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Qualitative evaluation of the Jobseeker Mandatory Activity (JMA)

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A report of research carried out by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social
Research, Sheffield Hallam University on behalf of the Department for Work and
Pensions

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Contents

Acknowledgements	v
The Authors.....	vi
Abbreviations.....	vii
Summary	1
1 Introduction	7
1.1 Background	7
1.2 Aims and objectives of the evaluation	7
1.3 Method	8
1.4 Structure of the report	9
2 Programme design	11
2.1 The origins of the JMA	11
2.2 Key features of the programme	11
2.3 Programme rationale	12
2.4 The influence of previous programmes	13
2.5 The role played by practitioners	13
2.6 Objectives.....	14
2.7 The current policy context	14
3 The Jobseeker Mandatory Activity Pilot	17
3.1 Introduction.....	17
3.2 Course origins	17
3.3 Course content and duration	18

3.4.	Course changes	20
3.5	Approaches taken to improving confidence and motivation	21
3.6	Strengths and weaknesses of provision	21
3.7	Staffing issues.....	23
3.8	The conduct of follow-up interviews	24
4	Key evaluation findings	29
4.1	Introduction.....	29
4.2	Meeting individual needs.....	29
4.3	Dealing with challenging behaviour	31
4.4	Sanctioning activities	33
4.5	Action planning	34
4.6	Partnership working.....	37
4.7	Beneficiaries	40
4.8	Messages from personal adviser interviews	41
4.9	Participant interviews.....	43
4.10	Impact of the pilot.....	45
5	Conclusions and recommendations	47
5.1	Introduction.....	47
5.2	When to intervene	47
5.3	Action plans	48
5.4	What works.....	48
5.5	Implications for the Flexible New Deal	49
Appendix	Discussion guides	51
References	69

List of tables

Table 3.1	JMA course content and delivery	19
Table 3.2	Key changes to course content	21
Table 3.3	Key strengths and weaknesses of course provision.....	22
Table 3.4	Key emerging staffing issues.....	24
Table 4.1	Two approaches to action planning.....	34

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Abbreviations

CRESR	Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research
CSCS	Construction Skills Certificate Scheme
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DMA	Decision Making and Appeals
ESOL	English as a Second Language
GOALS	Gaining Opportunities and Living Skills
IT	Information Technology
JMA	Jobseeker Mandatory Activity
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
JSAg	Jobseeker's Agreement
LMS	Labour Market System
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
PA	Personal Adviser
SHU	Sheffield Hallam University
UK	United Kingdom

Summary

Background

This report presents the key findings of a qualitative evaluation research programme that has examined the implementation of the Jobseeker Mandatory Activity (JMA) pilot. The JMA provided extra support to help Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants back into employment. The focus was on those aged 25 years or more who had been claiming benefits for six months. The pilot was tested in ten areas over a two-year period with the first customers entering provision in April 2006.

The intervention comprised a three day work-focused course followed by three Jobcentre Plus personal adviser interviews. The course and follow-up interviews were all mandatory and participants were informed that failure to attend would result in a one-week benefit sanction. A range of external providers were used for course delivery. They were instructed to ensure that courses were capable of meeting individual needs. A key outcome was the production of an action plan for each participant which sought to identify the steps necessary for re-engaging with the labour market.

The evaluation of the JMA

The evaluation of the JMA was undertaken by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University. The study was a formative evaluation that sought to support the process of improvement. The aim was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot and any emerging lessons for policy makers and practitioners. The evaluation combined direct observation of the delivery of 12 JMA courses, desk-based analysis of 60 action plans and 187 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with key stakeholders carried out in two waves. The second wave of interviews sought to capture any changes made to processes and procedures, i.e. the learning process that had taken place in the intervening period.

Observational fieldwork was conducted to explore how different providers delivered the courses, any changes made in the light of experience, and the way

in which participants reacted to provision. The observation was overt rather than covert and was undertaken as a prelude to discussion with providers. A standard checklist was devised to help the evaluators capture relevant data. A protocol was also developed to guide the conduct of the observational research.

Programme design

The decision to target support at those claiming JSA for six months or more was made because it would not be cost-effective to offer help before this period, i.e. deadweight levels would be high. A motivation course was selected because previous research had shown that long-term unemployed people may become demoralised. It is also known that increasing the range of job search and its intensity can help people to secure employment.

The JMA was a 'work first' programme in that it sought to help participants into work quickly rather than develop their human capital. The design of the intervention was influenced by previous activation programmes, most notably 'Restart'. The latter was introduced in 1986 and sought to enforce job search among claimants of active benefits by the provision of job counselling interviews and job search courses. A national evaluation found that it was a cost-effective means of reducing the claimant count and assisting jobseekers back into work. The pilot incorporated three key lessons from the experience of Restart:

- the Restart course was too long. It initially lasted for two weeks before it was reduced to one week. The JMA courses lasted for three days;
- the Restart course was too expensive. In contrast, the JMA was the minimum viable length in terms of funding;
- Restart was unable to sustain improvements in confidence and motivation. The JMA used three follow-up interviews with personal advisers to do so.

The Jobseeker Mandatory Activity pilot

It was originally envisaged that the focus of courses would be on examining job aspirations; motivation; emphasising rights and responsibilities and job search. The evaluation revealed that both course content and delivery has varied widely. Providers have, for example, taken two very different approaches to improving self-confidence and motivation. Some have employed cognitive behavioural techniques or have used motivational speaking to boost self-belief. In contrast, others have sought to raise motivation by improving the knowledge of the job application/interview process and by getting participants to focus on what they have to offer potential employers.

Past experience suggests that the way in which pilots are staffed may exert a powerful influence of their subsequent performance. At the outset some providers miscalculated the resources that would be required and some tutors lacked the

necessary skills and training. Staff turnover became an issue in many areas. A combination of low pay and the stress of dealing with difficult customers were contributory factors. Some providers recognised the need to manage the pressures on tutors to improve staff retention. However, it is significant that few instigated programmes of further training to improve course delivery.

The way in which Jobcentre Plus management have deployed their adviser team has varied. The most common model was for JMA duties to be shared amongst teams. This has allowed management to exercise more control over staff diaries. However, many individuals found juggling different responsibilities more challenging and this approach was reliant on experienced teams coupled with strong management support. In contrast, implementation in Cumbria and Bedford involved dedicated advisers who only took on other customers if they had the capacity to do so. The conduct of follow-up interviews has worked best where specialist advisers have spent considerably more time with individuals.

Key evaluation findings

Providers were encouraged to ensure that course were capable of meeting the potentially disparate needs of customers. However, this was compromised by several factors: First, groups have been mixed in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and previous occupation. Yet there has been little attempt to identify occupational backgrounds and sit similar people together for role play and group work. Second, the flat rate fee has encouraged some to deliver courses to large group sizes which made it difficult to meet individual needs. Third, many customers had basic skills needs which were not accommodated. Fourth, there have been significant numbers of English as a Second Language (ESOL) customers in Calderdale and Kirklees, South London and parts of Bedfordshire whose needs were not met.

Challenging behaviour has been a feature of course delivery and has taken three forms: First, many participants have been anxious and withdrawn although this often dissipated during the first morning. Second, the biggest challenge has been a lack of enthusiasm and engagement. Some participants have maintained a low profile whereas some young men have attempted to wrest control of groups. Finally, a small number of customers have been aggressive and violent. Some have been removed from provision. These problems intensified during the latter stages of the piloting period as providers dealt with a growing number of re-referrals.

Failure to attend any element of the pilot resulted in a mandatory one-week benefit sanction. There was strong support for the mandatory nature of the JMA. It was frequently pointed out that most customers would not have attended voluntarily. Relatively few of those sanctioned were subsequently penalised again. Sanctions were intended to produce a 'deterrent effect' on those claiming fraudulently. It appears that the pilot had a modest impact on fraud. A few advisers reported that some customers came off the register before the JMA and then resigned; others moved onto other benefits; and some signed off altogether.

A key outcome of the course was an action plan which identified the steps necessary for re-engaging with the labour market. It was envisaged that the plan would play a key role in tailoring the intervention to the needs of individuals. The observations revealed a marked difference between highly directive and flexible approaches. In the former, the time spent with individuals preparing their plan could be as little as 15 minutes and was often left until the final afternoon. Staffordshire and Cumbrian providers took a more personalised approach where the plan was progressively produced over the three days. Many of the course activities were designed to feed into the document which took up to two hours to complete.

The way in which plans were produced had a significant bearing on their quality and usefulness. In many areas a lack of customer ownership and the generic nature of many plans undermined their usefulness. The result was that advisers often derived little new intelligence about individual jobseekers. A lack of clarity about the target audience also limited the extent to which they formed useful, living documents. The process has worked best in Cumbria where dedicated advisers have had sufficient time set aside to fully explore issues and possibilities following a well received course.

The main beneficiaries of the JMA have been groups closest to the labour market. Provision has often helped to provide the 'final push' to help them into work. However, there have been several groups that were resistant to provision and/or failed to realise the full benefits. These have included: ESOL customers; individuals with poor basic skills; executive and other professional jobseekers; blue collar workers and those with drug and/or alcohol problems.

Conclusions and recommendations

The JMA has raised the confidence and motivation of many customers especially those that were initially well disposed to the intervention and reasonably motivated. Participant interviews revealed that positive impacts were most apparent in Staffordshire and Cheshire and Warrington. Provision has often had a 'therapeutic effect' on individual self-esteem which has resulted in tangible behavioural changes. Nevertheless, the evaluation has raised questions about the sustainability of such improvements, especially in the event that job goals were not quickly realised.

The pilot has had little impact on either the intensity of job search or the way in which work was sought. Very few individuals appear to have viewed prior warnings and possible sanctions as a threat and redoubled their efforts to find work. Many customers had their own 'tried and tested' approaches to finding work which they were unwilling to modify. Where change has occurred it has usually entailed widening job search methods to include greater use of the internet or informal sources and making speculative approaches to employers.

There is no 'magic bullet'; all pilots had strengths and weaknesses. A key finding is that the way in which pilots were delivered was just as important as course content or the particular approach taken to improving confidence and motivation. The JMA has worked best where dedicated staff (both tutors and personal advisers) were able to spend sufficient time with individuals. The time devoted to both action planning and the conduct of follow-up interviews emerged as a key indicator of quality.

The approach taken to course delivery was often a reflection of the organisational culture of the provider. The different approaches that have been taken with regard to course sizes; action planning processes; and dealing with falling referral levels in the second year have been a recurring theme. Organisational capacity and culture can thus make a significant difference to pilot outcomes. This suggests that future procurement exercises should ensure that successful bidders are better able to strike an appropriate balance between meeting business needs and the needs of customers.

The indications are that four or five days would have been a more appropriate course length. This would have allowed providers more time to tackle material in greater depth and give increased consideration to the production of individually tailored action plans. The Gaining Opportunities and Living Skills (GOALS) course is a possible exception because it could be used as a two-day course to improve the self-belief and enthusiasm of some groups. An ability to improve the attitudes of some customers was the basis of its popularity with advisers. Many have argued that it would be better to vary the number and duration of follow-up interviews according to individual need. However, the danger in the current climate is that some advisers would automatically scale them back to the bare minimum.

The present research has a number of implications for the implementation of the Flexible New Deal. These are discussed with reference to the:

- use of one-week sanctions for non-attendance;
- quality and usefulness of back-to-work plans;
- menu of activities made available at stage three.

The use of one-week sanctions has been relatively ineffective with customers that '*know how to play the system*'. These individuals often employed effective avoidance strategies such as making a short break in a claim or switching benefits. The effectiveness of sanctioning might be improved by tightening up loopholes which allow some to discontinue claims for very short periods in order to avoid participating in time-based interventions.

The UK Government's proposals envisage that at the six-month claim stage JSA customers would enter a supported jobsearch stage. A formal review with a personal adviser would be undertaken and a back-to-work plan finalised. A key message from the present research is that advisers will need to spend the necessary time with individuals to build relationships of trust so that all relevant

barriers to work can be identified and necessary steps back into the labour market are detailed. Claimants must play an active role in the process so that they have a sense of 'ownership' of the plan and some commitment to realising its aims. Back-to-work plans must also strike an appropriate balance between short-term and longer-term goals. A longer-term approach involving vocational training will be necessary for some if they are to access jobs that pay well and offer opportunities for progression.

Motivational provision might be an appropriate part of the menu of agreed activities during stage three of the Flexible New Deal. The present study finds that this would be most appropriate for those relatively close to the labour market. Future provision would be improved by undertaking initial screening exercises to identify the needs of customers and previous occupational experience. It would then be possible to minimise some of the difficulties caused by extremely diverse course groups and develop a broader range of provision, including ESOL and executive courses, to meet identified needs.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This report is the final in a series that has examined the implementation of the JMA pilot. It seeks to synthesise the key findings of a qualitative evaluation research programme that has spanned over 28 months and generated seven summary reports, an interim report and seven presentations of emerging findings. The report has been prepared for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) by CRESR at Sheffield Hallam University.

