

Provider-led Pathways to Work: the experiences of new and repeat customers in phase one areas

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Background

The report presents the findings from a survey of new and repeat incapacity benefits (IB) customers in Provider-led (PL) Pathways (phase one) areas.

The research aims to describe the pattern of customers' engagement with PL Pathways, their experiences and assessments of the process and services in order to understand their work and health outcomes in the medium term. Some key comparisons between customers in Provider-led Pathways to Work areas and new and repeat customers in pilot and expansion areas (where there is Jobcentre Plus delivery) are made in this report¹.

The survey was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions and was carried out by the National Centre for Social Research. Telephone interviews were conducted with 3095 customers, on average, 14 months after they claimed for incapacity benefits (June to mid September 2009).

Key findings

- A large proportion of customers had health conditions that had a substantial impact on their lives at the time of their claim (94 per cent). By the time of the survey, fewer customers reported having an ongoing health condition or disability (75 per cent).
- The majority of customers (68 per cent) recalled attending an initial Work Focused Interview (WFI) at Jobcentre Plus and 41 per cent recalled attending at least one with a provider. Customers

in poor health and those who lived alone were more likely to have attended a WFI than those in better health and those with a partner.

- Customers' assessments of both the initial meeting at Jobcentre Plus and provider services were largely positive.
- A small proportion of customers used health management services at Providers (eight per cent), but assessments were again positive.
- Three quarters of customers had not worked at all during the 13 month period following their claim for incapacity benefits.
- At the time of the survey interview, 21 per cent of customers were in paid work, 29 per cent were looking for work or waiting to start work or a business. Half were not looking or work with majority reporting their health problems as the key reason for this.
- The most important factor, by far, in whether customers were in paid work at the time of survey interview was the trajectory of their health conditions. Those with continued poor health or declining health were the least likely to be in paid work.
- Furthermore, customers who lived alone, those with a mental health condition, those with a fluctuating work history and those who had no qualification were also less likely to be in paid work at the time of interview.

Background and health characteristics of customers

As might be expected, at the time of their claim, a large proportion of customers were dealing with health conditions that had a substantial impact on their lives. Ninety-four per cent of customers

¹ Key data about new and repeat customers in Jobcentre plus-led pathways areas are taken from DWP research report 627: Hayllar, O, Sejersen, T and Wood, M (2010) Pathways to Work: The experiences of new and repeat customers in Jobcentre Plus expansion areas.

reported having a health condition and three-quarters (76 per cent) reported having one that limited their day to day activities 'a great deal'.

By the time of the survey interview, fewer customers reported having an ongoing health condition or disability (75 per cent). For two-fifths (42 per cent) of individuals, the effect of conditions on their activities improved over this time. However, a majority of customers (53 per cent) saw no improvement in the effect of their conditions or saw a decline in their health situation.

To describe the demographic characteristics of Provider-led Pathways customers:

- There were slightly more men than women (56 per cent male), and the majority (54 per cent) were aged 40 years and over.
- As with Jobcentre Plus-led Pathways to Work populations, a sizable proportion were renting housing from the council or social sector (37 per cent);
- Just over two-fifths (42 per cent) of customers lived in the most deprived places in the country.
- Twenty eight per cent lived alone, whilst 38 per cent lived with a partner. Amongst those with a partner, three-fifths (60 per cent) had a partner in paid job at the time of the interview.
- A quarter of customers had no qualifications at all, whilst 57 per cent were qualified to Level 2 or above (GCSE grades A-C) compared to 71 per cent of the working age population.
- About half (54 per cent) reported spending substantial amounts of time in paid work prior to their claim for incapacity benefits, whilst the remainder had experienced fluctuating work patterns or a limited amount of paid work.

Interaction with the Provider-led Pathways programme

Contact with Jobcentre Plus and Providers

Just over two-thirds of customers (68 per cent) recalled attending an initial Work Focused Interview (WFI) at Jobcentre Plus.

