

# Pathways to Work: programme engagement and work patterns

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## Background

The report presents the findings from a quantitative study of new and repeat and existing incapacity benefits customers in Jobcentre Plus-led Pathways to work pilot and expansion areas. Earlier reports were based on an initial interview around a year after customers started on the programme (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) research reports 456, 627). This report is based on a further interview that was carried out with these customers a year later – around two years since their start on the programme. It aimed to address questions about further participation in Pathways services and uses a five-year work and activity history to explore patterns of working and longer-term work outcomes.

The research was commissioned by the DWP and was carried out by the National Centre for Social Research. For new and repeat customers interviews were conducted, on average, 25 months after the qualifying claim (early 2007 in pilot areas and early 2008 in expansion phase one areas). For existing customers, interviews were conducted 24 months after they were called onto the Pathways programme (mid 2008).

## Key findings

- The limiting effect of health conditions was still prevalent among customers two years after their start on Pathways, particularly among existing customers.
- Customer attendance at Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) and participation in New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) and Condition Management Programme (CMP)

continued at a significant level into the second year following their claim.

- Most customers were positive about the helpfulness of meetings at this later stage. Assessments were most positive among those who stated that they needed work-related assistance and who regarded work to be a possibility in relation to their health.
- A third of new and repeat customers were in paid work two years after starting on Pathways. A fifth was actively seeking work but half were not looking for work.
- Existing customers were much less likely to be in paid work or looking for work than new and repeat customers. Only a tenth were in paid work at the time of the interviews. Three-quarters were not actively seeking work, many of whom did not expect to work again.
- Those with a 'high improving' health trajectory, those with a steady work history before their claim and those aged 30 to 54 were more likely to be in work two years after their start on Pathways.
- Customers in non-professional, low-ranking (in terms of managerial or supervisor responsibility), or temporary employment and those with a chronic or systematic physical disability were more likely to have a period of unsustained work.

## The longer-term health of Pathways customers

Three-quarters of new or repeat customers had a limiting health condition two years after their start on Pathways, as did 95 per cent of existing customers. Muscular-skeletal and mental health conditions were the most common categories

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of main conditions, with each affecting about a third of customers who had a condition of some type.

For many, the impact was significant. The day-to-day activities of more than half of existing customers (57 per cent) were affected 'a great deal' by their health condition, as were a third (32 per cent) of new or repeat customers. Two-fifths of new and repeat customers were still dealing with conditions that affected them a little, whilst a quarter had no condition or one with that did not affect their activities.

## Long-term Pathways engagement

A substantial proportion of mandated customers participated in Pathways. Over the two years between being called onto Pathways to Work and the second survey interview, 85 per cent of new or repeat customers and 86 per cent of existing customers had attended one or more WFIs.

Although most of the contact was in the first year of the programme, a substantial minority of customers were still meeting staff in the second year. Thirty per cent of new and repeat customers and 23 per cent of existing customers recalled work focused meetings at Jobcentre Plus in the second year after their start on Pathways. Those who were looking for work at the start of the second year were the more likely to have these meetings, as were those whose health was 'medium improving'.

In addition to contact with Jobcentre Plus, customers were still starting to participate in voluntary Choices services in the second year after their start on Pathways, but the proportion of customers was smaller. Among new and repeat customers, participation in NDDP was two-fifths of the level in the first year (38 per cent) and CMP was at half the level (51 per cent).

Assessments of the helpfulness of meetings among new and repeat customers in the second year were largely positive, with 31 per cent saying they had helped 'a lot' with thinking about work and a further 39 per cent 'a little'. Views were polarised, but two years after their start on Pathways to Work, nearly half of customers

(46 per cent) disagreed with a statement that it was unfair to ask those on incapacity benefits attend meetings at Jobcentre Plus, compared to a third (32 per cent) who agreed. Those who disagreed with a statement that incapacity benefit customers should do all they can to find work were more likely to say that work was not an option for them personally.

## Work patterns before and after a claim for incapacity benefits

A work history was established in the second survey interview that allowed seeing the pattern of work three years before a claim for incapacity benefits and 20 months after it (in the case of new and repeat customers). From a high of 55 per cent in paid work three years before a claim (which was somewhat below the national employment rate of 74 per cent at that time), there was a gradual fall out of work, accelerating in the six months leading up to the claim. During the post claim period there was a steady rise in the proportion of customers in paid work for 12 months. The proportion in work began to level off towards the 20 month mark, and peaked at 35 per cent in employment – well below the proportion three years prior to the claim.

A work history was also collected from existing customers. The group included in the first extension of Pathways to Work had been claiming incapacity benefits for between one and three years at the point of being called onto the programme and were not in paid work. A very small proportion of existing customers were in work following the start of the programme (two per cent), and the proportion moving into work steadily increased to stand at 11 per cent 20 months later. This was less than the third who had been in work five years previously.

