

# Delivering Employment Services to Vulnerable Customers: A Case Study of the UK's Employment Service

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*This article explores the impact of a more individualised public employment service on vulnerable people. It analyses a system Jobcentre Plus implemented in 2008, Accessing Jobcentre Plus Customer Services (AJCS), to improve customer services by minimising 'footfall' in local offices, encouraging the use of self-service facilities and targeting service delivery to the requirements of customers. The article shows that certain vulnerable groups, notably people with disabilities, are not necessarily well served by the new system. The article highlights tensions between managing a large and complex service and addressing the individual needs of vulnerable members of society adequately.*

**Keywords:** Jobcentre Plus, vulnerable customers, unemployment, disability, delivering services.

## Introduction

There has been a growing trend across OECD countries to integrate welfare, employment and social assistance services (Finn, 2000), the aim being to improve 'delivery of an employment-orientated service' (Wiggan, 2007: 416). In the UK, this approach was realised by the creation of Jobcentre Plus in April 2002, an agency that provides benefit and employment services through a national network of local offices and regional benefit processing centres (Benefit Delivery Centres). Recently, Jobcentre Plus implemented a model, Accessing Jobcentre Plus Customer Services (AJCS), to improve customer services and in particular to minimise 'footfall' (that is, the number of customers entering local offices).

However, AJCS was designed and trialled during an 'economic boom' when numbers claiming unemployment benefit (Jobseeker's Allowance) were relatively low, but was rolled-out nationally just before the economic recession dramatically increased unemployment. Not only did the new scheme have to cope with higher 'footfall', but users of employment services are a diverse and heterogeneous group, and this article considers how well a 'standardised' customer service model deals with 'vulnerable customers' who may be disadvantaged in the labour market. For the purpose of this article, vulnerable or disadvantaged groups in the labour market are taken to be disabled people, ethnic minorities, lone parents, older people (those aged 50 and over), women,

unskilled workers, and young people. However, when describing the AJCS research in more detail the discussion is focused on disabled people.

The findings presented here are based on two main sources. The description of the AJCS model is mainly based on Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) documents, whilst the findings are based on an independent evaluation of the AJCS commissioned by the DWP. The latter was a qualitative study of AJCS' operation, and based on interviews with staff, non-participant observations in local offices and a focus group with representatives of social security customer groups and advisory bodies.<sup>1</sup> Other than the focus group with representatives of customer groups there was no direct fieldwork with service users. However, the customer representatives provide a perspective on Jobcentre Plus users likely to have the most complex and difficult circumstances, and their experiences provide a 'good' test of the robustness of AJCS. The fieldwork was conducted between March and May 2009.

This article considers the context of Jobcentre Plus service delivery and then focuses on AJCS. The article outlines the nature of the problems for vulnerable customers using Jobcentre Plus and the tensions underlying the service. Although AJCS included procedures for identifying and supporting vulnerable customers, the research highlights that the needs of all vulnerable customers are not being met in full by Jobcentre Plus. The article also discusses the implications of AJCS for the efficacy of current policy initiatives.

### Service delivery

As a public service, Jobcentre Plus has a very large customer base. In February 2010, there were 5.9m working age claimants (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010a: 7). The key welfare benefits administered by Jobcentre Plus are Jobseeker's Allowance (an unemployment benefit with a caseload of 1.5 million in February 2010), Employment and Support Allowance and other incapacity-related benefits (2.6 million), and Income Support (principally paid to those with an incapacity, lone parents and carers) (1.8 million) (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010a: 7, 12). The employment services delivered include job brokering, advertising vacancies and delivering employment programmes.

Jobcentre Plus, like many Government agencies, has ostensibly a 'customer focus'. Indeed, such a focus had been a longstanding feature of its two predecessor organisations, the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service. This customer focus reflects the recasting of citizens and clients as customers as part of the rise of managerialism and the ideology of the New Right during the 1980s and 1990s (Newman, 2000: 45; Clarke *et al.*, 2007: 27–46; Ling, 1994). For example, early on in its history, the Benefits Agency had a customer-orientated focus (Benefits Agency, 1991), and in 1994 the Agency introduced its 'One Stop' programme which sought to provide a full service from a single contact. This focus continued under New Labour. Its 1998 welfare Green Paper had a strong customer focus, the intention being to have services that 'meet customers' needs, rather than those of the organisations delivering the service' (Department of Social Security, 1998: 71). Consumerism in Jobcentre Plus services has taken many forms, including branding benefit recipients as customers, the introduction of telephone call centres, web-based technology and other self-service facilities in local offices, and the development of more personalised/individualised employment programmes delivered by Personal Advisers (see Stafford, 2009). These developments transfer the onus and cost for securing a service from

the provider (Jobcentre Plus) to the user, mirroring systems currently used in the UK retail banking sector.