The JMA pilot was a 'work first' programme in that it sought to help participants into work quickly rather than develop their human capital. It provided extra support to help JSA claimants back into the labour market. The focus was on those aged 25 years or more who had been claiming benefit for six months. The intervention comprised a three-day work-focused course followed by three personal adviser interviews at intervals of two weeks. The pilot was tested over a two-year period with the first customers entering provision in April 2006.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the evaluation

The study was a formative rather than a summative evaluation. The former are undertaken in order to '*provide feedback to people who are trying to improve something*' (Scriven, 1980: 6). The primary purpose was, therefore, '*to support the process of improvement*' (Scriven, 1991:20). The aim was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot and any emerging lessons for policy makers and practitioners. The key objectives were to:

- find out the extent to which the pilot programme affects behaviours and improves the soft skills abilities (motivation, confidence, job search, job applications) of participants;

- explore the effects of the mandatory nature of provision together with sanctioning activity for non-attendance;
- inform good practice by providing a formative aspect to the evaluation.

1.3 Method

The general approach adopted by the evaluators recognised that in order to support the process of improvement policy makers needed regular information on how the pilot was being implemented and any issues arising. Consequently, the evaluation design prioritised the collection of data at regular intervals during the piloting period. The key findings were then identified and summarised in a series of seven short summary reports and an interim report.

The evaluation has combined direct observation of the delivery of 12 JMA courses, desk-based analysis of 60 action plans and 187 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with key stakeholders. The interviews were carried out in two waves and included:

- staff responsible for the design of the programme;
- participants;
- JMA course provider staff including tutors, designers and those in managerial positions;
- Jobcentre Plus personal advisers and managers.

All interviews were recorded, subject to the individual giving permission. Recordings were used for data capture purposes and were not transcribed. The second wave of interviews included an additional element of questioning that explored the changes to processes and procedures, i.e. the learning that had taken place in the intervening period.

Observational fieldwork was a distinctive feature of the evaluation design. It was conducted to explore how different providers delivered the courses, any changes made in the light of experience, and the way in which participants reacted to provision. The observation was overt rather than covert and was undertaken as a prelude to discussions with providers. A standard checklist was devised to help the evaluators capture the relevant data. The evaluators also developed a protocol to guide the conduct of the observational research.

Wave one of the evaluation programme identified some concerns with the quality of the action plans produced by providers. Consequently, during year two, 60 of the most recent action plans from each district were acquired by the research team for a desk-based review. An assessment framework was developed for this purpose. Key criteria included:

- the clarity and appropriateness of job goals;
- the extent to which the plan sought to meet individual needs;

- the extent to which the action necessary to move an individual closer to the labour market was clearly identified;
- their usefulness as a practical tool.

1.4 Structure of the report

The remainder of the report is organised in the following manner. Chapter 2 outlines the origins of the programme, its rationale and key design features. Chapter 3 examines the way in which the pilot was implemented. It considers course origins and content, approaches taken to improving the confidence and motivation of participants and the strengths and weaknesses of provision. The focus then shifts to the way in which providers have staffed the JMA and the conduct of follow-up interviews with personal advisers. Chapter 4 presents some of the key findings emerging from the evaluation. Chapter 5 articulates some of the main conclusions and considers the implications of our research for the Flexible New Deal.

2 Programme design

2.1 The origins of the JMA

The UK Government announced its intention to pilot the JMA in the December 2003 Pre-Budget Report. The intervention was promoted as a key means of ensuring that JSA claimants had effective support for job search to enable them to take advantage of employment opportunity. It arose from concerns that the JSA intervention regime was not working well for those unemployed for more than six months. In particular, policy makers had identified a gap in the available support for those unemployed between six and 18 months.

2.2 Key features of the programme

The intervention comprised a three-day work-focussed course followed by three personal adviser interviews at intervals of two weeks. The course and follow-up interviews were all mandatory and participants were informed that failure to attend would result in a one-week benefit sanction. Adviser guidance stipulated that since appointments for the course and follow-up interviews were agreed with the customer, non-attendance should only occur in exceptional cases and instances where the individual has suffered a genuine problem. Investigating the effect of one-week sanctions was one of the objectives of the programme (see Section 2.6).

Personal advisers were not responsible for sanctioning activity. Individuals were to be given two chances to participate, on the third time they were to be submitted to decision makers with a view to stopping their benefit altogether. Failure to attend three times in succession was deemed to raise questions about whether the individual could still be classed as available and actively seeking for work. It is important to appreciate that the JMA extended sanctioning activity.

The focus of the JMA course was on examining job aspirations; motivation; emphasising rights and responsibilities; and job search. A range of external providers were used for delivery. They were instructed to ensure that courses were capable of meeting individual needs. A maximum of 12 participants were expected

to attend each course. The providers were paid a flat rate fee (£200 per head) for each individual completing provision.

A key outcome was the production of an action plan for each participant which sought to identify the steps necessary for re-engaging with the labour market. The plan was to play a key role in tailoring the intervention to the needs of the individual. Provider guidance stipulated that it must detail:

- the provision attended and record of completion;
- job goals and the steps to be taken to achieve them;
- when reviews are to take place and their results;
- previous work history (where appropriate);
- previous skills and experience (where appropriate);
- previous training undertaken by the participant and qualifications obtained;
- real or perceived barriers to employment identified with the steps to overcome them;
- steps that need to be undertaken to ensure achievement of their goal;
- detailed information on the activities involved.

Providers were instructed to ensure that action plans were 'SSMART' (i.e. Stretching, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound). The intention was that personal advisers would use them during the follow-up interviews to help jobseekers back into work. Interviews were to focus on meeting the goals identified in action plans. The plan was to be sent to the customer's personal adviser in readiness for the first follow-up interview.

2.3 Programme rationale

The main economic justification of the programme was to keep long-term unemployed people actively seeking work to maximise the level of employment consistent with stable process or low and stable inflation. The decision to target support at those claiming JSA for six months or more was made because it would not be cost-effective to offer help before this period because many individuals leave benefit anyway i.e. levels of deadweight would be high. In this context deadweight is taken to mean the proportion of individuals that would have obtained employment regardless of participating in the JMA.

A motivation course was selected because previous research had shown that long-term unemployed people may become demoralised. It is also known that increasing the range of job search and its intensity can, in certain circumstances, help people to secure employment. Furthermore, the experience of the Restart programme suggested that mandatory provision for individuals reaching a particular duration may be effective at reducing the claimant count. The mandatory nature of the

JMA programme was also consistent with the growing use of compulsion in UK active labour market policies.

2.4 The influence of previous programmes

The design of policy pilots is often influenced by previous experiences. The JMA was a 'work first' programme in that it sought to help participants into work quickly rather than develop their human capital. This reflected the prevailing view amongst UK policy makers that such approaches may be more effective with some groups than programmes which place a greater emphasis on training. The design of the intervention was influenced by previous activation programmes, most notably 'Restart' and 'Jobsearch Seminars'.

Restart was introduced in 1986 and was targeted at those unemployed for six months or more. It sought to enforce job search among claimants of active benefits by the provision of job counselling interviews and job search courses. A national evaluation found that it was a cost-effective means of reducing the claimant count and assisting jobseekers back into employment. Many individuals discontinued their claim without attending the programme. It was, however, not clear which components of the programme (counselling, job search assistance or the threat of benefit sanctions) were the most effective at helping participants into work.

Interviews with JMA design staff revealed that cost had been a key consideration in determining the length of the course and the number of follow-up interviews. The pilot incorporated three key lessons from the experience of Restart:

- the Restart course was too long. It initially lasted for two weeks before it was reduced to one week. The JMA courses lasted three days;
- the Restart course was too expensive. In contrast, design staff revealed that the course was deemed to be *'the minimum viable length in terms of funding'*;
- Restart was unable to sustain improvements in confidence and motivation. The JMA used three follow-up interviews with personal advisers to do so.

2.5 The role played by practitioners

The JMA was developed centrally by the DWP Strategy Team. Personal advisers played a minor role in its design. A workshop was held for Jobcentre Plus Operation's staff to explain the policy and outline the possible consequences of its implementation. It met with a positive response from the Agency's management staff and was described by design staff as: *'a fulfilment of their wishes'*.

The selection of pilot sites was also undertaken centrally. This task was complicated by the re-organisation of Jobcentre Plus Districts. Despite the challenging context of headcount reductions and efficiency savings; the reorganisation of Jobcentre Plus Districts and the roll-out of integrated offices, none of the chosen Districts

declined the opportunity to pilot the JMA. This was probably due to the extra resources that were made available for piloting the initiative and the desire of management staff to test new initiatives.

2.6 Objectives

The JMA had five objectives:

- reduce the proportion of adult long-term unemployed compared to national and comparator areas;
- increase off-flows from unemployment between six and 12 months and JSA sign-offs going into work compared to the national and comparator areas;
- improve the confidence and motivation of participants to find work over national and comparator areas;
- test the effectiveness of mandatory one-week sanctions;
- produce financial savings (in terms of lower benefit payments and tax flow-backs) which exceed costs.

Interviews with DWP staff involved in the design of the pilot revealed a hierarchy of programme performance measures. A context of rises in the JSA claimant count meant that the effect on the register was deemed to be the most important measure of success. Policy makers were also anticipating 'deterrent effects' on those claiming JSA. Helping customers into work in a cost-effective manner was another, albeit less important, consideration.

2.7 The current policy context

The UK Government has continued its programme of welfare reform since the launch of the JMA. The Green Paper *'In work, better off: next steps to full employment'*, and *'World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England'* have set out how the Government intends to move towards a 80 per cent employment rate and world class skill aspirations. The emerging strategy will be based on five core principles:

- a stronger framework of rights and responsibilities to help move benefit claimants into work;
- a personalised and responsive approach;
- partnership – the public, private and third sectors working together;
- targeting areas of high worklessness by devolving and empowering communities;
- jobs that pay and offer opportunities for progression.

A key innovation will be the introduction of a Flexible New Deal for all jobseekers which will replace the separate New Deals for young people and unemployed adults. The key features of which will include:

- Jobcentre Plus will lead job search for the first 12 months of a claim;
- entrance into a supported jobsearch stage after six months leading to more intensive job search activity and skills assessment. A back-to-work action plan will be agreed with a personal adviser selecting from a menu of mandatory activities aimed at improving employability and job chances;
- the level of support and conditionality will be escalated throughout a claim;
- people still looking for work after 12 months to be referred to a specialist provider.

The final chapter of this report discusses some of the implications of the present research for the implementation of the Flexible New Deal.

3 The Jobseeker Mandatory Activity Pilot

3.1 Introduction

The JMA was piloted in ten areas exemplifying a range of population densities and labour market conditions. A procurement exercise led to contracts being awarded to several external providers. The evaluation was conducted in six sites:

- Bedfordshire;
- Calderdale and Kirklees;
- Cheshire and Warrington;
- Cumbria;
- South London;
- Staffordshire.

3.2 Course origins

The origins of particular JMA courses have varied. In some areas (Cheshire and Warrington and Calderdale and Kirklees) the provider purchased the GOALS programme from another company. The latter was originally developed by Motivational Systems and the Foundation for Self-Esteem in co-operation with the Los Angeles County Office of Education and the County Department of Public Social Services Programme. In contrast, the course was specifically designed for the JMA in Bedfordshire, South London, Cumbria and Staffordshire. Providers had often drawn upon their experience of other programmes such as the New Deal. However, the Bedfordshire provider was keen to stress that it was not: *'a cut and paste job'*.

3.3 Course content and duration

Provider guidance stipulated that courses must be delivered over three consecutive working days with a minimum of six hours on each day. A lunch break of one hour per day was to be allowed, in addition to the six hours of provision and a simple lunch was to be made available. Providers were allowed to extend these hours but they could not shorten them. The guidance stipulated that each course was ideally to be delivered to 12 participants, although numbers could be reduced or increased with the prior agreement of Jobcentre Plus.

The guidance stipulated that the service offered by providers must:

- be innovative, flexible and take into account the diverse nature of the customer group, e.g. status such as cultural and educational levels as well as other differences;
- be delivered in a welcoming environment, as participants were likely to be apprehensive and potentially lacking in confidence;
- support a seamless service between Jobcentre Plus and the provider; and
- work closely with Jobcentre Plus.