The majority of customers (60 per cent) who attended the initial Jobcentre Plus WFI were told about further meetings with a Provider. Two-fifths, therefore, did not recall having been told about

Providers. For most it did not appear that this was a result of a lack of clarity at Jobcentre Plus – three-quarters of customers said that the adviser there was 'very' (48 per cent) or 'fairly' clear (28 per cent) about the next steps for the programme.

Two-fifths of customers (41 per cent) had at least one WFI with a Provider organisation. As noted above, many of those who did not attend meetings did not recall being told about Providers by Jobcentre Plus staff. Among those who reported that they were told or knew about Providers, the most common reason given for not attending was that their health was not good enough (44 per cent) and that they were not told they had to go (27 per cent).

Provider-led Pathways customers generally had more prolonged involvement with the Pathways programme than customers in Jobcentre plus areas. Three-fifths (59 per cent) of those who met with Providers attended the full five WFIs. Overall, this meant that 23 per cent of all customers attended the five or more WFIs following the initial Jobcentre Plus WFI compared with 14 per cent of customers in Jobcentre Plus-led areas.

Customers in better health were less likely to attend a WFI at Jobcentre Plus or a provider than those in poor health. Further, those who lived alone were also more likely to have attended a Provider WFI than those who lived with a partner.

Service provision

Turning to the type of involvement that customers had with Providers during their contact with them, the large majority (77 per cent) had Provider staff undertake some work-related activities to support them, with the most common being 'receiving advice on applying for jobs or writing their CV' (53 per cent).

A quarter (23 per cent) of those who attended Provider WFIs took part in workshops. The most commonly attended workshops were connected with 'being positive, building confidence, being assertive or coping' (16 per cent). Workshops about developing interview skills (13 per cent) and dealing with stress at work (nine per cent) were popular too.

Nearly half of customers (47 per cent) who attended Provider WFIs said they were ready and able to think about paid work during their meetings, with the large majority of these (78 per cent) undertaking some work related activities.

Although only a small proportion of customers used

health management services at Providers (eight per cent), this was still a higher level than those who used the similar Condition Management Programme in Jobcentre Plus-led Pathways areas (four per cent).

Customer assessments of services

Approval for the initial meeting at Jobcentre Plus was relatively high. Approaching a third (29 per cent) of customers reported that meetings had helped ‘a lot’ to focus them on work with a further 27 per cent saying they helped ‘a little’.

Assessments of Provider services were also positive. When asked to rate how well they thought the advisers they spoke to understood their situation on a scale from ‘very well’ to ‘not at all well’, the majority of customers felt that the advisers understood very well (60 per cent). Customers were also positive about how well the Provider’s service met their needs, with 77 per cent saying it met their needs ‘very well’ or ‘fairly well’.

Customers assessments of health management services were also positive - with 73 per cent saying it helped a lot or a little (39 and 34 per cent) to manage their health condition. However, over a quarter of customers were less happy, stating that it was no help at all.

Paid work and intermediate outcomes

A quarter of customers had worked at some point during the 13 month period following their claim for incapacity benefits. A gradual movement into employment over the period was observed.

Of those who had worked at some point, a quarter (28 per cent) reported that they had been employed for the full period since their claim². A further quarter (26 per cent) found work in the first six months after their claim and a similar proportion (25 per cent) moved into work in a later period. The remaining fifth (20 per cent) of customers, who worked at some point, experienced falling out of the paid work they had been in.

At the time of the survey interview (14 months, on average, after their claim), a fifth of customers (21 per cent) were in paid work, 29 per cent were

actively looking for work or waiting to start work or a business, whilst half (50 per cent) were not looking for work. Among those who were not looking for work, the overwhelming reason given for this was health problems.

Over half (55 per cent) of customers who had found work were working 30 hours or more per week, with 27 per cent working 16 to 29 hours and 18 per cent working less than 16 hours per week. While 15 per cent of customers in work were in managerial and professional occupations, half of customers were in routine or semi-routine occupations³.