Nonetheless, the adoption of a customer approach to welfare benefits is problematic. Benefit recipients are not customers in the classic retail market sense as they have little or no choice in whether to use the service. Dissatisfied customers have no real option to exit and 'shop' elsewhere (Hirschman, 1970). The focus on consumerism also serves to undermine the idea that people have a social right to welfare services (Dwyer, 2004; Miller, 2004).

The establishment of Jobcentre Plus was accompanied by the transfer of staff from 'back office' benefit process to 'front office' customer service roles (Johnson, 2003: 3; Finn *et al.*, 2005; Karagiannaki, 2007). Whilst this led to greater efficiency in getting 'job-ready' people back to work, Jobcentre Plus does not provide the intensive and specialist support, which is not necessarily employment related, for those some distance from the labour market (Karagiannaki, 2007: 192–3; Stafford, 2009).

Alongside these service delivery developments, there has been the increasing marketisation of service provision with the contracting out of employment programmes (Finn, 2009) and the redesign of internal processes using private sector methodologies, notably the LEAN principles developed by Toyota.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding the emphasis on being customer-focused, modernisation has been driven by managers, and there has been little user involvement in planning or design (Stafford, 2009).

#### AJCS

The introduction in April and June 2008 of the Accessing Jobcentre Plus Customer Services (AJCS) model is part of this broader consumerist trend in Jobcentre Plus. At the local level, Jobcentre Plus receives two broad types of customer: those with pre-booked appointments (to see a Personal Adviser or to 'sign-on' as part of the regular benefit claiming process) and those without pre-booked appointments (or 'unappointed footfall'). For Jobcentre Plus reducing unappointed footfall was seen as releasing resources for job-brokering activities that require a face-to-face interaction. Accordingly, service users are encouraged to make appointments before visiting their local Jobcentre Plus office and to make greater use of non face-to-face or 'alternative' channels. These include the self-service facilities in local offices (such as Customer Access Phones (CAPs) and Jobpoints (computer terminals used to search for jobs)), the post (for providing information and supporting evidence), the internet (for instance, Jobseekers' Direct) and the telephone-based regional processing centres (Contact Centres for new claims and Benefit Delivery Centres for subsequent contacts). The underlying business model of AJCS requires that customers' benefit enquiries – where possible – be directed, via telephone, to the Benefit Delivery Centres, as the local offices are not intended to be frontline offices for the call centres.

According to Jobcentre Plus, AJCS has four main objectives (Jobcentre Plus, 2008a: 2): to reduce unappointed footfall by ensuring that customers use the 'appropriate channel'; to increase the level of jobsearch activity by customers; to identify and improve the service to vulnerable customers; and to ensure a safe office environment for staff and customers. For vulnerable customers, AJCS is designed to ensure that they 'more easily receive face to face support where this is appropriate' (DWP Standards Committee, 2008: 35). AJCS aims to provide a 'safety net' for those vulnerable customers who would otherwise have problems with non face-to-face channels (DWP Standards Committee, 2008: 41).

AJCS as a normative model has three stages. At the first stage the customer, on entering a Jobcentre Plus local office, is welcomed by a Customer Service Manager, who stands by a podium in the office's forum area. The Customer Service Manager establishes the nature of the benefit enquiry, assesses whether the individual is a vulnerable customer, provides minimum job-brokering advice in the form of information about jobsearch including internet and telephony services, and then either signposts the person to the appropriate channel/part of the office for further support and assistance or the individual leaves the office (Jobcentre Plus, 2008a: 4). If the Customer Service Manager identifies a vulnerable customer, they refer them to the Customer Support Officer (Appointments) (stage 2). Jobcentre Plus estimated that Customer Service Managers refer 20 per cent of the people they greet to stage 2 and the remainder are dealt with or channelled to other facilities.