It was envisaged that courses would focus on: confidence building and motivation; examination of job aspirations; identification of strengths and skills; identification of the barriers to work and how these may be overcome; job search skills; an emphasis on jobseekers' rights and responsibilities; identification of any training needs. Nevertheless, providers were given some flexibility with the result that both course content and delivery has varied widely between piloting areas (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 JMA course content and delivery

Pilot location	Course content
Bedfordshire	<p>The course was centred on the recruitment cycle with a strong focus on helping participants to produce more effective job application forms, covering and speculative letters and CVs.</p> <p>Course delivery relied on a single tutor speaking to the group but also entailed extensive use of video and some written exercises.</p>
Cheshire and Warrington; Calderdale and Kirklees	<p>The course used cognitive behavioural techniques and had a strong emphasis on improving the self-esteem of participants. It was highly structured but had some flexibility. Each participant received an illustrated guidebook, viewed extracts from an hour long DVD, had a personal diary and GOALS journal and a certificate.</p>
Cumbria	<p>The course was focused on the recruitment cycle and comprised a series of practical exercises and information sessions. Participants were encouraged to review and revise the types of jobs sought; sources of vacancy information; the barriers that they faced; the steps they can take to overcome them; and aspects of the job application process. Presentations from external organisations were used to signpost additional sources of help. Various resources were used including pre-prepared flipchart sheets, a 45-page handbook, off-the-shelf computer-based assessment exercises and an extensive range of handouts.</p>
South London	<p>The core elements included: a motivation and confidence building session; job search; help with CVs and interview techniques. Delivery was primarily through a single tutor speaking to the group but also included some written exercises; participants working in small groups; two short videos on CVs and three sessions on job search. Occasional short 'guest appearances' by other staff designed to raise awareness of training opportunities and a longer session on job search techniques and the benefit implications of work were additional features.</p>
Staffordshire	<p>The course made use of a 'tried and tested' diagnostic tool and focused on three key areas that are thought to affect employability: employment and education; family and relationships and health. The accent was on enabling participants to identify their aspirations and barriers. The deployment of several tutors and daily discussion amongst staff facilitated a flexible approach to delivery. Presentations from external organisations such as local colleges and Remploy were used to signpost participants to additional help.</p>

The JMA course lasted for three days but the indications are that four or five days would have been more appropriate for most courses. From the outset those responsible for designing the pilot acknowledged that three days was the minimum viable length. A majority of Jobcentre Plus staff felt that extending course length would have allowed providers more time to tackle material in greater depth and give increased consideration to the production of individually tailored action plans. The evaluators found that many attempted to squeeze action planning into the afternoon of the final day (see Section 4.5). A few indicated that it might also raise deterrent effects since more of those claiming fraudulently would have found it difficult to take a week off work. A minority view was that three days was sufficient

to convey the core messages. In contrast, most participants reported that three days was about right. Professional job seekers were more likely to report that courses were too long or could be dispensed with altogether.

The GOALS course is a possible exception because the present research suggests that it could be deployed as a two-day course to improve the self-belief and enthusiasm of some groups (see Section 4.7). This would necessitate dispensing with the production of action plans. Although it is not a panacea the indications are that, in the short-term, it can improve the attitudes of some customers and make them more receptive to advice and guidance. This is the basis of its popularity with some advisers. Nevertheless, some individuals will need to improve their skills as well as their attitudes if they are to access employment that pays well and offers opportunities for progression.

3.4. Course changes

The comparatively lengthy piloting period afforded ample opportunity for providers to reflect upon provision and make refinements in the light of experience and participant feedback. Table 3.2 details the changes made to course content over time. The main ones have included:

- although courses were generally delivered in a relaxed and welcoming environment some providers seeking to deal more effectively with the initial anxieties of participants. In Cheshire and Warrington, for example, a half hour 'settling in' session was introduced. The South London provider developed a common induction session across all four sites to combat 'fear of the unknown'. Similarly, a support worker settled Staffordshire participants on arrival and explained the course to them;
- during year two, a greater emphasis being on supplying practical help and advice. Many providers devoted more time to producing CVs and job application letters and rehearsing interview techniques. Customer feedback had often highlighted a desire to come away from the course with some form of tangible help;
- a reduction in the use of passive learning materials such as DVDs. This was most pronounced in Bedfordshire and Calderdale and Kirklees;
- the Staffordshire provider developing a broader range of provision including an ESOL JMA course to meet the diverse needs of participants;
- the method of delivery, typically a single tutor speaking to the group, largely remaining the same. However, two staff in Calderdale and Kirklees were deployed to explain the course to participants in year two. This allowed one member of staff to remove disruptive individuals from the group.

Table 3.2 Key changes to course content

Pilot location	Changes
Bedfordshire	Increased the time spent producing CVs, covering and speculative letters and rehearsing interview techniques. Much reduced use of videos (from three hours to 45 minutes).
Calderdale and Kirklees	Two staff spent the first 45 minutes on day one dealing with the negative attitudes of some participants. Dispensed with GOALS DVD.
Cheshire and Warrington	Greater emphasis on practical support, e.g. job search techniques, CVs, etc. Introduction of a half hour 'settling in' session on day one.
Cumbria	Additional time was devoted to CV preparation, application forms and action plans. Participants were no longer required to make a presentation about themselves to fellow participants.
South London	A common induction session was introduced across all four sites to help overcome initial anxieties. This included: welcome, health and safety, centre rules, complaints procedure, resources and course content.
Staffordshire	Developed extra support for those with learning difficulties. Learning support worker used to settle such individuals on arrival and explained the course to them. Tutors read from the workbook to ensure that those with literacy problems knew what was expected of them.

3.5 Approaches taken to improving confidence and motivation

The bidding guidance emphasised the need to motivate and inspire participants to find employment. Providers have generally taken two very different approaches to improving self-confidence and motivation. Those delivering courses in Calderdale and Kirklees, Cheshire and Warrington and South London have employed cognitive behavioural techniques or have used motivational speaking to boost self-belief. In contrast, others have sought to raise motivation by improving the knowledge of the job application/interview process and by getting participants to focus on what they have to offer potential employers rather than explicitly motivational activities. Section 4.7 discusses how different groups have responded to these two approaches.

3.6 Strengths and weaknesses of provision

The direct observations of course delivery combined with semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders has allowed the evaluators to gain an in-depth appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of course provision. The main findings are summarised in Table 3.3. The present study found that there is no 'magic bullet'; all pilots had strengths and weaknesses.

Table 3.3 Key strengths and weaknesses of course provision

Course	Strengths	Weaknesses
Bedfordshire	<p>Receipt of tangible help, e.g. improved CV.</p> <p>Good access to IT facilities.</p> <p>Referral to programme centre.</p>	<p>Over reliance on videos – subsequently reduced.</p> <p>Action planning is too directive and rushed.</p> <p>Little attempt to get participants to identify their own barriers.</p> <p>Written exercises are problematical for ESOL customers.</p> <p>Marketing of provision to customers.</p>
Calderdale and Kirklees	<p>Highly structured course.</p> <p>Mix of training methods (DVD, group work, written exercises, etc.).</p> <p>The course is broken down into small pieces. This helps to retain the attention of participants.</p> <p>Course challenges customer perceptions and makes them more proactive.</p> <p>Focus on raising self-esteem which is transferable to other areas of life.</p>	<p>Some resistance to key elements, e.g. 'career ladder'.</p> <p>Action planning is too directive and rushed.</p> <p>Action planning leaves participants unsupported for a large portion of the final day.</p> <p>Marketing of provision to customers.</p> <p>Complaints that the course is 'too Americanised'.</p>
Cheshire and Warrington	As above	As above
Cumbria	<p>Experienced tutors skilled at delivering material.</p> <p>Relaxed and flexible course delivery.</p> <p>Positive ethos of course which stressed customer capabilities.</p> <p>Personalised and flexible approach to action planning.</p> <p>Signposting to additional support.</p>	<p>Difficulties with staff retention with the result that some courses were understaffed.</p> <p>A lack of information on customer circumstances and needs prior to participation.</p> <p>Difficulties encountered meeting the varied needs of diverse groups.</p>
South London	<p>Commitment to continuous review and learning.</p> <p>Use of stories and anecdotes to engage participants.</p> <p>Use of individual interviews with dedicated 'action planners'.</p> <p>Mix of training methods, rhythms and styles.</p>	<p>Action planning is too directive, rushed and disruptive.</p> <p>Over-emphasis on motivational delivery.</p> <p>Struggled to accommodate diverse needs of participants.</p> <p>Poor training environment: cramped, hot and noisy.</p> <p>Preponderance of IT-based job search and less attention to interview skills and role play.</p>

Continued

Table 3.3 Continued

Course	Strengths	Weaknesses
Staffordshire	Use of a well regarded diagnostic tool. Allows customers to identify their own barriers to work and ensures a degree of ownership of action plan. Good level of one-to-one work. Signposting to additional support.	Section on 'self-reflection' is not well understood. A lack of confidentiality around action planning. Action planning is disruptive.

3.7 Staffing issues

Past experience suggests that the way in which pilots are staffed may exert a powerful influence on their subsequent performance. At the outset some providers miscalculated the resources that would be required. A few initially recruited small staff teams and were vulnerable to the problems caused by turnover and sickness. In Cheshire and Warrington the loss of tutors towards the start of the piloting period led to the remaining individuals delivering courses across the area which made it difficult to forge relationships with advisers. It also became quickly apparent that some tutors lacked the relevant skills and training. Others lacked experience of working with the long-term unemployed.

The evaluation found that tutors needed to possess a wide range of qualities and skills. The principal ones included: good interpersonal skills; a confident outgoing personality; excellent communication skills; enthusiasm; being empathetic and able to relate to the varied circumstances of customers. JMA course provider management in Calderdale and Kirklees reported that their best tutor had previously managed a public house and consequently was adept at building rapport with a range of different people. In contrast, a tutor with 25 years' experience of delivering corporate training had quickly left because they could not relate to the customer group. Some lacked the necessary training. A centre manager in South London explained that they had rebuilt a team to prioritise those with greater experience and appropriate training, e.g. NVQ Level 3 in Advice and Guidance.

Table 3.4 identifies some changes in the way in which pilots were staffed over time. Many experienced problems retaining tutors. It appears that a combination of low pay and the stress of dealing with difficult customers were acute in some areas. JMA course provider management staff in Calderdale and Kirklees acknowledged that:

'The pay structure did not reflect the difficulties of delivering the course.'

Difficulties retaining staff were compounded by the decision taken by some providers to reduce the size of their delivery teams in response to falling referral levels during year two. This often increased the workloads of the remaining staff with the result that poor morale became an issue in some areas. Nevertheless, the approach of the Cumbrian provider is instructive. The falling number of referrals

was addressed by getting tutors to work more flexibly to cover the courses delivered in Carlisle and Whitehaven.

Some providers recognised the need to manage the pressures on tutors to minimise the problem of 'burn-out' and improve staff retention. The Calderdale and Kirklees provider, for example, sought to ensure that tutors did not deliver 'back-to-back' courses and took a progressively more relaxed attitude towards staff leave so that individuals could 'recharge their batteries'. However, it is significant that few instigated programmes of further training in order to improve delivery. The South London pilot appeared to be the exception with bi-monthly trainer's days being held and tutors receiving training on issues such as conflict management and motivational speaking.

Table 3.4 Key emerging staffing issues

Pilot site	Key Issues
Bedfordshire	The provider maintained the core team in Bedford. The Luton office had suffered from frequent staff changes.
Calderdale and Kirklees	Tutor 'burn-out' became a significant issue especially in Halifax. Some tutors were pulled onto other provision, e.g. 'Jobfit'. The provider sought to ensure that tutors did not deliver courses district-wide.
Cheshire and Warrington	Tutor numbers were reduced from six to four which meant that some delivered courses district-wide. Staff morale became an issue because the provider could not guarantee employment beyond the piloting period.
Cumbria	New tutors were recruited in Barrow-in-Furness. Tutors in Carlisle and Whitehaven were encouraged to work flexibly to ensure sufficient support for participants in the two towns.
South London	Some use of locums to fill gaps in provision. Staff had training on first aid, conflict management, motivational speaking and received presentations on substance misuse and the needs of ex-offenders. Bi-monthly trainer's days were used to improve delivery.
Staffordshire	A dedicated manager was recruited. The staff team was enlarged to meet increased demand. Volunteers were increasingly deployed for some roles.

3.8 The conduct of follow-up interviews

Three follow-up interviews with a personal adviser were an integral part of the design of the pilot. The JMA Adviser Guidance recommended that the first follow-up interview should, if possible, occur one week after the end of the course and last 40 minutes. Subsequent interviews were to take place at fortnightly intervals. The follow-up interviews were to focus on job search and sought to maintain the individuals' confidence and motivation to find work. However, a context of headcount reductions in Jobcentre Plus and the agency's interview and job

submission targets has increased the workloads and competing pressures on personal advisers. An adviser in Wakefield confided that:

'My targets are set in stone. I have to do a certain number of interviews and job submissions. I am geared up to do that. They [targets] are at the back of my mind the whole time.'

The operational context of delivery has generated a number of implementation problems:

- growing caseloads have often constrained the amount of time that advisers spent with participants. A 48 year old Woolwich participant complained: *'Each one was less than 15 minutes. Less time than I was there waiting for them'*. It is in this context that some have expressed the view that three follow-up interviews were too many;
- competing pressures have slowed down key processes. A Wakefield adviser felt that: *'It is well nigh impossible to see them within one week'*. Advisers in Huddersfield estimated that it took four weeks to conduct the first follow-up interview. This was too long because: *'You need to strike whilst the iron is hot'* (personal adviser). Similar concerns were expressed in Bedford, Chester, Warrington and South London;
- follow-up interviews in some areas (Cheshire and Warrington and South London) were often not completed within the required timescale;
- some customers have been unable to see the same adviser for all three interviews;
- poor morale and adviser turnover has sometimes led to the deployment of inexperienced staff. Some had missed initial JMA training exercises. A Wakefield adviser, for example, complained that she had sought help from her colleagues about sanctioning procedures but found that they were all doing things differently;
- most personal advisers have often been too busy to attend JMA courses and devote the time necessary to establish good relationships with providers. Some customers were given misleading information. During an observation in Calderdale and Kirklees, for example, three individuals complained that they had been told that they would acquire a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card on the course. The latter is becoming an industry requirement for working on construction sites.