## Longer-term work-related outcomes for Pathways customers

Overall, a third of new and repeat customers (34 per cent) were in paid work two years after their start on Pathways to Work. A further 17 per cent were actively seeking work but half of all customers (49 per cent) were not looking for work.

Existing customers were much less likely to be in paid work or looking for work than new and repeat customers. A tenth (11 per cent) were in paid work at the time of the wave two interviews, with three-quarters not actively seeking work. Two-fifths of existing customers (43 per cent) did not expect to work again in the future and a further fifth (19 per cent) did not know when they would work again.

The majority of new and repeat customers in work had full-time jobs, with 59 per cent working 30 hours or more each week. A third (34 per cent) of existing customers worked this number of hours, whilst 29 per cent were doing only limited work each week (one to 15 hours per week). Half (49 per cent) of new and repeat customers were either very satisfied or satisfied with their pay. Existing customers were more likely to state that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the amount of pay they received (35 per cent).

## Work retention

On a strict definition of unsustained work (work ending within six months and being followed by a period of unemployment), 14 per cent of customers who found work experienced unsustained work. Customers in non-professional or without managerial/supervisory responsibilities were more likely to have a period of unsustained work following a claim, as were those on temporary contracts.

In addition, those with a chronic or systemic physical disability had a greatly increased chance of not sustaining their work following a claim, as had those with a musculo-skeletal physical disability or a mental health condition, albeit to a lesser magnitude. Improving health since a claim was associated with improved work retention.

## Conclusions and policy implications

### *Broad and long-term engagement well-received*

Pathways to Work reached a substantial proportion of mandated customers among

both the new and repeat and existing customer populations, and delivered services widely viewed by customers to be worthwhile. The participation in WFIs, NDDP and CMP continued at a significant level into the second year of customers' involvement.

In most cases, customers' assessments of the helpfulness of meetings at this later stage were positive. Assessments were most positive among those who acknowledged they had a need for work-related assistance and who regarded work to be a possibility in relation to their health.

### *Steady movement into work but well below the pre-claim levels*

The population that flowed onto incapacity benefits during the period captured by the survey was not typical of the working age population, even at a point three years before their start on Pathways to Work. At that time the proportion in paid work was 55 per cent – well below the employment rate for the general working age population around that time of 74 per cent<sup>1</sup>. A proportion of customers included in the cohort were 'repeat' incapacity claimants, and previous reports have described how health conditions were frequently long-term<sup>2</sup>.

At 35 per cent, the peak in the proportion of customers in paid work after the claim was well below the 55 per cent seen prior to the claims. Although the period observable following the claim was limited to 20 months, the levelling-off in the proportion of people in paid work by that time makes it unlikely that the level would return to the previous high in the short or medium term.

The overall pattern of a sharp fall out of employment and a steady rise back into work hides a more varied experience for individuals. The segmentation of work patterns identified two main groups: those whose post-claim work pattern mirrored their pre-claim pattern

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Bailey, R, Hales, J, Hayllar, O, Wood, M (2007) *Pathways to Work: customer experiences and outcomes: Findings from a survey of new and repeat incapacity benefits customers in the first pilot areas*. DWP Research Report 456.

(principally, steady work either side of a claim or no work at any point), and those whose pattern of work changed (largely moving out of steady work, but also moving into work from not being in work or having unstable work). Recognition of these varied journeys and targeting of varied services would seem the correct response for any future employment programmes for these customers.

### ***Factors affecting work outcomes and work retention***

Job retention among customers is clearly vital to the long-term success of any employment programme and for individuals themselves. Customers who found non-professional, low-ranking (in terms of managerial or supervisor responsibility), or temporary employment were more likely to have a period of unsustainable work. In-work support might be targeted at these groups to encourage and assist individuals to seek progression towards more stable positions or to engage with employers to develop strategies for maximising continuity of work.

Similarly, results highlighted the need for in-work support to focus on those with physical disabilities, particular those with chronic or systemic health conditions, who were less likely to be in high-ranking roles in terms of responsibility.

A third of new and repeat customers were in paid work two years after their start on Pathways to Work. A further fifth were actively seeking work but half were not looking for work. Existing customers were much less likely to be in paid work or looking for work (24 per cent) than new and repeat customers (51 per cent). Three-quarters were not actively seeking work, many of whom did not expect to work again. This large group of existing customers remains a considerable challenge for the future employment programmes.

As with analysis of earlier periods, the overwhelmingly important factor for whether or not customers were in work was their perception of the state of their health. Most customers continued on the same health trajectory throughout the two-year period. Those whose trajectory of health had been good or improving were far more likely to be in paid work, and it was health problems that were most frequently cited by customers themselves as a barrier to moving into employment. Findings also suggest that improvements to health following a claim, improves the chances of sustaining work.

Therefore, interventions targeted at helping customers manage their conditions are likely to be important to achieve positive and sustained work outcomes for customers with disability and health conditions.

The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 84712 771 6. Research Report 653. July 2010).

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

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