The other staff in the forum area are Customer Care Officers, who are contracted security staff from a private company, Trillium, and have responsibility for ensuring health and safety within the office.

At stage 2, the Customer Support Officer (Appointments) deals with straightforward enquiries, copies documents and provides support to vulnerable customers, but makes appointments with the Customer Support Officer (Interviews) or with the Customer Support Team Leader for vulnerable customers requiring specialist or more intensive support. If there is time, staff engage in job-brokering, which can involve establishing current jobsearch activities, providing information about jobsearch, conducting jobsearch and, if relevant, job submission (Jobcentre Plus, 2008a: 4). Jobcentre Plus estimated that Customer Support Officers (Appointments) deal with half of the cases and refer the remainder (that is, 10 per cent of the stage 1 flow) to stage 3. The non-vulnerable customers seen at stage 2 are those who insist on face-to-face contact even though they could have used other channels, and those needing to hand-in valuable supporting evidence, such as passports. Officially, stage 2 ought to take no longer than three minutes (Jobcentre Plus, 2008a: 2).

At stage 3 the Customer Support Officer (Interviews) identifies and seeks to address customers' needs. Staff can act as an 'advocate' through liaising with the relevant Benefit Delivery Centre (Jobcentre Plus, 2008a: 5). Job-brokering activities at stage 3 are the same as those at stage 2 (Jobcentre Plus, 2008a: 4). The duration of stage 3 varies (Jobcentre Plus, 2008a: 3). More difficult cases are handed-on to the Customer Support Team Leader. Jobcentre Plus estimates that at this stage approximately one-half of the customers seen by Customer Support Officers (Interviews) are classed as vulnerable. This implies that 3 per cent to 5 per cent of the initial intake will be classed as vulnerable by staff. However, this is an underestimate as some customers identified as being vulnerable will, with staff support, have used other channels, such as CAPs, and so not have reached stage 3. Furthermore, a separate survey reveals, for example, that nearly one-quarter (23 per cent) of visitors to Jobcentre Plus local offices without pre-booked appointments, who spoke to a member of staff, had a long-standing illness or disability (Tu *et al.*, 2009: 21). Of these 43 per cent (or one in ten of all unappointed face-to-face visitors) claimed that their condition or impairment adversely impacted on their ability to access services at Jobcentre Plus. In addition, 9 per cent of visitors said that their first language was not English or Welsh; and of the 13 per cent of customers from the black and minority ethnic community, 39 per cent did not have English or Welsh as a first language (Tu *et al.*, 2009: 20).

Telephony teams at Benefit Delivery Centres also determine vulnerability and if necessary book appointments at the relevant local office via a shared electronic diary

Table 1 Factors that may be relevant to identifying vulnerable customers (list is not intended to be exhaustive)

Personal factors	Mental health conditions Sensory impairments Drug or alcohol dependency or both Physical disabilities Learning disabilities Literacy levels Language skills Difficulty in communicating
Personal circumstances	Just left prison Just left hospital A history of being in care 16/17-year olds Homeless Recently bereaved Customers whose behaviour may pose a health and safety risk Customers who have suffered domestic violence or threats Customers who have recently been a victim of crime Customers with cultural barriers

Source: Jobcentre Plus (n.d.: 9–10).

for the individuals judged to be vulnerable. When the telephony team cannot deal immediately with a customer's enquiry, they can call them back within a call back target of three hours. However, for customers using CAPs in local offices, this delay can be very frustrating and lead to an increase in the risk of 'health and safety' incidents. This situation can be exacerbated according to customer representatives, as the call back target is often not met for the people their organisations deal with.

### Delivering services to vulnerable people

Jobcentre Plus defines a vulnerable customer as someone who 'at the time' experiences a 'difficulty' dealing with the demands of accessing the service (Jobcentre Plus, 2008a: 3). Vulnerable customers are unlikely to be able to use 'normal channels' and so will benefit from face-to-face assistance. Official guidance, the AJCS – Go Look See Support Pack (Jobcentre Plus, n.d.), was issued to staff to aid in the identification of vulnerability. The 12 page pack devotes two pages to defining vulnerability. The process of identifying vulnerable customers is predicated on the basis of staff using their own judgement. The guidance states that there are certain personal factors and circumstances likely to be associated with vulnerability (see Table 1). Moreover, there are behavioural traits (such as being in distress, not understanding questions and giving one word answers) that indicate that the person is unlikely to be able to use the self-help services.