The JMA has used three follow-up interviews with personal advisers to help sustain improvements in confidence and motivation. Yet a context of headcount reductions and competing pressures in Jobcentre Plus has often meant that the necessary time has not been spent with individuals. This has had a significant impact on the performance of the pilot and has undermined its ability to sustain any improvements in confidence and motivation. In a few cases participants reported that the follow-up interviews were counter-productive in this respect.

Many advisers have argued that it would be better to vary the number and duration of interviews according to individual need. However, the attendant danger in the current climate is that some advisers would scale them back to the bare minimum. This has prompted some reflections on the way in which Jobcentre Plus interacts with its customers. Some thought that the agency does not spend enough time with individuals. There was a sense that this problem was intensifying. It is in this context that some have suggested that the three follow-up interviews should have been carried out by external providers rather than Jobcentre Plus. The present research suggests that this would have been appropriate where the course has been well received and the action planning process has worked well.

The way in which Jobcentre Plus management has deployed their adviser teams has varied. The most common model was for JMA duties to be shared amongst teams. This allowed management to exercise more control over staff diaries. However, many individuals found juggling different responsibilities more challenging and this approach was reliant on experienced teams coupled with strong management support. In contrast, implementation in Cumbria and Bedford involved dedicated JMA advisers who only took on other customers if they had the capacity to do so. The conduct of the follow-up interviews has worked best in areas where dedicated advisers have been able to spend more time with individuals.

Customers in Staffordshire and Cumbria have been most positive about the follow-up interviews. This is because they have often lasted between 45 minutes and one hour and have been customer-centred and supportive. The action plan has often been integral to the process, with reviews being undertaken at each interview. The empathy and understanding of advisers has often been singled out for praise. A male participant in Cumbria enthused:

'The interviews were all very relaxed and laid back, the JMA PA [personal adviser] was interested in helping and prepared to take as long as it took.'

In-depth discussions have helped to develop stronger personal relationships based on trust and have allowed advisers to gain a better insight into individual needs. This has, for example, encouraged some participants to reveal hidden barriers such as the possession of criminal records or problems with drugs or alcohol. Additional interviews have sometimes been carried out for those facing the most intractable barriers or individuals unable to make sufficient progress. It is in this context that some customers have requested that their JMA adviser become their normal point of contact.

The picture which emerged in other piloting areas such as South London and Calderdale and Kirklees was of an impersonal process which was likened to a 'conveyor belt'. In these circumstances both parties were often reluctant participants. A male participant in Woolwich felt that:

'The adviser didn't want to be there, and nor did I.'

Consequently, a male participant in South London complained that:

'Nothing was discussed in depth or suggestions made. It was just a formality.'

Adviser expectations of the process were often depressed by the poor quality of action plans which often failed to provide any new intelligence on an individual. A small number of advisers complained, for example, that some providers had merely copied information contained on the Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg). The large amount of paperwork and the pressures on adviser time were additional factors. Some customers viewed them as just another hurdle to negotiate in order to protect their benefit entitlement. This was exemplified by a 36 year old Woolwich male participant:

'It's just a process you have to go through.'

It is in this context that Jobcentre Plus management in Calderdale and Kirklees felt that the implementation of the pilot had been undermined by the inability of the agency to devote the necessary time to the JMA. They felt: *'We are just ticking boxes at the moment'*. The research programme identified six main weaknesses:

- the interviews were too short, between five and 15 minutes, to be of any great benefit. The central management team in South London expressed concerns that some advisers were keen to conduct the three follow-up interviews as quickly as possible. They were likened to: *'battery hen work; they have referrals to do, DMA action and do three interviews over eight weeks'*;
- there was little about the process to distinguish it from normal signing activity. *'It is not essentially different from signing on. When you sign on you must show that you have a minimum plan for job search for the next two weeks and provide a report on the steps that you've taken.'* (36 year old Woolwich male)
- the action plan was incidental. A 49 year old Lewisham male participant reported: *'They weren't engaging with the action plan.'*;
- advisers have searched for appropriate vacancies and given general advice about job search;
- personal advisers have been unable to provide an individual service;
- there was not enough proactive work around realising steps in action plans and overcoming barriers.

4 Key evaluation findings

4.1 Introduction

This section considers some of the key findings of the research. The discussion has been organised around nine main themes:

- meeting individual needs;
- dealing with challenging behaviour;
- sanctioning activities;
- action planning;
- partnership working;
- beneficiaries;
- messages from personal adviser interviews;
- messages from participants;
- impact of the pilot.

4.2 Meeting individual needs

Providers were encouraged to ensure that courses were capable of meeting the potentially disparate needs of customers. The guidance identified a need to take into account the diverse nature of the customer group and specifically mentioned cultural, educational and other differences. In the words of a consultee responsible for designing the JMA: *'They must not be a sausage factory'*. However, the evaluators found that the ability of providers to genuinely meet individual needs was constrained by several factors.

First, the flat rate fee appears to have encouraged some to deliver courses to large group sizes which made it difficult to meet individual needs. Provider guidance stipulated that provision should ideally be delivered to 12 participants per course. Yet the participant/tutor ratios on the observed courses in year one ranged from

3.6:1 in Staffordshire to 7.5:1 in South London, 8:1 in Cumbria; 9:1 in Calderdale and Kirklees and 14:1 in Bedfordshire and Cheshire and Warrington. Interviews with tutors in Calderdale and Kirklees, Bedfordshire, Cheshire and Warrington and South London indicated that it was not unusual for ratios of up to 18:1. Similarly, participant interviews revealed that course sizes varied from just three individuals to 28. Some providers maintained that provision worked best with large groups.

Second, groups have been mixed in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and previous occupation. In South London and Bedfordshire unskilled manual workers have been on the same course as former managers and civil servants. Yet there has been little attempt to identify occupational backgrounds and sit similar people together for role play and group work. Participants have also exhibited a broad spectrum of employability from those 'close to the labour market' to individuals with serious and multiple barriers to work. Many providers have, for example, highlighted the difficulties encountered with those with criminal records and/or drug problems. Similarly, a Halifax participant complained about some fellow group members who were allegedly smoking cannabis in the stairwells of the provider's building during break time.

Third, offenders and those with alcohol or drug problems have often found it difficult to attend for the full three days. The research has uncovered incidences where individuals receiving heroin replacement medication have been sanctioned because they have temporarily left the course to gain their prescription. Similarly, some customers attending probation interviews have also been penalised. This problem tended to diminish later in the piloting period as providers and Jobcentre Plus put in place procedures for allowing such individuals to temporarily leave courses for pre-arranged appointments.

Fourth, many customers had basic skill needs which were not accommodated by providers. Fellow participants were often observed helping such individuals. JMA Guidance was that personal advisers were to screen customers for basic skill needs but in most cases such needs should not stop job seekers from taking part. For those unable to take part because of undue basic skill needs, assessment and training were to take precedence. Some providers suspected that personal advisers had not screened for basic skill needs with the result that some lacking the requisite basic skills were referred to provision. It is in this context that the Bedfordshire provider undertook a basic skills assessment of all course participants during the morning of the first day of the course.

Finally, there have been significant numbers of customers with English as a second language in Calderdale and Kirklees, South London and parts of Bedfordshire. An observed group in South London included individuals from Azerbaijan and Equatorial Guinea. Many providers have struggled to meet such needs. An Italian woman participating in an observed course in Bedford found it extremely difficult to take part in written exercises. Similarly, a Pakistani customer in an observed course in Wakefield found it difficult to follow verbal instructions. The tutor sought to provide individual assistance but was continually pulled away by the needs of

the rest of the group. Many of the advisers interviewed in Wakefield highlighted the prohibitive cost of providing translators for participants and identified a need for specialist ESOL JMA provision:

'I would have liked ESOL courses. We are getting a lot of ESOL here.'

(Wakefield adviser)

It is salient to note the approach taken by the Staffordshire provider. The significantly lower participant/tutor ratio allowed them to deliver a more tailored response to the diverse needs of participants. The observation revealed that course delivery was shared by several members of staff. This facilitated greater flexibility and allowed the more needy to receive additional support. Furthermore, previous difficulties prompted the development of an ESOL JMA course which included translator support.

During year two there was a marginal improvement in the ability of providers to meet individual needs. The evaluation identified four relevant issues:

- falling referrals meant that group sizes became more manageable. Although some providers (Bedfordshire, Calderdale and Kirklees and Cheshire and Warrington) remained wedded to the notion that courses worked best with large numbers of participants;
- some became more flexible around attendance and exemptions. In Cheshire and Warrington, for example, customers on probation or methadone programmes were allowed to leave for pre-arranged appointments: *'There has been give and take on both sides.'* (Jobcentre Plus management);
- the Bedfordshire provider, with the agreement of Jobcentre Plus, undertook basic skills assessments and removed individuals lacking the necessary skills;
- in Cumbria course timings were adjusted by up to 20 minutes either way to allow participants to catch buses or trains serving more distant communities.

4.3 Dealing with challenging behaviour

Participants exhibited three broad responses to the mandatory nature of provision: accepting; resigned; and hostile. The evaluators have, however, witnessed a lower incidence of poor behaviour during course delivery than anticipated. It is possible that an element of self selection occurred, with those most hostile to the courses staying away or it could have been a direct response to the observation. Challenging behaviour has taken three forms:

- anxiety and apprehension;
- a lack of enthusiasm and engagement;
- aggression and violence.

Most participants were apprehensive about the mandatory nature of the course and were initially withdrawn and sullen. This was often observed to dissipate during the first morning. The biggest challenge facing providers has been a lack of enthusiasm and engagement. A 41 year old Halifax male participant reported: *'I was not overjoyed. I've been on so many courses'*. In Cumbria several men initially refused to take off their coats and baseball caps and sat in a slumped position with their arms tightly folded. Some participants have merely maintained a low profile, whereas some young men have attempted to wrest control of the group by constantly making jokes.

A small number of customers have been confrontational and violent. A 29 year old male customer in Chester described the JMA as: *'a ball and chain approach'*. A 34 year old male in Halifax made it clear to the interviewer that: *'I don't like to be told what to do'*. Some have been removed from provision. A physically intimidating male was extremely belligerent on the first morning of the observed course in Bedfordshire during year two but was removed at lunch time. Further investigation revealed that his behaviour resulted from a concern that his inability to read or write would be revealed to the group. The Wakefield provider highlighted several cases of drunken and violent behaviour. In one incident a participant had physically assaulted a member of staff. The poor screening processes adopted by Jobcentre Plus were felt to increase the risks:

'They are all pushed through our door. But we have no security guards here unlike Jobcentre Plus. And most of our tutors are female.'

(Provider management in Calderdale and Kirklees)

During the latter stages of the piloting period some providers expressed the view that they were dealing with a hard core of customers, many of which were re-referrals. Tutors in South London reported that some: *'were not ready for the JMA'*. It is in this context that concerns about potentially violent individuals were more frequently aired. Some young men in Calderdale and Kirklees were, for example, reported to express their bravado in disrupting courses. A tutor noted that: *'They rip their certificates up in your face'*. More seriously a male tutor in Cheshire and Warrington complained:

'It has been quite dangerous at times – I have worked with people who have convictions for rape and murder. On one occasion I ended up alone in a room with a guy convicted for male rape. It would help to know in advance when there are people attending who might be challenging.'

Providers have deployed a number of strategies to minimise such problems:

- all have sought to distance themselves and their employers from Jobcentre Plus;
- tutors have acknowledged concerns over the mandatory nature of the programme but have stressed the individual benefits of participation (free lunch, something to do, opportunity for learning, etc.);

- a relaxed and informal approach has been adopted. Many have incorporated an 'ice-breaker' session on the first morning;
- some have been able to reassure participants by drawing upon their own personal experiences of unemployment;
- most sent customers a letter or leaflet explaining the course. This was deemed necessary because Jobcentre Plus correspondence was focused too much on the mandatory aspects of provision;
- the Staffordshire provider often telephoned referrals the day before to reduce their anxiety and stress;
- disruptive customers were removed from the group and interviewed to explore their concerns.

4.4 Sanctioning activities

Failure to attend any element resulted in a mandatory one-week benefit sanction. Individuals were given two chances to participate, on the third time they were submitted to decision makers with a view to stopping their benefit altogether. Many providers reported that up to a half of those referred to provision had failed to turn up.

