

Work and the welfare system: a survey of benefits and tax credits recipients

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This report contains the findings from a quantitative survey providing statistical analysis of the characteristics, circumstances, behaviour and attitudes of 4,315 working age benefits and tax credits recipients including 1,216 partners/spouses. Across the sample, it is possible to identify three broad groups of respondents:

- Younger (under 25) single respondents, often claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), who had either never worked or had a background of usually quite recent temporary or short-term work.
- Older respondents, many claiming Incapacity Benefit (IB) because of a long standing injury, often in a couple without children, with a history of steady full-time work which stopped (in many cases because of health problems or disability) some time ago. Both this and the previous group were predominantly male.
- Female respondents, working part-time at the time of the study or with a history of part-time work, but often with a less stable working background or shorter working spells, with ability to work more dependent on children or family. This group was often claiming tax credits or Income Support (IS).

Many non-working respondents expressed positive attitudes towards work, but there was a split in attitudes towards the financial implications of work and a majority felt that there was a lack of available vacancies.

Respondents in part-time work expressed positive attitudes towards work, but were split over whether they would be happier in full-time work and how easy or difficult it would be to increase their hours.

Opinions were divided as to whether they would be financially better off by working more hours. Only a minority of those in part-time work were looking to work longer hours.

Around half of respondents were out of work and not looking for work, with only ten per cent of these planning to look for work within the next year. The main reason was long-term sickness or disability, followed by childcare.

Respondents looking for work considered the type of occupation and the number of hours per week the two most important factors, and cited a lack of suitable vacancies, lack of jobs in the local area and health issues as the main barriers.

A cluster analysis was carried out to divide respondents into distinct groups based on their attitudes to work, which identified a total of six distinct attitudinal groups.

UC payment

While the majority of respondents felt that payment of all benefits or tax credits into a single account and as a single payment would make no difference to them, 42 per cent said that monthly payments would make it harder for them to budget, compared to ten per cent who said this would make it easier for them. The overwhelming concern was running out of money before the end of the month. However, 47 per cent said that it would make no difference or that they were already paid monthly.

Claiming online

A majority of respondents use the internet and a majority would be willing to claim a benefit or tax credit online. Where respondents were not willing to apply online, this was because of:

- a lack of skills;
- concerns about making a mistake;
- perceived cost;
- concerns about privacy or security; or
- a general lack of interest.

Just under half would need help or support to use an online service. The most popular type of support was a telephone helpline to resolve online queries.

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You can download the full report free from: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

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