The Jobcentre Plus definition of vulnerability is both relativistic and subjective. It is relativistic because it is not a trait or characteristic that individuals possess across all of their business with the organisation, rather it is time-varying – a person could be judged as vulnerable on one occasion but not on another. It is subjective because it is based on

a Customer Service Manager's observation and interaction with the individual and on the officer's own judgement (see DWP Standards Committee, 2008: 37). How vulnerability is defined and identified is important because failure to identify someone as vulnerable could cause them unnecessary financial hardship and distress.

As described above, forum area staff have to make very quick judgements on whether or not a particular customer should be classed as vulnerable when they enter the local office. The DWP suggest that stage 1 lasts between one to three minutes (DWP Standards Committee, 2008: 37). Indeed, a newsletter to Jobcentre Plus managers (Jobcentre Plus, 2008: 2) states that stage 1, including identifying vulnerable customers should in total only take up to one minute; and the official guidance states that identification of a vulnerable customer could take place in 'seconds' (Jobcentre Plus guidance cited in Duffy *et al.*, 2010). This is confirmed by some Customer Service Managers who claimed that they are expected to determine vulnerability in less than one minute.

The approach to identifying vulnerability varies between local offices and Benefit Delivery Centres and so vulnerability has been defined inconsistently across the country. As described above, vulnerability is largely assessed on a combination of the staff's own judgement and the agency's guidelines. Staff base their assessment on the behaviour of customers when they enter the office and any past experience of dealing with the person. Staff can also apply a 'behavioural test', whether the customer can use the office's self-service facilities without assistance, or a 'telephone test', whether customers have access to a telephone and the ability to use telephony services. Some staff insisted that they can infer vulnerability simply by talking briefly to people and by observing their behaviour. In addition, staff and the official guidance recognise that customers often know how their needs could be best served. Staff can take into account customers' wishes; for example, by allowing friends or relatives to act as translators for those with English as a second language. Indeed, at stage 1 some vulnerable customers, who have experience of stage 3, simply ask straight away to see a named Customer Support Officer (Interviews).

Many staff thought that the office environment had become safer, because forum areas were more actively managed by Customer Care Officers under AJCS. Other staff, however, believed that AJCS is itself a cause of tension within local offices because of the handing-on of customers to other channels, notably getting people to contact the Benefit Delivery Centre and associated queues around the CAPs. Any improved management of flows and safety may have been at the expense of vulnerable customers because of the variation in how local offices managed the unappointed footfall. In some local offices, Customer Care Officers, that is security staff, prioritised ensuring a safe environment and limited public access to the office. People without pre-booked appointments were turned away, and friends and relatives accompanying users (including vulnerable customers) were denied entry. Indeed, it is possible that vulnerable customers, especially those with a mental health condition, were more likely to be accompanied by a third party and so may have been disproportionately and adversely affected by staff limiting public access to local offices. The legal right of the public to enter local Jobcentre Plus offices is unclear, but AJCS was never intended to limit public access to self-service facilities in local Jobcentre Plus offices and staff should not have been doing so.

Whilst AJCS provides a degree of flexibility in the management of customers, there is a risk that some individuals who should be assessed as vulnerable are not. Consumer representatives, whose organisations deal with more complex and difficult cases, expressed concerns about the variation in the interpretation of vulnerability

nationally. They felt that many vulnerable customers are not being identified under AJCS due to a lack of staff training. As a consequence, their organisations are assisting people with less obvious vulnerabilities. There is a particular concern that people with 'invisible' disabilities, such as mental health conditions, hearing impairments or intellectual impairments, may not be identified as vulnerable when they should be. For example, consumer representatives said that someone with mid-range autism would be able to use a telephone and call a Benefit Delivery Centre and so might not be identified as vulnerable when arguably they might need additional help and support. Or someone with a bipolar disorder might appear on a visit to the local office to be positive and capable of coping with the system, but be unable to do so later on and so their claim may be inappropriately dealt with because their 'vulnerability' had not been identified at the outset. Customer representatives argued that some groups of consumers, such as those with literacy difficulties, would be unwilling to inform Customer Service Managers about their 'vulnerability' in what is a public space. It is also possible that people who were not 'vulnerable' – or are in fact able to use the self-service facilities – are incorrectly classed as vulnerable. These 'false positives' divert already limited staff resources from where it is needed. Moreover, some local office staff said that identifying vulnerability over the telephone is more difficult than assessing it face-to-face and accordingly telephony staff in Benefit Delivery Centres frequently misjudge a consumer's vulnerability. Notwithstanding these concerns, both forum area and Benefit Delivery Centre staff claimed that in general they are successful in identifying vulnerable customers.