The role of advisers in the sanctioning process was limited to administration and referral. This was valued because the impartial and impersonal nature of the process reduced the potential to disrupt positive relationships with customers. However, some disquiet was expressed about the lack of discretion regarding those referred to decision makers for sanctioning. In South London advisers complained that decision-making staff did not know customers and: *'cannot see a wider pattern of behaviour'*. In Cumbria some of those living in remote rural areas were penalised for arriving late even though this was caused by genuine problems with public transport. Many advisers interviewed thought that it ought to be possible to make allowances for exceptional cases. An adviser in Calderdale and Kirklees cited a customer who had been referred to decision makers for attending his father's funeral. She commented:

'I was ashamed. I could not look him in the eye.'

The evaluators found strong support for the mandatory nature of the JMA. It was frequently pointed out that most customers would not have attended voluntarily. This was confirmed by the participant interviews. The point was also made that few of those sanctioned were subsequently penalised again. Sanctions were also intended to produce a 'deterrent effect' on those claiming fraudulently. It appears that the pilot had a small impact on fraud. A few advisers reported that some customers came off the register before the JMA and then resigned; others moved onto other benefits and some signed off altogether. Sanctions were felt to be particularly ineffective with a 'hard core' of customers who *'know what excuses to give'* and *'know how to play the system'* (Adviser).

The indications are that during the early stages of the piloting period sanctioning rules were not strictly applied. Jobcentre Plus management in Calderdale and Kirklees acknowledged, for example, that there were initial problems because: *'Decision makers lacked training but we talked it through'*. The evaluation has sometimes highlighted more deep-seated problems. It was pointed out in Bedfordshire and Calderdale and Kirklees that sanctioning is a difficult message to get across to customers because many have had just five-minute signing slots for the first six months of their claim. It was also reported that some advisers lacked the time to adequately police JSA regulations.

4.5 Action planning

A key outcome of the course was an action plan which identified the steps necessary for re-engaging with the labour market. It has envisaged that the plan would play a key role in tailoring the intervention to the needs of individuals. The observations revealed how the action planning process has worked in practice. This highlighted a marked difference between highly directive and flexible and personal approaches (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Two approaches to action planning

Highly directive	Flexible and personalised
<p>Bedfordshire: Individuals completed the first page of the plan, i.e. personal details, skills/knowledge; experience during the first day. The jobs sought by participants were identified in a group exercise and were based on information contained in the JSAg. The tutor then spent a little time with individuals on the final day to complete the form i.e. the steps needed to achieve the previously identified job goals.</p>	<p>Cumbria: Many of the course activities were designed to highlight areas where participants needed help and then fed into the plan. Moreover, individuals were responsible for developing their own plan, with one-to-one advice and assistance available during the designated sessions. The final session on the third day was a confidential one-to-one discussion between the two parties with the aim of finalising content. Tutors spent over two hours providing one-to-one help.</p>
<p>Calderdale and Kirklees: Participants were instructed to think about the first page of the action plan, i.e. personal details, programme details; experience, skills and qualifications; work experience. Participants used business directories to identify six employers to approach for work. During the final day the tutor spent a little time with individuals to help complete the form.</p>	<p>Staffordshire: The plan was progressively produced over three days and was based on three short (20-30 minute) interviews with individuals. The low participant/tutor ratios were crucial in this regard.</p>

The observations revealed that the time spent with individuals preparing their action plan ranged from just 15 minutes in Calderdale and Kirklees to two hours in Cumbria. Moreover, the providers that were devoting the least time with individuals were more likely to introduce minor changes during year two to further speed up

the action planning process. In Calderdale and Kirklees, for example, two tutors were deployed to share this task during the final day. Similarly, designated 'action planners' in South London were given training on how to speed up the process and were set a target of completing eight plans per day.

Action planning was sometimes shared with additional members of staff that had no other involvement with course delivery. In South London, for example, the team included designated 'action planners'. However, the process was quite disruptive in areas such as Staffordshire and South London because individuals were removed from the course during delivery by other staff members responsible for action planning. A 30 year old male participant in Lewisham complained:

'Another member of staff would come to get people to take them off to another room to do the action plan...It would have been better if one of the teachers had done it. I thought that the person who did it couldn't ask all the right questions because they don't even know me. At least one of the teachers would have known me for eight hours.'

Participants in some areas have played a largely passive role in the preparation of plans. Tutors in Calderdale and Kirklees have, for example, completed the sections on individual barriers and the steps needed to achieve short-term goals. It was, perhaps, surprising that the evaluators discerned very little resistance to the process from most participants. This may be related to the view held by some that it was merely a hurdle that needed to be negotiated in order to protect benefit entitlement. Nevertheless, a few were reported to be wary of sharing plans with Jobcentre Plus.

The way in which plans were produced had a significant bearing on their quality and usefulness. The desk-based analysis of action plans revealed:

- participants in some areas have played a minor role in their preparation. The South London action plans contained a curious mixture of first person (I, my), second person (you) and third person (he, she) references. Some tutors have over-ridden the wishes of customers. The recommended action in a Calderdale and Kirklees plan was, for example, altered from undertaking plumbing training to widening job search;
- job goals were clear and appropriate. However, in South London and Cheshire and Warrington some of the plans failed to identify specific jobs but indicated economic sectors, e.g. retail;
- a small number had unrealistic goals. In Cheshire and Warrington, for instance, a children's football coach was encouraged to explore job opportunities with Premier League football clubs;
- some barriers were too imprecise ('money', 'lack of suitable jobs', etc.) for informing practical solutions;

- many plans were not tailored to individual needs. In many areas there was little beyond a standard menu of preparing a CV, job search, registering with an agency and making speculative approaches to employers;
- the exclusive focus on short-term goals in Calderdale and Kirklees, Cheshire and Warrington and Bedfordshire was problematical for those needing to undergo vocational training to improve their longer-term employment prospects;
- some plans failed to identify a clear and logical route from short-term goals to medium-term and longer-term goals;
- some provided customers with new information on vacancy sources (websites) or training opportunities. A few captured ideas discussed during the course;
- the listing of six employers to be contacted for work in Calderdale and Kirklees and Cheshire and Warrington may be counter productive for those who are not job-ready.

The JMA adviser guidance document defined an action plan as: *'a document prepared by the participant in conjunction with the provider, detailing what actions the customers will undertake to overcome barriers to finding work'*. However, the evaluation found that a lack of clarity about the target audience (customer or Jobcentre Plus) limited the extent to which plans formed useful, living documents. A lack of customer ownership and the generic nature of many plans also undermined their usefulness. A customer in South London, for example, revealed:

'To be honest I haven't even read my action plan.'

Another declared that:

'It's just a longer version of the Jobseeker's Agreement. Once you've been told what to do you know what to do...It seemed like another piece of paperwork.'

A Cheshire and Warrington adviser felt that: *'It works really well if someone is very motivated but there is not a lot we can do if customers do not value the action plan.'*

It is in this context that Jobcentre Plus staff were often highly critical of their quality and usefulness. Eight main weaknesses were identified:

- plans were too generic and not tailored to the needs of the individual;
- they often added little to the Jobseeker's Agreement process or simply replicated it. Advisers in Warrington were, for example, unwilling to share JSAs with the provider because: *'We found that [the provider] would just copy the Action Plan from an old JSAg.'*;
- some had poorly specified job goals such as 'get a job' or 'start attending a course';

- plans were overambitious. A frequent refrain was that customers had been encouraged to pursue self-employment;
- a few had inappropriate job goals. Advisers in Bedford pointed out that offenders had been instructed to consider a career in the security industry;
- the action needed to move an individual closer to the labour market was not specified;
- some providers used the process to market their own provision to customers. In Calderdale and Kirklees, for example, many were referred to the company's 'Jobfit' course. It was not clear what benefits to the individual, if any, accrued from this approach;
- some plans identified a need for expensive vocational training courses which Jobcentre Plus was unable to fund.

Nevertheless, the evaluators discerned a marginal improvement over time in the quality of plans in most areas. However, in Bedfordshire, Calderdale and Kirklees and Cheshire and Warrington, the problem was more intractable. In the former, action plans were described as: *'pointless'* and *'embarrassing'*. A few advisers confided that they no longer used them to guide the follow-up interviews. In Wakefield, for instance, advisers used the plan only in the first interview but used subsequent sessions to help with job search. A South London participant revealed:

'We didn't discuss the action plan in the other interviews. Instead it was more of a "how's it going" kind of chat.'

4.6 Partnership working

At the outset it was apparent that the JMA would require effective partnership working between:

- personal advisers and providers;
- personal advisers and their decision-making colleagues around sanctioning.

JMA guidance stressed that external providers were to work closely with Jobcentre Plus to help ensure a seamless service between the two parties. Relationships with providers at a strategic level were positive in most areas. In South London there was: *'a sense of doing the job together'* (Jobcentre Plus management). However, communication at an operational level was sometimes poor and few advisers witnessed course delivery which undermined their ability to market provision to customers. Strong relationships were often founded upon previous experience of working together and regular face-to-face contact. The close geographical proximity of premises which has facilitated regular contact was also helpful. There was 'open house' between personal advisers and provider staff in Carlisle who were based on a different floor of the same building. Close contacts were also identified as one of the benefits of operating in a small town like Barrow. Regular

contact was lacking in Huddersfield with the result that advisers questioned whether they had any relationship with the provider.

The culture of the provider was another important factor. A commitment to meeting customer needs and an ability to reflect on experience and continuously improve provision were vital. The South London provider held, for example, a two day internal conference twice yearly to review provision. An ability to deploy good administrative staff was also highlighted. Jobcentre Plus management staff in Calderdale and Kirklees felt that relationships were excellent because: *'The provider is good at making money so they keep advisers on side'*. They were also flexible and accommodating: *'[The provider] responds to Jobcentre Plus issues rather than just mud slinging'*. However, the evaluation has underlined the importance of the attitudes and behaviour of individuals since relationships with the same provider in Cheshire and Warrington were more problematical (see below).

The evaluation has shown that where strong relationships have been forged they have been instrumental in securing a range of benefits. These have included:

- the smooth exchange of routine information associated with the day to day processes of booking places, sending lists of booked participants and SL2 forms which are used to confirm attendance and trigger payments;
- where problems have arisen with, for example, missing SL2 forms they have been quickly resolved to the satisfaction of both parties;
- informal exchanges of information about particular customers. Cumbrian personal advisers would, for example, let course tutors know at the referral stage if a jobseeker had particular needs such as a lack of confidence or unfamiliarity with IT which did not show up in official paperwork. Similarly, course tutors would also let personal advisers know if the course had revealed any 'hidden barriers' to work;
- strong relationships have encouraged personal advisers to alert tutors if a referred customer was 'potentially violent';
- they have encouraged both parties to continuously improve provision. In South London, for example, the provider improved the training given to action planners following concerns raised by Jobcentre Plus about the quality of action plans emanating from a single JMA centre;
- they have promoted closer working arrangements. The Bedford provider, for example, has arranged a breakfast event for advisers and regularly visited the Jobcentre Plus office to exchange information and make presentations. The Barrow provider discussed planned changes to course content and structure with Jobcentre Plus prior to their introduction.

Partnerships remained more difficult in Bedfordshire and Cheshire and Warrington. Although in the former they were praised for changing course content following poor initial customer feedback. Nevertheless, a failure to develop an ESOL JMA

course and the marketing of their own provision to participants were continuing irritants. Jobcentre Plus management staff reported:

'We have bullied [the provider] to provide a JMA for ESOL clients but this has not happened...The provider has let us down badly here. It is a complete let down for a sizeable chunk of our community.'

Similar concerns were identified in Cheshire and Warrington but the problems appeared to have been more deep-seated. The evaluation has highlighted three contributory factors: First, a conflict of organisational cultures evidenced by persistent complaints that the provider did not understand how the agency works. It seems that both parties were responsible for this state of affairs given their reluctance to communicate on a regular basis. Second, concerns that the pilot represented a further step in the privatisation of the agency. Finally, a lack of regular contact between advisers and tutors which meant that neither fully understood nor appreciated the roles of their counterparts and the constraints that they were working within. A tutor revealed:

'I avoid them [personal advisers] as much as possible. I rarely have a nice conversation with Jobcentre Plus. Our customers go back more empowered and I think that can annoy them. We are constantly feeding back on missing information, mistakes and so on – it feels like we are working for them, not as a partnership.'

More generally, a lack of regular contact between advisers and tutors has generated three further implementation problems: First, it has resulted in a poor flow of routine documentation between the two parties. There have, for example, been frequent complaints about lost paperwork. Second, it has stymied the informal exchange of information about customers. In Huddersfield, for example, advisers reported that they had not discussed what they knew about the particular needs of customers with tutors. Finally, it has undermined the action planning process. Cheshire and Warrington advisers, for example, had not adequately informed the provider about the level of available funding for vocational training.

Relationships with decision makers improved following some initial 'teething problems'. Many advisers became on 'first name terms' with them and regularly sought their advice. This was vital because the process was dependent upon advisers giving decision makers good quality information. Nevertheless, some expressed surprise at some of the decisions made. In Chester an adviser complained:

'We know they are lying, people try it on time and again but it still comes back allowed.'

