing creating differences in impacts; impact on fraud; impact on minority ethnic couples; teething problems versus structural inadequacies; paperwork; dialogue between claimants; any labour-market impacts to date; encouraging people into work; information and communication technologies; complexity; disincentives of only one working; perception of partners' reactions, e.g. partners' understanding of labour-market requirements.

Performance and outcomes

Differences (if any) between stock and fresh claims, and between joint claims and other JSA claims once in the system; monitoring of clients' progress/use of Client Progress Kit; use of quality assurance; role of senior PAs; tracking of clients; follow-up work, especially re New Deal.

Strengths and weaknesses, successes and failure – models of good practice

Too early to tell? Examples and outcomes.

Please note that an over-riding concern implicit within this framework is the focus on the *household* and the potential impacts that Joint Claims for JSA may have upon that.

Conclusions

Actions/issues for the ES