Customer Support Officers at stages 2 and 3 could contact the Benefit Delivery Centre on the customer's behalf in an attempt to resolve their query. However, time constraints and the nature of the enquiries could mean that staff are unable to fully support customers, and may refer them to external advice agencies, even for help with relatively straightforward issues, such as completion of claim forms. Customer representatives believed that too many vulnerable customers are being channelled to external advice agencies when the matter could be resolved within Jobcentre Plus.

Additionally, and as mentioned above, there is evidence that some customers whose circumstances are more complex encounter difficulties in accessing services under the new regime. In part, this is because of difficulties they might encounter in having to deal with both their local office and the regional Benefit Delivery Centre, and communication shortcomings between local offices and the relevant processing centre. Many of these customers with complex circumstances are likely to be vulnerable. In general, staff thought that the working relationships between local offices and the Benefit Delivery Centre were positive. However, staff and customer representatives noted that on occasions customers have been passed between local offices and Benefit Delivery Centres a number of times before their enquiries are dealt with. Reactions include customers becoming increasingly agitated and frustrated. Local office staff felt that telephony staff do not always appreciate the reactions of customers both to delays in getting a response and to the (disappointing) information that telephony staff may have to relay to individuals. In addition, some Customer Support Officers (Interview) maintained that Benefit Delivery Centre staff sometimes double-book appointments or do not provide enough information in the shared diaries for pre-booked appointments and this limits what can be achieved at stage 3 and may mean that the customer is 'bounced' back to the telephony team. More generally, local staff were critical of the high staff turnover in Benefit Delivery Centres and a perceived lack of training for telephony staff.

AJCS is in part designed to re-focus Jobcentre Plus local offices on jobsearch-related activities, including using a jobseeking channel, searching for employment, and applying for a position. The increase in unemployment due to the economic downturn means that staff find it difficult to assess the impact of AJCS on jobsearch-related activities. Some staff said that by re-directing customers to self-help channels AJCS has created extra time for them to focus on jobsearch-related activities. Other staff, however, argued that operational time limits mean that once the customers' benefit enquiries have been addressed there is insufficient time to consider jobsearch-related activities. Moreover, the increase in the number of claimants and hence footfall due to the recession means that staff prioritise processing people through the system and this is at the cost of offering jobsearch-related support. In addition, vulnerable customers are often some distance from being 'job ready' and staff felt that offering support on jobsearch as inappropriate. Yet vulnerable people are likely to be particularly adversely affected during an economic downturn.

### **Implications for current policy**

Although the evaluation was about AJCS, it has significant implications for subsequent approaches to employment services and the reform of welfare by the Coalition Government. There are four recent policy changes that suggest that the number of vulnerable customers, using the DWP definition, will significantly increase, and this is a concern because of the difficulties the system has in identifying such customers. The four policies are:

- The £17.7bn cut in the social security budget (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011: 5, 7–8). Cuts on such a scale can be expected, at a minimum, to increase stress and anxiety levels and hence vulnerability, along with financial hardship, amongst a proportion of the customer base.
- A related issue is the reduction in the number of Jobcentre Plus staff. Between 2009 and early 2011, Jobcentre Plus had cut over 10,000 posts (PCSU, 2011) and in May 2011 it was announced that 17 Benefit Delivery Centres and five Contact Centres would be closed with a loss of 2,400 jobs (Wintour, 2011). The evaluation highlights that Jobcentre Plus staff have significant difficulty in balancing staffing resources and adequately meeting customers' needs. For vulnerable and non-vulnerable customers, these cuts in staffing are likely to delay the processing of claims and the provision of employment services, such as supporting jobsearch (see above).
- The introduction of the revised Work Capability Assessment, alongside the Employment Support Allowance, has had the effect of reducing the numbers flowing on to, and retaining entitlement to, incapacity benefit. Some customers withdraw their Employment Support Allowance claim (36 per cent between October 2008 and November 2010), whilst others (39 per cent) fail the medical assessment and can then claim Jobseeker's Allowance (Department for Work and Pensions, 2011: 7). The Work Capability Assessment is highly controversial (see, for example, Gentleman, 2011; Harris, 2011), with claims that people unfit for work, especially those with mental health disabilities, are being denied appropriate support and suffering distress and even harm from the assessment (Work and Pensions Committee, 2011: 16–17). The implication is that the number of vulnerable customers will have been increased. The AJCS evaluation shows that customers with 'invisible' mental health conditions are at particular risk of



not being identified by staff, a situation that is possibly more likely if the individuals concerned cannot identify themselves as Employment Support Allowance recipients.