The situation in Hanley and Bedford remained more problematic. Advisers in Bedford reported, for example, that they had: *'no confidence on decision making and appeals'*. It was pointed out that there had been several decision makers each with a different idea about the process. Some concerns were also expressed about the administrative burden of getting customers sanctioned. The time taken to receive adjudications was also identified as an issue in Bedfordshire, Cheshire and

Warrington and South London. Management in Bedfordshire complained that it took up to six weeks to receive a decision.

4.7 Beneficiaries

JSA claimants are required to be available and actively seeking work. The reality is that within this group there is a spectrum of employability ranging from those that are 'close to the labour market' to those whose barriers to work appear to be insurmountable. A person might be described as being 'close to the labour market' if they have positive attitudes to work and a good psychological state, have job search skills and a knowledge of the local labour market, are able to make persuasive job applications and demonstrate that they are a low risk (taking into account vocational skills, experience and soft skills). The evaluation has found that those closest to the labour market have benefited most from the JMA. For these individuals provision has often helped to provide the necessary final 'push' to help them into work.

However, there have been several groups that were resistant to provision and/or failed to realise the full benefits. These included:

- ESOL customers;
- individuals with poor basic skills;
- executive and other professional jobseekers;
- blue collar workers;
- offenders;
- those with drug and or alcohol problems.

The main beneficiaries of cognitive behavioural techniques have been groups closest to the labour market. The indications are that individuals had to be 'open minded' and receptive to new ideas. Many women, those with experience of service sector work, individuals recently made unemployed and some professional jobseekers have valued this approach. The GOALS course might be particularly beneficial for some of those recently made unemployed. However, some working class men have often been resistant and found group work and discussing their feelings more difficult. This may partly reflect an unwillingness to acknowledge weaknesses, especially in the presence of other men. Some of the more challenging customers have reacted badly to this type of provision and have been violent and disruptive. When asked for his reflections on day one of the course in South London, a participant replied:

'I'm not into motivating. I thought that it was going to be about looking for jobs. It's alright being jolly in the morning, but I haven't done anything to get me a job yet. I don't lack motivation. That's not the problem. If it's like yesterday, then that's no good.'

The main beneficiaries of provision that has sought to boost motivation through improving knowledge of the recruitment process have been individuals needing practical help, e.g. with compiling their CV or job search. The well qualified have derived little from this sort of intervention. Jobcentre Plus management in Bedfordshire acknowledged that:

'The only benefit that professionals got was helping others on the programme.'

The Cumbrian provider sought to address this issue by including a varied programme of activities and group exercises where such participants could contribute their existing knowledge and help other individuals. This has meant that many of those with higher or professional qualifications have been able to take something from the course.

4.8 Messages from personal adviser interviews

The evaluation found that most advisers were initially unenthusiastic about the prospect of the JMA. It seems that heavy workloads had encouraged many to view it as an additional and unnecessary burden. Subsequent experience often led to a much more positive appraisal especially where provision changed customer perceptions and made them more proactive. An adviser in South London commented:

'They're all smiles: enthusiastic, optimistic and things are looking up. Sometimes you can see a gleam in their eye, there's a light at the end of the tunnel, and that it is my reward. When the momentum is high, that's when you can work with them to keep it going.'

This has made it easier for advisers to manage their caseloads. A South London adviser explained that: *'This makes our job easier'*. This was highly prized in an organisational context of headcount reductions and efficiency savings which have tended to increase the workloads of many Jobcentre Plus personal advisers. Consequently, in Cumbria it was reported that the course was: *'the best provision that has been put in place'*. A Bedford adviser pleaded: *'Please bring it back'*. Similar sentiments were expressed in Cumbria, Calderdale and Kirklees and South London.

It was envisaged that the JMA would stimulate change in the way in which advisers work with their customers. Those responsible for the design of the pilot expressed the view that advisers needed to become more directive and begin to challenge poor customer behaviour. This study suggests that this has largely not occurred. Advisers have worked in their usual way. All accepted the need to ensure that customers were actively seeking work but many expressed an understandable desire to avoid conflict. A few felt that the emphasis should be on providing support and alluded to the inherent tension between the agency's customer service culture and policing benefit entitlement with sanctioning activity. Some were strongly opposed to such change:

'We are giving real support not scaring customers.'

(Bedfordshire personal adviser)

The evaluators explored whether similar outcomes could be achieved by devoting more resources to the three interviews and dispensing with the course. A small minority felt that this would be the case. Where this view was expressed, individuals indicated that providing additional resources for advisers was not politically feasible. *'It comes down to resources. It is cheaper to run a programme than get more advisers in the Jobcentre'* (Jobcentre Plus management in Bedfordshire). JMA courses have helped to secure several additional benefits including:

- the perceived neutrality of providers allowed them to build relationships of trust with customers that resulted in a fuller understanding of individual needs;
- JMA courses often encouraged customers to take responsibility for their own actions;
- provider neutrality gave core messages such as the need to accept 'any job' to begin climbing the 'career ladder' increased credibility;
- provision often generated significant therapeutic benefits;
- some participants developed work-related social ('soft') skills such as getting out of bed on time, following instructions, working in a team etc;
- many customers became less hostile and easier to work with. Although provision had the opposite effect with some of the more challenging individuals.

Many advisers identified a pressing need to streamline key processes and reduce the amount of paperwork. They have been highly critical of administrative burden generated by both referral and sanctioning activities. Some thought that the paperwork for Decision Making and Appeals (DMA), including giving customers the opportunity to provide reasons for absence was a waste of time. Advisers in Huddersfield estimated that they spent about one hour per day dealing with JMA paperwork. The resulting complexity sometimes resulted in key documentation such as SL2 forms being mislaid. It is in this context that a Hanley adviser (Staffordshire) complained, for example, about the:

'...phenomenal increase in workload with additional paperwork at all stages of the process.'

The evaluation has also revealed widespread problems with JMA markers. The main ones have included:

- markers were not always been put onto the Labour Market System (LMS);
- they were applied at the wrong time. This appears to be the result of the tendency of some advisers to undertake this activity on a weekly basis rather than at the relevant interview;

- there have also been problems with cancelled markers. An adviser in Warrington highlighted an instance where it became clear that a customer was not suitable for JMA because of functional illiteracy only after the marker had been set.

The high workloads of many advisers have been a key contributory factor. Adviser turnover had also resulted in the deployment of inexperienced staff. The latter often missed initial training exercises and failed to appreciate the importance of accurate recording. A few thought that the problem was more systemic and stemmed from the inadequate way in which the process was explained to staff. A manager in Bedfordshire complained that the usual Jobcentre Plus approach was: *'Have a read of this and get on with it'*. Staff in Barrow reported that they had received no specific guidance. Rather an adviser had worked out what to do and then wrote step-by-step instructions for other staff.

4.9 Participant interviews

The evaluators have conducted 73 in-depth interviews with participants. These have highlighted a plethora of experiences and views. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern four key messages emanating from these interviews:

- jobseekers have valued the receipt of practical support;
- many have identified the need for a greater degree of one-to-one support;
- provision has often helped to alleviate social isolation and has generated 'therapeutic benefits' for some individuals;
- providers should ensure that provision meets local needs.

First, participants have most valued the receipt of practical support rather than explicitly motivational elements. Although the process of making an individual more informed about the job search process has often improved their confidence and motivation. Help preparing for job interviews and compiling speculative letters and CVs and the opportunity to use the Internet for job search purposes have often been highlighted as the most useful aspects of JMA courses. Many expressed a desire to gain practical insights into the job search process such as how to word job application forms or effective responses to typical questions posed by employers at job interviews. This need for practical help and advice was exemplified by a female participant in Woolwich:

'I want some feedback and advice on it [action plan]. What is on it? Is it right? Is this the right path? I want some guidance on whether it is the right thing to do.'

Some participants have also identified the opportunity to develop work-related social ('soft') skills. A Bedfordshire participant, for example, reported that:

'It helps people get into the swing of getting up early and looking for work. This is one of the best things about the course. You get into a routine of form filling and attending on time.'

Second, participant interviews have frequently suggested that the pilot would have been improved by the provision of a greater degree of one-to-one support. Some were clearly uncomfortable about participating in group exercises. A 28 year old male in Halifax noted: *'You would not get a word out of me in a group setting'*. Others expressed a need for specialist advice and support which the provider was unable to meet. This was particularly the case for those considering setting up their own business or contemplating a change of career. Many indicated that they had received insufficient personal attention during the action planning process. A male participant in Woolwich spoke for many:

'There wasn't enough time because it's a standard process...A bit like a sausage machine. I suppose it was useful. But it didn't tell me anything new.'

Third, the courses have often helped to alleviate the social isolation experienced by some long-term unemployed people. A male participant in Luton noted that: *'There is not much social interaction when you are unemployed'*. The development of a positive group dynamic with participants cajoling and helping each other was a feature of some courses particularly when any initial anxieties about the process had been overcome. This was witnessed first hand by the evaluators during some of the course observations. A male participant in Woolwich enthused:

'The camaraderie of it was good. We were able to share a lot of our frustrations. Everybody had something to give someone else.'

Many advisers highlighted positive changes in the self-esteem and confidence of some participants which had resulted in tangible physical changes. An adviser in Huddersfield, for example, drew our attention to a jobseeker that was now taking a renewed pride in his appearance. In a small number of cases the friendships established during the JMA course have led to the realisation of new employment opportunities. In Wakefield, for example, advisers cited the example of two individuals that had met on a JMA course and subsequently started a business supplying smoking shelters to public houses. The evaluators have also witnessed examples of participants sharing business ideas with each other and intelligence about local employers. In Bedford, for example, there was an animated discussion about the prospects for establishing a business manufacturing pedal cars for children based on replicas of classic cars. Participants frequently sent letters of thanks to course providers. A letter sent to the Calderdale and Kirklees provider read:

'Just dropping you a line to let you know how much I enjoyed the course. Guess what? Within three days of finishing the course I got my "any" job.... All thanks to yourselves and me believing in myself and getting back out there, I am now back being part of the human race.'

Finally, the evaluation has shown that providers must ensure the provision meets local needs. This was a particular issue for the GOALS course which was delivered in Calderdale and Kirklees and Cheshire and Warrington but was originally developed in the US. Many working class males, particularly those with an history of manual work, found it extremely difficult to relate to cognitive behavioural

approaches and frequently complained about American jargon such as 'positive affirmation' in course materials. They often disliked exercises which were designed to reveal personal information such as listing their ten most admirable qualities. Furthermore, many felt embarrassed about a 'guided fantasy' exercise where individuals were encouraged to sit in front of their peers and relate a positive life experience. Similarly, an exercise where the individual is encouraged to sit in front of a mirror and talk positively to themselves often met with a mixed response. It is salient to note that bitter experience led many tutors to dispense with some of these exercises.

More generally, many working class men have found it difficult to contribute to group work and have questioned the appropriateness and relevance of some exercises. The poor behaviour of some individuals has undermined the effectiveness of group work. A Halifax participant, for example, complained about 'grumbly men' and recounted an instance where the failure of a particularly disruptive individual to return to the course following a break was met with a collective cheer. The emphasis of some courses on helping individuals to produce a CV and complete written job application forms was also criticised by some of those active in economic sectors where recruitment is often of an informal nature. A previously self-employed floor fitter in Bedford, for example, complained:

'They [CVs] are just not used in my line of work. I get work by asking around and by ringing my previous employers.'

4.10 Impact of the pilot

Provider guidance stressed that provision should motivate and inspire participants to find employment. The JMA courses appear to have raised the confidence and motivation of many customers. The indications are that the pilot has worked best for those who were initially well disposed to the intervention and reasonably motivated. Participant interviews suggested that positive impacts were most apparent in Staffordshire and Cheshire and Warrington. A 26 year old Longton participant felt:

'I have more incentive to do something with my life.'

A few individuals indicated that the process had made them more resilient. A 29 year old Chester participant reported:

'I am not negative about setbacks anymore.'

The setting of goals and the articulation of the steps necessary to realise them has been beneficial for those unused to seeking employment in a structured way. Improved confidence has also arisen where individuals have become more informed about the job search process. Some have also been energised by being made aware of additional sources of help and advice. Furthermore, provision has often had a 'therapeutic effect' on individual self-esteem which has resulted in tangible behavioural changes. Advisers frequently reported that some participants had become more pro-active as a result of the intervention.

The JMA used three follow-up interviews with personal advisers to sustain improvements in confidence and motivation. Yet headcount reductions and competing pressures in Jobcentre Plus offices have often meant that the necessary time has not been spent with individuals (see Section 3.8). This has meant that they have been relatively ineffective in sustaining any improvements. A few participants have reported that follow-up interviews had the opposite effect. A 52 year old former manual worker in Chester, for example, complained that he was terrible on the phone but had been pressured to apply for a job as a customer service adviser. It also became apparent that subsequent experience in the labour market could quickly undermine any improvements. A 53 year old Halifax participant was, for example, dismayed when one of the first questions during a telephone interview for a post in a pet supplies manufacturer was about her age and ability to cope with the physical demands of the work. The present study suggests that the development of strong relationships of trust was an essential pre-requisite for maintaining improvements in confidence and motivation during the follow-up interviews.