As consistently found to be the case in previous studies in Jobcentre plus areas, those whose health improved were considerably more likely to be in paid work than those whose health had not improved or had deteriorated.

Conclusions

The contact with Jobcentre Plus and provider

A high proportion (68 per cent) of Provider-led customers recalled attending a WFI at Jobcentre Plus. This was a little below the proportion who reported attending the initial WFI in Jobcentre Plus led Pathways areas (75 per cent).

Overall, two-fifths of customers attended at least one WFI with a Provider. As intended by the process in place during this study period, Jobcentre Plus staff seemed to have screened a proportion of customers out of the programme. Those told they had to attend meetings were much more likely actually to attend.

Strong referral and clarity of communication was important for Provider attendance – 59 per cent of those for whom messages about next steps were ‘very clear’ attended a Provider, compared with 34 per cent of those for whom they were ‘not at all clear’.

Provider-led Pathways customers generally had a prolonged involvement with the Pathways programme. This would seem to indicate a degree of success on the part of Providers in encouraging engagement with the programme. It may reflect the greater focus among Providers on ensuring customers finish the sequence of WFIs as a strategy

² In some cases this may relate to Permitted Work – work of less than 16 hours per week that Jobcentre Plus allows without there being a reduction in benefits – or undeclared work. However, it is likely that in some instances respondents have not equated a period where they were not working due to ill-health with being ‘out of paid work’.

³ As examples, semi-routine occupations include receptionists, market research interviewers, steel erectors, home carers, educational assistants and assembly line workers in electrical or automotive plants. Routine occupations include cleaners, unskilled factory workers, labourers and bus drivers.

for maximising work outcomes (in the context of payment by results), or the response of customers to the approach taken to the meetings more generally.

The more prolonged attendance may also reflect the lower level of movement into work (and therefore out of the WFI sequence) that was observed among this sample of Provider-led customers. In comparison with new and repeat customers in the Jobcentre Plus-led Pathways areas, Provider-led Pathways customers were less likely to be in paid work (30 compared to 21 per cent). This may reflect differences in labour markets, particularly as the sample in Provider-led areas made their claims just as the economic downturn took hold and customers are likely to have faced a more difficult labour market than did the earlier sample from Jobcentre Plus-led areas (the surveys in Jobcentre Plus-led areas were conducted before the recession).

Positive assessments of services

There was a high level of satisfaction with services. Customers generally reported that Provider staff understood their situations well. There is evidence to suggest that this might improve further with an improvement in the utilisation of the information gathered by Jobcentre staff on customers' situations by the Provider. Twenty-nine per cent of customers were not aware if this information was received by the Provider when they first met. Having someone whom the customer felt they could always contact to get help was strongly associated with positive assessments of services.

Ultimately, 44 per cent reported that the Provider services had helped them to think about work 'a lot' and a further 24 per cent 'a little'. This was higher than the levels reported for Jobcentre Plus

in the pilot and expansion areas, although they were dealing with a larger proportion of the total customer population.

Among those who were in work at the time of interview and who had met with a Provider, a fifth (19 per cent) felt that they had been helped into this work entirely as a result of the Provider.

Interestingly, there were no statistically significant differences in assessments of how much the Provider helped them think about paid work according to customers work history pre-claim. This could be because previous work history may not necessarily always indicate work readiness at the time of the customers' participation in the programme. For example, some customers might have had extensive work histories, but were in poor health so not able to move back into work.

Work outcomes

As for customers in Jobcentre Plus-led areas, the most important factor, by far, in whether they had moved into work after their start on Pathways was the trajectory of their health conditions. Other characteristics had a bearing on this outcome, such as living with a partner who was in paid work and having qualifications or not having multiple disadvantages. Overall, those with more limiting health conditions were considerably less likely to be in paid work (seven per cent were in paid work among those limited a great deal by their health condition compared to 40 per cent of those who had no condition or one with no effect).

This suggests that interventions targeted at helping customers manage their health conditions may be important to achieve positive and sustained work outcomes.

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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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