- The planned introduction of Universal Credit by the Coalition Government. This is a more simplified benefit and tax credit system with a Universal Credit replacing selected means-tested benefit and tax credits (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010b), and it can be argued that complexity in the (existing) benefit system disadvantages vulnerable customers. However, the research reported here would suggest the need for some caution in assuming that vulnerable customers would necessarily gain from a more simplified benefit system. If a diverse benefit population is subsumed under a single working age benefit, there is a risk that vulnerable people may lose out if the delivery mechanism is not sufficiently sensitive to their needs. The evaluation suggests that a 'one size fits all' customer focus, which is likely with the new benefit, will, unless it goes beyond the AJCS procedures, fail to identify all vulnerable customers claiming Universal Credit.

The Coalition Government's wider cuts will also be penalising vulnerable customers of Jobcentre Plus. Third sector organisations that support vulnerable customers with advocacy and advice services face cuts in public funding, notably from local authorities (see False Economy, 2011). To the extent that these bodies are now less able to support (an increasing number of) vulnerable people, then the more complex and difficult cases that need more than AJCS provision are at risk of being failed by the State.

## **Conclusions**

This article highlights the risks for vulnerable people from the introduction of delivery systems that appear to be designed for the typical user. In the current economic downturn, some client groups appear to be at greater risk of being unemployed (Stafford and Duffy, 2009) whilst using an employment system that, in seeking to manage overall footfall, does not meet their needs in full. This demonstrates a tension between managing a large and complex service and addressing the individual needs of vulnerable members of society.

The challenge for public services, like Jobcentre Plus, is to devise delivery systems that are efficient and effective in dealing with a user population that is highly diverse and has varying capabilities in coping with administrative systems and the labour market. The study implies that effective and efficient administration requires a close 'fit' between the organisation of welfare services and the structure of benefits. Whilst there are employment programmes to deal with some groups disadvantaged in the labour market, the research reported here highlights that such programmes are not the only support that must be considered. How Jobcentre Plus 'manages' vulnerable people and its interactions with them is also important to ensure their re-entry into the labour market is successful.

The designers of AJCS recognised that a mechanism was required to identify and support vulnerable people using Jobcentre Plus. However, implementing a national 'standardised' model with a procedure for vulnerable people highlights the tension or conflict between the four objectives of AJCS. For example, the minimisation of unappointed footfall and/or securing a safe local office environment – prioritised in practice – can restrict improvements in services to vulnerable customers, including providing jobsearch support. To minimise footfall, vulnerable customers can be

encouraged to use non face-to-face channels when this is not necessarily in their best interests, and/or access to Jobcentre Plus local offices for people accompanying them to provide necessary support is denied. Furthermore, the research highlights problems with the relativistic and subjective approach Jobcentre Plus adopts to identifying vulnerable customers. This approach risks both 'false negatives', not identifying customers who are vulnerable, and 'false positives', referring people to stages 2 and 3 who do not need this additional service. Thus, AJCS appears to lack the necessary degree of 'personalisation' to deal with a diverse user population. Paradoxically, an approach rooted in consumerism is insufficiently individualistic to meet the needs of those most disadvantaged in the labour market.

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### Notes

1 The research with staff was conducted in ten Jobcentre Plus local offices and their associated five regional Benefit Delivery Centres. It involved 42 in-depth face-to-face interviews with managers and frontline staff in local offices, observational studies of staff and customers in the local offices as well as of the office environment and 15 telephone interviews with staff in the Benefit Delivery Centres. The focus group was conducted with members of the National Jobcentre Plus Customer Representative Group Forum.

2 Lean manufacturing, formerly known as the Toyota Production System, seeks to maximize efficiency through optimizing flow.

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