The pilot appears to have had little impact on either the intensity of job search or the way in which work was sought. Very few individuals appear to have viewed prior warnings and possible sanctions as a threat and redoubled their efforts to find employment. Virtually all reported that they were already actively seeking work. It became apparent during the participant interviews that many had their own 'tried and tested' approaches to finding employment which they were unwilling to modify. Where change has occurred it has usually entailed widening job search methods to include greater use of the internet or informal sources and making speculative approaches to employers.

The impact on individual barriers to work has also been modest unless the principal hurdle has been a lack of confidence or motivation. Nevertheless, the process had often given participants a better appreciation of their barriers and the range of available local help and assistance. Moreover, some customers became more willing to take responsibility for their own actions. However, the poor quality of action plans was a key limiting factor. There was also widespread concern about the perceived inability of the agency to fund further training where a lack of vocational skills had been identified as a principal barrier.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents some of the main conclusions of the evaluation. The evaluators discuss the most appropriate time to intervene, the utility of action plans and what has worked before considering some of the implications of the present research for the implementation of the Flexible New Deal.

5.2 When to intervene

The JMA targeted those claiming JSA for six months because the longer someone is unemployed the more their confidence and motivation falls which puts them at greater disadvantage in the search for work. The case for intervening at six months was based on evidence that shows many people leave unemployment before reaching this duration while beyond this point the likelihood of leaving starts to fall rapidly. An internal DWP paper by Osmon (2003) found, for example, that the rate by which a cohort of JSA claimants left unemployment decreased over time. At three months, 35 per cent of July 1999 entrants were still claiming JSA, 20.4 per cent by six months and 6.7 per cent by 12 months. Intervening too early, therefore, increases the risk of helping people who would have left unemployment in any case.

Nevertheless, a majority of Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed during the course of the research felt that six months was often too late and favoured intervening at the 13-week stage. Some identified a need for a preventative approach given the reluctance of some employers to recruit from the ranks of the long-term unemployed. However, making provision generally available at 13 weeks would be costly and wasteful since it would increase deadweight. This might be minimised by the development of early entry criteria to prioritise meeting the needs of some groups before making it generally available at the six-month stage.

5.3 Action plans

The production of individually tailored action plans was at the heart of the JMA intervention. However, the evaluation has uncovered widespread problems with action plans. It is possible to identify three key messages for policy makers.

First, it is possible for providers to develop useful action plans as part of short work-focused courses. The positive experience of Cumbria, where the process has generally worked well, suggests that it is feasible. However, providers must devote sufficient resources to the process. Similarly, it is important that dedicated personal advisers have sufficient time set aside to fully explore issues and possibilities following a well received course.

Second, the development of useful action plans is not necessarily prohibitive in terms of time. The present evaluation suggests that two hours of one-to-one work with an individual may be required to produce plans of sufficient quality. However, it was only possible to devote this level of resource to the process in areas characterised by small course sizes and good staffing levels such as Cumbria and Staffordshire. In retrospect it was a mistake to allow some providers to routinely exceed ideal course sizes. The problem here also suggest that future bidding guidance might pay greater attention to the process of producing plans. One suggestion may to stipulate a minimum amount of one-to-one work in the production of such plans. The existing guidance tended to place too much emphasis on outputs rather than processes.

Finally, the present research suggests that a good action plan is characterised by a high degree of ownership by the individual jobseeker. The indications are that they can be instrumental in sustaining improvements in confidence and motivation, particularly where the follow-up interviews have been experienced as a supportive process.

5.4 What works

A key finding is that the way in which pilots were delivered was just as important as course content or the particular approach taken to improving confidence and motivation. The JMA has worked best where dedicated staff (both tutors and personal advisers) were able to spend sufficient time with individuals. The time devoted to both action planning and the conduct of the follow-up interviews emerged as a key indicator of quality. The follow-up interviews, for instance, worked best in areas such as Cumbria and Staffordshire where advisers have spent considerably more time with individuals.

The approach taken to course delivery was often a reflection of the organisational culture of the provider. The different approaches that have been taken with regard to course sizes, action planning processes and dealing with falling referral levels in the second year has been a recurring theme. Consequently, organisational culture and capacity can make a significant difference to pilot outcomes. This strongly

suggests that future procurement exercises should ensure that successful bidders have a demonstrable commitment to meeting customer needs coupled with an ability to reflect on experience and seek to continuously improve provision.

Local implementation conditions were a less important issue. The high number of JSA customers did, however, emerge as a factor in South London. A large throughput of around 15,000 individuals over two years meant that many courses were overcrowded particularly towards the end of the piloting period. Yet again this problem was compounded by the decision to reduce provider staff numbers towards the end of year two even though referral levels remained steady or even increased.

5.5 Implications for the Flexible New Deal

The present research has a number of implications for the implementation of the Flexible New Deal. These are discussed with reference to the:

- use of one-week sanctions for non-attendance;
- quality and usefulness of back-to-work plans;
- menu of activities made available at stage three.

The use of one-week sanctions has been relatively ineffective with customers that *'know how to play the system'* (see Section 4.4). These individuals employed effective avoidance strategies such as making a short break in a claim or switching benefits. The response of most Jobcentre Plus interviewees was to call for a progressively tougher sanction regime similar to that applied in mandatory New Deal provision. Many also wanted more severe benefit sanctions. However, the present research is unable to provide strong evidence to support these views. The evaluation does suggest that the effectiveness of sanctioning might be improved by:

- reducing the delays around decision making so that sanctions are applied as quickly as possible;
- tightening up any loopholes. Some customers discontinued their JSA claim for very short periods, e.g. one day, to avoid participating in the pilot;
- removing the 'three strikes and out' rule, i.e. failure to attend three times resulted in ineligibility for the JMA. This was inappropriate for a mandatory programme.

The UK Government's proposals for the Flexible New Deal envisage that at the six-month claim, stage JSA customers would enter a supported jobsearch stage. This would involve a formal review with a personal adviser who would draw up a back-to-work action plan selecting from a menu of activities aimed at improving employability and job chances. Each of the agreed activities would be mandatory. The present research has identified several key lessons:

- personal advisers will need to spend the necessary time with individuals to build relationships of trust so that all relevant barriers to work can be identified and necessary steps back into the labour market are detailed. Escalating conditionality will make the process of fostering trust more challenging;
- claimants must play an active role in the process so that they have a sense of 'ownership' of the plan. This will help secure their commitment to realising its aims and minimise the tendency for some to view it as an administrative vehicle for protecting benefit entitlement;
- the back-to-work action plan must strike an appropriate balance between short-term and longer-term goals. A longer-term approach involving vocational training will be necessary for some if they are to access jobs that pay well and offer opportunities for progression;
- the process will be extremely demanding of personal advisers. The indications are that they will need appropriate ongoing support and training.

Motivational provision might be an appropriate part of the menu of agreed activities during stage three of the Flexible New Deal. The present report finds that this is most appropriate for those relatively close to the labour market. Future provision would be improved by undertaking initial screening exercises to identify the needs of customers and previous occupational experience. It would then be possible to minimise some of the difficulties caused by extremely diverse course groups and develop a broader range of provision, including ESOL and executive courses, to meet identified needs.

Nevertheless, a key message is that the way in which advisers work with customers will be crucial in determining the performance of the programme. The experience of the JMA is that personal advisers have worked in two very different ways. In some areas the process has been likened to a 'conveyor belt' in which both parties were reluctant participants. Advisers complained that it had not led to any new intelligence about individual jobseekers and pointed to high and growing workloads which were exacerbated by the amount of paperwork generated by the pilot. Customers often viewed the interaction as just another hurdle to negotiate in order to protect benefit entitlement. In contrast, the process has worked best where specialist advisers have been able to spend the necessary time with individuals. In-depth discussions have helped to develop stronger personal relationships based on trust and have allowed advisers to gain a better insight into individual needs. This is a vital pre-requisite if the UK Government are to realise their ambition of developing a more personal and responsive approach to worklessness.

Appendix

Discussion guides

Discussion guide for design staff

The evaluation begins by exploring the views and motivations of those responsible for designing the JMA. Previous experience suggests that it is vital that considerable attention is paid to the intricacies of pilot design. We envisage carrying out three separate semi-structured face-to-face interviews which will focus on the following questions:

- Why was the pilot developed?
- What is the rationale and underlying assumptions?
- How well have DWP and Jobcentre Plus colleagues worked together on the design of the policy? (Probe for any conflicts around priorities and goals).
- What role, if any, have practitioners (e.g. personal advisers) played in the design of the initiative?
- What role, if any, have Jobcentre Plus districts played in both design and the selection of pilot sites/comparator areas?
- To what extent was the pilot influenced by the experience of previous activation programmes such as Restart?
- If Restart provided the inspiration, what key lessons have been incorporated into the design of the JMA?
- What is the relative importance attached to different programme outcomes such as reducing the claimant count, helping customers into work and improving the soft skills of participants? i.e. 'treatment effects' versus 'deterrent effects'.
- How are the two key components of the pilot (JMA course and subsequent adviser interviews) expected to produce the desired effects?

- What, if any, significant design changes have taken place since the pilot was first proposed?
- If relevant, why was the design of the pilot changed?
- How does the design of the pilot facilitate the delivery of a flexible and tailored approach to the needs of JSA claimants?
- How is the mandatory nature of the pilot, which is reinforced by benefit sanctions, expected to affect the attitudes and behaviour of participants?
- What are the key challenges that are likely to be encountered during the piloting period?
- What level of performance (job-entry rate, proportion discontinuing their claim etc) will constitute 'success'?

Discussion guide for participant interviews – post-JMA COURSE

- Introduce self/CRESR
- Introduce evaluation:
 - **independent research** for DWP;
 - aim is to help identify the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of the JMA and any **lessons** for policy makers;
 - interviewing a sample of participants completing the JMA course and those that have completed the three personal adviser follow-up interviews to gain their views.
- Alert interviewees to the award of **£20** incentive payment. Stress that this is a **gift** and does not affect their benefit entitlement.
- **Confidentiality/anonymity**: You will not be named in our report and, while we will draw upon what you say, no quotes will be attributed to individuals.

Individual characteristics

Ascertain:

- age;
- gender;
- ethnicity;
- marital status;
- number and ages of children, if any.

Course content

- Where was the course delivered? (Probe whether the venue was easily accessible/had they been there before?/did they feel comfortable there?)
- What can you remember about the course?
- How relevant was it to you? (Probe the extent to which it addressed issues that have been identified as assisting them into work)
- What aspects of the course have you found most/least useful?
- What could have been included that would have helped you further?
- What do you think about the length of the course? N.B. Provision must be over three consecutive working days with a minimum of 6 hours per day. (Probe whether they feel it was too long; too short or about right and their reasons for this judgement)
- What do you think about having to be unemployed for six months before you can go on the course? (Probe whether they would have found it more useful earlier or later and their reasons for this judgement).

Action planning

- What do you think about the amount of time that was spent with you in terms of identifying your barriers to work and the steps that you need to take to return to work? (*Probe whether they feel it was too little; too much; or about right and their reasons for this judgement*)
- How was your Action Plan developed? (*Individuals should have a sense of 'ownership' of the Plan. Consequently, ascertain whether they completed it with the help of the provider or the provider did it all for them. Supplementary questions might include: What questions did the provider ask them? Did they feel able to tell them everything? Did they feel inhibited discussing some issues in a group setting?*)
- To what extent does the Plan clearly identify the steps that you now need to take to find:
 - how has the Plan affected your confidence about getting work?
 - how has the Plan affected your motivation to gain work?
 - how has the Plan affected the way in which you search for work? (*Probe around several dimensions e.g. changed type of work sought; widened geographical search area; changed methods (informal, formal); increased time looking for work*).

Sanctions

- How did you feel when told that the JMA course was mandatory and subject to sanctions for non-attendance?

- Would you have attended if the JMA course had been voluntary?
- What effect, if any, did the fact that the JMA course was mandatory and subject to sanctions for non-attendance have on your attempts to find work?

At end of the interview get the individual to sign the form confirming that they have received £20 payment.

Discussion Guide for Participant Interviews- Post Adviser Interviews

- Introduce self/CRESR
- Introduce evaluation:
 - independent research for DWP;
 - aim is to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the JMA and any lessons for policy makers;
 - interviewing a sample of participants completing the JMA course and those that have completed the three personal follow-up interviews to gain their views.
- Alert interviewees to the award of **£20** incentive payment. Stress that this is a **gift** and does not affect their benefit entitlement
- **Confidentiality/anonymity:** You will not be named in our report and, while we will draw upon what you say, no quotes will be attributed to individuals.

Individual characteristics

Ascertain:

- age;
- gender;
- ethnicity;
- marital status;
- number and ages of children, if any.

Content of Follow-Up Interviews

- What did you discuss in these three interviews with your personal adviser?
- How long did the interviews last? (Probe around whether they think this is too long, too short or about right and their reasons for this judgement)
- Did you have the same adviser for all three interviews?

- What have you found most/least useful about them?
- What could have been included that would have helped you further?
- What do you think about the number of follow-up interviews? (*Probe whether they feel it was too many; too few or about right and their reasons for this judgement*)
- What do you think about the timing of the interviews? (*Establish how long they had to wait for the first interview following the JMA course and probe whether they think this was too soon after JMA course, too late or about right and their reasons for this judgement*).

Action planning

- How was your Action Plan used during your Follow-Up interviews? (Relevant supplementary questions might include: What did the adviser ask? What was your response? Did they challenge you? What suggestions were made for taking the Action Plan forward?)
- How useful has your Action Plan been during these interviews?
- How have the interviews affected your confidence about getting work?
- How have the interviews affected your motivation to gain work?
- How have the interviews changed the way in which you search for work? (*Probe around several dimensions e.g. changed type of work sought; widened geographical search area; changed methods (informal, formal); increased time looking for work*)
- How has the Follow-Up interviews affected your confidence about getting work?
- What, if any, further kinds of help do you need to find work?

Sanctions

- How did you feel when told that the Follow-Up Interviews are mandatory and subject to sanctions for non-attendance?
- Would you have attended if the interviews had been voluntary?
- What effect, if any, did the fact that the JMA was mandatory and subject to sanctions for non-attendance have on your attempts to find work?
- Do you have any suggestions for ways in which the JMA could be improved to help individuals to find work?

At the end of the interview get the individual to sign the form confirming that they have received £20 payment.

Discussion guide for course provider interviews

- Introduce self/CRESR.
- Introduce evaluation:
 - independent research for DWP;
 - aim is to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the JMA and any lessons for policy makers.
- Interviewing course providers to gain their views.
- **Confidentiality/anonymity:** You will not be named in our report and, while we will draw upon what you say, no quotes will be attributed to named individuals.

Provider details

Ascertain:

- whether interviewee represents the lead provider or subcontractor
- what their role is e.g. course designer, manager, tutor
- the identity of subcontractors (where appropriate)
- whether we can access course design materials.

Key questions

- Can you describe the course and its different components?
- Was the course designed specifically for the JMA or is it a pre-existing design which has been modified?
- Where appropriate for which group(s) was the course originally designed?
- What experience does your organisation have of delivering this type of provision?
[Probe around the extent to which they are able to access experiences tutors, have they needed to recruit specialist staff etc.]
- How have you sought to ensure that the course is able to meet individual needs?
Prompt e.g. people with basic skill needs if not mentioned.
- Have you experienced problems in meeting the varying needs of participants?
- How have you balanced commercial considerations with the need to deliver a flexible and tailored response to the needs of JSA claimants?
- How has the payment system (a flat fee paid based on the number of customers completing provision) affected the way in which you have delivered the course?

- How have you sought to overcome the suspicion of participants about the process?
- What innovative features of course design have been used?
- How useful have the Action Plans been in helping customers to find work?
- To what extent has the course been able to address the barriers to work faced by participants?
- What else do participants need to gain work?
- How effective has communication with Jobcentre Plus been? Has sufficient information been provided?
- How do you know that the course is working?
[Probe around the way in which they gather performance data and how it feeds into continuous improvement]
- To what extent have they modified the course in the light of implementation experience?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the course?
- Would you like to have done anything differently?
- What are the lessons for policy makers?

Discussion guide for course provider interviews (Wave 2)

- Introduce self/CRESR.
- Introduce evaluation:
 - independent research for DWP;
 - aim is to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the JMA and any lessons for policy makers;
 - interviewing course providers to gain their views.
- **Confidentiality/anonymity:** You will not be named in our report and, while we will draw upon what you say, no quotes will be attributed to named individuals.

Provider details

Ascertain:

- whether interviewee represents the lead provider or subcontractor;
- what their role is e.g. course designer, manager, tutor;
- the identity of subcontractors (where appropriate).

Key questions

- Since our last visit have there been any changes in the way the pilot has been managed and staffed?
[Probe whether staff teams have been big enough and the extent to which they have been able to access and retain experienced tutors]
- If relevant, what impact have these changes had on the implementation of the pilot?
- What, if any, other developments have affected the implementation of the pilot?
- How have you improved the ability of the course to meet individual needs?
[Probe whether they have developed specialist JMA courses; limited course sizes; gained more prior information on customer needs etc.]
- How have you sought to overcome the suspicion of participants about the process?
- How have you balanced commercial considerations with the need to deliver a flexible and tailored response to the needs of JSA claimants?
- How has the payment system (a flat fee paid based on the number of customers completing provision) affected the way in which you have delivered the course?
- What innovative features of course design have been used?
- How useful have the Action Plans been in helping customers to find work?
- Have you improved communication with Jobcentre Plus? Has sufficient information been provided?
- How do you know that the course is working?
[Probe around the way in which they gather performance data and how it feeds into continuous improvement]
- What, if any, modifications have been made to the course (both design and delivery) in the light of implementation experience?
- In what ways is the course stronger as a result?
- What are the lessons for policy makers?

Discussion guide for personal adviser and Jobcentre Plus management interviews

- Introduce self/CRESR.
- Introduce evaluation:
 - independent research for DWP;
 - aim is to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the JMA and any lessons for policy makers;

- interviewing personal advisers and Jobcentre Plus management to gain their views.
- **Confidentiality/anonymity:** You will not be named in our report and, while we will draw upon what you say, no quotes will be attributed to named individuals.

Interviewee details

Ascertain:

- What is their role e.g. personal adviser, office manager, district manager etc?
- The relevant office and Jobcentre Plus District
- Whether they have attended a JMA course.

Key questions

- What level of priority has the District attached to the implementation of the pilot?
- How is the JMA pilot managed in your District?
- What impact has the JMA had on your workload?
- What other responsibilities do advisers have and what impact have these had on implementation?
- What are your views on JMA being a mandatory programme, subject to sanctions?
- Is the threat of sanctions effective in making customers attend JMA?
- To what extent are the rules for sanctioning those failing to attend being applied?
- **Are you more willing to use the sanctions, because they are 1 week sanctions?**
- **What do you think to having a 1 week sanction for failing to attend an interview instead of the usual FTA action? Does this affect customer behaviour?**
- **If sanctions are not being used, why?**
- How would you describe relationships between personal advisers and decision-making colleagues? (around sanctioning).
- **Do some customers leave the register when told that they have to attend JMA?**

- How would you describe relationships between personal advisers and provider staff?
- What factors have helped/hindered partnership working?

If adviser has been on a course:

- **What did you gain from going on the course? If not, what do you know about what is delivered through the course? Do you think it's important to understand the process the customer is going through?**
- What is the process for referring customers to JMA courses?
- **How long does the process of referral take? How long after six months do customers attend a JMA course?**
- What type of individual customer information is sent to providers?
- **Are there any issues with using the JMA markers on LMS?**
- Do you provide any feedback regarding customer destinations to providers?
- What do you think about the quality of the action plans that have been produced? **How could they be improved?**
- How are advisers using the action plans in the follow-up interviews?
- **Are there differences in customers' attitudes/behaviours after attending JMA course? Eg job goals are more realistic, change in focus of job search**
- Have advisers identified a need for training as a result of the JMA pilot?
- How well integrated are the two main components of the pilot (JMA course and follow-up interviews)?
- Have advisers relationships with customers changed in any way? (i.e. are they becoming more challenging and directive)
- What impact has the JMA had on customers' barriers to work?
- **Could the same outcomes be achieved with just PA interventions?**
- Would the national roll-out of the pilot benefit this customer group?
- **Is six months the right time for JMA? If not, when?**
- **Who does JMA work for?**
- **If JMA was targeted for particular groups, can you identify groups that would benefit most?**
- How might the policy be improved?
- What are the key lessons for policy and practice?

District Managers only

Are there any issues with payments to providers?

Discussion guide for personal adviser and Jobcentre Plus management interviews (Wave 2)

- Introduce self/CRESR.
- Introduce evaluation:
 - independent research for DWP;
 - aim is to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the JMA and any lessons for policy makers;
 - interviewing personal advisers and Jobcentre Plus management to gain their reflections on the pilot.
- **Confidentiality/anonymity:** You will not be named in our report and, while we will draw upon what you say, no quotes will be attributed to named individuals.

Interviewee details

Ascertain:

- What is their role e.g. personal adviser, office manager, district manager etc?
- How long have they participated in the pilot?
- The relevant office and Jobcentre Plus District.

Key questions

- How was the JMA pilot viewed by customers?
- What impact has the JMA had on customers' barriers to work?
- Which groups benefited most/least from JMA provision?
- What impact has the JMA had on individual barriers to work?
- How was the pilot viewed by Jobcentre Plus staff?
Probe around the extent to which it was seen as a vehicle for policing benefit entitlement i.e. 'deterrent effects' or improving the confidence/motivation of customers
- What are your views on the fixed term sanctions used in the JMA?
- What are your views on fixed term sanctions used in JMA?

- What aspects of the pilot worked well?
Probe around referral processes, course provision, action plans, partnership working, personal adviser follow-up interviews, etc
- What aspects did not work well?
- How well integrated were the two main components (JMA course and follow-up interviews)?
- What do you think about the number and length of follow-up interviews?
- How well integrated are the two main components of the pilot (JMA course and follow-up interviews)?
- What do you think of the number and length of the follow-up interviews?
- What were the main problems encountered delivering the pilot?
- How were these problems addressed?
- What contact did you have with providers?
- Were you happy with the amount of contact?
- Did you observe the delivery of a JMA course?
- If so, was this helpful and if so, in what ways?
- Were there any issues with the exchange of information between the provider and Jobcentre Plus?
- What contact did you have with the providers?
- Were you happy with the amount of contact?
- Did you and/or your colleagues see a JMA course?
 - If yes, was this helpful and if so, in what ways?
 - If no, did you want to see a course? Did anything prevent you from visiting a course?
- Were there any issues with:
 - information being sent to the provider?
 - being sent from the provider to the Jobcentre?
- If policy makers sought to introduce motivation courses in the future what would you suggest they change/retain?
Probe around the focus of courses; their length and timing; number of participants; action plans; payment systems; number and duration of follow-up personal adviser interviews; types of sanctions; types of sanctions etc.
- How might policy makers maximise the 'deterrent effects' associated with mandatory motivation courses?
- What other lessons for policy and practice would you identify?

Generic issues for the action plan focused interviews

The evaluation has explored how different providers produce action plans. The next stage is to explore how plans are used by both advisers and participants. The research team will acquire individual action plans before going into the field and will use them to help frame specific questions about the action planning process. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a series of **generic questions** which will form the foundation of such discussions. These might include:

Participant interviews

- What were your expectations of the three follow-up interviews with the personal adviser?
- How did your action plan relate to your original JSAg?
(E.g. Was it a natural extension of your JSAg or completely different? Was your JSAg modified as a result of the action plan?)
- Did you see the same adviser for each of the interviews?
- How long did they take?
- What was discussed in the interviews?
- How was your action plan used during this process?
- How useful has your action plan been during these interviews?
- To what extent have the interviews affected your confidence/motivation to gain work?
- To what extent have the interviews changed the way in which you search for work?
(E.g. changed type of work sought; widened geographical search area; changed methods; increased time looking for work)
- How could your follow-up interviews have been improved?

Personal adviser interviews

- What are the strengths/weaknesses of the action plan?
- How did the action plan relate to the original Jobseeker's Agreement?
(E.g. Was it a natural extension of the JSAg or completely different? Was the JSAg modified as a result of the action plan?)
- To what extent did the plan identify the action necessary for moving the individual closer to the labour market?
- How could the action plan be improved?
- How have you used the action plan in the three follow-up interviews?

- How useful was the action plans in the follow-up interviews?
- More generally, how do you feel that the follow-up interviews work?
- How might they be improved?

Checklist for the observation of the delivery of JMA courses

Background Information

Name of observer:

Pilot site:

Location:

Date of course:

Provider:

Number of provider staff and their roles:

Number of participants:

Make-up of group:

Description of room layout:

Course content and delivery

Day one

Time	Activity	How delivered (Group, one-to-one etc.)	Level of participant engagement (High/Medium/Low)

Day two

Time	Activity	How delivered (Group, one-to-one etc.)	Level of participant engagement (High/Medium/Low)

Day three

Time	Activity	How delivered (Group, one-to-one etc.)	Level of participant engagement (High/Medium/Low)

Comments

Please comment on:

The extent to which the course was delivered in a welcoming environment:

The ability of the tutor to break down any suspicions that participants may have had about the course:

The ability of the tutor to manage uncooperative/disruptive behaviour:

The extent to which the provider was able to meet the diverse needs of the group:

The way in which Action Plans were produced:

The amount of one-to-one help provided in the production of Action Plans:

The strengths and weaknesses of the course and the way in which it was delivered:

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Qualitative evaluation of the Jobseeker Mandatory Activity (JMA)

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